

False Consciousness and Equality of
Opportunity
In Helena Montana:

A Quantitative Study of Perceptions of Equal Opportunity

Honors Thesis

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ABSTRACT

The main theory examined in this study is that of Karl Marx, specifically his ideology on false consciousness. Important writings referred to in this research include Jonathan Turner and Charles Starnes on inequality in the American society and the article "Truth and Consequences: Some Economics of False Consciousness" by Donald Boudreaux and Eric Crampton. This study is a quantitative study that presents the results of a survey measuring 100 citizens in Helena, Montana's class status and perspectives of equality of opportunity. This survey was designed to measure a correlation between class statuses, based on educational level and occupational level, and the perspectives of equality of opportunity in Helena, Montana. Control variables included in this survey were gender and age. The results of this survey show the stratified groupings (upper/lower) agreeing with each other that there is equal opportunity for various variables in Helena. The variable *who one knows* is the response to what most effects equal opportunity and *religion* is the variable seen as least effecting equal opportunity. The participants agreed that there is equal opportunity in Helena for *minorities, elderly, youth, religion, gender, and political affiliation*. They also agree that those who control the main institutions in society influence equal opportunity (*city, county, school boards, federal and state*). The conclusion to this study acknowledges that there is an indication between the participant's responses on equality of opportunity and the concept of false consciousness.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1-2
Literature Review.....	2-8
Hypotheses.....	8
Methodology.....	8-10
Results.....	10-23
Conclusion.....	23-24
References.....	25-26
Appendix.....	27-28

Throughout history varieties of social scientists, philosophers, politicians, and many others have been researching the question of equal opportunity. For the citizens of the United States of America (USA), questions regarding equality of opportunity hit close to home when one realizes that this country is considered to have the largest gap between the rich and the poor of all modern industrialized countries (Kerbo 2003: 21). In fact, Gilbert (2003) states that within the United States, poverty is increasing, the middle class is shrinking, social mobility is declining, and wealth is becoming more concentrated (p. 19). Studies on topics regarding equal opportunity can be viewed from the conflict perspective and can also be related to the idea of social stratification.

Kerbo (2003) noted that a system of social stratification can mean that something like rules or norms have been developed that explains how rewards are distributed and why they are distributed in a certain way (p. 12). When looking at equal opportunity in relation to social stratification, it is important to understand the concepts of ascription and achievement, achievement being the primary topic considered here. Ascription describes a condition of class or strata placement that is primarily hereditary, or that people are placed in positions in a stratification system because of qualities beyond their control like race or gender. Achievement describes a condition of class or strata placement that is due primarily to qualities that can be controlled by individuals (Kerbo 2003: 12-13). In other words, people obtain their place in the stratification system because they have value, because they live up to certain ideals, or because they pursue the criteria for achievement in society.

Given the many questions and debates regarding inequality of opportunity, this paper presents the results of a survey measuring 100 citizens in Helena, Montana's class

status and perceptions of equality of opportunity. This study measures a correlation between “class status,” based on educational level and occupational level, and the perceptions of equality of opportunity in Helena, Montana. According to conflict theorists the “haves” in society may perceive equal opportunity to be relatively the same as the “have nots”. If this holds, it may support the conflict theory which states that the “haves” perspectives in a society are a dominant influence of the functions and the overall ideology of the society and that the oppressed “have nots” experience false consciousness.

This paper examines the conflict perspective of Karl Marx, whose ideology has played a primary role in the development of modern theories on social stratification. The theory explains social structure and changes in it by arguing that “actors pursue their interests in conflict with others and, according to their resources for social organization” (Borgatta and Montgomery 2000: 414).

LITERATURE REVIEW

MARX'S THEORY

Modern attempts to formulate an efficient theory of class differences began with Karl Marx's work in the nineteenth century. Gilbert (2003) stated that Marx's life events were influential enough to convince him that societies are mainly shaped by their economic organization and that social classes form the link between economic facts and social facts (p. 3). Therefore as Marx might say, an understanding of class is basic to comprehending how societies function and how they are transformed.

