

# Ladders with strings attached



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Investigating how socioeconomic status impacts social stratification and mobility, and the impact of gender differences on identity formation.

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# Introduction

The formation of one's identity is filled with intricate complexities and diverse life experiences. During this process, individuals seeking acceptance and belonging; often compare themselves to others in attempts to fit societal norms and gain a successful identity over others. As a teenager personally shaped by societal norms and peer expectations, I became interested in the factors that influence patterns of social stratification within society in an effort to gain a successful identity.

This Personal Interest Project (PIP) explores how the identity formation of males and females in Australia is influenced by societal expectations emerging from different socioeconomic classes. In Society and Culture, investigating how identity formation is shaped by socioeconomic status and social stratification is pertinent. Whilst the topic of identity formation is imperative in Personal and Social Identity, the nature of social identity and its formation is explored as an interplay between social stratification and social mobility in Social Inclusion and Exclusion.

Through the use of a professional interview from the University of Sydney, I gained insights from a professor's perspective regarding the topic, which allowed me to gain various insights on the topic for my PIP Chapters. The research process has allowed me to view the direct impact of my topic on the contemporary world in which individuals live. As I was able to learn about the interconnectedness of the concepts related to identity formation, specifically with how socioeconomic status had a direct correlation to individual entitlement in modern society, as well as the implications that arise within the discussion of entitlement.

Through the exploration of the topic, it allowed me to apply my skills to achieve social inclusion, and I am aware of the issues of discrimination and prejudice. Through this, I built a deep connection to the syllabus through the topic of "Investigating how socioeconomic status impacts social stratification and mobility, and the impact of gender differences on identity formation."

These structures influence the beliefs and values of males and females through gender roles, reinforcing cultural norms, influencing how individuals form and express their identities. These interrelated concepts affect how individuals navigate society and develop their identities. Through Darwinism, individuals seek superiority over their peers through upward

and downward comparisons as a way to strengthen their identities. Socioeconomic status is a concept in which status can be measured concretely in the form of income, education, and occupation. In contrast, social stratification reveals how society subjectively organises and ranks different groups, leading to inaccurate portrayals of members within society.

The investigation of how objective and subjective factors coalesce in influencing identity formation and social mobility among males and females in contemporary Australian society. This PIP contains a questionnaire to directly target specific socioeconomic classes and to uncover the trends within society that are about the identity formation of males and females within society. Through the utilisation of a personal reflection, I was able to articulate my perspective and how my personal experiences have been able to shape my identity and obtain a broader understanding.

# Log

The inspiration for this PIP emerged among a combination of factors, including being called spoiled and entitled, and witnessing others being socially stratified into groups. These moments inclined me to become increasingly aware of how varying socioeconomic status resulted in stratification, impacting how people are perceived and treated, often in ways that do not reflect their sense of self. This curiosity led me to choose the topic of "Investigating how socioeconomic status impacts social stratification and mobility, and the impact of gender differences on identity formation." I believed that this topic could address the increasing influence of societal perceptions on individuals.

My choice of this topic was driven by observation and secondary research findings that individuals are often misperceived by society, creating a disconnect between how they see themselves and how they are collectively identified. Personally, I have experienced pressures on my personal identity to conform to these societal expectations. In reflecting on this, I noticed how unconscious bias operates not just on a personal level, but on meso and macro levels, particularly in the workplace.

It is important to acknowledge my involvement within the research process of the PIP, as the pursuit of social studies is to gain valid, accurate and reliable results not influenced by personal or statistical bias. It is a priority to present findings with pride and integrity to ensure the information is not misrepresented or influenced by bias. Challenges that arose during my PIP stemmed from the niche field, with limited secondary research information available. As a result, primary sources were more useful in this research project.

Through secondary research, I developed a stronger understanding of the sociocultural concepts surrounding gender, which informed my choice of the questionnaire, personal reflection and professional interview as my primary methodologies. The questionnaire provided insight into societal perceptions of gendered authorities, revealing patterns of female oppression. My personal reflection was essential in highlighting the emotional and subjective impact of the invisible glass cliff, allowing me to connect macro-level structures to my own meso-level experiences. The professional interview with a university professor offered expert insights into the psychological and cultural expectations placed on females, supporting my investigation into the evolutionary and societal roots of maternal expectations.

The concept of the invisible glass ceiling affects females on meso and macro levels due to maternal expectations, rooted in a Darwinian evolutionary psychology that women and their children must thrive in society. The concept of the invisible glass cliff, where marginalised groups are placed in leadership during times of crisis, sparked my interest as society evolves in recognising structural inequalities and shifting power dynamics.

Throughout the PIP, I believe that I have become more socially and culturally literate, understanding the power dynamics within gender across micro, meso and macro levels. However, I faced obstacles with limited access to diverse secondary research, restricting the analysis of my findings. As a result, I placed greater emphasis on primary research methodologies to enrich the depth and relevance of my PIP.

# Chapter 1

## Do we know or do we not know?

Social and cultural identity play a crucial role in shaping an individual's sense of self. Females often face higher societal pressures due to social stratification, which reinforces the 'invisible glass ceiling'. Males and females experience different societal pressures stemming from their socioeconomic status, which in turn determines their place within society. To explore this, participants within a survey were asked whether they had "made assumptions about another individual's social class based on their behaviours or mannerisms",<sup>1</sup> with 90 participants revealing the different ways that males' and females' perceptions of social class intersect with gendered expectations. This stratification creates a tension between personal and social identity, as the two measures of objective and subjective wealth often conflict, leading individuals to experience identity tensions where their values do not align with those in society. As social systems continue to reward merit and effort inconsistently, individuals struggle to reconcile their internal self-perception with external evaluations. According to 43 participants, believing that on a scale of 1-5, their effort is recognised as a 3 out of 5.<sup>2</sup> Females are persuaded away from pursuing high career levels within the workplace environment due to societal pressures and tensions, which cause harm to their personal and social identity. As "women still have a disadvantage, as young women can be disadvantaged, as people presume they may take maternity leave. Menopause is also an issue for older women in the workplace".<sup>3</sup> This chapter investigates the conscious and unconscious drivers of social stratification, revealing the hidden forces of why individuals diminish others in social settings to elevate their perceived status.

At a micro level, individuals can directly observe males' merit and effort. Societal expectations at this level often emphasise roles such as being a provider. The interactions within the micro level affect interpersonal relationships, especially within families, as the "family unit remains our primary socialising force".<sup>4</sup> Males tend to be less competitive for social ranking within the family compared to other contexts. They generally don't actively try to diminish others to elevate themselves. However, "Darwin's theory of evolution" becomes

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<sup>1</sup> Primary Research Method: Questionnaire Response Question

<sup>2</sup> Primary Research Method: Questionnaire Response Question 17

<sup>3</sup> Primary Research Method: Questionnaire Response 98 Question 14 Female Respondent

<sup>4</sup> Primary Research Method: Interview

relevant specifically among siblings, as they compete for social status and parental attention.<sup>5</sup> Across both micro levels, “economic capital, cultural capital and social capital are relevant ... As well as the networks that can determine their opportunities”.<sup>6</sup>

At a micro level, where merit and effort can be observed personally, females tend to be more competitive than males in terms of social ranking. This is evident in competition “with her sisters, other female relatives, and unrelated female competitors for social status or mates”.<sup>7</sup> While social stratification remains present among females at this individual level, its impact is less pronounced compared to meso and macro levels. Darwin's theory of evolution remains applicable to the issues being discussed, as “social hierarchies” still shape female micro-level interactions within the micro-level context.<sup>8</sup>

At the meso level, social stratification among males becomes more visible due to the limited visibility of individuals' merit and effort, unlike in more intimate micro-level relationships. Without access to deeper interpersonal insights, individuals often rely on surface-level interactions to rank each other. This dynamic fosters a culture of social comparisons with their peers, particularly among males, who frequently engage in upward and downward evaluations of their peers to solidify their social standings. Following “Darwin's theory”, males constantly strive to climb the social hierarchy and appear superior to their peers.<sup>9</sup> The concept of meritocracy fails to account for underlying inequalities, such as disparities in access to economic and social capital. This advantage gives individuals access to “greater opportunities and roles within the workplace environment.”<sup>10</sup> Although merit is presented as a neutral and fair principle, it often masks the structural advantages that are embedded into the micro-level interactions, such as familial level support, educational background and networking abilities.

