

Power in society

Power is certainly one of the most important concepts in the study of social organization: power in kinship and domestic groups, power in gender relations, in small-scale and large-scale communities. Our study of social stratification has shown that while there may be many ways by which societies have reached a point where some groups within them have more power than others, once a society is stratified, power differentials tend to insure it stays stratified - remember *hegemony* (the social, cultural, ideological, or economic influence exerted by a dominant group)?

We have also seen that societies with stratification tend to develop ideologies, sometimes very elaborate, which justify the way things are in society. We might think of power between the doctors and the Hmong in Lia Lee's case, the ideology behind honor killings, the tracking of students into honors and vocational pathways. What about the social status hierarchy in North Town, generally; who has power, who does not? Being the critical, even cynical, students of anthropology that we are, however, we are not likely to be lulled into believing that the ideology of a society simply *reflects* "the way things are." By the same token, we may find that some societies may have egalitarian ideologies, which again do not simply reflect social reality.

Your assignment is to look carefully at your own society, in terms of the ideology and the reality of social stratification.

- Are there different social classes in your community?
- Do different classes, if they exist, really have differential access to power?
- What seems to be the ways in which your society represents class structure and power differentials among classes, or other groups (such as ethnic groups)?
- How does your society's ideology, the way in which it justifies the power differential, of social stratification relate to the "social reality" as you have observed it?

You may use examples from one of three places: *People Like Us: Social Class in America*, *Learning Capitalist Culture* or your own life experiences. Please finish reading chapter 3 before beginning the response.

People Like Us: Social Class in America

part I: bud or bordeaux

- a. Joe Queenan's balsamic vinegar tour
- b. the trouble with tofu
- c. how to marry the rich

part II: high and low

- a. WASP lessons
- b. bourgeois blues
- c. Tammy's story

part III: salt of the earth

- a. gnomes R us
- b. friends in low places
- c. don't get above your raisin'

part IV: belonging

- a. all you need is cash
- b. most likely to success