Marx acknowledged that it is with private ownership of the means of production that class and class conflict begins (Marx 1977: 86-87). Capitalist societies based on

production have two classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. For Marx a society's conflicting interests derive from the division between those who control the means of production (bourgeoisie) and those who do not (proletariat) also known as the owners and the propertyless workers (Marx 1977: 77). To Marx the "opposition between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is a struggle of class against class, a struggle which carried to its highest expression is a total revolution" (Marx 1977: 215). Thus the conflict perspective states that conflicts are based on power, dividing the capitalists, who have an interest in maintaining the status quo, from workers, who have an interest in changing it (Borgatta & Montgomery 2000: 415). To Marx the most serious political conflicts develop when the interests of a rising class clash with the established ruling class (Marx 1977: 215). The change from feudalism¹ to capitalism was an example of this. Marx explains that when the means of production shifted from land, marked by feudalism to industry, marked by capitalism, the bourgeoisie became the dominant class (Marx 1977: 163). As this happened, the lower class became dominated by the ruling class. This change occurred because the ruling class dominates and controls the *surplus values*² produced in the society for its own needs (Marx 1973: 328-329). Within this process the exploitive nature of capitalism can be found in that capitalists pay workers only a living or sub-living wage, a wage below the value workers actually produce (Marx 1977: 232).

¹ Feudalism, or the estate system, existed during the middle ages in Europe. It is primarily a relationship based on military power or economic dominance. This system centered on the landholdings of an originally military class. The estate system emerged because when state sanctioned estate ranks (or classes) were formalized, they were given justification or legitimization by law. Three estates were defined by this system, the priestly class (first estate), the nobility (second class), and (everyone else) the commoners (Marx 1977: 163-164).

² When the difference between the value created by the worker and the cost of maintaining the worker (wage, benefits etc.) is calculated there is profit (surplus value) left over; the remainder of what is produced is *surplus value* (Marx 1973: 328-329).

This exploitation, according to Marx, creates the alienated worker.³ Marx stated that both the business class and working class became alienated as industrialization occurs (Marx 1977: 77). To Marx, the phenomenon of alienation describes a person's place in society, relations to others, and outlook on life as shaped by their work experience (Marx, 1977; 78). The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that the labor becomes an object, or an external existence, but that it exists outside him as something alien, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him (Marx 1977: 80). Alienation develops out of social order which exists because one class is favored by a specific stage of economic development and is able to maintain social order through its power over the lower classes (Kerbo 2003: 88). The class that controls the means of production usually controls the *superstructure* which is the "political, ideological and religious components of society" (Gilbert 2003: 5).

In the famous introduction to the *Communist Manifesto* Marx declared that

the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it ... the individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things consciousness, thus ruling as thinkers and as producers of ideas who regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age. (Marx 1977: 176)

This idea of the dominate class control over societal institutions helps explain how the powerful/ruling class is able to manipulate the subordinate class and keep them

³ Marx (1977) states that there are four forms of alienation under capitalism: (1) workers are alienated from their work, (2) their product, (3) the individual existence of the individual being, (4) and the alienation of man from man (p. 83). He goes on to explain the first two in that the worker does not own or control either the means of production or the product that it externalized from them. The third is shown as a form of alienation because it alienates workers from their humanness, since meaningful labor is what makes humans human. Finally, this externalization of labor results in an estrangement from other people because workers must compete with others not labor with them (Marx 1977: 81-83).

oppressed, Marx stated that “men have constantly made up for themselves false conceptions about themselves, about what they are and what they ought to be; they have arranged their relationships according to their ideas of normal men” (Marx 1977: 159). This manipulation and misconception introduces the Marxist idea of *false consciousness*.⁴ Marx explained the concept of consciousness by stating that “consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process” (Marx 1997: 164). *False consciousness* begins with the pattern of exploitation which ends with products, or commodities, becoming a *fetish*⁵ for the consumer/worker, which then are treated in terms of their trade value rather than their use value (Marx 1971: 154).

BOUDREAUX AND CRAMPTON

In their article “Truth and Consequences: Some Economics of False Consciousness” (2003) in The Independent Review, Boudreaux and Crampton discussed the logic of false consciousness applied in the economic realm. Though the primary discussion does not provide much relevance to this study, they stated some criticism to the idea of false consciousness. First they noted the Marxist idea of false consciousness stating “workers choosing jobs over revolt, according to this theory, do so only because they haven’t recognized the depths of their own oppression” (Boudreaux and Crampton 2003: 27). They continued to claim that “many on the radical left invoke the concept of false consciousness to explain the failure of the oppressed to behave and talk as we might expect oppressed people to behave and talk. False consciousness, as diagnosed by the

⁴ False consciousness is the identification of the oppressed proletariat with the system – capitalism – of the bourgeoisie who oppress them (Adams 2001: 426).

