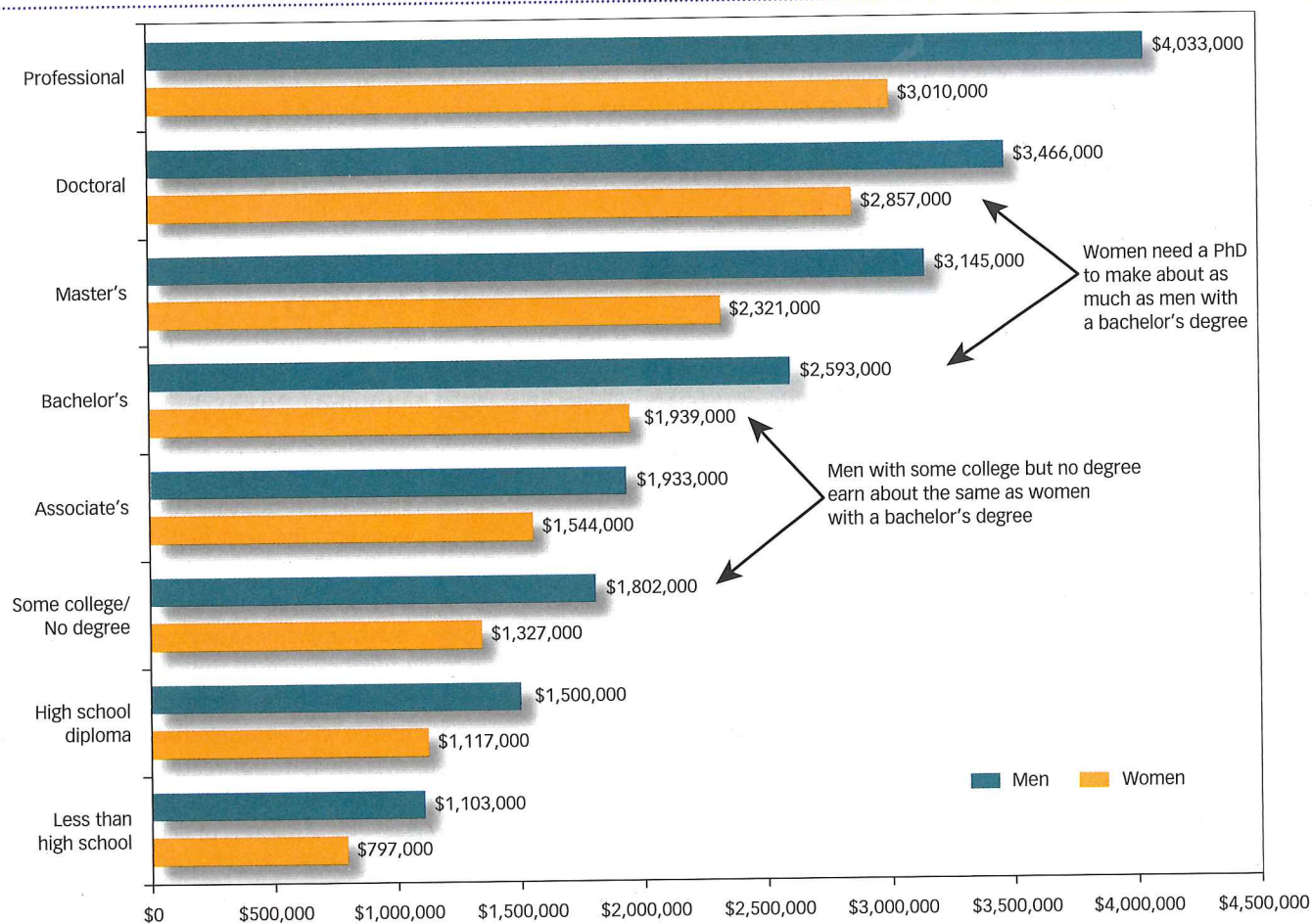


FIGURE 8.9 • Educational Attainment and Lifetime Earnings in the United States by Gender



SOURCE: From *The College Payoff: Education, Occupations, and Lifetime Earnings*, Anthony P. Carnevale, Stephen J. Rose, and Ban Cheah, The Georgetown University Center on Education and Workplace. August 5, 2011. Reprinted with permission.

water wells. As a group, they continue to be desperately poor, powerless, landless, and largely illiterate.

