

Duke University

Department of Sociology

GRADUATE QUALIFYING EXAMINATION

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

August 28, 2008

The doctoral exam in Social Stratification is organized into two parts. The question in Part I is mandatory, and you must select TWO of the questions from Part II. The aim of the examination is to determine your command of this specialization within the constraints of time. No such examination can test exhaustively the content of your knowledge but it should demonstrate your general familiarity with major theories and methods as well as contemporary issues in the specialization.

Please allocate your time over the next 24 hours as efficiently as possible. Each question of the examination should be allocated four to six double-spaced, typed pages, and the completed exam can have a maximum of 15 typed pages of text (excluding references and analytical charts). Please use standard one-inch margins, and a reasonable font size. You may consult your notes and readings but you may not discuss any aspects of the examination with others until after all exams have been completed. Return your completed exams to Claudette Parker.

DATE AND TIME STARTED: _____

DATE AND TIME COMPLETED: _____

SIGNATURE: _____

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Part I: This first question is REQUIRED:

1. Is inequality increasing or decreasing in the United States? Define what you mean by inequality. Review key contributions in the literature that address this question. Identify and briefly discuss what you see as the major methodological issues in answering this question.

Part II: Answer TWO of the following five questions.

2. Well over a century of debate surrounds class-based versus non-class-based views of stratification systems, indeed going back to Marx and Weber if not earlier. Explicate and justify your own intellectual position in this debate. Identify key contributions in the literature and explain how they inform your position.
3. As social scientists we use a variety of conceptual and empirical lenses to generate understandings about wealth and poverty. How has the conceptual and empirical literature on wealth influenced our understanding of contemporary American poverty, and how has “poverty knowledge” informed our understanding of wealth?
4. Select one of your areas of sub-specialization and identify an unresolved problem that involves contrasting theoretical arguments in the literature. Briefly explain the main arguments and how they differ in accounting for the problem. What hypotheses can you formulate? Then, propose a study that can empirically adjudicate between the contrasting arguments. Be sure to make clear what sort of evidence would be necessary to support or refute the contrasting arguments. Offer a feasible research design including the operationalization of key concepts, the primary or secondary data to be collected, the sampling design (if applicable), and analytical techniques or methods to be deployed.
5. It has now been 50 years since Robert K. Merton’s classic essays (“The Bearing of Sociological Theory on Empirical Research,” and “The Bearing of Empirical Research on Sociological Theory”). Identify a key line of research in social stratification. Explain how theory in that area shapes and informs empirical research, and explain how empirical research in the area has reshaped and informed theory. What could Merton’s ideas (from the above articles) add to that line of research? Give detailed citations.
6. Is there a developmental rhythm to inequalities in social mobility based on gender across the life course? Are there periods in the life course when males’ and females’ access to social mobility opportunities (e.g., education, employment) converge? Are there periods characterized by notable divergence? If so, what factors influence these periods of convergence and divergence? If not, that is, if inequalities in social mobility remain constant throughout the life course of males and females what are the unique social factors in childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle-age, and old age that sustain that continuity over time? Addressing this question requires that you integrate your understanding of the science of gender and age inequalities.