In our discussion of The Rules of Sociological Method, we said that Durkheim was concerned to establish sociology as a hard science, with methods for identifying variables and testing causal relationships to a degree of objective certainty characteristic of the other sciences. In order to do this successfully, he had to define in the broadest sense the variables sociology would measure, argue that they are distinct from variable categories already measured by other disciplines, that they are indeed measurable, and finally that they have measurable effects. He defined these variables as social facts, and argued both that they are quantifiable, measurable “things,” and that we can locate the causes of social facts with other social facts. This claim by Durkheim is the generalization that justifies the discipline, and thus perhaps the broadest generalization made by the theories we have studied.

Generally, we test sociological theories by identifying the “social facts” that are the variables, and testing them. If we treat Durkheim’s methodology as a theoretical generalization, we are left to determine a means for testing something about his broad variable category, “social facts.”

The first challenge is to determine what about “social facts” needs to be tested. Is it the existence of social facts, or do we accept that “social facts” is a definitional category, which can be filled with whatever meaning we choose to give it? If this turns out to be the case, then it is the meaning given to the category that ought to be tested. Again, though, what about the meaning do we test?

We might choose to test the internal logic of Durkheim’s generalization. Social facts, as he defines them (assuming we can create a reliable variable based on what he tells us social facts are meant to be) will explain other social facts. Our goal then is to test whether the variable defined by Durkheim has measurable effects on other variables that are appropriately called social facts. Durkheim’s own application of his methodology to real questions is meant to accomplish this. And while we may find him persuasive, there seems to be a precedent question unanswered.

Are “social facts” as Durkheim defines them not just intuitively distinct from other kinds of facts – such as psychological facts, biological facts, chemical facts, or even metaphysical facts – but distinct in a way that can be measured? Durkheim believes he can demonstrate, by essentially controlling for other types of variables, that his social facts have measurable effects. Clearly we have accepted this as a discipline. But there still seems to be a definitional leap in the logic.

Perhaps the most obvious way to test the validity of “social facts” as the variable category upon which sociology is founded is to hypothesize the alternatives. Certainly this has been done. We can systematically examine both the independent and dependent variables sociologists use, and, rather than simply try to find alternative explanations for certain causal relationships, try to find alternative meanings for those variables from other fields. Presumably, if we find variables that seem to have meaning outside of any concept we might draw from another discipline, and particularly if we can establish that it is the distinct meaning sociology gives to the variable that is responsible for effects in a causal chain, we have shown the sociological category to be valid. The difficulty is that this begins to seem almost identical to what Durkheim himself sets out to do in Suicide, which while partially satisfying, does not get at some piece of the initial assumption he makes about the quantifiability of social facts.
It may be that because Durkheim’s generalization is definitional, and because it is the meaning of the category we want to test, there is something unavoidably subjective and untestable about it. However, it seems as though Durkheim would have argued otherwise, and thus perhaps the real question would be whether we can test whether “social facts” have objective meaning, or are in some respects a subjective category.

Catherine R Bell <crb260@nyu.edu>
Some ideas, plenty of problems.....I look forward to our class discussion.

Theory: In Suicide, Durkheim identifies “anomie” as a major cause of suicide. This, he says, is an explanation for the rise in suicide rates at times of positive as well as negative social upheaval. Generalization: Disorder in the social realm affects the individual by disrupting the balance of personal expectations with the means of their fulfillment. Variables: Extent of social disorder; material or status expectations of individuals; probability of the fulfillment of those expectations. Application/Measurement: Given the recent economic, political, and natural disasters in southern California (that’s not editorializing, is it?), the social realm in that area could be designated “disordered.” Nearby Washington state could be considered comparatively socially stable. Neighborhoods of distinctive class membership within each state could be surveyed to control for class difference. People’s material and status expectations could be measured by a survey that captures their current socioeconomic status (as measured by income, occupation, and years of education attained), their expected future SES, their hoped-for future SES, and the SES they expect for their children. Measuring the feasibility of those expectations is a more difficult task, one which I am not sure how to approach. Could this be accomplished by an analysis of class mobility for particular groups over past generations? Does mobility in the past answer our questions about the feasibility of material expectations in the present? Perhaps the focus should be on current indicators of economic health (unemployment rate, etc). Another testing ground could be administering a similar survey to workers in a stable and solvent corporation/industry and to workers in a comparable company that is “restructuring” and implementing a series of widespread layoffs. Problems: Unreliability of self-reports. Vague parameters for the definition of social disorder. The disorder in southern California is superficial compared to that of war-torn countries, for example; however, this state provides us with a basis for comparison with other American states, given a relatively homogenous culture and other shared traits (ie, economic, political). Also, there is an inherent problem in measuring the feasibility of people's material expectations in a time of social/economic upheaval, because the future is, by definition, less predictable than at more stable periods. Perhaps this is the deal-breaker, an unmeasurable variable that disqualifies the experiment.