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<sup>5</sup> C. Darwin, *The origin of species*, (London, Simon & Schuster, 1859), [https://www.vliz.be/docs/Zeeijfers/Origin\\_of\\_Species.pdf](https://www.vliz.be/docs/Zeeijfers/Origin_of_Species.pdf), page 32-33, accessed November 9 2024.

<sup>6</sup> Primary Research: Interview

<sup>7</sup> B. S. Low, ‘Competition Throughout Women’s Lives’, in Maryanne L. Fisher (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Competition*, Oxford Library of Psychology (2017; online edn, Oxford Academic, 4 Aug. 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199376377.013.5>

<sup>8</sup> C. Darwin, *The origin of species*, (London, Simon & Schuster, 1859), [https://www.vliz.be/docs/Zeeijfers/Origin\\_of\\_Species.pdf](https://www.vliz.be/docs/Zeeijfers/Origin_of_Species.pdf), page 32-33, accessed November 9 2024

<sup>9</sup> C. Darwin, *The origin of species*, (London, Simon & Schuster, 1859), [https://www.vliz.be/docs/Zeeijfers/Origin\\_of\\_Species.pdf](https://www.vliz.be/docs/Zeeijfers/Origin_of_Species.pdf), page 32-33, accessed November 9 2024

<sup>10</sup> Primary Research method: Interview



Darwin's theory of evolution states that individuals who exert more merit and effort will gain greater capital and rewards; however, Darwin's theory assumes that all individuals start from the same position. Individuals within workplaces may have a competitive advantage due to micro interactions in which they can access greater resources. This competitive dynamic is particularly evident in professional settings where males often engage in status-displaying behaviours like dominating conversations, showcasing achievements, or competing for leadership positions. This is reflected in the responses of 51.7% of participants stating that people rank and compare "to feel more secure about their own position".<sup>11</sup> As there are constant societal pressures to maintain or improve their identity which can lead to stress and anxiety, as males feel compelled to constantly prove their worth to their peers and "behaviors that may not align with personal values, causing internal conflict and stress".<sup>12</sup> By addressing meritocracy to be inclusive of individual circumstances, acknowledging that individuals belong to different socioeconomic statuses. Individuals can become more aware of the merit and effort of other individuals in an attempt to create positive social change. This competitive environment at the meso level often reinforces "existing social hierarchies and can make it difficult for males from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to advance despite meritocracy".<sup>13</sup>

At the meso level, females experience more intense competition compared to the micro level, since merit and effort become less visible. Society has long reinforced competitive dynamics among women in social settings. Within the workplace environment "Women who exhibit these personality traits, i.e. Being disagreeable, competitive and assertive are rewarded accordingly with promotions and leadership positions, as I have observed within corporate workplaces and in most organisations I've worked within".<sup>14</sup> This competition often emerges as "women may rely more on indirect forms of aggression, such as social exclusion".<sup>15</sup> Due to this long-standing tradition that has transcended throughout society, it has led to negative social change regarding female confidence and especially in the workplace environment. This is reinforced by 43% of respondents stating that unconscious biases within the workplace

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<sup>11</sup> Primary research method: Questionnaire Question 6

<sup>12</sup> The Team at Love Discovery Institute, 'Navigating Societal Pressures: Understanding the Psychology Behind Social Pressure', Love Discovery, 2023, <https://www.lovediscovery.org/post/navigating-societal-pressure-understanding-the-psychology-behind-social-pressure>, accessed 29 April 2025.

<sup>13</sup> Primary Research Method: Interview

<sup>14</sup> Primary Research Method: Questionnaire Response 30 Question 9 Female respondent

<sup>15</sup> J. F. Benenson et al., 'Under threat of social exclusion, females exclude more than males'. *Psychological science*, 22/4 (April 2011), 538–544, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797611402511>

affected females negatively.<sup>16</sup> Compared to the assumptions of unconscious biases towards males within the workplace with 0.8% believe males are affected negatively.<sup>17</sup>

Within the macro level, males experience significant pressure from societal expectations and stereotypes about success and achievement. The competitive nature intensifies as merit and effort become almost completely invisible at this scale, leading to judgments based primarily on visible markers of status and wealth. This creates a system where social stratification becomes more competitive, with males often feeling compelled to conform to societal definitions of success regardless of their application.

At a macro level, females face systemic barriers and deeply ingrained societal biases that affect their social mobility and status. The concept of the “invisible glass ceiling” becomes most apparent at this level, where, despite equal or superior qualifications, women often encounter invisible barriers to advancement in corporate and institutional hierarchies.<sup>18</sup> This systemic inequality is reinforced by broader societal expectations and traditional gender roles, which can create a disconnect between women's actual capabilities and society's perception of their potential for leadership and success. This can be due to the ignorance towards recognising the merit and effort of individuals, as they are not as visible to society. As 43.7% of participants stated that “by transitioning to a system which recognises merit and effort we can increase transparency and reward those efforts”, as increasing visibility to the macro level society helps to break down systemic barriers that males and females experience.<sup>19</sup> Thus leading to positive social change, fostering greater recognition and appreciation of individuals within society, as individuals feel more valued and respected, leading to a society that emphasises social inclusion and a more equitable and inclusive society.

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<sup>16</sup> Primary research method: Questionnaire Response Question 8

<sup>17</sup> Primary research method: Questionnaire Response Question 8

<sup>18</sup> R. Naguib. and .M Madeeha., ““Making visible the invisible”: Exploring the role of gender biases on the glass ceiling in Qatar's public sector”, Manara - Qatar Research Repository, Journal contribution, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2023.102723>

<sup>19</sup> Primary research method: Questionnaire Response Question 19

## Chapter 2

### Dissonance between social perceptions and sense of self

Personal and social identity are important factors that contribute to an individual's understanding of their beliefs and values. The dissonance between social perceptions and sense of self arises when individuals recognise the disparity between societal stereotypes at the macro level and their self-concept, which then affects how they are treated at the micro and meso level. This is important due to the perceptions of society and perceptions of self. This external bias leads to a dissonance where their self-perception of their abilities and worth does not align with the societal view of them. This factor is mainly due to individuals not being able to see the merit and effort of individuals clearly from a meso and macro level perspective. This is challenged by meritocracy, which suggests that individuals can rise within society due to social mobility.<sup>20</sup>

At a micro level, males typically share close relationships with family and friends who recognise their authentic selves. Within these intimate circles, males generally experience minimal dissonance as “higher levels of intimacy were significantly associated with lower levels of loneliness and higher levels of relationship quality.”<sup>21</sup> This fosters a strengthened sense of personal and social identity as these relationships are based on genuine understanding rather than societal expectations. However, dissonances may emerge when familial or peer expectations about career choices, behaviour, or achievements don't align with the individual's self-perception. As males face these “social challenges and experience internal conflict, which can impact both their engagement and sense of identity.”<sup>22</sup> Micro-level interactions shape identity formation through social capital, with family unit interactions as the main socialising source on a micro level.<sup>23</sup> This leads to subtle mismatches between how individuals see themselves and how they are perceived within close relationships, although this dissonance is not as intense as the meso and macro levels. This

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<sup>20</sup> Primary Research Method: Interview

<sup>21</sup> B. R. Barnett, ‘Identity Development: Implications for Intimacy in Emerging Adulthood’ (2021), Doctoral dissertation, [https://etd.auburn.edu/bitstream/handle/10415/8273/Final%20Dissertation%20-%20B.%20Barnett.pdf?sequence=2&utm\\_source=](https://etd.auburn.edu/bitstream/handle/10415/8273/Final%20Dissertation%20-%20B.%20Barnett.pdf?sequence=2&utm_source=), accessed 30 April 2025

<sup>22</sup> M.-T. Wang, N. Kiuru, J.L. Degol and K. Salmela-Aro, ‘Friends, Academic Achievement, and School Engagement During Adolescence: A Social Network Approach to Peer Influence and Selection Effects’, *Learning and Instruction*, 58 (2018), pp. 148–160, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0959475217306801>, accessed 30 April 2025.

