

Theories of Inequality: An Overview and a Strategy for Synthesis*

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Abstract

The long debate between functional and conflict theories of social inequality has not been resolved largely because the issues have been inadequately formulated. This paper largely abandons this dichotomy and presents explicit models of five approaches to explaining inequality. These are then synthesized into a common framework. It is shown that stratification literature as divergent as status attainment models, the Davis-Moore theory, power elite studies, Lenski's evolutionary theory, Habermas' analysis of distorted communications, and world-systems theory can be subsumed under the framework.

One of the classic concerns of sociology has been to identify the sources of social inequality. Since World War II the discussion has often taken the form of a debate over whether conflict or functional approaches to social analysis are most useful in answering the question. Gerhard Lenski (1966) attempted to develop an explanation of social inequality that was based on a synthesis of the conflict and consensus perspectives. Lenski's work has made an important contribution to our understanding of variations in patterns of inequality across types of societies but the proposed theoretical synthesis has been largely rejected or ignored. Dahrendorf (1966) characterized the synthesis as superficial, though he was generally positive about Lenski's analysis. More important recent major works on stratification theory largely ignore Lenski's proposed synthesis—though not his analysis. The core of Randall Collins' *Conflict Sociology* (1975) is stratification theory. Yet as the title suggests he clearly and unapologetically begins his whole analysis from a conflict perspective—explicitly rejecting most of the assumptions of consensus and functional approaches to sociological analysis. In contrast, Donald Treiman's *Occupational Prestige in Comparative Perspective* (1977) is basically a functional theory; universal functional and organizational imperatives are assumed to produce essentially similar patterns of occupational inequality across all complex societies. In addition to

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scholarly works our stratification textbooks often organize their discussions around this contrast. In short, the debate between the conflict and consensus perspectives—especially with respect to stratification theory—continues largely unabated and unresolved.

When debates drag on ad nauseam it is often because the issues have been formulated in a misleading way. In many respects the theoretical debates over the sources of inequality are reminiscent of the blind men and the elephant: each theoretical position claims that the part of reality that it has grasped adequately represents the totality. It is my contention that we need to in large measure abandon the conflict-consensus debate and construct a more complete picture drawing on a number of approaches.

The core of this paper outlines five major approaches to explaining inequality. While these vary in their degree of generality and the aspect of inequality they purport to explain, all of these approaches have stimulated a significant amount of theoretical discussion or empirical research. For each approach an explicit set of propositions is presented in the form of a diagrammatic causal model. The models are then interrelated into an overarching framework.

The utility of the framework will be discussed later, but a few words are in order about what is *not* being attempted. The outcome is not a synthesis in the sense of subsuming the previous arguments under a limited number of more abstract propositions. Nor is the result a grand structural equation model which can be used directly in empirical research. What is modeled are alternative theoretical arguments, not concrete empirical processes. Rather the framework is on an intermediate level of abstraction that is intended to be of assistance in moving toward both empirical models and more abstract theory.

Several technical notes are required about the models presented in Figures 1–6. There are variables characterizing three different units or levels of analysis and these are indicated by the shape of the box. Hexagons indicate that the unit of analysis is the *act* of some subunit of a larger social unit. Rectangles indicate the unit is some *subunit*—a person, a social position, a social class, an organization, etc.—of some larger macro-unit. Ovals indicate the unit of analysis is the *macro-unit*, for example, a society. The levels are, of course, relative to a given analysis; in some analyses the subunit might be the individual and the macro-unit a local community, while in others the subunit might be a nation-state and the macro-unit the “world-system.” In Figures 2–6 the arrows composed of “dotted” lines indicate propositions that were previously introduced. The arrows composed of solid lines indicate the new propositions that are added at that particular stage of the presentation. If there is no sign by the point of a given arrow this means the relationship is considered positive and roughly monotonic, the greater *A*, the greater *B*. A minus indicates an

inverse relation, the greater *A*, the less *B*. It must be kept in mind that some of the variables have “dual directions.” For example, conformity can involve either conformity or deviance and hence the sanctions may be either positive or negative. Consequently, the accumulated power and resources will depend on the mix of positive and negative sanctions received. The symbol “U” indicates the relation is curvilinear. When the variables shown in the diagrammatic models are first introduced into the discussion they are italicized in the text.




The Conformity–Deviance Process

This section will focus on attempts to explain the level of rewards (or punishments) received by some subunit—an individual, a social position, a social class, etc.—of a larger macro-social group. The dependent variable is the amount of *sanctions*, positive or negative, which the subunit receives. This is explained in terms of differential *conformity* to norms: those whose acts conform most to a group’s norms receive the most positive and the fewest negative sanctions, those who conform least receive the reverse (Parsons 1954). But perfect conformity to one norm will be more highly rewarded than perfect conformity to another norm. Variations in the level of rewards received (for approximately equal levels of conformity) are explained in terms of a supply and demand process. The more in demand a particular kind of conformity, the more highly it will be rewarded. Similarly, the more scarce a desired conformity the more highly regarded it will be.¹ This model is summarized in Figure 1. (See Kimberly [1970] for a review of more detailed exchange processes relevant to a micro model. See Busching & Milner [1982] for an attempt to broaden the assumptions of the exchange theory which underlie most of these micro models.) Variability in levels of conformity, of course, assumes common norms. The source and legitimacy of such norms will be considered in the next section.

This model is essentially the one presented by Homans (1950, pp. 121–27, 138–49) and represents the core of the theory of inequality presented by Davis and Moore (1945). Moreover, it is a version of the supply and demand model from market economics. As has been pointed out by several writers, Davis and Moore’s concept of “functional importance” is the analog of demand, “scarcity of personnel” is the analog of supply, while their “level of rewards” is the equivalent of price (e.g., Collins 1975; Grandjean 1975; Simpson 1956; Wrong 1959).²

Over time, differential levels of sanctions tend to accumulate and generalized differences in *resources and power* begin to develop (indicated in the model by the summation sign, i.e., “Σ”) and in turn provide the basis of differential *privileges*.³ But before these processes are considered

Key to Symbols

-  = social act
-  = subunit
-  = macrounit

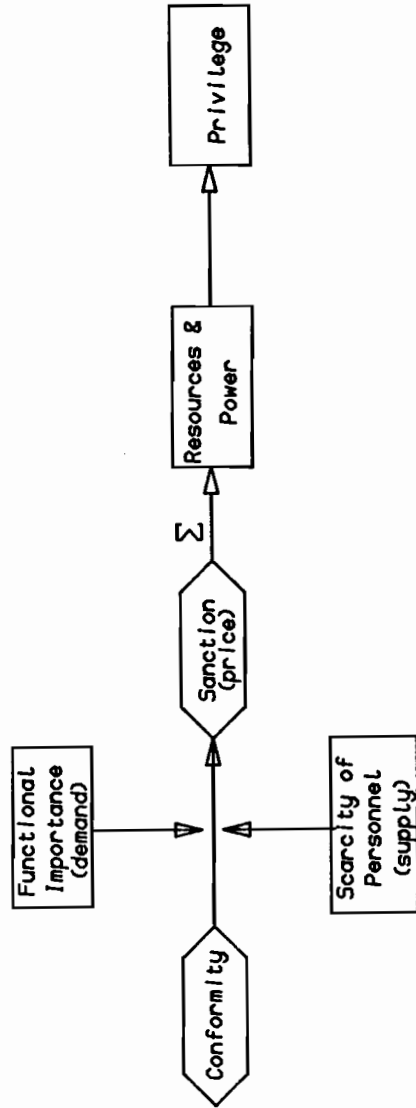


Figure 1. MICRO "FUNCTIONAL" MODEL (CONFORMITY AND SANCTIONS)

we need to examine the key assumptions behind the conformity-deviance model and to analyze how consensus and conflict theorists differ with respect to these assumptions.