"Deirdre O'Sullivan" <do342@nyu.edu>

marx's theoretical generalization: the economy is the "base" of society and determines the superstructure, which includes ideology, politics, religion, etc.
conceptual variable: we should be able, then, to analyze the superstructure and see the influence of the base. so, for example, we can look at punishment, as a part of the superstructure, to analyze economic determinism.

measurement: as marxist analysis has done, we can look at the relationship between rate of imprisonment and the labor market (e.g. perhaps as the needs of the labor market changes -- demand for labor goes up or down, demand for unskilled or underskilled workers goes up or down -- the prison population rises or falls); assess the value of labor that occurs in prison vs. the cost of imprisonment; look at the "industry" of imprisonment and the contribution it makes to the economy; study what happens to convicted felons when the re-enter society and attempt to return to the labor force (e.g. perhaps an underground economy of cheap and unskilled or moderately skilled labor is created as a result of stigma and legal barriers that prevent felons from fully reintegrating after time served)

problems: first, this idea runs counter to the rhetoric that surrounds punishment, which speaks to things like deterrence and future crime prevention, or a natural morally equivalent punishment for every crime. if, as marx argues, there is false consciousness and legitimation of the interests of the ruling class, it would be difficult to uncover the true relationship between the economy and punishment. measuring an "underground economy" would prove difficult (e.g. reliance on self-reporting, etc.) since i haven't taken statistics i'm not sure, but it seems that all of these measurements would be difficult to isolate from other intervening variables. and i would think doing so would take the findings out of context in a way that may render them meaningless.

"Danielle Jeanne Lindemann" <djl281@nyu.edu>

Quantifying "Capitalistic Spirit":

Both Weber's "Capital" and Marx's "The Protestant Ethic" imply the generalization that a "spirit of capitalism" (Weber's term) pervades modern society, though the texts differ as to its genesis. In PE, Weber notes that capitalism itself did not lead to the spirit of capitalism (34-37); rather, capitalism was preceded by a kind of capitalistic spirit which arose, partially, as a result of a seventeenth-century Puritan doctrine which prized systematic work and the accumulation of wealth. Marx, however, implies the inverse, postulating that one must systematically understand capitalism as a totality before interpreting the ways in which it affects the lives of specific individuals. To Marx, capitalism is self-perpetuating, and its ideology, which is reinforced by a set of inextricably interwoven social, economic, and political systems, has arisen from the thing itself. Both theorists, however, postulate that this overriding ideology of capitalism -- which, in both cases, I am including under the umbrella of the capitalistic spirit, or CS -- has become virtually inextricable from modern society. Weber's "iron cage" theory ("The Puritan wanted to be a person with a vocational calling; today we are *forced* to be" (122)) and Marx’s notion that the proletariat must experience a shift in its overriding perception of the capitalist system before revolution is possible imply a CS which is fully entrenched in our collective consciousness.