<sup>23</sup> Primary Research Method: Interview

stereotypical pressure is corroborated by 81 respondents who believed that societal biases exist for males and females.<sup>24</sup>

At the micro level, females often experience a stronger alignment between their self-perception and how they are perceived by their close friends and family. This alignment helps reduce dissonance between their sense of self and external perceptions. Nonetheless, subtle tensions can still emerge as broader societal standards may influence expectations around their career choices, even within close relationships. As “the findings reveal that adolescent girls often feel compelled to align their career choices with parental expectations, which may conflict with their personal interests or aspirations, leading to internal stress and reduced autonomy in decision-making.”<sup>25</sup> This creates a disconnect between personal aspirations and familial pressures within close relationships. Heightened standards and expectations, such as childbearing norms and traditional gender roles, placed on females from an early age can complicate their navigation of identity and self-perception. The pressures of the invisible glass ceiling may be visible for females at the micro level due to childbearing expectations.<sup>26</sup>

Males, conversely, at the meso level face more prominent societal expectations within a community/everyday life, often being compared and socially stratified against other males. Within the micro level, the efforts and accomplishments are not visible outside of close relationships, as the interactions within this level are limited to this small group of people. But within the meso level, actions and interactions are more visible through community and group interactions, in which these outcomes are visible on a greater level. The pressure to align with these masculine stereotypes furthers this tension, leading to a greater dissonance between social perceptions and sense of self, where the majority of males do not feel that the social perceptions of them align strongly. Given the lack of security about their social standing, males are more conscious about “seeking validation and approval from others”, as 19 participants stated.<sup>27</sup> The majority of males feel they are aligned with their sense of self and societal expectations. Contested by 38% of participants stated they have felt pressured and adopted behaviours to conform to their perceived social status.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Primary research method: Questionnaire Response Question 10

<sup>25</sup> S. Bhatia & N. Babu, ‘Parental Involvement in the Career Decision Making of Adolescent Girls’, *Journal of Applied Research in Humanities, Language and Social Sciences*, 1/1 (October 2021), 111-120.

<sup>26</sup> Primary Research Method: Interview

<sup>27</sup> Primary Research Method: Questionnaire Question 6

<sup>28</sup> Primary Research Method: Questionnaire Question 11

Females at a meso level face distinct challenges compared to men at this level, facing challenges such as professional competence, caregiving roles and appearance standards. If they do not live up to these stereotypes or attempt to defy them, they are seen as failing to meet societal norms. “Assumptions for females such as ‘sleeping their way to the top’ or ‘sleeping with their bosses’ are often used to undermine successful women, reflecting the insecurities of those who feel threatened by their achievements.”<sup>29</sup> This creates a strong dissonance between a sense of self when it comes to social stratification, as females are expected to conform to societal norms more strictly than males. These expectations stem from deeply rooted beliefs surrounding gender roles, specifically childbearing responsibilities. Due to these expectations, the chances of women striving for high levels of success will decrease. A female participant stated that “It is easier for males to progress further within companies due to societal expectations. It is harder for women to progress within the workplace due to sexism and other circumstances that are against women”<sup>30</sup>. Deterring women from striving to achieve high positions in the workplace. Additionally “childbearing roles that are placed on women around the age of 45.”<sup>31</sup> Resulting in men being a more appropriate role model for business. Societal expectations believe that men are more reliable than women.

Males at a macro level face societal expectations in terms of emotional restraint and traditional masculinity. In macro-level society, there is a higher level of societal expectations that have to be met by males. Societal structures often favour men in terms of career advancement. This comes with a psychological cost due to restrictive norms around masculinity. At the macro level, societal biases affecting men have been identified with 73 participants stating that certain genders excel in certain professions, and societal biases suggesting “men excel in math”.<sup>32</sup> This is where pressure regarding societal expectations for males becomes most apparent. At this level there is often a strong dissonance between social perceptions and sense of self, as males are expected to conform to societal expectations such as being “tough, emotionally restrained, and self-reliant, and these societal expectations can make it difficult for them to express vulnerability or seek help, leading to higher rates of depression, anxiety, and even suicide.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Primary Research Method: Personal reflection

<sup>30</sup> Primary Research Method: Questionnaire Respondant 2 Question 14 Male respondent

<sup>31</sup> Primary Research Method: Interview

<sup>32</sup> Primary Research Method: Questionnaire Question 10

<sup>33</sup> C. Foy, FHE Health, ‘How Societal Expectations Impact Men’s Mental Health’, FHE Health, 2022, <https://therehab.com/learning/societal-expectations-men-mental-health>, accessed 30 April 2025.

In contrast, females conversely face societal expectations on a greater level compared to males. Women are often held back by society by challenges such as the “invisible glass ceiling”<sup>34</sup>, in which they cannot progress beyond a certain level. At this macro level, females face a greater dissonance between their sense of self and social expectations as they have greater expectations to conform to. Societal expectations, such as the invisible glass ceiling and assumptions surrounding childbearing responsibilities, continue to shape women's experiences in the workforce. According to 41 participants, “societal expectations for women have been a growing influence for the past couple of years.”<sup>35</sup> Consequently, women are often ranked lower in social stratification due to limited social mobility. Even when women achieve success, they frequently encounter derogatory remarks such as claims that they “slept their way to the top’ of the company.”<sup>36</sup> These comments reflect the broader issue of the underrepresentation of women in positions of power, stemming from deeply embedded unconscious biases towards both males and females within society.

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<sup>34</sup> Naguib, R. and Madeeha, M., “Making visible the invisible”: Exploring the role of gender biases on the glass ceiling in Qatar's public sector, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 2023, [online] Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S027753952300050X> [Accessed 20 July 2025].

<sup>35</sup> Primary Research Method: Questionnaire Question 13

<sup>36</sup> Primary Research Method: Personal reflection

## Chapter 3

### Can we be equal in the future?

Within the meso and macro levels of society, individual merit and effort often go unrecognised, making it difficult to acknowledge individual achievements and contributions. By “transitioning to a system which recognises merit and effort, we can increase transparency and reward those efforts”.<sup>37</sup> This shift would promote a more inclusive society, one that values individuals' merit and effort, contributing to a greater sense of personal and social identity from all societal levels. Making merit and effort more visible within institutions can contribute to global social change by addressing the underlying structural issues that have been embedded over time. Broadening the definition of merit and effort to be more inclusive of emotional intelligence and personal growth would help counter the effects of social stratification, as society can recognise individual achievements. The expansion of government support through the implementation of economic policies supports the promotion of equal opportunities so that they are accessible across all societal levels, addressing continuity and change.

