



Social class is a very difficult idea to define and sociologists differ greatly in their ideas on social class.

Marx argued that there were two social classes – the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

Max Weber (1864 – 1920) argued that stratification and social class were more complicated than this. He argued that social class was based on a person's **market position** which is basically how much money or wealth they have and their bargaining power to get this. He also introduced the ideas of **power** and **status** as making up a full picture of a person's position in society. Status refers to how people are thought of and regarded in society.

Read this example:

Lesley comes from a background where both her parents work; her father as a school cleaner and her mother as a postwoman. She does really well at school and goes on to university where she qualifies as a doctor and specialises in general practice.

By the age of 40, Lesley is married with children and is a widely respected general practitioner in her community. She is a member of her children's school's PTA and helps to organise fundraising events for their school. She is well thought of in her community.

A few years later, she misdiagnoses a patient with a serious illness and there is an investigation. There is a lot of publicity and she feels pressurised into leaving her job. She stops working in medicine altogether and goes to work on the shop floor at Matalan. By the age of 60, Lesley lives alone in a small one-bedroom flat, working part-time in a shop. No-one she works with knows about her qualifications. She is now quite poor. In her spare time she runs a local choir which she set up to make new friends.

According to Marx, despite all of these changes in Lesley's life, she would always be a member of the proletariat. Can you explain why this is?

However, her position in society has changed throughout her life which is why Weber would think differently to Marx.

Discuss the following with your partner:

- What is Lesley's class when she is a child? What is her status?
- What is Lesley's class when she is 40? What is her status?
- What is Lesley's class when she is 60? What is her status?
- Has she any status left at 60?