Norms, Consensus, and Discourse

The central assumptions behind any conformity-deviance model are: (1) there are social norms (though they often lack explicitness and precision), (2) most individuals in the group are aware of the existence and the basic content of these norms, and (3) most individuals take them into account in deciding how to behave. This "taking into account" may involve conformity, reconciling oneself to the consequences of deviance, or taking measures to hide one's deviance, or publicly displaying one's conformity. People are not, however, oblivious of the norms.

While those who emphasize a conflict or coercion perspective may place less emphasis on the significance of norms as an explanation of behavior, this is not their crucial point of contention with consensus theory. Most conflict theorists recognize that dictators, ruling classes, and governing elites all use norms to produce social order, though the application of norms may be more arbitrary and biased in authoritarian regimes. Norms are used because it is so much more efficient to rule via rules.

The major point of contention between conflict and consensus theorists is over the source and purpose of social norms. Consensus theorists would hold that the norms are rooted in a fundamental consensus about social values (e.g., Benedict 1934; Durkheim [1915] 1965; Parsons 1951). Such a consensus may be seen as a functional requirement for a society to survive over any extended period of time (Aberle et al. 1950). Moreover, the content of the consensus may be explained as a functional adaptation to the environment necessary for the survival of the society (Malinowski [1944] 1960).

In contrast, conflict theorists see norms primarily as a mechanism that ruling groups use to dominate others and perpetuate their interests. Ralf Dahrendorf's essay "On the Origins of Inequality Among Men" (1968), is the clearest statement of this position. Dahrendorf's argument can be summarized in the following propositions:

1. The very existence of a society assumes social norms and sanctions to enforce them.
2. Differential conformity to norms and the resulting differential sanctions are the origin of social inequality.
3. Norms are always the norms of the ruling class and biased in their favor to serve their interests.

The third proposition is what distinguishes Dahrendorf from a simple consensus model. It is relatively easy to demonstrate the inadequacy of Dahrendorf's position when stated in its most extreme form.⁴ The more important question, however, is whether most norms are usually biased—and to what degree it is possible to reduce such a bias.

Whether norms are biased is primarily determined by how they are created and maintained, that is, by the terms of discourse and communications which are used to establish and justify them. Among contemporary sociologists it is Jürgen Habermas (1970, 1971) who has made the nature and significance of discourse and communication his central preoccupation. In undistorted discourse differences in power—other than power of rational argument—are not allowed to affect either the agenda or the outcome. But Habermas' originality is in being concerned not only about current power distribution among those who engage in discourse—for example, whether the decision was fully democratic—but how power differences in the past have distorted people's capacity for free and open communication. Psychoanalysis is the process whereby the interests of individuals that were banned from their public agendas and even consciousness—by repression during socialization—are made conscious. Such distortions occur not only at the level of the individual but also at the level of social institutions. Ideology is the description of social existence that has been edited by the repression of unwanted facts. Just as individuals require therapy, social orders require critique—based on "critical theory." But the very concepts and methods needed for developing a critical theory of social life are themselves distorted and require a new understanding of the ever evolving relations between truth and power, between "knowledge and interests."⁵

The central point is this: if norms are to represent general interests rather than special interests they must emerge out of authentic consensus arrived at through discourse which is insulated from both present power differences and distorted forms of communication which originated from past forms of differential power and repression. While historically most norms have been the norms of the ruling class, it does not follow that this is equally true for all societies at all periods of time—much less inevitable in any total sense.

Habermas' argument should make us skeptical of accepting the existing social consensus at face value. This is the tendency of consensus theorists and most admirers of democratic pluralism. Even if an existing norm received the uncoerced support of 100 percent of the population this does not necessarily mean that it is unbiased. People may adamantly support norms which are biased against their interests just as individuals may be strongly attached to neurotic patterns that are against their interests. To recognize this fact does not mean that an "enlightened" self-appointed vanguard has the right to kill and persecute people because of their false

consciousness and in the name of "the people's" objective interest. Rather it means that norms and all types of commitments, including voter preferences in democratic politics and consumer preferences in market economics, are socially constructed. Therefore, they must be treated as variables to be analyzed, not as "givens" which remain outside the realm of analytical, political, or moral scrutiny. On the other hand, Habermas' analysis warns us against the opposite error of being overly cynical or pessimistic about the possibilities of authentic consensus and unbiased norms. While the assumption that all norms serve the ruling class may be a more defensible simplification than accepting consensual norms at face value, it is still an unnecessary oversimplification. Consequently, such an assumption needlessly hampers sociological analysis.

What is required is that we treat the degree to which norms are biased, the authenticity of consensus, and the terms of discourse, as variables and attempt to empirically determine to what degree these are biased in favor of special interests. What the measurement of such biases requires is that we identify value premises that might serve as a baseline or zero point. One example of a recent attempt to provide a model of equity is John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1971). At the core of Rawls' theory is a concept of unbiased discourse—what Rawls calls the "original position." Sociology must draw on the value premises provided by such analysis in an attempt to specify how an unbiased social system would look.

This is not a new or unorthodox procedure in sociology. Often intergenerational transmission of status is analyzed in relation to a concept of equality of opportunity, which in turn may be based on a model of statistical independence. A correlation between the incomes of fathers and their sons is a departure from statistical independence and suggests the possibility of inequality of opportunity. Such a concept of equality of opportunity is not sociology per se, but rather the operationalization of value premises commonly held in the society. Concepts of equality of opportunity may change over time (Coleman 1968), or different concepts may be held by different subpopulations—as shown by the debates over affirmative action.

Just as there have been different models of equality of opportunity there are likely to be alternative models of unbiased discourse and the resulting normative and cognitive norms. Some of Rawls' arguments, for example, have been widely criticized and debated (e.g., Nozick 1974). Sociology cannot prove one model is more desirable than another. But it can, however, try to determine what models people actually use (e.g., Alves & Rossi 1978; Jasso & Rossi 1977) and point to the extent to which the social structure actually matches various models and the resulting consequences. Moreover, we can go one step further; by a sociology of knowledge approach we can analyze the social sources of variations in value premises, and hence further sensitize people to the possible biases in the

creation and adoption of value premises. The empirical and methodological problems associated with such efforts are manifold. This makes it tempting to simply exclude the problem of biased norms and discourse from our analyses. In the long run, however, sociology—and human life—is likely to be poorer if this is the path we take.

Figure 2 shows how these additional variables would be combined with the conformity-deviance model. The content of norms in a given social unit determines what constitutes conformity (or deviance). This content is the macro attribute which is a precondition for variation between microunits such as classes, roles, and individuals. Our focus here is the extent to which the content of the norms favors some and disadvantages others, that is, with the degree of *normative bias*. In large measure what determines whether the content of these norms is biased is the *terms of discourse*: do all groups have a fair opportunity to influence the discussion and decisionmaking which establishes the norms.

Discourse, however, not only shapes the group's sense of ought, that is, the content of the norms, but it also shapes their sense of what is, that is, the definition of the situation. Stated another way, discourse shapes the content of both the evaluative consensus (norms) and the cognitive consensus (the dominant definition of the situation). Just as normative systems can be biased, so can definitions of the situation, that is, there can be *cognitive bias*. The definition of the situation—and any cognitive bias it contains—affects social inequality by determining which activities, roles, etc. are defined as important. This in turn affects the demand for these activities and the rewards they receive. (See note p. 1089.)

