

I: Social Status

Overview: The ways we choose to present ourselves to other people also give clues as to our social status, which is the position we occupy in a particular setting. Some statuses carry more prestige and power than others.

A: STATUS SYMBOLS

1: Sometimes we wear status symbols, or signs or symbols of a respective status.

a. Professors wear academic regalia to identify their status within the collegiate setting.

b. Successful businesspeople may drive luxurious cars or wear expensive clothing or jewelry to indicate a high financial status within the community.

i. A wedding ring is also an example of a status symbol in our culture, as it communicates the message that the wearer is married.

2: Not all status symbols are positive. In some states, an individual who has been convicted of driving a car while intoxicated must put a bumper sticker saying "DUI" (Driving under the Influence) or "Convicted DUI" on their car.

a. The bumper sticker indicates a status that is generally looked down on in our society.

B: STATUS INCONSISTENCY

1: We tend to have more than one status at any given point in our lives, and most of the time there is consistency among our various statuses.

2: Status inconsistency results when a person occupies one or more statuses that do not ordinarily coincide in the same person.

a. A seventy-five-year-old grandmother who is a college freshman and a cab driver who is a classically trained Shakespearean actor both exhibit status inconsistency.

C: MASTER STATUS

- 1: A master status overrides all other statuses and becomes the one by which we are first known to others.
- 2: For many people, their occupation is their master status, since it conveys so much about their income, education, skills, and interests.
- 3: People who differ from the rest of society in some way may have a different master status.
- 4: For many people who are homosexual, their sexual orientation becomes their master status, and others think of it when they hear those people's names.
- 5: Their statuses as professionals, athletes, family members, and community leaders are secondary to their status as homosexuals.

D: STIGMAS

- 1: Some of the traits we possess are actually stigmas.
 - a. A stigma is a trait or characteristic we possess that causes us to lose prestige in the eyes of others.
 - b. A disfigured face might be a stigma, as someone whose face is severely disfigured is likely to have lost prestige among his or her peers and coworkers.
 - c. Many would also consider homosexuality to be a stigmatizing characteristic.
 - i. Because of widespread homophobia, many people would think less of a person they knew to be homosexual.

E: DEGRADATION CEREMONIES

1: If an individual's identity is spoiled beyond redemption, some times the groups to which he or she belongs must decide how to handle his or her new identity.

- a. One way to deal with individuals whose identities have been spoiled is through a degradation ceremony.
- b. A degradation ceremony is a ritual designed to expel a person from a group and to strip this person of his or her identity as a group member.

2: There are several elements of a successful degradation ceremony:

- a. The individual's stigma or transgression must be made known to the entire group.
- b. An authority figure must make the individual's stigma known to the group. Group members cannot denounce one another.
- c. The group must believe that the authority figure is acting out of concern for the whole group. If the group believes that the leader is denouncing an individual because of a personal feud or vendetta, the degradation ceremony will not be successful.
- d. The transgressor must be criticized in public, before the entire group. This serves to further humiliate the guilty party and reinforce the boundaries of behavior to the rest of the group. By publicly denouncing a group member, the leader is also telling everyone what kinds of behavior will and will not be tolerated.
- e. The offending individual must be evicted from the group. If the group leader allows the transgressor to remain in the group, he or she is communicating to the other members that bearing a stigma, or breaking the rules, will be tolerated.