At the micro level, males are often able to express themselves openly with close friends and family, having formed meaningful personal connections. Within these intimate relationships, others are typically aware of their capabilities and accomplishments, which helps to foster understanding and support. Research shows that experiencing “meaningful connections can effectively work to decrease loneliness. However, there may be factors impacting successful development of intimate relationships, which may be attributed to these increased rates”.<sup>38</sup> The systems that recognise individual merit and effort are generally less affected by structural inequalities compared to meso and macro levels. As personal relationships at the micro level allow for greater visibility of an individual's experiences, values and achievements, these factors are often overlooked or obscured by institutional influences at broader societal levels. Conversely, females at this societal level benefit from having personal relationships, which helps to foster authentic expressions and mutual respect. Their value is acknowledged beyond institutional measures such as workplace performance, as theoretical identity and

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<sup>37</sup> Primary Research Questionnaire Question 18

<sup>38</sup> B. R. Barnett, ‘Identity Development: Implications for Intimacy in Emerging Adulthood’ (2021), Doctoral dissertation, [https://etd.auburn.edu/bitstream/handle/10415/8273/Final%20Dissertation%20-%20B.%20Barnett.pdf?sequence=2&utm\\_source](https://etd.auburn.edu/bitstream/handle/10415/8273/Final%20Dissertation%20-%20B.%20Barnett.pdf?sequence=2&utm_source), accessed 30 April 2025

accomplishments are understood more holistically within these intimate social settings. As a result, females typically experience minimal social exclusion at this level, due to the personalised nature of interaction and recognition.

At the meso level for males, merit and effort are often less visible, particularly in corporate environments as “in the workplace, your progression is not about the effort you put in, it’s about the value you add and the results you produce. The sad thing is, nobody cares about your recognition, at least in a corporate environment.”<sup>39</sup> This evaluation is crucial in the synthesis of the report, revealing that merit is only acknowledged when it is tied to production and efficiency. This reveals that recognition of effort is shaped by societal norms.

The structural inequalities that are embedded within society are relevant to the way it affect females on the meso level. Structural inequalities such as the “invisible glass ceiling”,<sup>40</sup> at this level, disproportionately affect females more than males. “You need to jump up and down and wave your arms sometimes to get yourself recognised... It’s about more than effort; it’s about how you’re perceived. I think this needs to be communicated to young people.”<sup>41</sup> Within this finding, females experience greater stagnation in career progressions due to expectations of maternal leave and unconscious biases. This may end up in males being selected for roles rather than females for leadership roles. Thus, the disparities are revealed within “female-dominated industries are disproportionately underpaid commensurate with their education”.<sup>42</sup> This highlights the need for society to reevaluate how merit and effort are defined. Revealing the mandatory need for society to reevaluate the way merit and effort are currently defined. A new understanding has emerged that merit and effort are essential components for achieving results and output within the workplace environment. However, this relationship is not consistent for everyone as some individuals may achieve significant results with minimal effort, highlighting disparities in how success is experienced and evaluated.

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<sup>39</sup> Primary Research Method: Questionnaire Response 30 Question 20 Female Respondent

<sup>40</sup> R. Naguib. and .M Madeeha., “Making visible the invisible”: Exploring the role of gender biases on the glass ceiling in Qatar's public sector, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 2023, [Online] Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S027753952300050X> [Accessed 20 July 2025].

<sup>41</sup> Primary Research Method: Questionnaire Response 30 Question 20 Female Respondent

<sup>42</sup> Primary Research Method: Questionnaire Response 91 Question 9 Female Respondent



In contrast, in the school environment, they offer more equitable systems of recognition. Within the school environment, recognition is becoming more valued and recognised as it leads to greater identity formation across all individuals. “The Statement of Equity Principles acknowledges that students come from diverse cultural, linguistic, social, economic, geographic and family backgrounds”.<sup>43</sup> Recent shifts in educational policies further illustrate this movement towards equality. In which the efforts of underperforming students who display significant merit and effort can be recognised in the meso level context, as institutions are recognising these efforts, as well as the disadvantages that students may have. These initiatives recognise the disparity that exists between different socioeconomic groups and ethnicities, which gives certain groups of individuals a disadvantage in education. As society becomes more aware of these issues, efforts to reduce barriers to entry and promote equal opportunities have gained momentum. This advocacy supports positive social change to create a more equitable society across all genders and ethnicities.

The University of Sydney has responded to these issues through structured efforts to address unconscious bias in education. Mandatory training programs aim to ensure fairer treatment to individuals from diverse backgrounds. This workshop includes a day-long training session on cultural competence, strategies for equitable assessment and strategies for self-reflection when marking assessments. Sessions are available for leadership training to question thinking patterns. The courses on ‘Cultural competence and diversity’ which is central to the development of cultural intelligence “is the ability to adapt, relate and work effectively with teams across cultures.”<sup>44</sup> These strategies contribute to positive social change by not only raising awareness of embedded biases but also equipping individuals with tools to challenge stereotypes and promote fairness in both academic and professional settings. “As unconscious bias is a thought that cannot be eliminated, but creating awareness and acknowledging it.”<sup>45</sup>

At the macro level, individual recognition is often diminished, as societal structures tend to generalise identities and overlook personal achievements across both genders. To address this, there is a need to broaden societal understanding of merit and effort by redefining these concepts to reflect a wider range of factors, including the impact of negative stereotypes on

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<sup>43</sup> ‘Statement of Equity Principles’, NSW Education Standards (n.d.), <https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/Understanding-the-curriculum/curriculum-development/syllabus-development/statement-equity-principles?utm>, accessed 2 July 2025.

<sup>44</sup> Secondary Research- *Diversity and Inclusion Course: Cultural Intelligence and Unconscious Bias* (n.d.) CCE University of Sydney. Available at: <https://cce.sydney.edu.au/course/DAIC> (Accessed: 5 June 2025).

<sup>45</sup> Primary research method: Interview

specific demographics. Although merit and effort are already well-established concepts, expanding their definition to become more socially and culturally inclusive allows an evaluation of individuals by challenging structural bias and reducing reliance on stereotypes.

This redefinition, however, may carry implications, particularly in societies where merit-based systems are already institutionalised. Integrating elements such as personal growth into the evaluation process encourages more holistic recognition and allows individuals to express their development in constructive ways. Additionally, including emotional intelligence should be considered, as it enhances understanding and acceptance of diverse perspectives in society. However, it is important to acknowledge that emotional intelligence may include some negatives, such as backlash and discrimination, as individuals might not interpret emotional intelligence the same way you perceive yourself, potentially leading to negative social outcomes. However, emotional intelligence can be subjected to misinterpretation, as others may not perceive emotional awareness as intended. Which could lead to misunderstandings, backlash or even discrimination, revealing the complexities of redefining merit in an inclusive and applicable framework.

Government support can play a crucial role in achieving positive social change. Through the implementation of broader economic policies, governments can reduce social stratification and promote equal opportunities across all societal levels, particularly the meso and macro levels. “Stratification economics, which has emerged as a new subfield of research on inequality, is distinguished by a system-level analysis. It explores the role of power in influencing the processes and institutions that produce hierarchical economic and social orderings based on ascriptive characteristics.”<sup>46</sup> To address these issues, implementing programs such as unconscious bias training can be included to increase awareness and sensitivity when it comes to social stratification. Whilst stratification cannot be entirely eliminated, these measures help to mitigate its effects and foster a more equal and proactive society.

A new finding has been discovered regarding females in terms of crisis, as “researchers have found that women have a better chance of breaking through that ceiling when an organisation

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<sup>46</sup> Secondary Research- S. Seguino, ‘The Macroeconomics of Stratification’, Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Economics and Finance, 2021, <https://oxfordre.com/economics/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190625979.001.0001/acrefore-9780190625979-e-747>, accessed 6 June 2025.

is facing a crisis”.<sup>47</sup> This new finding states that in terms of crisis, women and marginalised groups have a greater chance of being promoted to leadership positions. The findings found that when the company had been led by men and was doing well, 62% of the students who read that scenario chose the male candidate. But when the male-led company was in crisis, 69% chose the female candidate”. These findings challenge traditional gender stereotypes and highlight a shift in perceptions during times of economic and political instability, showing a significant new interpretation empowering these marginalised groups. At the macro level, these developments challenge the invisible glass barriers of the glass ceiling, paving the way towards cultural change.