The Effects of Power Differences

Once generalized differences in resources and power are present they have an additional effect on the processes we have considered so far. This section will trace the various mechanisms through which differences in power operate to affect subsequent inequalities. Though the conformity-deviance processes were discussed first, this does not mean that they have theoretical or empirical priority. In some situations the process of social inequality starts with initial differences in power, for example, those due to "natural" inequalities. Someone is bigger and stronger and threatens violence if others do not follow the norms she/he lays down. She/he elaborates a rationale to justify his/her rules, and subsequently rewards and punishes people according to their conformity and deviance. Hence, the decision to start with conformity-deviance, take up next the formation of norms, and then move to the exercise of power, was based on considerations of exposition rather than theoretical emphasis. Now let us return to the analysis; the propositions showing the effect of power differences are summarized in Figure 3.

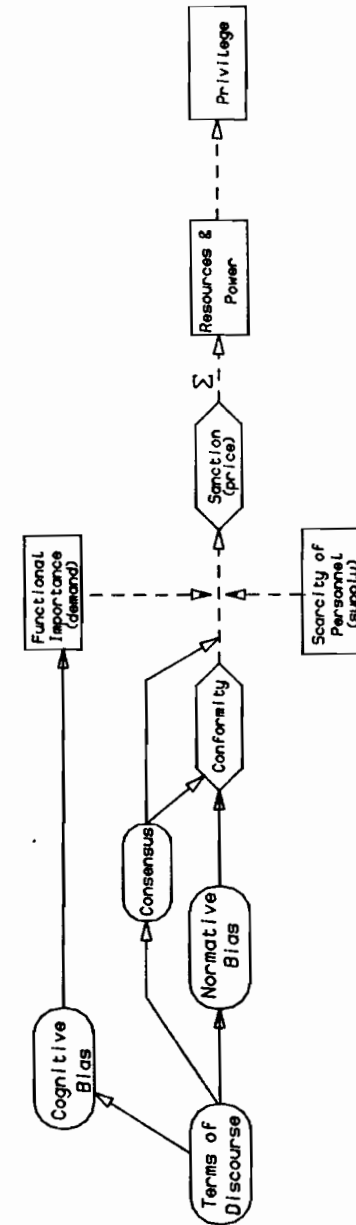


Figure 2. NORMS, DISCOURSE, AND CONSENSUS

crucial point is that even without deliberate manipulation, the evaluation process tends to favor those with high status and underevaluate those with low status. This seems to be due to the effect of stereotyping on perceptions, which is possibly rooted in the tendency toward cognitive balance (Crawford 1976; Heider 1946). For example, established achieved statuses such as occupation or having a police record, or ascribed characteristics such as sex and race, or characteristics which in principle are irrelevant, such as beauty or height, can bias the perception of one's conformity or deviance (e.g., Mazur et al. 1984; Webster & Driskell 1983). This is in addition to whatever role such factors play in deliberate discrimination. We must remember, however, that such biases are historically created and that even within a relatively short time period the same ascribed characteristic can take on a different or even an opposite meaning and bias (e.g., Peterson & Hagan 1984). Such measurement biases should not, however, be seen as inescapable psychological processes which make inequality inevitable. Sell and Freese (1984), for example, have made specific suggestions about how these processes might be minimized. Structural, rather than psychological, factors are the main source of measurement bias.

Perhaps the most important such structural source of bias is the *enforcement or restriction of contact and visibility*. Power is used both to enforce close supervision of those of lower rank and to make the visibility of those with power highly selective. In Goffman's (1959) terms, power is used to create a front stage and a back stage so that conformity and good performance can be lavishly displayed while deviance and poor performances can be carefully hidden. Control of visibility is one of the major reasons for the tendency toward the creation of social strata, broadly conceived. Control of visibility is the structural prerequisite for the use of a wide array of mechanisms of subversion: lying, cheating, stealing, plagiarism, bribery, name dropping, etc. (Coser 1961). Visibility is manipulated not only to affect the measurement of conformity-deviance, but also to obscure the actual level of rewards received. The rich and powerful are typically highly secretive about the extent of their resources and exactly how they are acquired.

Analysis of evaluation procedures by Dornbusch and Scott (1975) shows that the social measurement of performance is a highly complex and subtle process. Here only two of the factors which are potential sources of bias have been discussed to illustrate the broader issue.

C. MANIPULATION OF SUPPLY

The third major way in which power may be used to affect subsequent inequalities is by manipulating the *supply of personnel*. Most typically this is done by ascription, for example, only the sons of nobles can become no-

bles. This has the dual effect of decreasing the supply of potential nobles and increasing the supply of serfs. Holding demand constant, this increases the rewards of the former and decreases the rewards of the latter. While ascription is the classical means of manipulating mobility and scarcity of personnel, credentialism is an alternative mechanism in industrial societies (Berg 1970; Collins 1979; Freidson 1970). Professional groups which have managed to gain control of certification procedures usually insure that there is a relative scarcity of personnel. This mechanism of limiting the supply by excluding competition is the major focus of what has come to be called closure theory (Murphy 1984; Parkin 1979). The manipulation of demand will be taken up later.

D. TRAINING, SOCIALIZATION, AND INDOCTRINATION

Equality of educational opportunity has been one of the primary preoccupations of reformers in the modern period (e.g., Welter 1962). For about 200 years, it was assumed that inequality of educational resources definitely played a major role in affecting later achievements. Subsequent research and analysis have indicated that, at least in the U.S., differences in the resources available for formal education have had much less effect on later achievements than was often assumed (e.g., Boudon 1974; Bowles & Gintis 1976; Coleman et al. 1966; Jencks 1972; Milner 1972, 1973; Moynihan & Mosteller 1972). Nonetheless, differences in the resources available to one's family and the informal nurturing of family life and status group subcultures seem to play an important role in one's later ability to conform to performance norms and hence to compete with one's age peers (Jencks 1979).

But in addition to using resources to provide one's own children nurturing and training that makes them more competitive, resources and power can also be used to bias the macro process of *socialization and indoctrination*, that is, to spread and institutionalize a particular world view and ideology (e.g., Habermas 1975; Mueller 1973). In the USSR all anti-Communist ideologies are repressed, while enormous resources are used to convince people that the Soviet system is superior to alternatives. In the U.S. the processes are more subtle, but I know of no public school system that offers courses which stress the virtues of socialism and the vices of capitalism—though many courses do the opposite. The primary effect of these processes is to change both the content and intensity of the normative bias. On the other hand, simply because a given ideology or world view is largely uncontested in public discourse does not necessarily mean that it is unquestionably accepted by the lower classes (Abercrombie & Turner 1980); acquiescence is not acceptance. The main significance of a dominant ideology may not be lower class indoctrination, but upper class solidarity—a matter which will be taken up shortly.

E. AUTHORITY AND CENTRALITY

Formal *authority* is one of the primary forms of power and it typically includes the right to promulgate various rules and regulations as well as to interpret norms and rules arrived at by more participatory mechanisms, for example, legislation. The limits on the rights of those in authority to promulgate rules can vary widely. In a situation where unions have worked out highly detailed contracts lower level managers may not be able to promulgate any additional rules without the consent of the union. At the other extreme the martial law administrator of a new revolutionary regime may have absolute authority to change and create constitutions, laws, and rules. The key point is that those with even modest amounts of superordinate authority are usually able to affect the contents of the norms—*independent of the process of discourse discussed earlier*. This, of course, provides an opportunity to bias the system of norms to favor their particular interest and hence contribute to inequality.

The ability of those in authority to bias norms is to a significant degree conditioned by the extent to which the normative system has been formalized. Lenski's (1966) emphasis on the importance of constitutional government in limiting abuses of power is an example of this. But the relation between formalization and the centralization of authority is a complex one, both at the organizational level (e.g., Hall 1977) and at the macro level. At the macro level certain types of formalization can be associated with totalitarianism, or excessive bureaucratization, limiting the rights of citizens rather than limiting the power of those in authority. These conditioning effects are not explicitly included in the diagrammatic model but could easily be added.

