

## **Chapter 1 - The Road to Social Inequality: A Conceptual Introduction**

### **Chapter Overview**

Social inequality and social stratification are two distinct but often-misunderstood concepts. Social inequality focuses on an unequal access to resources. Social stratification focuses on the different levels or hierarchies in which a given society or societies are rewarded as a result of their access to goods and rewards. Those groups that have the most power are able to put in place institutions that support and maintain their access to rewards while blocking others from receiving those same rewards. These systems of stratification are designed to be seen as deserved and are made legitimate by those who hold the most power in society.

Inequality goes beyond individuals and groups. It also exists between nations, particularly those that are wealthy and those that are poor. Globalization and more specifically, the development of a global economy, play an instrumental part in creating and maintaining a stratified system that involves the economic and political system.

The development of multinational corporations and the loss of jobs in one part of the world and the introduction of jobs in another do not necessarily result in equally improved lives for either group. The recipients of these jobs may find that they are at the mercy of politicians and multinational corporations that are focused on the bottom line—profit. The profit motive of multinational corporations often results in a loss of jobs in wealthier nations, as it is cheaper to do business in less-developed nations. Workers are easier to exploit in less-developed nations and they are paid less than workers in developed nations. They are also often placed in work conditions that are unsafe. At the same time, products made in less-developed nations by U.S. and other western countries are cheaper and available to more people in wealthier developed nations.

Capital is found in four forms—human, social, cultural, and financial. Human capital is one's ability to learn skills and gain knowledge and expertise. Social capital involves networking with others. This form of capital is especially important when it comes to education and employment. Cultural capital involves the learning of knowledge, skills, and behavior that is passed from one generation to the next. Financial capital is the acquisition of money in the form of wages, salary and so forth that allows one to purchase assets or resources that one can use in obtaining the other forms of capital.

The various forms of capital are important in the perpetuation of social inequality and in no other place is this seen more clearly than in the education system. This is where we learn our various roles in life and through social interactions with others who share our social class and expectations about achievement.

### **Learning Objectives**

1. Define *social class*.
2. State the difference between social inequality and social stratification.
3. Describe the American ideology and its impact on the production and perception of social inequality.
4. Define *capital* and explain the four types of capital.
5. Explain what the Gini index is and describe its weaknesses.
6. Describe social reproduction.
7. Describe how an ideology can be impacted by one's *habitas*.
8. Explain how globalization impacts social inequality.

## Chapter Outline

- A. Overview of text's main themes
  - a. social inequality
  - b. social stratification
- B. The Rise of the Global Economy
- C. The Conceptual Skeleton: Social Reproduction and the Impact of Capital Types
- D. Social Reproduction and Schooling

## Key Terms

capital	ideology
cultural capital	social capital
financial capital	social class
Gini index	social inequality
globalization	social reproduction
habitas	social stratification
human capital	

## Questions for Class Discussion

1. Is globalization helpful or harmful in addressing the problem of social inequality?
2. How is the global economy involved in creating inequality among nations?
3. How can one's *habitas* impact one's ideas about going to college?
4. How is obtaining one form of capital linked to the acquisition of other forms of capital?
5. Why do you think it is that the U.S. produces greater economic inequality than other developed nations?

6. What others areas of life do you think are impacted by social class besides education, employment, and place of residence?

### Websites

1. Globalization 101.org. Gives a description of globalization and provides a number of examples for learning about the economic, political, and cultural systems that impact poor and less developed countries. [www.globalization101.org/](http://www.globalization101.org/)
2. Walmart Watch. Provides information on employees' wages and benefits, lobbying efforts and other issues relating to the impact of Walmart globally and nationally. [walmartwatch.org/](http://walmartwatch.org/)
3. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Policy making organization with data and reports of countries' economic well-being. [www.oecd.org/](http://www.oecd.org/)