Testing the extent to which this ideology is entrenched in the modern world, by turning CS into a
variable which may be studied using specific instruments, however, would not be an easy feat. One dilemma is that, if capitalism really is such an "iron cage" from which no one is free, how can sociologists, as human beings, and thus caged beasts ourselves, expect to achieve any level of objectivity in our analysis of its ideological rootedness? In addition, because of theorists like Marx, who have brought to the forefront of modern thought the idea of capitalism as a social evil, capitalism has, in many circles, taken on a pejorative connotation. Yet while, externally, individuals may disavow their own capitalistic "spirits," this disavowal may belie their own subconscious perpetuation of the system. Can one loathe and disavow the term "capitalism" and still be vigorously exhibiting CS? Perhaps. This duality would have to be taken into account when developing instruments to test this variable. Finally, locating measurable evidence of CS may prove extremely difficult, particularly if we accept Weber's theory that the spirit of capitalism is now perpetuated merely by an overwhelming capitalistic system, in which we are all amoral automatons. If the original Puritan values (e.g. self-denial and the limitations placed on the pursuit of pleasure) no longer drive CS, it would seem that no observable social or economic values would provide us clues about the pervasiveness of CS in our society. If the variable perpetuates itself, and does not exist in relation to any other variables, then we have no other indicators to guide us in our analysis of CS.

Yet, it may be possible to quantify the spirit of capitalism in the modern age by returning to one key element of Weber's original theory. In developing his culturally-based argument, Weber rejects the idea that human beings work in response to need, nothing that, if this were the case, the poor would be the individuals engaged in the most vigorous economic activity. "People do not wish 'by nature' to earn more and more money" (22), he writes, noting that the spirit of capitalism is perpetuated by external forces. An analysis of the pervasiveness of CS in modern society, then, might examine the ways in which the pursuit of money is, or is not, affected by class status, looking at indicators such as the average number of weekly working hours of individuals in various economic strata. Drawing on Marx's theory, moreover, we might analyze the pervasiveness of the variable by examining individual "loyalty" to the ideals it represents. One point Marx makes is that the ideology of capitalism is so firmly engrafted in the collective mindset that workers believe their economic woes are the result of specific corruption within the system (e.g. "My boss is a corrupt man"), rather than the basic nature of capitalism itself. They still possess CS, or an ideology which basically affirms the system. Using Marx's point as a springboard for our research, we might test the perceptions of the modern "proletariat" to gauge how loyal such individuals remain to the system -- Do they blame economic hardship on specific "evil" individuals and/or corporations, or do they think it's the system? As noted, however, CS would be particularly difficult to quantify, because what people think about capitalism, and what people *say* they think about capitalism, may be immaterial to their exhibition of CS.

"Melissa Judith Velez" <melissa.velez@nyu.edu>

Theory: Weber posits that ideal types, "constructed concepts endowed with a degree of consistency seldom found in actual history" (55), can be used to measure and compare social phenomena. They are abstractions of social concepts, such as a bureaucracy, that give researchers a point of comparison against reality. For example, in Weber's Bureaucracy, he delineates characteristics of modern bureaucracy which can then be applied to the analysis of real life
modern bureaucracies. Perhaps, then, ideal types are "mini theories" about what social concepts are in their purest form?

Generalization: In theory, Weber’s ideal types should be a useful tool for any theorist needing a point of comparison or a stable concept that doesn’t necessarily exist in the real world. Not only can theorists draw directly upon Weber’s ideal types, they can also create their own ideal types through their own research. For example, perhaps we could say that Durkheim uses ideal types to describe mechanical and organic solidarity. While solidarity in reality may not be as consistent as he posits in his work, using what he theorizes to be an ideal type of solidarity allows him to further his other theories.

Conceptual Variables/Measures: The conceptual variables would depend on how the ideal type was characterized. For example, to test whether or not an institution is a bureaucracy, one can test the extent to which it has jurisdictional areas, an office hierarchy, management through written documents, rules which can be learned, etc.

Problems: How does one create this ideal type? While theorists can base it on historical or practical concepts, does it fall prey to the theorist’s own bias of what encompasses the concept? Are ideal types present in all theories (perhaps, though, not so explicitly as in Weber’s works)?