Authority typically gives one *centrality* in the communication network. High status may also contribute to greater centrality even when it is not accompanied by formal authority. Those with authority, status, and other resources both talk more and are talked to more. This greater centrality increases the likelihood that one will participate during collective discourses. This in turn increases the probability that one will have an influence on the content of the evaluative consensus. Being central to the communications network also increases the information that one receives about the resources, motivations, behaviors, and expectations of other group members. This *social knowledge* both increases the effectiveness with which one can sanction others and increases one's ability to conform to the norms and expectations that are truly salient to others. The effect of rank on centrality and centrality on influence, social knowledge and conformity has been studied rather extensively at the micro level (e.g., Hopkins 1964) and is increasingly considered in macro level analyses. (For example, central place theory suggests that business districts are increasingly devoted to coordinating activities such as government and finance,

i.e., geographical centrality provides an important supplement to more obvious kinds of power and authority [Wallace 1980].)

F. LINGUISTIC REPRESSION

Even more indirect than socialization and indoctrination is the process of linguistic distortion and repression. This concept has been developed and elaborated by Habermas (1970, 1971, 1975), Mueller (1973), David Bell (1975), and literary critics such as Roland Barthes (see Coward & Ellis 1977). The essence of the notion is that the very categories of thought and discourse are restricted and biased. Consequently, the content of the evaluative consensus favors those with power. A contemporary example is the debate that has developed over sexist terminology which tends to identify high status with masculine terms. One recent study argues that the notion of "the economy" involves definite biases and is one mechanism for the "ideological incorporation" of the working class into contemporary society (Emmison 1985).

G. CLASS SOLIDARITY⁶

Up to this point the variable in Figure 3 labelled class solidarity has been skipped over. As is indicated, it is an important direct source of power; when individuals form coalitions and offer each other mutual support in conflict with outsiders their individual and collective powers are greatly expanded. There are, of course, many factors which affect class solidarity (see Giddens [1975] for a discussion of the theories and data about class "structuration" in advanced societies).

Related to the issue of class solidarity is the question of class consciousness. There are many complex issues involved, but, at least since Lukacs (1971), a major bone of contention has been over the extent to which such consciousness could be stimulated by deliberate political and ideological activities, and the role that party cadres can and should play in such endeavors. A related concern is to identify the structural factors that seem to retard class consciousness. Such issues continue to be a primary focus of Marxist theorists like Poulantzas (1978) and Wright (1978) and empirical research (e.g., Allen 1984; Aminzade 1984). I have not tried to include the various arguments in the model here. There is no reason why this could not be done by decomposing the variables of "class solidarity" into its many components.

The model here focuses on two key processes. Of first importance is restrictive contact—high levels of interaction within classes and low levels of interaction across classes increase class solidarity. This effect is obviously accentuated by low levels of mobility while high levels of mobility make contacts less restrictive (Blau 1977). Second, special nurturing and

training seem to play a crucial role in maintaining distinctive class subcultures. It is not accidental that the nanny, the "public" school, and "the club" were key symbolic institutions of the British upper class. The first two produced class oriented socialization and the third maintained restrictive contact.

H. A NOTE ON THE POWER ELITE AND THEORIES OF THE CAPITALIST STATE

Most of the controversies in the power elite literature (e.g., Domhoff 1967, 1971, 1975; Domhoff & Ballard 1968; Mills 1956; Rose 1967) are arguments over the significance of the mechanisms discussed in this section. The argument essentially revolves around two questions: (1) how much solidarity is there among the American upper class, and (2) if there is a high level of solidarity, to what degree do they act collectively to bias the conformity-deviance process in their favor? Most of the various aspects of these questions are captured in the propositions introduced in Figure 3. Of course, problems of methodology and inadequate data make a definitive test of the propositions very difficult.

A related issue is the role of the state in modern capitalist societies. The traditional view, coming largely from Lenin and elaborated by writers like Miliband (1969) is that the state is simply the political arm of the ruling class which pursues the interests of that class. But if this is so why have citizens in so many nation-states continued to be loyal to their state? Why has nationalism been a more powerful force than class solidarity? These questions have led other Marxists to attempt to develop models of the capitalist state which emphasize more subtle and indirect forms of support for the upper classes. The state is seen as a mediating agent which does not always support the immediate interests of the dominant members of the ruling class, but rather by applying relatively universalistic criteria plays a key role in maintaining the legitimacy and viability of the capitalist system. (For an overview of such arguments see Frankel [1979].) Other analyses, however, emphasize that such a mediating role is caught in a web of contradictions that will eventually produce a new kind of crisis for capitalism (e.g., O'Connor 1973). As important as this debate is, it is on a lower level of abstraction and generality than most of the other arguments about the sources of inequality, and hence cannot be included without considerable elaboration of an already very complex model. The simplest representation of the relations of state activity to the processes that are represented in the model would show it as an intervening variable between power and resources and the various feedback effects which bias the conformity-deviance processes and the discourse and norm creation processes. The liberal democratic view would see the state as reducing the biasing effect of the unequal distribution of resources. The traditional Marxist view would see the state as the chief collective actor which main-

tains and accentuates these biases. The revised Marxist view would stress the role of the state in balancing the processes of exploitation on the one hand, and legitimation on the other. As in the case of the arguments about the role of the power elite we simply do not have enough hard data to definitively choose between these alternative interpretations. Of course, it is possible that our collective ignorance may be perpetuated by those who have a vested interest in seeing that these questions are not answered.

Functional and Organizational Imperatives

Out of the broader functionalist framework (e.g., Malinowski 1960; Merton 1957; Parsons 1951, 1954; Radcliffe-Brown 1952) arose arguments that social inequality was rooted in certain functional requirements or organizational imperatives. A slightly more dynamic version of this argument is Parsons' (1964) concept of evolutionary universals in which the development of stratification is seen as a near universal adaptive mechanism which is a precondition for further evolutionary development. For societies—at least complex societies—to survive they had to meet certain universal functional requirements. For example, they had to allocate personnel so as to match talent and responsibility. Social inequality was seen as a crucial means to this essential end; more responsible roles were given higher rewards in order to attract talented people. The classic statement of this argument was made by Davis and Moore (1945). This type of argument has been almost endlessly discussed and criticized since its appearance (Collins 1975; Lenski 1966; Schwartz 1955; Simpson 1956; Tumin 1953; Wesolowski 1962; Wrong 1959). But despite all of this criticism arguments of this type continue to appear in the sociological literature both implicitly (e.g., Pfeffer and Salancik's [1978] model of managerial succession) and explicitly. Treiman's *Occupational Prestige in Comparative Perspective* (1977) is particularly noteworthy because it explicitly and unapologetically draws on such arguments. Treiman supports his theory with what is probably the most extensive array of comparative quantitative data to appear in the sociological literature. The core of his argument is that there is a common and universal scale of occupational prestige for all complex societies. This is so because prestige is ultimately determined by power and all societies distribute power across occupations in virtually the same way. Supposedly this occurs because of universal functional and organizational imperatives. Haller and Bills' (1979) detailed review and critique has qualified the generality of Treiman's conclusions but they did not fundamentally attack the validity of his theorizing or the extensive array of comparative quantitative data.