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<sup>47</sup> S. Bruckmüller & N. R. Branscombe, ‘How Women End Up on the “Glass Cliff”’, Harvard Business Review (January 2011), <https://hbr.org/2011/01/how-women-end-up-on-the-glass-cliff>, accessed 14 May 2025.

# Conclusion

Throughout the process of the PIP, the question remains that inspired this investigation: “Why are people ranked the way they are in society?” Social stratification remains deeply embedded within our culture, and throughout this PIP, I set out to explore how genders are subjectively ranked through measures of merit, effort and socially constructed assumptions. Undertaking this PIP has made me more socially and culturally literate, recognising how gender expectations continue to inform micro, meso and macro level interactions.

Throughout this investigation, it became clear that gender based assumptions, such as the belief women are less capable of holding leadership roles, are often built on outdated patriarchal norms, rather than objective assessments. My findings clearly supported my hypothesis that women continue to face structural barriers such as the invisible glass ceiling. Even more interesting, the concept of the invisible glass cliff, revealed that marginalised groups are elevated into positions of power during times of crisis, placing them at higher risk of failure. This phenomenon reveals how merit and the capacities of individuals are overlooked in surface-level interactions, reinforcing the persistence of social stratification.

Chapter 1 laid the foundations for exploring how social rankings are embedded within society, exploring the conscious and unconscious drivers of social stratification. The professional interview was essential in highlighting the meso and macro levels that fail to recognise individuals' merit and effort, instead relying on societal expectations. Chapter 2 investigated the dissonance between self-perceptions and sense of self, exploring the way that individuals perceive themselves and the way they are perceived by society. This was challenged by the way that the media interprets and continues to produce unequal representations of standards. Chapter 3 focused on change and the initiatives that have been taken, such as unconscious bias training and the invisible glass cliff, to empower marginalised groups by challenging traditional gender norms.

This topic is relevant within today's society, as gender norms shift and awareness of inequality grows, our understanding of merit and effort should also change. Social institutions play a major role in the transformation towards redefining the definition of merit and effort to be inclusive of emotional intelligence and personal growth to promote inclusion and positive social change.

Through secondary and primary research methodologies within the PIP, it was appropriate in exploring the way that individuals are ranked within society perceived merit and effort. The use of the interview provided expert insights into the gendered biases that females face, whilst my reflection added personal depth. The lack of secondary research was a limitation and may have hindered the findings, as time constraints challenged my ability to expand on the use of this research.

In conclusion, this Pip journey has taught me that social stratification cannot be solved definitively, but it can be understood and made visible. Through awareness through education and government interventions, we can begin to shift societal views and reduce this inequality. Furthermore, this change relies on not erasing the existence, but dismantling these hierarchies which unfavourably advantage some while holding others back.

# Annotated Bibliography

## Primary Research

### **Personal Reflection**

The evidence in Chapter 1, to discover the social hierarchy where I noted, reflects on personal experiences within the micro and meso levels of how unconscious biases affect the identity formation of males and females within Australia. This can be examined through the example of the unconscious drivers of decision making. What do you think when you see homeless people? Typically, people assume they have trouble gaining a consistent income, can't afford housing and belong to a low socioeconomic status. People within society want to feel a sense of superiority and find flaws in others to make them feel superior. By making individuals aware of the difference between socioeconomic status, which is an objective truth, as well as social stratification, which are the views that are determined by society.

Chapter 2 explores the dissonance between what people think of their achievements and what peers think. Facing challenges of obtaining job positions due to societal expectations based on ethnicities. Marginalised groups such as females, LGBTQ and ethnic individuals struggle with societal expectations, stereotypes and unconscious biases that create the invisible glass ceiling in which these individuals. The invisible glass ceiling prevents marginalised groups from reaching high levels of success, due to societal norms, gender stereotypes and unconscious biases. This causes these marginalised groups to not strive to high levels due to the invisible glass ceiling as they believe they cannot reach high levels of success. In the case that females in the workplace achieve a high level of success within a company, assumptions get made surrounding the rise to this new position. Assumptions for females such as 'sleeping their way to the top' or 'sleeping with their bosses' are often used to undermine successful women, reflecting the insecurities of those who feel threatened by their achievements. This leads to a conflict between the way individuals view themselves and the way that societal perceptions view the success of individuals in the workplace when it comes to social stratification.

The concept of deserving or merit raises complex questions about objective measurement and societal perceptions. Within contemporary society, there exists a fundamental challenge in quantifying and recognising individual merit and effort. This limitation in visibility of personal achievements creates discrepancies in how different socioeconomic groups interpret and evaluate entitlement. The subjective nature of merit assessment leads to varying interpretations across different social strata, ultimately influencing how different groups determine worthiness and entitlement to resources or opportunities. Making merit and effort recognisable to society allows individuals to feel recognised and valued within society.

## **Interview**

The use of interview was conducted with Professor Freebody, a professor who works at the University of Sydney. With a Bachelor's in Drama and GradCert in educational studies, and an award in Faculty of Education and Social Work Teaching Excellence Award 2008. With knowledge in subjects surrounding social structures, inequalities and social justice as well as social change. This helped to consider the opinion of a professional with knowledge on the subject. This allowed me to gain valuable insight into the discrepancies from a female perspective on society. Specifically helping me gain knowledge into 'Chapter 3 Can we Be equal in the Future?' as to the initiatives that organisations have been doing to improve the personal and social identity of individuals by recognising their merit and effort. The interview allowed me to gain reliable and accurate information for my PIP, aiding me to address continuity and change within the meso and macro levels.

## **Questionnaire**

Over the past couple of months, I distributed a questionnaire to males and females in Australia, to adolescents and adults. There were a total of 121 responses, 93 female responses, 24 male responses, 2 prefer not to say, and 1 nonbinary/other. Throughout the questionnaire, there were a combination of open and closed responses that examined socioeconomic status's impact on social stratification and mobility, and how this differs between males and females in Australia. The questionnaire was distributed through direct messages and Facebook community groups. The validity of the survey was a bit invalid due to the invalid sample size of females in comparison to males. The validity of the survey did

not account for ethnicities of individuals, so it could not be representative of a certain race. The validity of the questionnaire was ethically sourced to ensure ethical integrity throughout the research process. Additionally, I received feedback before sending out the questionnaire to the Facebook groups to ensure that the questions seemed valid and ethically appropriate. The results were anonymous and entirely voluntary, with the options to skip questions being available. The data was skewed due to some of the participants not being able to understand the meaning of the questions. This led to invalid responses as responses were unclear and didn't contribute to the PIP. Despite these concerns, these were resolved through the use of the interview and secondary research. The inclusion of personal voices throughout the responses of males and females led to primary evidence of the discrepancies throughout the meso and macro workplace environment. Additionally, definitions of key terms were included at the top of the questionnaire so that participants could understand. Throughout the questionnaire, I included examples with some of the harder questions so that the participants could have a clearer understanding. So that they can have a greater understanding of social and cultural literacy as which helped my writing for the chapters.



## Secondary Research

**Barnett, B. R., ‘Identity Development: Implications for Intimacy in Emerging Adulthood’ (2021), Doctoral dissertation,**  
**[https://etd.auburn.edu/bitstream/handle/10415/8273/Final%20Dissertation%20-%20B.%20Barnett.pdf?sequence=2&utm\\_source](https://etd.auburn.edu/bitstream/handle/10415/8273/Final%20Dissertation%20-%20B.%20Barnett.pdf?sequence=2&utm_source), accessed 30 April 2025.**

In the 2022 doctoral dissertation, researchers explored the relationship between identity resolution during adulthood and intimacy outcomes. It found that identity formation through Erikson's theory captured the 8 eight states of his theory. Individuals who had higher levels of satisfaction from relationships had greater identity development and an increased well-being. Individuals who tended to resolve their relationships had more stable relationships. Showing the interplay between the importance of micro relationships and their effect on individual identities. It was found that “Those who scored higher in identity also scored higher in intimacy, suggesting a direct relationship between identity development and relationship quality”. This was crucial to my PIP as it highlighted the importance of a greater sense of self due to meaningful relationships on a micro and meso level. This study was reliable as it was a research study published by Auburn University. It included a large sample of individuals and was approved by a group of professors. The sample may include some bias; it included strictly college students as it represented Western views from America.

