

Social Stratification in Action

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Abstract

This paper first explains stratification and explores possible reasons why stratification exists in societies. Next, the paper details the life of a woman in the lower class and describes her lifestyle. The paper then compares the lower-class lifestyle to that of a lower-middle class lifestyle and an upper-class lifestyle. Social capital is explained and compared for the upper class versus the lower class. Finally, the paper explains lessons that I learned through this assignment as well as problems that I encountered.

Social Stratification in Action

Stratification exists when there are inequalities among different groups within a society who vary in the rewards they receive (Giddens, Duneier, Appelbaum, and Carr. 2017). One of the main aspects of stratification is class; though class structures are fluid and have ambiguous divisions, a person's class is usually determined by their education, occupational status, wealth, and income (Giddens et al. 2017). The origin of stratification is disputed among sociologists. From a structural functionalist stance, stratification is necessary because some jobs are less replaceable than others and societies need the right number of people in each role (Giddens et al. 2017). Structural functionalists like Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore argue that the less replaceable a job is, the more someone in that job should be paid (Giddens et al. 2017). On the contrary, a conflict theorist would argue that stratification exists because there is a division between the proletariat (laborers) and the bourgeoisie (capitalists). The bourgeoisie owns the means of production (proletariat) and they earn money from profit, while the proletariat earns from wages (Giddens et al. 2017). No matter the reason why stratification exists, it is present in most societies.

Rebecca Robosterson is a 32-year-old female who lives with her two children Olivia and Colin who are eight and six years old respectively. Rebecca's family did not have the funds to send her to college, so she attempted to go straight into the workforce. She could not find a job that would hire someone with only a high school diploma, so she ended up at Food Lion in the deli and has been there since. Rebecca's annual income is \$15,049, which means she works a minimum wage job eight hours a day, five days a

week, each week of the year. Since she could not find happiness in her job, she started dating Paul Trusmian and they had two children, but never married. Paul felt that Rebecca would never satisfy him since she did not make much money, so he left her with the children.

The Robosterson family lives in a one-bedroom apartment in the Robinson Park Apartments in Harrisonburg, Virginia, where Rebecca sleeps on the couch. While Rebecca works, her children attend Cub Run Elementary School. Rebecca's parents live in the same apartment complex as her, which allows them to babysit the children before and after school. Rebecca can only spend \$336.16 for groceries each month, which means the family eats many processed and store-brand foods that are not healthy and will likely cause health issues in the future. Her children are bullied in school because they are overweight from lack of exercise and nutrition. She had to spend most of her savings, which only totaled \$2,320, for a down payment on a used car that had over 160,000 miles on it and needs frequent repairs. She is barely able to save any money each month for retirement and college for the children, but she tries her best to save for college so that the children can have a better life than she did. Rebecca is attempting to grant her children upward intergenerational mobility, which is defined as "movement up or down a social stratification hierarchy from one generation to another" (Giddens et al. 2017:210). Since Rebecca has had no intragenerational mobility (mobility within her own life) in her life from lack of higher education, she hopes that her children will be better off from the start.

While Rebecca Robosterson is not at the bottom of the social hierarchy, she is considered lower class. Rachel Petterson's lower-middle class family lives a much different life than Rebecca's family. Rachel's family is similar in that they own a used car, but it is a 2015 model as opposed to Rebecca's 2001 Toyota Camry. An annual income of \$70,042 sustains Rachel's family of four. Her husband is an electrician, while she works from home part time and watches the children. Rachel's family owns a home in a downtown area with four bedrooms and two baths for which they pay \$1,750 per month. Her family can afford television, internet, and a phone plan for each of the parents as well as the oldest child. In addition, one of the children plays soccer. The family's diet is balanced with a mixture of processed food and fresh food. Like Rebecca's family, Rachel's family has little income left each month to allocate to retirement and college. Her family prioritizes saving for emergencies so that one emergency does not ruin their savings and believes that providing "normal" socialization for their children is more important than saving for college. Unlike Rebecca's family, Rachel's family has made more connections with others because they have more time and money for sports and socialization.