In short, despite the numerous criticisms the idea of functional and organizational imperatives will not go away. More to the point, the analy-

sis of a very extensive body of comparative data does not allow us to reject these arguments—though neither do the data prove that the functional arguments are correct. Other empirical work also offers some support for such arguments (e.g., Abrahamson 1979; Cullen & Novick 1979; Stinchcombe 1963). Therefore, the most reasonable strategy seems to be to ask how these arguments are related to the ones with which we have already dealt. By doing so future empirical work can attempt to determine to what extent the "imperatives" are important universals and to what extent they are misleading interpretations of spurious empirical relationships—especially those that result because the feedback effects of power differences discussed in the previous section have not been adequately controlled.

The model presented here (Figure 4) includes those concepts that approximate the notions of universal functional and organizational imperatives. These are (1) an inherent *interdependence* between human beings (Lenski 1966), (2) some significant *pressure for productivity and efficiency* (Treiman 1977), and (3) *external threats* from other social groups (Aberle et al. 1950). Many other functional imperatives have been suggested and formulated in the literature—for example, Parsons' (1954) famous AGIL scheme—but these are sufficient to illustrate how functional arguments can be related to the propositions already introduced.

The degree of these various pressures or imperatives can, of course, vary but the assumption is that they rarely fall to zero and typically societies define these as problematic. The pressure for efficiency and production is particularly crucial because it is supposedly a primary impetus to increasing the division of labor and other forms of functional *differentiation*. Many theorists, including Marx, have stressed the importance of functional differentiation as a source of social inequality (e.g., Dahrendorf 1968; Treiman 1977). Increased differentiation subsequently has a number of relevant consequences. First, it usually has the intended consequence of increasing productivity. Second, any complex division of labor inherently creates some differences in authority over the means of production because some tasks require more equipment, skill, or autonomy than some other tasks (Treiman 1977). (This may or may not take the form of private property in the bourgeois sense.) Hence a division of labor necessarily creates some *differential authority*. Third, differentiation leads to still additional differential authority by creating *pressures for coordination*. This increased coordination may come about through the creation of centralized authority. But it may also be achieved through market-like mechanisms. Extensive private exchanges in markets necessarily involve more elaborate rights of private property. Typically this results in an unequal distribution of property and hence a kind of unequal authority. Parsons (1966) sees the tendency toward differentiation and reintegration by means of more elaborate cybernetic mechanisms as the major dynamic behind social evo-

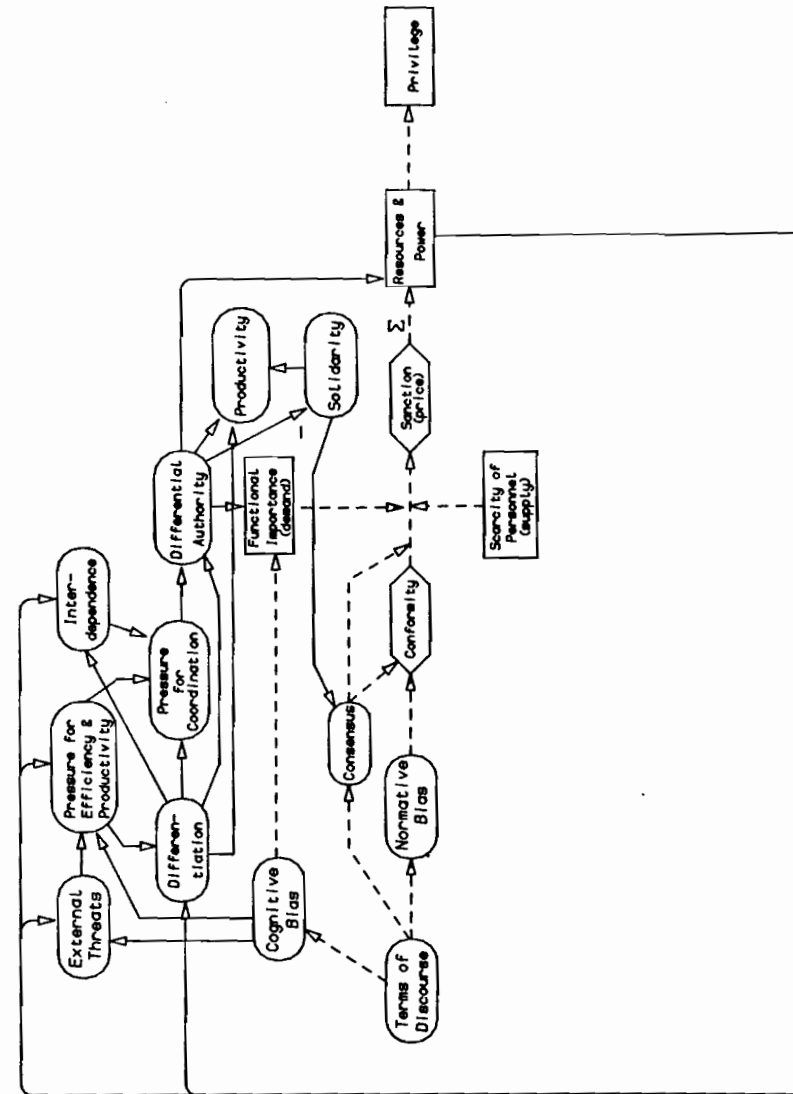


Figure 4. MACRO FUNCTIONAL MODEL (ORGANIZATIONAL IMPERATIVES)

lution, and hence a major contextual factor shaping other processes relevant to social inequality.

The emergence of significant authority differences—whether in the form of centralized authority or property—has at least four important consequences. First, coordination is usually improved and therefore productivity increases (e.g., Simon 1976). Second, by definition authority differences mean that some individuals or subunits are going to have more power and resources than others. (This, of course, can have a multiplier effect by feeding through the power mechanisms discussed in the previous section.)

Third, creating authority differences tends to also create differences in the functional importance of positions. When a system is organized on the assumption that someone will exercise authority, the absence of that authority will usually handicap the other subunits and hence increase the functional importance of those with authority. This is not, however, an inevitable and universal functional imperative. There are at least certain situations in which a social unit can significantly reduce differences in positional functional importance if they are willing to pay the cost of a more participatory decisionmaking process. An analogous effect is apparent in the realm of property: when a major corporation is threatened with bankruptcy an entire economy can be adversely affected, whereas the bankruptcy of a small barber shop has much more limited consequences. In these restricted and historically contingent senses, some positions or social subunits are more functionally important than others. But this is because, in a given historical context, a social system has valued production more than participation, or considered the sunk costs in the bankrupt corporation too great to allow complete disintegration. Such collective decisions may reflect common value choices, but they are not universal and inevitable imperatives. The fourth effect is indicated by the notion of contradictory functional requirements (Davis 1948; Sjoberg 1964). The key idea is that social units face contradictory pressures or requirements. This can be illustrated by the relations between *solidarity*, *productivity*, and differential authority. There is good reason to assume that, other factors constant, the productivity of a unit—including military action against other units—is increased when solidarity is increased.⁷ An alternative strategy for raising productivity is to improve coordination by increasing differential authority. But differences in authority also tend to decrease solidarity (e.g., Collins 1975). Consequently, increasing differential authority tends to have contradictory effects on productivity. As we shall see in the next section, variations in productivity can in turn have important effects on inequality.

Usually it is assumed that functional imperatives are either largely constants, or nearly universally present at a given stage of evolution, or they are randomly determined by forces external to the social unit. But an

equally plausible assumption is that these are significantly affected by the feedback effects of power differences. For example, elites sometimes create external threats by provocation in order to increase internal solidarity and the pressures for productivity, differential authority, etc. More indirectly, what constitutes an external threat is very much affected by the socially created definition of the situation. Those with power usually play a crucial role in formulating this definition. Situations which define outsiders as threats also tend to increase secrecy and therefore reduce visibility and increase measurement bias (Mills 1956).