**Benenson, J. F. et al., ‘Under threat of social exclusion, females exclude more than males’. *Psychological science*, 22/4 (April 2011), 538–544,**  
**<https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797611402511>**

This journal article was published in April 2011 and examined the way that males and females respond to social exclusion. The study found that women are not specifically competitive at a micro level through confrontation, but rather by body behaviours of social exclusion, as it is found that women tend to find other women who exclude other people. It was found that “Females may attempt to form an exclusionary alliance, whereas males may endeavour to unilaterally and directly dominate an opponent.” This study was crucial to my PIP; pertaining to understanding social inclusion and exclusion at the micro and meso levels

in relation to cross-cultural behaviours. This source is reliable - as it is published by a group of researchers and was peer-reviewed document to mitigate biasness impacting the research. However, though the article uses 38 academic references to other academic articles and journals, the sources were often clustered around the same researchers, such as Archer, Benenson and Crick (to name a few). An argument could be made that this impacts the credibility of the research; as the clustering of the source information contributes to a lack of source variety. Finally, there seems to be little bias as it was conducted cross-culturally, which also considered different perspectives contributing to the validity.

**Bhatia, S. & Babu, N., 'Parental Involvement in the Career Decision Making of Adolescent Girls', *Journal of Applied Research in Humanities, Language and Social Sciences*, 1/1 (October 2021), 111-120.**

The article was published in October 2021 and was written by Suruchi Bhatia & Nandita Babu. This article details parental involvement in career decisions for adolescent girls. The main concept revolves around the types of involvement that parental figures have on adolescent girls, in which it can be supportive, prescriptive and informative. Through this, we examine how each interaction influences the career choices and aspirations of these girls. This was crucial to the study in my PIP for chapters 1 and 2, in which I was able to discover how, at the micro level, parental figures directly influence the aspirations of girls. The source was published in a peer-reviewed journal and was written by professors from the University of Delhi, supporting the source's validity and reliability. There could be some potential bias within it not displaying the whole population with the sample size of the Indian population.

**Bicchieri, C., Muldoon, R. & Sontuoso, A. (2018). Social Norms. in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2023 Edition). Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2023/entries/social-norms/>>., accessed 8 January 2025.**

University paper detailing social norms, it was published on March 1st 2011. About the social norms within society that govern different bodies, such as government and social classes of individuals. About how social norms form market behaviour within society. This concept was

useful in examining social norms and how they are used to form, maintain and their impact on behaviour and identity formation within society. An important aspect of this study was how norms were formed, as it is defined to be the “equilibrium of a strategic interaction” showing how norms develop through social dynamics rather than top-down imposition. This research was useful within my PIP as it showed the way that social norms are developed, which is crucial to my PIP and the way that individuals are affected by social norms on societal levels. This source has a high reliability as it comes from Stanford University and has been peer-reviewed by multiple authors. Additionally, it comes with minimal bias due to it being peer-reviewed as well as coming from an encyclopedia.

**Bruckmüller, S. and Branscombe, N. R., ‘How Women End Up on the “Glass Cliff”’, *Harvard Business Review* (January 2011), <https://hbr.org/2011/01/how-women-end-up-on-the-glass-cliff>, accessed 14 May 2025.**

This study was published in 2011, and it explores the glass cliff phenomenon, which is where females are likely to be selected to leadership roles during times of crisis. As it showed that “When a male-led company was doing well, 62% selected a male CEO. When the same company was in crisis, 69% selected a female CEO.” This was crucial in the findings of my PIP for the conclusion, but mainly within Chapter 3. The source was reliable as it was published by Harvard Business Review, which is a peer-reviewed source. The authors of the article are academics in psychology and social research, reinforcing its reliability and validity. There may be some cultural bias as it was based in the United States and does not consider the whole world.

**Burns, K. and Kean, J., ‘How to Make Schools Gender Inclusive’, *The University of Sydney* (6 March 2024), <https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2024/03/06/how-to-make-schools-gender-inclusive.html>, accessed 7 May 2025.**

This article was published on the 6th of March 2024, and it revolves around how school gender inclusive requires more than just going co-ed. This was useful in my PIP through the use of it in my Chapter 3 and conclusion, contributing to my continuity and change aspect.

But also communicating complications, such as “Simply enrolling girls will not automatically make a boys school more inclusive, less sexist or safer.” communicates that there are complexities to making schools become more inclusive. This source is highly reliable, published by the University of Sydney and was published by University professors and supported by academic research and government surveys to support its validity and reliability. There is some minimal bias surrounding the survey, focusing on more expensive and elite boys' schools rather than accounting for public schools. This may reveal them emphasising issues in which these elite schools only face issues, not accounting for the majority of schools.

**CCE University of Sydney, ‘Diversity and Inclusion Course: Cultural Intelligence and Unconscious Bias’ (n.d.), <https://cce.sydney.edu.au/course/DAIC>, accessed 5 June 2025.**

The course explores the concept of how cultural intelligence and unconscious bias work in order to foster inclusive workplaces and learning how to analyse their own biases they are able to promote inclusion and build emotional and cultural intelligence. This course promotes that individuals will become more aware of the issues within society when interacting with people, taking into consideration these factors not to offend anyone. This study was useful within my Chapter 3, as it is mentioned that unconscious bias stems from social stratification. The course, which is offered by the University of Sydney and is reliable due to it being from a reliable source and professor supporting its validity and reliability. There would be minimal bias due to the course structure and participants' way of responding to the bias.

**Chapman, B., ‘Tall Poppy Syndrome’, *Parents & Families* [blog post], 2023, <https://parents.wfu.edu/2023/07/tall-poppy-syndrome-4/>, accessed 6 November 2024.**

Discusses 'Tall Poppy Syndrome' where successful individuals face criticism from peers. This article discusses the social phenomenon known as 'Tall Poppy Syndrome', where successful individuals are criticised or disparaged by others. The author's perspective aims to educate the audience about 'Tall Poppy Syndrome' and why people should not ‘cut down’ their peers' success. This was useful within the findings of my PIP, which was useful to my PIP in discovering the way that individuals are perceived by their peers. The source is from a

Wake Forest University student and was published in 2023. Sources published by Wake Forest University are peer-reviewed before publishing, supporting the validity and reliability of this source. Tall Poppy Syndrome is a crucial concept within my research project, as it relates to my topics of socioeconomic status, social stratification, social mobility, and Social Darwinism. There is some bias within this article. It suggests that the phenomenon originated in Australia and New Zealand, though it may have been discovered elsewhere. The concept has existed for a long time but wasn't addressed until the 1980s. Additionally, the source assumes an individual's insecurities and that they're relatively similar for everyone, when in reality, insecurities vary greatly from person to person.

**Darwin. C, *The Origin of Species* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1859), pp. 32–33, [https://www.vliz.be/docs/Zee cijfers/Origin\\_of\\_Species.pdf](https://www.vliz.be/docs/Zee cijfers/Origin_of_Species.pdf), accessed 9 November 2024.**

Original document founding evolution theory and natural selection principles. This source is the original document founding the principal ideas now commonly known as 'Darwin's theory of evolution', and the existence of natural selection emphasises the struggle for life. This theory was evident within Chapter 1, as it was applied throughout the way that individuals are stratified against each other in an attempt to seem superior against each other.