Nina King's family lives in luxury; the down payment for her house, a new construction, is \$85,398, around six times the amount of Rebecca's income. Nina's family bought two new cars. With their income, they can purchase organic food and have a surplus of food each month. The family spends more on groceries weekly than Rebecca's family can in a whole month. This healthy lifestyle is coupled with a gym membership. While Rebecca works all day and only has enough time to make dinner and

relax for a few minutes before bed, Nina's family has expensive facial care products, time for trips to the spa, and lawn and maid services. Nina allocates \$1,500 monthly toward tropical vacations and trips out of the country, while Rebecca only has the funds to allocate \$10 and will likely never afford a vacation. Nina's kids are in sports as well as piano lessons. Her family is well-known in the area and has time to participate in community activities. Her children will also be able to find well-paying jobs since they have the money to attend college. Most of these discrepancies derive from the amount of money that Nina and Rachel's families makes as opposed to Rebecca's family, but the differences are deeper than just money.

Nina and Rachel's families differ from Rebecca's in social capital. Social capital is defined as "social knowledge and connections that enable people to accomplish their goals and extend their influence," (Giddens et al. 2017:149). For someone at the bottom of the social hierarchy, it is nearly impossible to have any social capital; however, as one moves higher in the hierarchy, there is more social capital. Those who have more money are likely to have access to additional resources to extend their influence. For example, many wealthy people, such as presidents and their cabinets, as well as other political figures, gather each year at the Bohemian Grove. At the Bohemian Grove, attendees are treated to plentiful feasts and plays performed by actors galore. The idea of the Bohemian Grove is for the wealthy attendees to introduce their children to each other, so they marry and stay at the top. It increases group cohesiveness and exclusivity (Domhoff 1975). The amount of social capital that one obtains is directly related to social exclusion of people without social capital. Many people try to reach the top using social capital, which would

be easy for Nina's family, more difficult for Rachel's family, and most difficult for Rebecca's family, who has no money and no way to climb the social ladder. Rebecca's family will probably always be excluded from luxury activities and groups unless there is a case of rare upward mobility.

Lacking a college degree prevents social mobility. Like Rebecca's experiences in struggling to find a well-paying job with only a high school diploma, a *New York Times* article by Timothy Egan tells the story of two men who lost their jobs and struggled to find another stable job since they did not have college degrees. A study presented in the article found that a man in his 50s with a college degree can earn around 81% more than a man the same age with only a high school diploma (Egan 2005). One of the main lessons I learned and problems I encountered, was that finding a job with no college degree is difficult. If someone has a college degree, they are more likely to find a well-paying job, and are then more likely to earn a higher income. With more income they have more opportunities to add to their wealth. Education is a key factor in determining if someone is lower class or upper class. This is especially difficult if a family, like Rebecca's, cannot afford to send their child to college.

Another problem that I encountered and lesson I learned was that living in the lower class not only means that someone has less money, but that they are also likely to suffer from poor mental and physical health. People in the lower class work most of the day, sometimes multiple jobs. When they arrive home after work, they may only have enough time to make dinner and relax for a few minutes before bed. When there are children in the equation, it is more difficult because the person also must care for them

and spend time with them. Working all day with no rest can cause major physical concerns, and no time for leisure or pleasure can lead to major mental health concerns. When journalist Barbara Ehrenreich abandoned her comfortable lifestyle in order to live in the working class, she was forced to work two jobs and relied heavily on caffeine and pain medicine to make it through the day. She recognized that the income she was receiving was barely enough for her and could not even imagine how it would be for someone with children (Ehrenreich 2001). Without social security benefits, this income would have been barely adequate for Rebecca herself.

While many people believe that members of the lower class abuse social security benefits, none of these benefits are simply “handed to” people. Forms for benefits are taxing and take much time and effort to complete. Rebecca is required to fill out an 18-page general social security benefits application, a form for her children to receive free lunch and breakfast each day, and a form to receive her tax credit. Social security benefits forms are no easy task, and Rebecca’s family would not be able to survive on her income without them.

Stratification is a vicious cycle. More education means a better job and more income. Those at the top use their social capital to remain at the top, and there is not much hope for those who do not start at the top when they are born. Intragenerational and intergenerational mobility are rare for those in lower classes. Between grocery lists, social security benefits forms, and finding somewhere to live as well as transportation on a low budget, I have been able to understand how difficult life in lower classes can be. Stratification is a great example of the famously used saying, “life is not fair.”

References

Domhoff, G. William. 1975. *Bohemian Grove and Other Retreats*. New York: Harper Torchbooks.

Egan, Timothy. 2005. "No Degree, and no Way Back to the Middle." *New York Times* (1923-Current file), May 24, (<https://bceagles.idm.oclc.org/docview/92982773?accountid=26485>).