"Mihaela Serban" <serbanm@juris.law.nyu.edu>

There seems to be growing consensus that inequality is on the rise. We blame neo-liberalism and globalization, use the widening income gap and social marginalization and exclusion to measure it, and continue to ascribe a negative moral value to its mere existence. Both Durkheim and Weber, however, seem to draw different conclusions from their analysis of inequality and society.

The crucial component of Durkheim’s analysis of society is the social division of labor. In this theory, modern societies and their evolution have been primarily determined by the growing division and specialization of labor, increasingly characterized by cooperation, interdependence, and integration. Durkheim asserts that the social division of labor, and the interdependency and complementarity it creates, ensure both the cohesion of modern societies and individualism.

One clear implication of this theory is that modern societies also become more and more differentiated and stratified, thus that social inequality is an inevitable element of any complex society. Furthermore, if the differentiation that results from the division of labor creates [organic] solidarity and social integration, inequality might actually be seen as a necessary element of stability and coherence in society.

In Weber’s vision of society, the distribution of power determines the manner of its organization, and classes and status groups are phenomena of the distribution of power. Class and class situation are exclusively determined by economic and market terms, while status groups are defined through the social distribution of honor, which thus determines the social order. It appears that for Weber as well differentiation and stratification are an inevitable component of
complex modern societies.

The fact that inequality is inevitable does not mean it is “good” (in a moral or utilitarian sense), but it probably does mean that we need to inquire into the roles it plays and whether there are any needs that it answers to. What kind of and how much inequality is “good” for society? How would we measure the link between inequality and stability, solidarity, and coherence of a society (Durkheim also talks about social anomie and how it is fostered by industrialization, so we can infer he had a certain societal balance in mind), and how would we define “stability” and “coherence” in this context? Furthermore, if we choose social inequality as our main variable, we need to distinguish it from economic and political inequality (and would Durkheim have included all of them in the same category for these purposes)? How does inequality (types of inequality) change over time? How do we measure and how do we interpret these changes? (At this point, it seems to me that measuring inequality is the stuff social scientists’ nightmares are made of.)

Some basic variables for measuring stratification are race, gender, ethnicity, age, and maybe geographic area. To measure economic stratification, traditional variables have been income/wealth and occupation. To measure political stratification – power, and social – status, lifestyles, education, values, (social capital, opportunities). It is not clear, however, how to operationalize all of these variables, and whether we can measure stratification objectively (for example, the problem of needs versus wants, or how to measure and interpret whether people are happy with their life, or the question of whether using occupation as a variable isn’t really measuring status).

Assuming we have mapped society and accounted for the main possible interactions, how would we link the existence and types of inequality (diversity, pluralism, heterogeneity?) with stability and coherence?

Tey Meadow <stacey.meadow@nyu.edu>

Inertia: (a relevant topic for a Monday, n'est-ce pas?)

I'd like to focus my comment on the presence of inertia (resistance or disinclination to motion, action, or change), which I see underpinning a good deal of the material we've covered this semester. From the maintenance of entrenched bureaucracies, to capitalism's self-perpetuating architecture, the ways in which both social structures and social actors are resistant to change lends to a discussion of theory as much as does a focus on the historical evolution of social forms. Though most of our reading focuses specifically on change, i.e. how social systems we have now came to be, how they evolved over time, what the driving forces behind changes were, equally as telling are the resisting forces those changes pushed against, and the new ones they created.

The clearest example of the significance of society's resistance to change is Durkheim's discussion of anomie and the relationship he traces between de-regulation, confusion over shifts is value systems and the increase in suicide rates. Why do we respond so severely and self-
destructively to the social disequilibrium that accompanies norm-less-ness? Also, in examining Weber's construction of bureaucracy, it is possible to argue that a structure which imbues positions (not people) with power is resistant to change. In fact, the continued relevance of larger and larger scale entrenched bureaucracies evinces society's stake in maintaining rigid systems of norms and rules.

The idea of inertia presents Sociology with a particularized set of methodological problems. How do you study inertia? How do you quantify resistance? Collective resistance to social change is a pretty observable phenomena, but that is only part of what I'm talking about. I feel like there's a level of social inertia that falls between the individual consciousness (the lack of a drive to act) and collective resistance (a collective drive to act against social change). Maybe I'm just getting myself into a theoretical morass, though.

