

Social Stratification: The Cause for Reduced Chances

In today's society, there always seems to be strong visual differences between those with less and those with more. This inequality and division of class is a common societal structure that has come about for a variety of reasons. Alexander et al., author of *Contemporary Introduction to Sociology* and Matthew Desmond, author of *Evicted*, both explore these reasons and real life situations that can be used to explain class inequality. Alexander et al. focuses on different definitions and theories that can be applied to interpret class inequality and Desmond's novel includes his personal ethnographic research to observe the class inequality present in today's neighborhoods and he uses eviction as a key research topic to strengthen the awareness of social stratification. Alexander et al. and Desmond both portray the apparent inequality in society through social stratification and the lack of life chances. Desmond elaborates on the concepts mentioned in Alexander et al.'s textbook by providing real life situations which show the drastic effects of social economic status on the availability of education and jobs.

In Alexander et al.'s textbook, he explains the foundation of society's inequality to be from the concept of social stratification. He states that social stratification comes from differences that individuals have amongst various cultures and subcultures. This then forms a hierarchical society from individuals' access to resources, opportunities, and social influences (2012:253). In other words, individuals that associate with others in their proximal population usually have similar dispositions and surrounding influences. When you branch out from one community and observe the various communities in society, there are differences in opportunities and influences. For example, those in wealthy neighborhoods typically do not have

to worry about drug influences infiltrating their neighborhood; however lower class families living in the slums might have daily fears regarding their safety or the safety of their families. In Desmond's novel, he depicts status stratification partially to be a result of influences in the lower class because they are more readily exposed to negative influences; this different environment sets them apart from upper class society. He states, "The poor were being left out of the inequality debate, as if we believed the livelihoods of the rich and the middle class were intertwined but those of the poor and everyone else were not." (2016:317). Social stratification is an issue as the lower class is clearly set apart from the general population. This separation from the rest of society has further implications in that this division causes less life chances, and accessibility to resources like education and jobs.

Furthermore, social stratification is also developed from a difference of life chances that are either available or restricted in different social economic classes, such as education and jobs. Alexander et al. defines life chances to be the "opportunities for sharing in material or culture goods during one's lifetime." (2012:253). Desmond observed a lack of life chances in the Milwaukee slums while doing his research on eviction. He writes that, "Problems endemic to poverty-residential instability, severe deprivation, concentrated neighborhood disadvantage, health disparities, even joblessness-stem from the lack of affordable housing in our cities." (2016:333). Due to lack of affordable housing and the social economic status of the evictees, they become trapped within their social group. This confinement of the lower classes within poverty ridden societies, might partially be from their disadvantage of opportunities when it comes to education. Alexander et al. states that, "students who are given the impression that they are dumb and not expected to succeed academically may incorporate this label as part of their self-concept and behave as the label suggests." (2012:435). Even though this quotation does not

specifically point out lower class individuals, the labeling principle could be applied to children in lower class families. If children grow up with family background of poverty, basic education of family members, and low paying jobs, then they might have a lack of motivation to pursue higher than that of their family background (Alexander et al. 2012). This lack of a higher education, or high academic success, then inhibits their ability to receive higher paying jobs, thus keeping them in the lower class. Ultimately, this is made worse by the lack of affordable and available housing because the lower class cannot afford to go outside of their “status” and they are reduced to living in the lower class. This prominent social stratification based on living arrangements, thus limits the life chances that the lower class can obtain when it comes to housing.

In addition, Desmond depicts the lack of opportunities of life chances to be from the environmental and social influences of society. He argues that, “your race and gender, where and how you were raised, your temperament and disposition- can influence whom you meet, what is confided to you, what you are shown, and how you interpret what you see.” (2016:325). In other words, individuals’ self is shaped by any external influence. Looking back on Alexander et al.’s explanation of life chances he states that, “members of the same social stratum may have similar lifestyles.” (2012:253). If this is compared to what Desmond argues, those with similar lifestyles might have similar influences, dispositions, and upbringings. Therefore those with lower social economic status, are immersed amongst people “like them” or with similar backgrounds. This similarity in the community creates access to similar chances, such as jobs. If individuals of lower classes obtain similar low paid jobs: such as factory work or cashiers, then that creates more demands for that job and reducing the demand of other job chances in the community. All and all, because of the similar dispositions that are among people of the same status, life chances

are reduced because they are limited when it comes to influences and opportunities outside of their social status.

Ultimately, both Alexander et al. and Desmond talk about the effect that social economic status plays on the availability of life chances. They both strongly suggest that life chances are reduced amongst communities of lower class, which then reduces access to higher education and higher paid jobs. Evidently, both authors talk about the social economic status and effects that are prevalent in today's society; however how did the social status barrier even begin in societies? Class separation had to of began somehow, so what underlying influences started this status barrier and why has it grown to shape today's society despite the negative effects it has on communities.

Works Cited

- Alexander, Jeffrey C., Laura Desfor. Edles, and Kenneth Thompson. 2012. *A Contemporary Introduction to Sociology: Culture and Society in Transition*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Desmond, Matthew. 2016. *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. New York, NY: Crown Publishers.