Perhaps most important, functional arguments may overestimate the significance of efficiency pressures and underestimate the role of power differences as the source of functional differentiation. Is the division of labor due to efficiency pressures or to the fact that those with power find it more pleasant and profitable to avoid certain tasks? There is considerable evidence that the latter process is not unimportant (e.g., Blau & Scott 1962; Milner 1980; Wallerstein 1974). The direction of this causal relationship is not clear even for major historical transformations. For example, elaboration of the division of labor and hierarchies of authority during the industrial revolution were, according to some, due to a desire to increase labor control and discipline more than to demonstrable pressures for efficiency (Braverman 1974; Marglin 1974; Thompson 1968). These are complex and debatable issues, but it seems reasonable to conclude that power differences are probably as much of a cause of differentiation as vice versa.

Finally, an obvious point should be made. It is the variables that are dealt with in this section, especially differential authority in the form of control of the means of production and differentiation in the form of the division of labor that are at the core of Marx's analysis. Both Marxists and functionalists agree that these are crucial sources of inequality at the macro level. What they disagree about is the degree to which particular levels and forms of differentiation and differential authority are universal or historically contingent conditions.

Technology, Surplus, and Need

A central theme of much of the Marxian tradition has been the effect of changing technology on social structure in general and inequality in particular. Lenski's *Power and Privilege* (1966) is the work in contemporary sociology that has most drawn on and developed this idea. He has analyzed variations in equality across the entire range of human societies from primitive hunting and gathering tribes to highly industrialized nation-states. He argues that when we consider this range of variation the primary determinant of a society's level of *productivity* and, in turn, its level

ing concentration of authority, with multinational corporations and socialist economies being the most striking examples. But with the development of what has been called post-industrial society the importance of human capital has increased (Daniel Bell 1973). When physical capital is the main productive resource, superiors can fire subordinates and the capital stays in place. But if the crucial resource is human capital, the subordinates take that with them if they leave; it simply cannot be appropriated in the same way that physical capital can. This is one of the reasons for the increased importance of professional authority with its less centralized and more collegial modes of control. On the other hand, highly trained personnel often require very high levels of physical capital in order to work: the scientist requires a laboratory, the doctor a hospital, the accountant a computer. Often the cost of these is beyond the capacity of the individual professional to own, so even those with high levels of human capital are dependent on physical capital that is centrally controlled. The net effect of these countervailing processes is highly complex and it is simply too soon to come to any definitive conclusion. Tentatively, the more arbitrary and blatant forms of hierarchy seem to have been reduced. Some would argue they have been replaced by more subtle and insidious forms of control (Foucault 1965, 1979).

Perhaps more important than changes in the concentration of differential authority are changes in the manner in which it is exercised, especially the use of coercion. This second mechanism is indicated in Figure 5 by the way that the level of *technology* conditions the relation between *differential authority* and coercion. The use of coercion as an effective means of organizing production seems to reach its height in agrarian societies. Certainly it has declined in importance in the modern period as production technology has become increasingly complex. This complexity makes it very difficult to maintain work discipline through coercion or even through solely utilitarian rewards. In Etzioni's (1975) terminology the crucial mechanism of compliance has shifted from coercive to utilitarian and normative: from slaves and peasants, to hired hands and workers, to employees and professionals.

Probably the most important mechanism which decreases inequality in industrial societies is a shift in the ratio of concentration of power to the absolute amount of surplus. Industrialization increases the level of material resources, and hence the surplus, almost exponentially. Even if the concentration of power remained the same, additional increments of surplus are so great that they are bound to have a declining marginal utility to elites—at least as direct consumption commodities. This is indicated in Figure 5 by the curvilinear interaction effect of *level of resources* on the relation between *power* and *privilege*: when the surplus is very low or very high the correlation between power and privilege declines—though it is, of course, still very significant.

In addition to the effects of technology and surplus Lenski argues that there are a number of other mechanisms of secondary importance—what he calls “second and third order” factors—which affect inequality. For example, he argues that the use and institutionalization of constitutions reduces inequality and elaboration of the “rights of citizenship” (Marshall 1965). In part this is because constitutions tend to limit the use of coercion and make it more difficult to use resources to purchase or organize coercion for private ends. These propositions are not included in Figure 5 but could easily be added.

The introduction of the various elements of the argument is now complete and the combined model is shown in Figure 6. Note that Figure 6 shows that the subunit attributes *resources and power*, and *privilege* can be aggregated to give the macro distributional “shape” of the stratification system. What can be called the formalist tradition, which has its roots in the work of Simmel, has focused on the significance of these types of variables. The “shape” of the stratification system is seen as setting the parameters for various opportunity structures, for example, the opportunities for vertical mobility or cross-group associations. In other words the shape is seen to have important feedback effects. For example, theoretical (Blau 1977), methodological (Boudon 1974), and empirical (Tyree, Semyonov & Hodge 1979) work all indicate that the shape of the stratification system has an important effect on subsequent patterns of mobility. This and a number of other effects could be specified and added to the model.

Other Literature on Social Inequality

There are major bodies of literature which have not been considered because they cut across two or more of the submodels. Now let us go back and illustrate how the framework that has been created can be used to throw light on how these perspectives can be related to the material which has already been analyzed. To illustrate the versatility of the framework I will focus on two bodies of work that are usually seen to be drastically different with respect to units of analysis, research techniques, theoretical assumptions, and ideological implications: status attainment research and world-systems theory.

The Status Attainment Tradition

Certainly the most extensive body of quantitative empirical work on the sources of invidious differences between individuals is the status attainment research using structural equation models (e.g., Blau & Duncan 1967; Curtis & Jackson 1977; Duncan, Featherman & Duncan 1972; Featherman & Hauser 1978; Hauser & Featherman 1977; Jencks 1972, 1979; Sewell & Shah 1968a, 1968b). All of the core propositions of this tradition are