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Ashley Elizabeth Mears <aem304@nyu.edu>

One particular facet of Durkheim’s theory I’d like to discuss is his idea that Catholics are less prone to suicide than Protestants. Later some feeble attempts will be made to link this with differences Weber sees between Protestants and Catholics.

1. Durkheim shows how suicide is a generalization of social dissolution in the modern world. When suicide-prone individuals combine with the social currents of egoism, altruism, or anomie, suicide rates will spike.

Conceptual variables: A whole range of social causes result in egoism, which is a slack in the social fabric. Egoism is the primary cause of Protestant suicides. Protestants experience ineffective, weak social bonds from a loss of cohesion in religious society, the high value of knowledge and pursuit of education, greater freedom of individual thought, and increased individualism. These are some of the causes of egoism. Catholics have more social cohesion, less individualism, less egoism, and less suicide.

Measurements: Statistical data proved valuable for Durkheim to locate higher rates of suicide among Protestants than Catholics.

Problems: Durkheim is trying to measure individuals’ psychological health with social currents. In addition, there is the curious outcome of suicide itself. It is unclear why individuals must self-destruct when faced with slack social bonds. Why don’t Protestants rather just binge eat or use some other outlet for their frustration?

2. Weber propositions that the Protestant ethic was a necessary condition for the rise of capitalism. Something about Protestantism was influential in developing capitalism.

Conceptual variables: Calvinism’s notion of a calling led individuals to become quite anxious about their fate. This anxiety led to worldly asceticism, rationalization, and growing
individualism. These in turn fueled reinvestment, profit-seeking, and the dissolution of traditional society. Thus, the capitalist spirit is born.

Measurements: Historical and regional comparisons provide some proof, yet Weber also is trying to account for individual psychological transformations, or subjective meanings, with social developments.

Problems: Capitalism is a system of many, many actors, so Weber’s focus on individual’s behavior may be limited. In addition, there is the curious outcome of capitalism. It is unclear why anxious and lonely individuals solve their woes by organizing into capitalist societies. Why don’t Protestants rather just commit suicide?

In both Durkheim and Weber we see that very different moralities in Protestantism and Catholicism result in divergent social outcomes. We have seen that Catholicism is a tougher glue that keeps individuals bound to society and less likely to commit suicide. Protestantism, on the other hand, encourages individualism, egoism, and therefore the likelihood of more suicide. At the same time, we have also seen how Protestantism led to the development of anxious worshippers seeking proof of their divinity, and this led to rationalization, worldly asceticism, and individualism, all necessary components for the rise of capitalism. Catholicism, on the other hand, is more tightly tied to traditional passiveness with less individualism.

What is the relationship between pathology and crime?

Durkheim posits that there is no relationship, that in fact crime is necessary for society (Methods, pg. 101). If this is the case, then what variables do we use to measure pathology? Are only collective social phenomena pathological (for instance, would war be considered pathological?), or can individuals also be pathological? Durkheim implies that pathological social facts are temporal, in that they must be determined in relationship to a particular society at a particular point in that society's evolution (Methods, pg. 92). For instance, slavery may have been considered normal, or useful, for American society at the time that it started, but now we consider it highly abnormal to enslave a person. Also, if pathology is considered abnormal, then how do we measure the extent of that abnormality? If we relate pathology to a state of not being healthy, or a sickness, then would it be feasible to use the same standards that we use to determine when an illness becomes an epidemic? In other words, is a fact more pathological when it affects a wide range of people or when it settles in a certain community?

I haven't offered any clear cut variables for measuring pathology because quite frankly I don't know what variables to use. Also, I am still not convinced that crime, deviance, and pathology are not all interrelated.
Apologies for this posting being a little late – I was attempting to be an overachiever (by connecting more than one theorist) and ended up being a slacker (by submitting late).

