

INTRODUCTION

Some people have recently come up with new ideas about Class relations and have tried to answer these questions:

- What does Class do, and how does it do it?
- Who came up with the term 'class', who does it serve and who does it apply to?
- How does it help our understanding of general social relations?

People rarely talk about the effect of Class on relationships between people, but feelings like fear, anxiety and disgust are strongly associated with it.

In moments of financial insecurity, people generate stories about the lower classes to create an atmosphere of hope or fear in society. In her 1999 study, Sonia Rose found that the idea of the “contagious dangerous woman” was used to contain the British national anxiety of the time; however, the success of America’s first black president in 2008 grew from a campaign that turned Barack Obama into a symbol for hope.

We can better understand class relations if we combine it with a knowledge of the capital value system. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu showed that Class shapes the way we move, speak and act. He developed a way to map out how our position in society relates to others and how they give us the power to move through the ranks of social space.

To do this, he identified four types of capital:

Economic capital is about what you own: income, wealth, inheritance, assets.

Cultural capital is about the long term nature of the mind & body, your cultural goods and your institutional benefits, i.e. qualifications.

Social capital is about who you know and how they help you prosper & grow.

Symbolic capital is about how something becomes valuable to be considered something worth trading in, giving power to its owner.

People are given their place in society based on how much of these types of capital they have, combined with how they acquired it. Bourdieu showed the difference between people who are given a higher status in society because of who they ARE versus those who've had to prove their worth by what they DO.

Translated by Vanessa Farinha, 2021