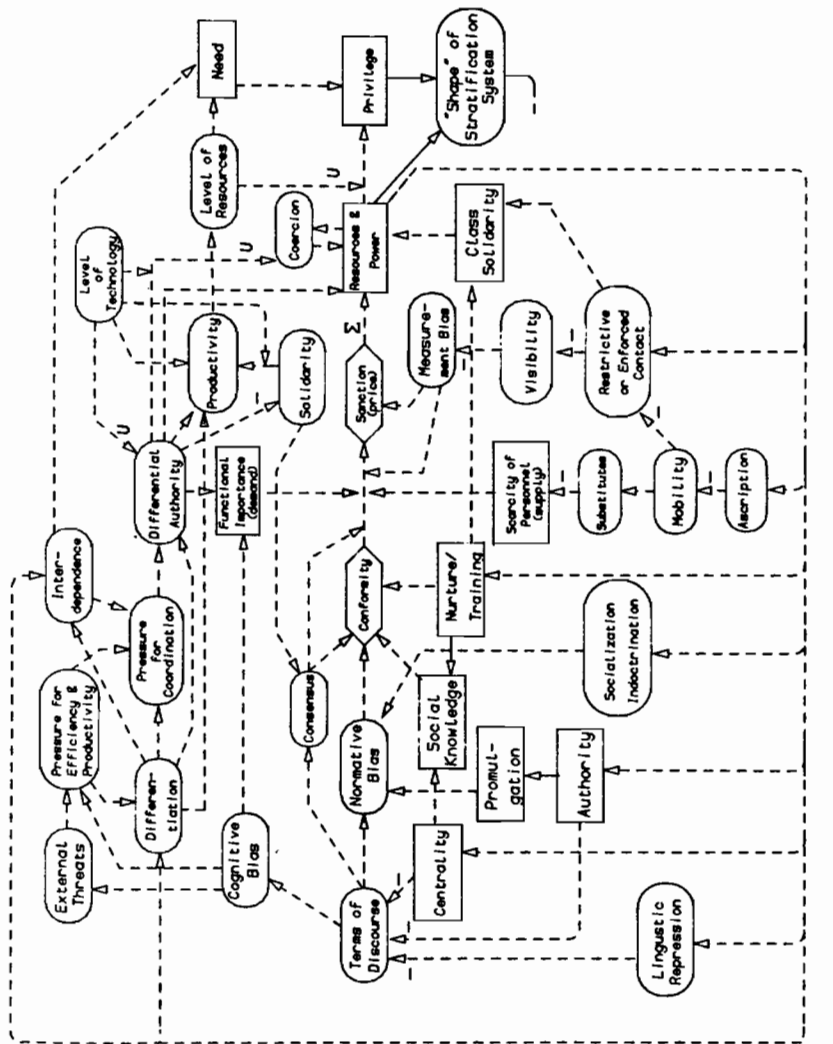


Figure 6. COMPLETED MODEL

included in the models that have been outlined. Parents' income and status is a special case of accumulated *power and resources*. This initial resource base then affects the chances of gaining subsequent education, that is, *nurture, training, and capital*. These in turn affect one's chances of *conformity* to alternative sets of role expectations, that is, the chances one has of being in one occupation rather than another. Conformity to the entrance requirement and the performance norms of a particular occupation in turn plays a crucial role in determining one's income, that is, the monetary *sanctions* one receives. Income accumulated over time is a key determinant of wealth, power and status, that is, resources and power, which in turn will affect the nurture, training, and capital available to one's children and their subsequent achievements.

The later work in this tradition has focused on the effects of so-called structural or contextual factors affecting one's opportunity structure: the individual's firm, industry, age cohort, internal labor market, etc. (e.g., Baron & Bielby 1984; Bibb & Form 1977; Grandjean 1981; Hargens & Felmler 1984; Rosenbaum 1979; Stolzenberg 1978). In terms of the model presented here what most of the factors are attempting to measure are variations in supply and demand for different historical and structural contexts. Did one enter the labor market in a period of boom or bust? Did one join an industry that was rapidly expanding or one that was declining? Of course, contextual factors also tap interaction effects. For example, there may well be a much higher correlation between training and income in educational institutions than in sales organizations. While the model presented by no means includes all of the variables that are of interest to the status attainment researcher, it does include the key propositions of both traditional models and more recent innovations—and can be easily elaborated to incorporate more complex analyses.

Dependency Theory

Dependency theory has developed primarily out of the attempts to understand relations between developed and underdeveloped nations and regions. Wallerstein's *The Modern World-System* (1974) is probably the most influential formulation of these arguments. While the arguments are often extremely complex, several of the propositions central to dependency theory are captured in our model. First, initial differences in power are used to create a division of labor that reserves the most rewarding economic functions—the production of highly processed goods and services—for the "core area" and to assign the production of raw materials to "peripheral" areas. This is, of course, a version of the argument made earlier that power differences often explain functional *differentiation* (i.e., the division of labor), rather than vice versa. Second, the core areas maintain relations of dominance over the peripheral areas by exercising informal power through market relations rather than by means of the formal

authority of empires. In terms of the model, power is exercised via *centrality* rather than *authority*. Third, the breaking off of the formal authority relations of empire enables the core area to increase homogeneity and internal solidarity. This argument is in part captured by the effect of *restrictive contact* on "class" solidarity and the effect of the latter on increasing the *power and resources* of the subgroup. Fourth, the core areas use their power to protect the producers in the areas under their formal authority from foreign competition, while attempting to encourage competition between the producers of raw materials located in the periphery. In terms of the model this is a special case of manipulating the *supply*. Foreign traders are excluded from home markets—a form of ascription—which reduces the geographical *mobility* of potential competitors. This reduces *substitutes* (i.e., alternative trading partners) which limits the competition faced by local producers and increases their rewards. Power is used to produce the opposite effect in peripheral areas. This last argument—restricting the competition for privileged core groups and maintaining it for peripheral groups—is also strongly emphasized by Collins (1975), and is receiving increasing attention in post-Keynesian economics (e.g., Heilbroner 1980) and closure theory (Murphy 1984). Let us stress again that I do not claim that the full complexity and subtlety of Wallerstein's analysis, much less other elaborations of dependency theory, are captured by the model. Nonetheless, at least simplified versions of the central argument are present.

It is important to point out that in order to subsume dependency theory within the model the level of analysis must be drastically shifted. The microunits are no longer individuals, roles, or classes within a society, but rather societies within a world-system. A given nation-state is able to conform better to the norms of the international market and therefore receives high rewards (sanctions) because it has used its power to bias the terms of competition in its favor. For example, tariffs are used to protect home markets and gunboats are used to insure "free trade" in peripheral areas. This shift in the level of analysis, however, raises the issue of how to relate the processes of inequality between societies in a world-system and the processes of inequality within the societies of such a system—and how the model presented could be used to analyze the interrelations between these two levels of analysis. It is important to keep in mind that two separate models and analyses would be required. First, there would need to be an inter-unit analysis and the key dependent variable would be the power and resources received by a society (or some other major macro-unit, e.g., a region or a city) in its competition with other societies. The *power and resources* received by the unit at that level would then become the value for the macro level of *resources* variable in the model used to analyze intra-unit processes, that is, the distribution of resources within the society. There have already been several empirical studies within the

dependency theory tradition which look at the relation between a society's rank within the international system and the distribution of rewards within the society (Chase-Dunn 1975; Rubinson 1976). There are also studies which extend this mode of analysis to geographical subunits within nation-states, that is, the nation-state becomes the system and the subunits are regions (Biasioli 1980; Hechter 1975). For the most part such studies have simply taken the rank of the subunit within the system as an exogenous independent variable. The next step needed would be to analyze simultaneously inter-unit processes and intra-unit processes by linking two models together in the manner suggested above.

Space limitations have precluded the discussion of other important analyses of social inequality. Turner's recent *Societal Stratification* (1984) and the important theoretical work that is being done on gender stratification (e.g., Blumberg 1984; Collins 1975) are only two of the most obvious examples.

What Has Been Accomplished?

An understandable reaction to the preceding analysis is a suspicion that the blind men may have also been struck deaf and mute by complexity and a lack of focus. Hence it is important to make clear precisely what the purpose and the results of this exercise are.

The intent of this paper has been to piece together a more complete and accurate "map" of what we know about the sources of social inequality. This map is considerably less than a general theory. Yet it is more than an inventory of propositions, or an assertion that everything is related to everything else. For it attempts to show *how* these various processes are interrelated. It is somewhat analogous to an early textbook on anatomy or physiology which attempts to identify and describe various subsystems—neurological, circulatory, respiratory, digestive—and show how they are interrelated.

One major purpose of such a map is to keep us from posing the wrong questions. Stated another way, one of the functions of this framework is to *discourage* research and debate. Theory not only suggests possibilities for empirical research, but it also makes clearer what kinds of research and intellectual debate are likely to be unproductive. Asking whether social inequality results primarily from conflict or consensus is like asking whether life is sustained primarily by breathing or eating. Asking which of the five sets of processes I have discussed accounts for most of the empirical variations is like asking whether brain function, circulation, respiration, or digestion is what sustains life. We all know that the latter question cannot be meaningfully answered except by specifying the timeframe and the relations between the subsystems: starvation will not

kill you nearly as quickly as a bullet through the brain, but eventually a lack of food will stop respiration and circulation and in turn brain function. It is not, however, a meaningless question to ask what was the cause of death of a particular person or whether more people die of strokes or heart failure. Similarly for our questions about the sources of social inequality to be meaningful they must be more specific. For example, if we ask how important is ascription in determining the sanctions (rewards and punishments) people receive, the answer will obviously vary depending upon whether we are talking about Virginia in 1985 or Virginia in 1785. If we ask how important is biased discourse in creating normative bias, the answer will vary depending on whether we are talking about contemporary Netherlands or China during Mao's Cultural Revolution. Even if empirical research indicated discourse was highly biased in both societies, we would expect the mechanisms used to create such biases might be quite different. The differences between Virginia in 1785 and 1985 would in part be captured by variation in macro variables such as level of technology and differentiation. The crucial point, however, is that the importance or impact of specific processes is not determined once and for all, but conditioned by both exogenous variables and interaction effects between indigenous variables.

