GCSE Sociology: revision notes

Theories of social stratification

Your notes

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What stratification is

- **Social stratification** is the way society is structured into layers (strata) of inequality, such as by class, gender, ethnicity and age.
- Societies have had different systems: slavery, caste (a closed system based on birth, as traditionally in India), feudal estates, and social class (a more **open system** where mobility is possible).

Functionalist view

- Davis and Moore (1945) argued stratification is necessary and beneficial: the most important jobs need the most talented people, so these jobs are given high rewards to motivate people to train for them.
- Critics say rewards don't always match importance (some nurses earn far less than celebrities) and that inequality of opportunity stops talented people rising.

Marxist and Weberian views

- Marx argued society is divided into two classes: the bourgeoisie, who own the **means of production**, and the proletariat, who sell their labour. Stratification benefits the ruling class through exploitation.
- Weber argued that inequality has several dimensions: class (economic position), **status** (social prestige) and **party** (political power). This gives a more complex picture than Marx's two classes.

Key terms

Social stratification	The layering of society into unequal groups.
Caste system	A closed system of stratification based on birth.
Open system	A system where social mobility is possible.
Means of production	The things needed to produce goods, such as factories and land.

Status	Social prestige or honour.
Party	Weber's term for political power.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What is social stratification?
2. What is a caste system?
3. What did Davis and Moore argue?
4. What is a criticism of Davis and Moore?
5. What did Marx say divides society?
6. What three dimensions of inequality did Weber identify?
7. What is status in Weber's theory?
8. Which system allows social mobility?

Answers

1. The layering of society into unequal groups
2. A closed system of stratification based on birth
3. Stratification motivates talented people to fill important jobs
4. Rewards don't always match the importance of a job
5. Ownership of the means of production
6. Class, status and party
7. Social prestige or honour
8. The class system

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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Your notes