In trying to generalize any theory it is important to look at the variables, and so in trying to create generalizations which incorporated more than one theorist’s work I thought it would be best to identify variables which are common to more than one theorist’s causal mechanisms. For Durkheim, anomie and solidarity are key variables in his theories. To what degree are these variables also present in Marx’s theories, or can these variables be operationalized to enhance Marx’s theories? Take, for example, Marx’s factory and the interaction that occurs between the big bad capitalist and the poor exploited worker (factory, capitalist, and worker all being ideal types). If we apply Durkheim’s theory of organic solidarity, as the division of labor increases so, too, should organic solidarity (operationalizing “solidarity” is obviously problematic, which is why we’re discussing it in class). If we consider the factory as a small organism, as the division of labor increases among the workers so, too, should the solidarity, but is this solidarity among the workers or between the workers and the capitalists? If we assume it to be among the workers (each man performing a separate function, the cumulative actions of all the workers creating a whole, finished product) is there maybe a theoretical “point of no return”, after which increased division alienates, rather than unites, workers? In other words, can the increased division of labor, beyond a certain point, create an anomic environment in which the worker becomes detached, alienated, both from himself, his work, and his fellow workers? If the over-division of labor decreases rather than increases solidarity this might explain why a “collective conscious” did not emerge and the proletariat revolution did not occur as Marx had envisioned.

More generally, Durkheim stresses the importance of treating elements of the social world as objective facts, things that can be studied. This is obviously a useful practice, which is why sociologists continue to do so. Certain problems seem to be inherent in this, however. For example, sociologists have also engaged in deconstructing so called “facts” to show that they are indeed social constructions (two very important examples which come to mind are race and gender). How does treating social constructs as facts create problems for theory? Looking at Durkheim’s theory of anomic suicide, as Miodrag pointed out if we do not subscribe to Durkheim’s belief in the different natures of the sexes (treating gender as fact) the theoretical argue falls to bits. What other “facts” in other theories we’ve encountered need to be problematized?

Finally, just as a general observation/question, in terms of Marx, Weber and Durkheim, how specific are all of their theories to “modern society”?

"Michelle Lynn" <ml957@nyu.edu>

In Suicide, Durkheim puts forward the argument that a particular type of suicide-called anomic suicide-occurs when a person is unable to adapt to a change in a social situation that brings about instability.

From this argument, we could make (and hopefully test) the following generalization: that
conditions which lessen society's tendency to limit individuals' expectations lead to an increase in individual crises.

In testing this generalization, we could consider the following variables:

- The strength of a particular society's limiting influence on individuals BEFORE that influence is lessened
- The size of the gap between individuals' wants and their real lives
- The number of different types of manifestations of individual crises, including suicide, abandonment of family, creating alternate identities, or otherwise "opting out"

To examine these variables in the real world, we might look at literature, film, even pornography as indicators of the gap between people's desires (as expressed in fantasy) and the lives that they really live. We could look at statistics for bias crimes as one indicator of the strength of social norms vis a vis conformity.

One problem would be the difficulty in identifying measurable manifestations of individual crisis outside of suicide. I consider abandoning the family (not just divorce, but truly disappearing) or choosing a hermit-like lifestyle to be indicators of such a crisis, but I'm not sure that others would agree.

"Sarah Beth Kaufman" <sarah.kaufman@nyu.edu>

Generalization: Marx's theory of class is too general to hold true. Weber asserts in "Class, Status, Party" that class groups can include several sub-groups. For example, Weber argues that the "proletariat" that Marx puts so much faith in, actually includes several different groups. Day-laborers do not depend on one another for identity, and therefore might actually take the label "proletariat" as their main identity. But also included in Marx's "proletariat" group are those craftsmen who identify as craftsmen as such. Their identity is not the same as the "day-laborer." Instead, craftsmen hold themselves above day-laborers. Therefore, their identity is dependent upon the degree to which the other craftsmen maintain a "craft" identity.

Theory: Status groups depend on non-economic estimations of honor, based on life-style and prestige. These groups depend on exclusivity and closure in order to protect identity. Often these status groups are dependent on internal traditions, rather than rational necessity.