This theory highlights how the struggle for existence differs for every creature/individual based on the complex relationships within their environment. Imperatively, the source proposes the perspective that animals (and humans by extension) are driven to survive at all costs within a hierarchical system; with the goal of eliminating threats (predators) and maintaining constant nourishment (food/prey) for survival and longevity. There doesn't appear to be any personal bias from the authors within the book; however, the theory of "survival of the fittest" and the concept of natural selection are evident. "The Origin of Species" is a primary source, written by Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace, who developed the theory of evolution through natural selection.

**Foy, C, FHE Health, 'How Societal Expectations Impact Men's Mental Health', *FHE Health*, 2022, <https://fherehab.com/learning/societal-expectations-men-mental-health>, accessed 30 April 2025.**

This study about the levels of societal expectations that impact men's mental health was written by Chris Foy, who was an individual who worked for 6 years within behavioural health facilities. The article details the effect of traditional gender norms, which affect men's mental health, and how toxic masculinity has affected mental health. This is more crucial to my PIP, through the impact of behaviours at the micro level of when they form their identity and are impacted severely by close friends and family. With effects of mental health as “Men also struggle to form close relationships with others. They keep their distance from male friends, leaving them with no support system when they deal with depression, anxiety, or grief.”. This new finding was relevant to my PIP at the micro level as it relates to a dissonance between the responsibilities they have as male. This source doesn't include any references, but includes an author. This source was supported by the National Institute of Mental Health and the CDC, which supports its reliability and validity. However, there is bias regarding the use of the source as a promotional tool, as there are constant reminders to book appointments, etc. This source is useful to my research through the use of the information through valuable statistics and realistic examples. However, the negatives include a lack of references and credentials for the author to create the source due to a lack of professionalism.

**Harmon-Jones, E., & Mills, J. ‘An introduction to cognitive dissonance theory and an overview of current perspectives on the theory’. In E. Harmon-Jones (Ed.), *Cognitive dissonance: Reexamining a pivotal theory in psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 3–24). *American Psychological Association*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000135-001>**

The theory began more than 60 years ago, regarding cognitive dissonance and how this feeling is universal among individuals. The theory focuses on the emotions, decision making and motivations of individuals. And how there are trends regarding behaviours from cultures and ethnicities, as it was found that "People from collectivist cultures, like Japan or China, are more likely to attribute inconsistency to social roles rather than internal dispositions.”. This theory is crucial to my PIP for Chapter regarding the ‘Dissonance between social perceptions and sense of self when it comes to social stratification’. Specifically, the part that examines the concept of emotions in decision making about perceptions of self. This is due to the brain function of the anterior cingulate cortex and prefrontal cortex are involved in monitoring dissonance and resolving it. This was interesting due to the fact that people used strategies to reinforce their self-worth through changing beliefs and ideologies. The source is

highly peer reviewed by a group of psychologists with a total of 48 references showing the source is reliable and valid. It includes minimal bias as it considers views of Western societies and Asian cultures within the study.

**‘How to Master Micro, Mezzo, and Macro Social Work: A Practical Guide’, *Social Work Education Center*, 2025,**

**[https://www.socialworkdegree.net/social-work-practice/?utm\\_source](https://www.socialworkdegree.net/social-work-practice/?utm_source), accessed 30 April 2025.**

The article details the 3 levels of society, micro, meso and macro level society, displaying how each level can develop skills for individuals, communities and governments. This article does not include a specific author or sources of information within the article. And is written by the organisation that published it is called Social Work Education Centre. It highlights the visibility of work at each level as “Micro social workers provide direct counselling and therapy services, while mezzo practitioners run group services and community programs. Macro social workers take on systemic problems through policy change and community organizing.”. This study was helpful within my research of the PIP, as it highlighted the way that individuals are perceived at different societal levels, and how individuals' merit and effort are viewed. The reliability of the article can be questioned. It was written for educational purposes as it provides information and statistics. The article doesn't provide an author's name and sources of work; however, it does come from an organisation regarding social work, reinforcing its reliability and validity. It may contain some bias within the article as it is written from an educational perspective to educate individuals surrounding the business. The article provides a detailed and simple example of the micro, mezzo and macro levels, at the various stages with statistics. However, the article lacks validity, as it does not contain any resources to prove its findings.

**Leo, Y. et al., ‘Socioeconomic correlations and stratification in social-communication networks’, *Journal of the Royal Society Interface*, Dec 2016, paras. 1–7,**

**<https://doi.org/10.1098/rsif.2016.0598>, accessed 5 November 2024.**

Examines relationship between social networks and economic status using phone and bank transaction data. Shows strong socioeconomic stratification in social structures. This study examines the relationship between social networks and economic status using data from phone communications and bank transactions, revealing strong socioeconomic stratification in social structures. This source was useful within Chapters 1 and 3, the effects of social stratification with social structures, specifically Chapter 1, where employees are stratified dependent on ranks within the company. The authors' perspective is mainly from the view that there is an uneven wealth distribution among social classes, causing shifts in social structures and changes in modern societies. This source, from the National Library of Medicine, a reliable educational resource, was researched by five authors who published the study. It utilised a wide range of participants, referencing 46 sources to reinforce its validity. However, the source shows some bias, as it's based on a specific Latin community, not accounting for the whole population, thus shifting the true value of the results.

**Low, B. S. 'Competition Throughout Women's Lives', in Maryanne L. Fisher (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Competition*, Oxford Library of Psychology (2017; online edn, Oxford Academic, 4 Aug. 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199376377.013.5>**

This article was published on April 7th 2015, and revolves around the nature of how there is competition on all societal levels for females. The Competition Throughout Women's Lives was a chapter of the book *Women and Competition* by Maryanne L. Fisher, which explores how competition among females starts from the moment that females are born and continues throughout their whole lives. This was useful within my PIP Chapter 1, which explores how females at the micro level may face competition from sisters and other family members as they fight for social status, partners and opportunities, even though female competition is less visible than males. The source was useful within my Chapter 1 and my micro-level cross-cultural perspectives. The source was published by Oxford University, which is a highly credible academic source, and was part of a book published by Maryanne L. Fisher, which has been peer reviewed and published. This chapter was reliable and valid due to its use of well-established research and arguments for the broad understanding of women's social behaviours. There is some bias within the article in which it states that females compete for



males, but this statement may not be true as societal norms have changed and come from an evolutionary perspective.

**Naguib, R. & Madeeha, M., ““Making visible the invisible”: Exploring the role of gender biases on the glass ceiling in Qatar's public sector’, *Manara - Qatar Research Repository*, Journal contribution, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2023.102723>**

The invisible glass ceiling was published on May 1st, 2023, and it is an investigation that details how gender biases contribute to the “invisible glass ceiling” and how this is relevant within Qatar's companies. This consists of the assumption that females within the workplace will take maternity leave. This drastically impacts females from climbing organisational structures due to the fact that, since females take maternity leave, the company's production may slow down. As a result, they prevent females from reaching high levels within companies, as the result may be less significant. As a result, males are preferred for higher positions within companies as society believes that males are more dependable and reliable. The “invisible glass ceiling” leads to gender stereotypes and unequal treatment towards females within organisational structures. Some of the key findings found that society assumes are “that women are the problem, rather than organizational structures and social norms.” This theory is crucial within the chapters and conclusion of this PIP. Specifically helpful within chapter 3, in addressing continuity and change, in which the “glass ceiling” was overcome due to the “glass cliff”. This source was reliable as it contained primary research from interviews as well as came from a reliable source. This study contained secondary research to prove the evidence, coming from a trustworthy source, “Science Direct”, supporting the validity. This source may have contained bias as the source focused specifically on Qatar's company which may not account for the rest of the workplaces.