Ehrenreich, Barbara. 2001. *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America*. United States: Henry Holt and Company.

Giddens, Anthony, Mitchell Duneier, Richard P. Appelbaum, and Deborah Carr. 2017. *Essentials of Sociology, 6th Edition*. New York: Norton.

Appendices

1. Family Budget Worksheet
2. Housing and Transportation Information
3. Food Purchased (one week's worth) List
4. Free and Reduced Meal Application for Children
5. Earned Income Tax Credit (1040)
6. Social Security Benefits Application

My Monthly Family Budget

Student Name: Erika Clary
 Family Name: Number in your family:
 Class : Initial Savings:
 Annual Income:

Allocation of Initial Savings

Type NUMBERS ONLY in the cells below.

Housing		
	Down Payment on Home	\$0.00
	OR security deposit on apartment	\$450.00
Car	Down Payment	\$1,500.00
Investments	Specify:	
Savings	Retirement	\$120.00
	College for Children	\$200.00
Other	Specify: Cell phone from Verizon (Prepaid)	\$50.00
	Specify:	
Total Spent from Initial Savings		\$2,320.00
Balance left from Initial Savings		\$0.00

PLEASE NOTE:

There are multiple tabs (sheets/pages) in this Budget Worksheet. Look in the lower left-hand corner of the screen, and you will see them lined up there. They say: "Initial Cash Savings," "Net Monthly Income," "Fixed Expenses," "Flexible Expenses," "Monthly Savings," and "Final Check." To adequately complete this worksheet, your input is required on most of these tabs. Be sure to look at and go over all of them.



This number should EQUAL the INITIAL SAVINGS amount above.



This number should be ZERO when you are done allocating your savings.

This page calculates your net monthly income (take-home pay) after you enter the amount of taxes that are going to be withheld from your paycheck (and add in any supplemental income from social services, if applicable).

Type NUMBERS ONLY in the cells below.

Below: Supplements

MONTHLY INCOME	(total annual income / 12) =	\$1,254.08
TAXES	(use online tax calculator)	\$119.59
SUPPLEMENTAL	If you think it is necessary you may (pseudo)apply for TANF or SNAP (foodstamps) but you <u>must</u> document with forms/quotes. See me first.	\$651.33
NET MONTHLY INCOME	equals =	\$1,785.82

\$100 Medical Insurance

\$75 Heating/Cooling

\$476.33 EITC/month

 This is

total amount of money you can spend per month

MONTHLY FIXED EXPENSES (out of your monthly net income):

Type NUMBERS ONLY in the cells below.

HOUSING	Find a home or apartment using realtor.com or other source, and if buying use online mortgage calculator.	
or	Mortgage	\$0.00
	Rent You may qualify for subsidized housing, but if you want to use, you <u>must</u> document with forms/quotes. See me first	\$450.00
Home or apartment insurance	Use online sources to find a quote. REQUIRED if buying, OPTIONAL if renting.	\$19.00
Utilities	25% of your monthly mortgage or rent	\$112.50
Food	At home: Weekly \$ 84.04 x 4 =	\$336.16
	Dining out: Weekly \$ 25.00 x 4 =	\$100.00
Health insurance & medical expenses	For Employer-Provided Plans: Monthly average family premium is \$85/person PLUS \$112 in monthly deductibles or co-pays. Health insurance is now legally required. You may also look for better rates (including MEDICAID if eligible) but if you use one of these you must document with forms/quotes	\$197.00
Car #1 (car is optional, but list other transport costs below)	payment	\$9.26
	insurance	\$134.62
	gas	\$20.00
	maintenance	\$40.00
Car #2 (if possible and/or necessary)	payment	
	insurance	
	gas	
	maintenance	
Other	Specify: Cellphone Payment	\$40.00
	Specify: Laundry	\$30.00
	Specify:	
Fixed Expenses TOTAL		\$1,488.54

Looked up usual amount for area

FLEXIBLE EXPENSES (out of your monthly net income):

(Choose these areas as your budget allows. That is, you don't HAVE to spend money on any of these things)

Type NUMBERS ONLY in the cells below.