Measurement: Status groups can be operationalized by identifying groups that depend on non-economic characteristics for their identities. For example, a researcher could identify social groups that appear to share similar race, sexual orientation, or religion. Group members could then be interviewed as to the social practices that brought the group together, practices of closure/exclusion, experiences of life-style honor, etc.
Problems: In this post-whatever 21st century, it is rare to find a group whose identity has only one facet. In other words, an individual in any given status group may have multiple status-identities. Likewise, a status group might include individuals with many different social estimations of honor. A single professional group, say computer programmers, may contain a single mom, a gay man, a and recovering alcoholic. These individuals might depend on their status as "computer programmer" in some instances, but hide or depend on their other identities at other times. Multiple status-identities may prevent any real coherence between members or may encourage members of a single status group to practice inclusion rather than exclusion. Coalitions may be built among and between status groups, acknowledging that membership in one does not preclude membership in another.

"Robert Weide" <robertweide@hotmail.com>

One generalization that can be made from the Marx readings relates to the workers’ situation in a capitalist system. In a capitalist system, workers are free to sell their labor, but they are not free to not sell their labor. This is because workers need to sell their labor in order to earn wages with which to provide for their subsistence. If they are not able to earn wages by selling their labor they will perish. The workers in a capitalist system are therefore in a precarious bargaining position when they meet the capitalist in the “free” marketplace. The capitalist is free to not hire any worker because there are other workers who can be hired in his place. However the worker does not have the freedom to refuse to sell his labor, because if he is unable to sell his labor he will perish. In a marketplace of labor with this bargaining dynamic the capitalist is in a dominant position and is free to pay the lowest possible wage for the labor he buys, because the workers will have to take whatever wage he offers, so long as it is sufficient to survive on. Workers in this system are forced to take whatever job is offered them at whatever meager wage is being paid. They end up in low paying dead end monotonous jobs that do not allow them to express their full human potential. Their pathetic lives are consumed by the robotic repetitions their job demands, thereby reducing them to an “appendage of the machine”, as Marx characterizes them. Weber also recognizes that workers are trapped in a virtual iron cage where they are forced to participate in the capitalist system in order to survive.

This generalization applied well to the capitalist system of the 19th century because workers were completely at the mercy of the free and wholly unregulated marketplace. They were paid wages so low that they could barely reproduce themselves. This resulted in horrid conditions for the workers and lucrative profits for the capitalists. One might consider this generalization to be true, to some extent, even in today’s modern capitalist system. The vast majority of workers today, report that they do not like their jobs. This is because they are forced to take jobs they don’t want because jobs they do want are in short supply. Therefore, they have to take jobs that they don’t want in order to provide for themselves and their families. They too are stuck in low paying dead end jobs that they have to take because that’s all that is available. Anyone who has worked at a fast food joint can empathize, I’m sure. The difference between now and when Marx was alive, is that now there are some safeguards, though arguably insufficient, to protect workers from the peril of the free marketplace. There is a minimum wage that employers must pay their workers, though insufficient to live on in modern society. There is some welfare, also insufficient to live on, and now only available for a short period of time while workers are unemployed. Before they know it, workers stop receiving their welfare and are forced back into the
marketplace to not get the job they want and instead accept a job that they don’t want.

"Jennifer Elizabeth Petersen" <jen.petersen@nyu.edu>

Marx’s theory of value is that surplus value generates and re-generates capital for the owner of the means of production (the capitalist), and is quite distinct from use value, or what price a commodity fetches on the marketplace. The difference between surplus value and use value is the profit that the capitalist may then roll back into their production process—purchasing more labor power for lower prices, extracting more hours of work without pay, running machinery that requires fewer laborers and mandates increased specialization (and often lower skill levels), each enabling the capitalist to ‘cut corners,’ minimizing production costs and maximizing profits at every turn. One generalization of this theory is to state that the shrewd capitalist will seek out any possible way to trim production costs in an effort to increase the difference between use and surplus value in order to expand his capital base.

The conceptual variables include labor and its division, wages and a broader wage structure that determines the going rate of labor on the free market, technology employed in the production process, and the price fetched by the commodity on the market, determined by competition among producers and demand for a given commodity.