Though caste survives in contemporary India, the caste system has been altered greatly by various social changes. After India gained independence in 1947, legal changes were instituted to address inequities among the castes. The constitution prohibited discrimination against those considered untouchables and others in public places. Affirmative action provided avenues of social mobility to the Dalits—now called the “scheduled castes” by the government. For example, positions are reserved for Dalits in universities and in the government bureaucracy.

An economic boom transforming much of India, urbanization, a crisis in agriculture, affirmative action policies, and political changes have prompted some sociologists to argue that the caste system is fast breaking down. Take the case of Ashok Khade (Raman 2011). His family belonged to the Dalits. Battling great odds, such as living under staircases and working as a stevedore by day while going to night school for a degree in engineering, Khade invested

in education. He now owns a business empire worth 550 crore—approximately 5.5 billion rupees, or almost \$110 million. He is part of a group of 31 entrepreneurs (including one woman) who are now referred to as the *Dalit crorepatis*, Dalits with at least 10 million rupees.

Still, for all their successes, Dalit entrepreneurs have faced exclusion within the market, particularly in terms of the credit needed to build and expand their businesses (Raman 2011). Sociologist Surinder S. Jodhka (cited in Raman 2011) argues that achieving success is difficult for Dalit entrepreneurs who lack access to social networks and cultural and economic resources: “It is a tough struggle in a market where businesses are run on networks and caste lines, and being a Dalit often means no land and virtually no assets. The discrimination is not just on the lines of untouchability[;] a whole structure of stereotypes is built around them—that they lack the required skills or can’t speak good English.” Dalit entrepreneurs face a brutal market and an exploitative informal sector, as well as declining public investment and shrinking avenues of

employment in the government sector. To better their odds, they have tried to create their own social capital through the formation of business networks such as the Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DICCII). That some of them are succeeding is a sign that there are cracks in the caste system in India.

Another extreme stratification system associated with ascription is slavery. **Slavery** is a system in which people are defined as property, involuntarily placed in perpetual servitude, and not given the same rights as the rest of society. Slaves, of course, exist at or near the bottom of the stratification system. This was the case, for example, in the American South before the end of the Civil War. Some forms of slavery persist to this day, such as child slavery in Southeast Asia (Rafferty 2007), a phenomenon that is at least in part related to human trafficking (Hoque 2010) (see Chapter 1). Children, particularly girls, are being used not only for hard labor, but for the sexual gratification of adults. In each country where this sort of slavery occurs, existing structures shape the nature of slavery. In India, for instance, children who become sex slaves are most likely to be victims of the caste system as well (Hepburn and Simon 2010).

THEORIES OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Within the sociology of social stratification, the dominant theoretical approaches are structural/functional theory and conflict/critical theory. These approaches are also involved in the major theoretical controversies within this area of sociological study (de Graaf 2007). Also to be discussed here are inter/actionist theories of stratification.

As in all areas of the social world, different theories focus on different aspects of social stratification. Instead of choosing one theory over another, it may make more sense to use all of them. Structural/functional and conflict/critical theories tell us much about the macro structures of stratification, while inter/actionist theories offer great detail

slavery A system in which people are defined as property, involuntarily placed in perpetual servitude, and not given the same rights as the rest of society.



Slavery defines people like these South Carolina plantation workers of the 1860s as property and denies their rights as humans. What keeps such an extreme form of stratification in place?

about what goes on within those structures at the micro levels.

STRUCTURAL/FUNCTIONAL THEORIES

Within structural/functional theory, it is structural-functionalism that offers the most important—and controversial—theory of stratification. It argues that all societies are, and have been, stratified. Further, the theory contends that societies need a system of stratification in order to exist and to function properly (Davis and Moore 1945). Stratification is needed first to ensure that people are motivated to occupy the less pleasant, more difficult, and more important positions in society. Second, stratification is needed to be sure that people with the right abilities and talents find their way into the appropriate positions. In other words, what is required is a good fit between people and the requirements of the positions they occupy.

The structural-functional theory of stratification assumes that higher-level occupations, such as physicians and lawyers, are more important to society than such lower-level occupations as laborers and janitors. The higher-level positions are also seen as being harder to fill because of



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