**Oh, G.-E.G, ‘Social Class, Social Self-Esteem, and Conspicuous Consumption’, *Heliyon*, 7/2 (22 February 2021), paras. 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e06318>**

Examines relationship between social self-esteem and conspicuous consumption. This article highlights the negative relationship between social self-esteem and conspicuous consumption, as well as the connection between socioeconomic status and how insecurities can be

expressed through material goods to compensate for a lack of recognition. This source was useful within the research of the PIP as it expressed how people from all socioeconomic statuses purchase some form of material goods to compensate for a lack of recognition, in an attempt to get their merit and effort recognised. The National Library of Medicine, which peer-reviews articles and reports before publication, is a reliable source. The information originates from the “Institute of International Business and Governance, Lee Shau Kee School of Business Administration, Open University of Hong Kong”. Although it's unclear whether a professor or university student wrote the report, its validity is supported by credited experts and references to 100 sources of information. This source may include some bias due to the sample size coming from the US, which may not account for the rest of the world.

**Orenstein, G.A. & Lewis, L., ‘Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development’, in StatPearls [book], 1st edn (Florida, United States: StatPearls Publishing, 7 November 2022), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK556096/>, accessed 6 November 2024.**

Details eight stages of human development influenced by psychosocial factors. Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development is a theory on the eight stages of human development influenced by psychosocial factors throughout the lifespan. Where each stage is characterised by opposing reactions. This source was taken into consideration within the research of my Primary research, within my questionnaire, as it was sorted into age groups in which Erikson's theory was applied. The source cites 12 references and, all content on Stat Pearls, has undergone peer review before publication. Stat Pearls mentions that its "focus is to use data and analytics to create the largest, most comprehensive, and continuously updated educational suite of peer-reviewed point-of-care activities for the benefit of health professionals worldwide," which confirms the source's reliability and validity. The article does not have a specific author's perspective on the theory. This may contain some bias within genders, as people perceive the way that males and females believe that females are often overlooked within this theory.

**Science Letter, ‘New Anthropology Study Findings Have Been Reported by Researchers at University of Haifa (An Experience of Entitlement: the Intersection of High**

**Socioeconomic Status, Self, and Early Recollections)’, NewsRX LLC, 15 October 2021, paras. 1–2, <https://support.gale.com/doc/ezproxy>, accessed 29 October 2024.**

Examines childhood recollections of high-SES adolescents and correlation with feelings of entitlement. This source examines the childhood recollections of adolescents from high-socioeconomic status households and how these memories correlate with feelings of entitlement, superiority, and self-focus. This was useful within the findings of my PIP, which was useful to my PIP in discovering the way that individuals are perceived by their peers. The article does not present a clear author's perspective. This source was useful as this showed the theory that individuals from high socioeconomic status who show little merit and effort are perceived as entitled. This was useful within the log of my PIP. The article does not present a clear author's perspective. The source comes from "State Library," which is a reliable source that goes through a peer-review process before being published. However, the validity of the study may be questioned due to its small sample size (14 participants), which isn't enough data to provide findings for the entire "upper class." The article potentially shows bias by not including participants from lower socioeconomic classes or considering the entitled adolescents' perspectives from micro, meso, and macro levels, which is an unacknowledged limitation.

**Seguino, S., ‘The Macroeconomics of Stratification’, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Economics and Finance*, 2021, <https://oxfordre.com/economics/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190625979.001.0001/acrefore-9780190625979-e-747>, accessed 6 June 2025.**

The article is by Stephanie Seguino and was published on 22 December 2021. The article introduces stratification economics as a field of macroeconomic policies that reinforce inequality through race and gender. Showing the interactions of macroeconomic policies and how they interact with cultural ideologies and stereotypes. This was important within my Chapter 3, through how the implementation of government policies can help to support the continuity and change aspect of my PIP. As the article details about "power and the institutions that create economic and social hierarchies based on race and gender.”. This source is reliable as it is published by Oxford Research Encyclopedia and is authored by Stephanie Seguino, who is known for her work on economics and gender. The article has

been peer reviewed, supporting its validity and reliability. There may be potential bias as it could be more economically focused on fiscal policy and emphasis on government spending.

**‘Statement of Equity Principles’, *NSW Education Standards* (n.d.), <https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/Understanding-the-curriculum/curriculum-development/syllabus-development/statement-equity-principles?utm>, accessed 2 July 2025.**

This article was published by NESA and details the commitment to education and the aim of ensuring inclusive, respectful education to support all students. This was useful within my Chapter 3, and I implemented the use of this within the meso level. As they encourage “respect for the rights and dignity of all people.” This source is highly reliable as it is from a government authority and used as a standard for all schools within NSW. This source’s values and policies align with the values to keep a fairer and more equal society, especially within the school community. There may be some institutional bias as it is directly from authority to critique other system failures.

**The Team at Love Discovery Institute, ‘Navigating Societal Pressures: Understanding the Psychology Behind Social Pressure’, *Love Discovery*, 2023, <https://www.lovediscovery.org/post/navigating-societal-pressure-understanding-the-psychology-behind-social-pressure>, accessed 29 April 2025.**

This article was published on December 14th 2023. It focuses on the impact of societal pressure on individuals and how this affects mental health, and the behaviours of individuals in which they can be their own authentic selves. The article explores the factors such as social media, peer pressure, and societal expectations and their role on personal and social identity. It goes through the unrealistic expectations that society has set for individuals and how this makes people feel as if they need to conform to societal expectations. As this “pressure to present a perfect life on platforms like Instagram can contribute to a distorted sense of reality and negatively affect mental health.” This study was helpful within Chapter 1 of my PIP, it showed the way that societal pressure impacts males into conforming to societal pressure. This source is published by Love Discovery, which is an institution that focuses on mental

health and therapy, suggesting that there is expertise in this document. The article does not point out specific studies or resources to support its claims. The validity of this article offers insight, but this could be supported greater through the use of references. There is a bias within the article as the company suggests that individuals who are experiencing these symptoms book appointments.

**University of Minnesota, 8.2 Explaining Stratification – Sociology, in University of Minnesota, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 2016), Chapter 8.2 Textbook, <https://open.lib.umn.edu/sociology/part/chapter-8-social-stratification/>, accessed 5 November 2024.**

Explores importance of social stratification and how society ranks individuals based on merit and effort. This article explores the importance of social stratification, highlighting how society ranks individuals based on merit and effort. It goes through the underlying forces of societal inequalities that create a stratified system of upper, middle, and lower classes where moving vertically can only occur through increased merit and effort. This source was useful in the research of my PIP, as it revolves around social stratification, which embodies the concept of the PIP, showing the significant impact the source had on the PIP. The source is from a University of Minnesota textbook. The author requested to be anonymous and be removed from the website for undisclosed reasons, prompting the university to unpublish their contributions from 2013–2016. As a university textbook, the information is reliable and valid. However, the article displays some bias due to its limited perspective on environmental factors. As it identifies discrimination as a key issue, it offers no solutions to address it.

**Wang, M.-T., Kiuru, N., Degol, J.L. and Salmela-Aro, K, ‘Friends, Academic Achievement, and School Engagement During Adolescence: A Social Network Approach to Peer Influence and Selection Effects’, *Learning and Instruction*, 58 (2018), pp. 148–160, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0959475217306801>, accessed 30 April 2025.**

This study about how peer influences and peer selection affect adolescents' school engagement across emotional, cognitive and behavioural activities. This study consisted of

1419 adolescents, examined how friendships and school engagement can develop over time. Using various measures of emotional values and cognitive efforts, as well as behavioural engagement. Findings such as “students became more similar to peers in terms of engagement.” This was crucial to my micro and meso level findings for my chapters, specifically for Chapter 2, Dissonance between social perceptions and sense of self, for the cross-cultural perspective. This article’s validity was strong as it showed a wide sample size of adolescents, with social network analysis to remove the biases and errors that may occur. The only bias that could have occurred is that the study was carried out in Finland, and that it may not apply to the rest of the world. The study utilised secondary resource data and provided the sources supporting its reliability and validity