

# DOES SOCIAL CLASS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

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Social class may be less visible than other types of difference. However, in many countries like the U.S., where individualism is valued, it is common to believe that all people are created equal and that the same opportunities are available to everyone who has the innate talent and is willing to put in the effort. This position ignores the challenge of overcoming the social, educational, and networking resources of class origins. This exercise is designed to help you to understand how social class could affect a person's life experience due to differences in access and resources. Although social class in childhood does not necessarily determine status across one's life span, it may limit educational and career options that may make it more difficult for a person to achieve personal goals. Of course, individuals within a social class can have very different experiences due to a variety of factors.

## DIRECTIONS

Complete the following two columns by thinking about what is apt to be the more common experience of a child growing up in Justin's or Clark's situation. Considering that Justin represents a child born into the lower socioeconomic class and Clark represents one born into the upper middle class, your answers should reflect what is likely to be the more common experiences for children born into these situations.

**Justin** was born to a 16-year-old single mother who lived with her family in an inner-city housing project. When he was born, she dropped out of high school to care for him. After he started school, she took a job cleaning rooms in a local hospital. She is currently studying nights to get her General Equivalency Diploma (GED).

**Clark** was born to a suburban couple in their mid-thirties. His mother has an MBA, and his father is a lawyer. Clark's mother quit her job when he was born. She returned to a managerial position when his younger sibling was in junior high.

	Justin	Clark
How might this child spend his time before he attends kindergarten?		
When he goes to kindergarten, he is diagnosed with a learning disability. What types of help is he most likely to receive?		
During grammar school, how is he likely to spend his school vacations?		
What types of after-school activities is he likely to participate in?		
What role may sports play in his life?		
He needs help with math in high school. What types of resources are most apt to be available to him?		
Where can he learn about technology?		
If his College Board scores aren't too high, what resources may be available to help him raise his scores?		
If he needs an internship in college, who can help him secure one?		
Given the differences of growing up in different social classes, what job-related life and career skills may he have that give him workplace advantages or disadvantages?		

### Discussion Questions

1. In terms of the workplace, how does social class matter?
2. Is social class *really* an invisible difference or are there ways that people often deduce other's social class origins? What can be the effect of this in job interviews, work-related social situations, and so on?
3. What role does the media play in perpetuating both positive and negative social class stereotypes? Support your answer with examples.
4. In this exercise, both people were male and no specific race was suggested. Which of your answers might have been different if the examples were female or nonwhite? Why?