Child care	Children watched by family	\$0.00
Clothing		\$25.00
Gifts (birthdays, holidays, etc.)		\$30.00
School expenses		\$20.00
Cable/satellite TV	For Phone and Internet	\$65.00
Allowances		\$0.00
Home furnishings and improvements		\$9.58
Entertainment		\$30.00
Charitable donations		\$0.00
Other	Specify:	

	Specify:	
	Specify:	
	Specify:	
	Specify:	
<u>Flexible Expenses</u> TOTAL		\$179.58

MONTHLY SAVINGS (out of your monthly net income):

Type NUMBERS ONLY in the cells below.

	begin with 10% of income if possible	
Long term savings	retirement	\$20.00
	college for children	\$25.00
Emergencies	aim for 5% or more of income	\$62.70
Vacation savings	if possible	\$10.00
<u>Savings</u> TOTAL-		\$117.70

Final Check: Did you stay in budget???

MY MONTHLY NET INCOME IS:

\$1,785.82

MONTHLY FIXED EXPENSES TOTAL:

\$1,488.54

MONTHLY FLEXIBLE EXPENSES TOTAL:

\$179.58

MONTHLY SAVINGS TOTAL:

\$117.70

MONTHLY TOTAL ALLOCATION:

\$1,785.82

BALANCE left from my Monthly Income

NOTE: This CANNOT be a NEGATIVE Number

\$0.00



This number should be ZERO when you are done allocating all of your monthly net income. If you have any left over, it should go into your "Monthly Savings."

Housing and Transportation Information:

Residency:

Robinson Park Apartments - Harri x +

https://www.apartments.com/robinson-park-harrisonburg-va/qy29ysw/

1 Bedroom \$335 - 450 | 660 Sq Ft

540-217-6104

Contact Property

Available Soon

Features

- Washer/Dryer Hookup
- Air Conditioning
- Cable Ready

Kitchen

- Dishwasher

Robinson Park

Robinson Park Apartments - Harri x +

https://www.apartments.com/robinson-park-harrisonburg-va/qy29ysw/

Map Menu Español Apartments.com Sign Up / Sign In

1 Bedroom \$335 - 450 2 Bedrooms \$535 - 655 3 Bedrooms \$740

Apartment Amenities

- Pet Policy**
No Pets Allowed
- Lease Length**
One year
- Features**
 - Washer/Dryer Hookup
 - Air Conditioning
 - Cable Ready
- Parking**
Surface Lot
Assigned Parking.
- Interior**
 - Clubhouse
- Property Information**
 - Built in 2017
 - 88 Units/3 Stories
- Services**
 - Laundry Facilities
- Kitchen**
 - Dishwasher

540-217-6104

First Name * Last Name *

Email Address * Phone

03/01/2019

Message

Email me listings and apartment related info.

Contact Property

Car:

Family Budget | Backstory - Go | Expenses - Go | Inbox - eclar | Student Home | Course: 2019 | Used 2001 To | how much is | +

https://www.auto.com/cars/toyota-camry-2001-4t1bg22k61u853541

Apps | Onward We Go | Drive | My8C | School Email | Netflix

2001 Toyota Camry

Vehicle Details, Special Features, Pictures and Contact Info

Home > Cars in Harrisonburg, VA > Toyota > Camry > 2001 > Back to my Results


2001 Toyota Camry

GREAT DEAL \$1,999

STEVEN NISSAN
2275 E Market St
Harrisonburg, VA 22801
View in Google Maps
(540) 908-3450

Get behind the wheel today!
Arrange a Test Drive

Want to drive it home today?
Ask About Financing



Send to Phone

Contact Seller

Have questions? Easily contact Steven Nissan right here:

Your Details:

First Name

Last Name

Email Address

Phone Number (Optional)

Your Message:

Hi! I'm interested in this 2001 Toyota Camry at your dealership in Harrisonburg, VA listed for \$1,999. Please contact me as soon as possible. Thanks!

Type here to search

Family Budget | Backstory - Go | Expenses - Go | Inbox - eclar | Student Home | Course: 2019 | Used 2001 To | how much is | +

https://www.auto.com/cars/toyota-camry-2001-4t1bg22k61u853541

Apps | Onward We Go | Drive | My8C | School Email | Netflix

Easy Money

Buying a new ride would be easier if you could save money on car insurance. Get a quote!