This could be measured in the real world by conducting a market study of a given commodity over time, such as women’s dresses. A decent sampling of high end US dress manufacturers based in a common region (say, Los Angeles, the current capitol for ladies dress labels) studied over a period of five years, for example, could reveal the efforts made to reduce production costs and maximize surplus value.

Problems include: fragmentation of the production process across international borders, intervention of organized labor that change the relationships between laborers and capitalists, and, as in the case of long shore workers’ or other transportation strikes, affect the flow of raw materials (including labor) to sites of production, and externalities, such as geopolitical conflicts that affect petroleum supplies and conveyance of goods to markets for sale.

"Miodrag Stojnic" <miodrag.stojnic@nyu.edu>

Here's a generalization that Weber makes:
Every technological repercussion and economic transformation threatens stratification by status and pushes the class situation into the foreground. Epochs and countries in which the naked class situation is of predominant significance are regularly the periods of technical and economic transformations. And every slowing down of the change in economic stratification, leads in due course, to the growth of status structures and makes for a resusciation of the important role of social honour. (Weber, Economy and Society, p 938).

Let's take a look at technological change and its impact on the significance of economic class and
social status. So we have one independent variable which is technological (non)change and two dependent ones, economic class and social status. Instead of looking at big scale innovations in large areas, we can make a historical comparison in small towns or even big villages where technological innovations such as phone, car, radio, TV, computers were introduced in last 40 years. I would assume that before these changes came to these areas which were not industrialized there were clear demarcations along economic situations of individuals and social status or social honour as Weber says. We could use in-depth interviews of people on what were the perceptions of certain economic classes and status groups before technological changes occurred and after they've occurred. Perhaps we could also find a local historian, or a cleric, which often performs a similar function and use his knowledge or written texts. In the interviews we should also control for the age since older people might have different perceptions than younger ones, who didn't live in a highly stratified society for a long time.

"Leslie-Ann Bolden" <lab341@nyu.edu>

The question which ignited my response was: Why hasn't capitalism failed thus far?

Using Marx, Weber, and the post-industrial world economy, I would suggest the following:

1. Innovations/Innovators -- Marx noted the economic change which was brought about by the technological advances of the time with the invention of the cotton gin and other machines which aided the division of labor. He recognized the structural economic change which this technology brought as it meant the collapse of feudalism.

Weber noted the Innovators in the religious realm and the businessmen who participated in transactions on the coasts in Germany. These innovators gave capitalism the moral/psychological footing in the society. The religious fanatics (who were innovators in their own group as they challenged the mighty Catholic Church and won) made long hours spent at work and the practice of usury morally acceptable. Moreover, businessmen who lived on the coast established a pattern of business practices and preparation of their young to continue the form in the way they socialized them through the education choices of the children. Today, the innovations and the innovators are those who advance and ignite capitalism and spread it across the globe through the use of information/digital technology which has the ability to 'globalize' the planet more than ever before. No one on earth today remains unaffected, whether negatively or positively by the rapid growth of information and communication technologies. The leaders in this market have the power to control not only countries but continents with their technology, for example Bill Gates is worth more than Sub-Saharan Africa. This situation was made possible through the capitalist machine. It allowed the 'market' to decide who were the information 'haves' and 'have nots.'

2. Willingness to have others become part of its class. Capitalism was able to surpass the Aristocracy because it facilitates new members into its ruling
class. This influx of 'new blood' always keeps the ruling class alive, not stationary, and gives the appearance that it is an egalitarian system, making it less likely that the masses will revolt. Marx showed that the bourgeoisie were not all members of the nobility and they co-opted the best from the lower classes. Weber posited that it was the middle class which initiated capitalism and then moved into the upper class with its success. Today, the not all the 'techies' of Silicon Valley or Investment Bankers on Wall Street were originally from the upper class. Like the Protestants whom Weber wrote about, not all were upper class, but many were middle class and some are working or lower class. The macro-societal structure which capitalism engendered, however, has allowed them to enter the the upper class and likewise become powerful.