NUB 102: Structural Inequality

Block 5a
(Fall 2016)
Learning Objectives

○ What are structures/institutions and how do they function?

○ How do institutions create privilege for some individuals and groups in society and inequality for others?

○ What is structural inequality? What are some examples?

○ Why is understanding structural inequality important?
What Are Structures/Institutions?

- To define structural inequality, we have to first define the term “structures.” Structures are societal institutions.

- Structures, or institutions, are “social organizations that involve established patterns of behavior organized around particular purposes. They function through social norms (cultural expectations), which […] are institutionalized and patterned into organizations and sometimes established as rules and/or laws.”

Examples of Institutions

“Major institutions in our society include the family, marriage, the economy [including business and industry], government and criminal justice systems, religion, education, science, health and medicine, mass media, the military, and sports” (Shaw and Lee 63).

Looking at the list, which of these institutions...

...make you feel good or good about yourself?

...make you feel included, safe, or whole? (no threat posed)

...don’t make you feel good or good about yourself?

...don’t make you feel included, safe, or whole? (a threat is posed)
How Do Institutions Function?

- Societal institutions have their own distinct set of rules, ideologies, roles, practices, laws, and resources, which, in turn, are distributed to individuals and groups in society.

- This distribution often *creates and maintains* advantage for some and disadvantage for others depending on their social location (i.e. factors gender, gender identity, sex, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, age, religion, education, etc.).

- The distribution can be:
  - Intentional or unintentional (e.g. established laws vs. company practices)
  - Direct or indirect (raises vs. preferential treatment for a certain gender or race)
How Do Institutions Create Structural Inequality?

- Combined, all of these societal institutions create a web (or system) of advantage/privilege and disadvantage/inequality for different individuals and groups in society.

- In other words, institutions create systems of privilege and inequality (e.g. race, racism, and white privilege) that are structural barriers to equality and inclusiveness.

- This is known as structural inequality.
What is Structural Inequality?

- Structural inequality refers to the *system* of privilege and inequality created and maintained by interlocking societal institutions. It is also referred to as:
  - systemic inequality
  - systematic/institutionalized oppression
  - specific types: structural racism, institutionalized homophobia, systematic sexism

- As these terms suggest, inequality is embedded *within* and *across* institutions. In other words, the “major institutions in society are interconnected and work to support and maintain one another” (Shaw and Lee 65).
Video #1: “The House We Live In”

RACE – THE POWER OF AN ILLUSION
Episode III: The House We Live In

Click here for video

1. Which institutions listed here worked together to create and maintain structural racism in the form of housing segregation and other unfair practices?

2. What happened as a result? Think about both short- and long-term effects/consequences.

SOCIETAL INSTITUTIONS
- family/marriage
- the economy
- government and politics
- the criminal justice system
- religion
- education
- science
- health and medicine
- mass media
- the military
- sports
- business/industry
- workplace
Video #2: “Racism: Is It Over Yet?”

- According to Green, why is it hard for some Americans to understand that racism is still a problem today?

- What solutions does Green offer to combat racism? What solutions do you have in general and for our discipline in terms of the workplace? For instance, what might be needed in the workplace to increase diversity and lessen potential individual or institutional forms of racism?

What were some examples of structural inequality in this video? Or some specific institutions that were mentioned or alluded to?
1. Obama declares that “the confederate flag is a reminder of systemic oppression,” which is aka structural inequality. What do you think Obama means by this? Which institutions listed here came together to create and maintain the system of slavery? How so?

2. Which of these institutions were positively affected/advantaged by the system of slavery and which ones were negatively affected/disadvantaged by slavery?
What’s the Big Picture?

be the change