A second important function of such a map, which is implied by the first point, is to keep us from overinterpreting our conclusions. If research shows that one's income is highly correlated with one's performance (conformity), and that the system of formal education is equally available to all who qualify, this should not be interpreted as conclusive evidence that there is equality of opportunity. There are many other mechanisms—early childhood socialization, measurement bias, linguistic repression, manipulation of demand—that may bias the allocation of rewards and punishments. Hence specific empirical research findings must be placed in the context of the broader array of processes which have not been examined.

A third consequence is that the framework enables us to see that a major difference between the five approaches is a difference in analytical focus, especially differences in units of analyses and timeframes. For example, Lenski's and Wallerstein's work are primarily interested in how major shifts in the mode of production produce changes in the macro structure, that is, in the societal or international distribution of resources—usually over relatively long periods of time. In contrast, status attainment research focuses on which individuals receive what rewards in a given societal context over an individual's career. Similarly the micro conformity-deviance arguments of functionalism focus on the latter question, while the arguments about the functional requirements of a society are concerned with macro characteristics. In some respects these points are obvious. But they have not been obvious enough or we would not still

have textbooks which draw broad contrast between conflict and consensus, or functional and Marxist theories of inequality.

Fourth, where the units of analyses and timeframe are specified and historically contextualized, the framework helps us to see that many of the debates are empirical rather than theoretical. Whether the rewards received in a given historical context are primarily determined by actual performance or the manipulation of visibility and measurement bias is primarily an empirical question. Choosing one theoretical framework over another may make the question more or less interesting to a given researcher, but it will not answer the question. Only carefully designed empirical research that attempts to measure both types of effects—and interprets the results in light of what has not been measured—can begin to resolve such an issue.

In concluding, a word or two is appropriate about the implications of the model for social policy and politics. Perhaps the acid test of one's ideological position is the stand one takes on the inevitability of social inequality. Conservatives see radicals as naive optimists and radicals see conservatives as cynical pessimists. The model presented gives reason for both pessimism and optimism. If nothing else, it should help us to understand why reform programs nearly always have much less effect on reducing inequality than their advocates hoped. Most reform programs—and even radical revolutions—tend to focus on at best a limited number of the mechanisms identified. More often than not the reductions in inequality are at best modest or new inequalities soon reemerge along some new dimension via some mechanism not given serious attention by the reformers. On the other hand, if this is why inequalities are so recalcitrant, we do not have to attribute this recalcitrance to "human nature" or conclude that the existing levels of inequality are inevitable.

The central thrust of this paper is that we must move beyond rather oversimplified debates which attempt to choose between these various alternative explanations on the basis of logic, ideology, or meta-theoretical orientation.⁸ No one of the subtheories can be considered adequate unless it is at least reasonable to argue that the factors included in other subtheories have been controlled or at least taken into account. This means that a great deal of arduous empirical research lies ahead of us—but research guided by theory which attempts to grasp the complexities of the "real world" and takes seriously the insights that have been associated with quite different theoretical and ideological perspectives. This will not remove politics from the analysis of social inequality, but it is hoped it can help us become clearer over the nature of our disagreements.

Notes

1. The relation between conformity and rewards is more complicated than this. Often leaders both conform more *and* deviate more. The rank that their high conformity has produced

means that deviance in minor matters is tolerated, and that they are the most likely persons to be able to introduce innovations (Sherif 1964).

2. The model in Figure 1 appears to depart from the Davis-Moore and market model—though not the Homans argument—in one respect. Supply and demand are not shown as directly affecting differential sanctions (the analog of “price,” “rewards”), but rather as interacting with the relation between conformity-deviance and sanctions. For example, increased demand increases the return (rewards) to any given level of conformity. The departure from the earlier models is only apparent, however. In the basic market model the analog of conformity is the type and quality of the commodity, or for the Davis-Moore theory, a specific type of social position. The market model (and the Davis-Moore theory) treats these as constants; the usual supply and demand curves apply to a single commodity of uniform quality or a single position with standardized role requirements—thereby holding the level of conformity constant. But for the purposes of explaining individual social inequality it is much more realistic and useful to show conformity as a variable—and hence the impact of supply and demand as interaction effects.

3. The issue of what is meant by terms such as resources, power, and privilege is a complex matter that can only be briefly touched on here. Basically I follow Giddens' conceptualization of power (1975, especially pp. 88-95). In this conceptualization power is a subcategory of “transformative capacity” and resources are the media through which power is exercised. One of the things this means is that power is *not* simply political power nor does it necessarily imply force or coercion. In addition to political power it includes status and material resources. Resources (or liabilities) result from the accumulation of the sanctions that others exercise toward you. The probability that such resources will be converted into power is conditioned by such factors as the inclination of the actor to so utilize his resources, as well as the mix of resources that are available. (For a discussion of this conversion process see Marsden and Laumann [1977].) This has been a central concern of community power studies and is another aspect of the model that could be decomposed and elaborated. The distinction between power and privilege is essentially a distinction between savings, investment, and production, on the one hand, and consumption, on the other hand. Coleman and Rainwater's (1978) distinction between resources and rewards is the essence of the distinction being drawn here. This concept of privilege is narrower, and I think less ambiguous than Lenski's concept (1966). Since we are concerned with issues of inequality the primary focus will be on the relational aspects of power.

4. For example, it is hard to see how rules which specify which side of the street one must drive down are seriously biased in favor of some subgroup. Some societies specify the right side and some specify the left. The important thing is that there be some rule and that everybody follow it. So in its extreme form Dahrendorf's position is clearly an overstatement.

5. Following leads given by Marx and Marcuse ([1955] 1962), Habermas sees the productive capacity of a given historical period as a key determinant of the modes of repression—on both the individual and collective level—and consequently a key determinant of the content of the consensus which passes for human knowledge. As the technological capacities for productivity increase—especially through long-term social evolution—there are resources to meet more and more of peoples' instinctual and cultural needs. Consequently, less repression is required, communication can become less distorted, and social consensus can become more authentic.

6. “Class” is used here in a very broad sense to refer to any subgrouping based on differences in power and resources. As we shall see shortly, it can apply to groupings of nation-states—core vs. periphery—as well as individuals, families, or roles. The main focus, however, is on class in its more historically limited sense (Giddens 1975).

7. See Likert (1961) for an old-fashioned example from industrial sociology; see Shils and Janowitz (1948) on military units; see Wallerstein (1974) for a macro example from dependency theory. This is not the same thing as assuming that high cohesion among nonelites increases productivity; see Etzioni (1975).

8. I am not suggesting that no important ideological and metatheoretical questions exist in sociology, but only that these have sometimes unnecessarily obscured much of the progress made in understanding the sources of inequality.

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Note Added After Page Proof

The less bias the terms of discourse, the greater the consensus over the long run. In turn the greater the consensus the greater will be the conformity. High consensus also increases the correlation between conformity and sanctions—which can be interpreted as increasing the match between performance and rewards.