Payment Calculator

FICO® Scores are used in 90% of credit decisions **experian.**

Trade-In Value	Vehicle Price
\$ 0	\$ 1999
APR	Down Payment
4.3 %	\$ 1500
Term (in months)	Sales Tax
60 mo	0 %

Estimated Payment
\$9.26
Vehicle Price 1,999

*Title and other fees and incentives are not included in this calculation, which is an estimate only. Monthly payment estimates are for informational purposes and do not represent a financing offer from the seller of this vehicle. Other taxes may apply.

Have question about financing?
Contact the seller to learn more about which financing options might be available to you.

CONTACT SELLER

Contact Seller

Have questions? Easily contact Steven Nissan right here:

Your Details:

First Name

Last Name

Email Address

Phone Number (Optional)

Your Message:

Hi! I'm interested in this 2001 Toyota Camry at your dealership in Harrisonburg, VA listed for \$1,999. Please contact me as soon as possible. Thanks!

Check Availability

By clicking here, you authorize Cars.com and its sellers/partners to contact you

Car Insurance Information:

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying a GEICO car insurance quote. The browser's address bar shows the URL <https://auto-buy.geico.com/nb#/sale/coverage/gskmsi?id=>. The page features a blue header with the GEICO logo and a "Your Quote" section. The main content area displays the quote details:

First, here's your quote!

Start Your Policy Today For
\$134.62
6 Month Total Premium
\$777.72

A blue button labeled "CONTINUE TO PURCHASE" is positioned below the quote. Below the button, a list of benefits is shown with green checkmarks:

- ✓ Meets or exceeds your state minimum requirements
- ✓ Includes Bodily Injury Liability, Property Damage Liability, Comprehensive, and Collision. [Is this full coverage?](#)
- ✓ Discounts applied: **\$53.15**

The bottom of the screenshot shows the Windows taskbar with the search bar, task view button, and various application icons. The system tray on the right indicates the time is 7:53 PM on 2/20/2019.

Weekly Food List:

Breads/Cereals	Item	Price each	quantity	Total
	Sandwich Bread	0.67	1	\$0.67
	Waffles	2.30 per box	1	\$2.30
	Cereal Fun Packs	2.82	1	\$2.82
	Granola Bars	2.73	1	\$2.73
				<u>\$ 8.52</u> Total for Breads/Cereals
Dairy/eggs	Milk	2.56 per gal	1	\$2.56
	Eggs	1.48	1	\$1.48
	Cheese	1.28	1	\$1.28
				<u>\$ 5.32</u> Total for dairy
Meats/poultry fish	Sliced Turkey Breast	2.36	1	\$2.36
	Popcorn Chicken	4.12	1	\$4.12
	Hot Dogs	1.50 per pack	1	\$1.50
	Fish Sticks	3	1	\$3.00
	Chicken Breasts	7.48	1	\$7.48
	Ground Beef	3.88 per pound	1	\$3.88
	Bacon	2.78	1	\$2.78
				<u>\$25.12</u> Total for Meats
Fruits/Vegetables	Bag of Apples	3.44	1	\$3.44
	Green Beans	0.38	2	\$0.76
	Iceberg Salad	0.92	1	\$0.92
	Grapes	1.88 per pound	1	\$1.88
	Baby Carrots	0.88	1	\$0.88
	Corn	0.38	1	\$0.38
	Broccoli Florets	0.98	1	\$0.98
	Bananas	0.20/each	6	\$1.20
				<u>\$10.44</u> Total for Fruits/Vegetables
Drinks/Alcohol	Coca Cola 12 Count	4.88	1	\$4.88
	Water Bottles	1.74	1	\$1.74
	Apple Juice	0.98	1	\$0.98
				<u>\$7.60</u> Total for Drinks
Miscellaneous	Frozen Pizza	2.78	1	\$2.78
	Ramen Noodles	1.94	1	\$1.94
	Mac and Cheese	2.46	1	\$2.46
	Fruit Snacks	1.48	1	\$1.48
	Potato Chips	0.78	1	\$0.78
	Spaghetti Pasta	0.82	1	\$0.82
	Frito Honey Twists	2.54	1	\$2.54
	Prego Sauce	1.88	1	\$1.88
	Pizza Bagels	1.72	1	\$1.72

Chicken Noodle Soup	0.46 /can	4	\$1.84
Lunchables	1.36	3	\$4.08
Ice Cream	1.98	1	\$1.98
Oreos	2.74	1	\$2.74
			<hr/>
			\$27.04 Total for Misc.

GRAND TOTAL FOR THE WEEK'S GROCERIES: \$ 84.04