⁵ A fetish is an item that in a hollow way pretends to give meaning to life (Adams 2001: 128).

left, is a mental condition that immunizes victims from truly understanding how and even that they are victimized” (Boudreaux and Crampton 2003: 28). They agreed that

People can be misled systematically about how others treat them and people can form and cling sincerely to utterly invalid theories of social reality-theories that distort their adherents’ views of reality and, hence, cause these adherents to support policies harmful to them and to those about whom they care (p. 28). Although no one can hope to understand reality in full, false consciousness exists whenever the degree of misunderstanding is so great that people mistake social arrangements that really harm them as really being social arrangements that benefit them. (Boudreaux and Crampton 2003: 29)

Later they argued that there may be an academic bias when considering false consciousness.

Consciousness raising typically overlooks the fact that most people whose consciousness allegedly requires raising (according to academics) are people whose consciousness really does not need raising, for nothing raises the consciousness of a decision maker more dependably than making decisive choices about matters in which he has a direct personal stake . . . hence, academic social criticisms and policy proposals will likely be distorted by misinformation, and intellectual arrogance. (Boudreaux and Crampton 2003: 39)

TURNER & STARNES

Any society with economic surplus possesses many systems of inequality. Thus, each system produce’s a dominant class with a dominant ideology that justifies the structure and consequences of the system. (Turner and Starnes 1976: 7)

According to Turner and Starnes (1976) the dominant ideology in the case of America is an ideology of inequality. They continue to state “that there are three American perceptions that reflect the dominant values and ideology in America: (1) America is infatuated with the belief that America is a equal classless society unlike any other in history, (2) America claims that equality of opportunity exists for all who seek it, and (3) America sees failure to rise to the top of the social pyramid resulting from lack of

ambition, talent, or perseverance” (p. 7). To Turner and Starnes it is important to understand that:

Victims of inequality are blamed for not making it to the top and the benefactors are praised for their privilege by the victims of inequality (Turner and Starnes 1976: 7).

In relation to this concept they emphasize four factors of inequality:

(1) existence of economic surplus creates distributive problems, (2) conditioned by thousands of years of struggle for survival, humans compete for shares of the surplus, (3) those who have ownership in this competition are able to buy power that can be used to preserve privilege, (4) to decrease the need for the use of intimidation, those with power seek to avoid conflicts of interest by the use of ideas. (Turner and Starnes 1976: 61)

They claimed that “the privileged few in America have used their power to divide the middle and lower income groupings, which create the outcome of power that the middle classes of America inadvertently support and admire the privilege of elites” (Turner and Starnes 1976: 62). Due to this support Turner and Starnes stress that the middle income groupings

become diverted, creating an advantage for the privileged in that they are now able to create a political ‘wealthfare’ system through their political influence by which they maintain their privilege and power (Turner & Starnes 1976: 63). The middle-income groupings function under an inaccurate misperception as they perceive this wealthfare system as preserving their material comfort (Turner and Starnes 1976: 63). The opposite of the wealthfare system is the welfare system which is a necessity for four reasons, (1) it is necessary to keep people from starving, (2) it is defined as humanitarian, (3) it is politically necessary because the poor have some power to threaten revolt, and (4) it is an effective way for the rich to keep the attentions of the majority diverted away from the more expensive wealthfare system (Turner and Starnes 1976: 63).

Turner and Starnes also maintain that the beliefs and perceptions of the wealthfare and welfare systems in America are upheld because of the idealized ‘work ethic’ in society.

This ‘work ethic’ makes the affluent seem morally entitled to their resources because they work for their incomes, while the poor are stigmatized and seem unworthy for charity because of the values of activism, achievement and

individualism that have come to represent 'work' in American society (Turner and Starnes 1976: 85). The elite are subject to few negative beliefs because they set the ideological tone of society and through their ability to hide their privilege and its sources mitigates any conflict and makes them subject to mild suspicions from the wealthy. (Turner and Starnes 1976: 85)

HYPOTHESES

H1 In this sample of Helena area residents there is a correlation between educational level and perceptions of equality of opportunity.

H2 In this sample of Helena area residents there is a correlation between occupational level and perceptions of equality of opportunity.

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative survey was conducted for this study to measure citizens of Helena, Montana's perspectives of equal opportunity. The survey was distributed in person to one hundred citizens and contained twenty-one close ended questions that relate to equality of opportunity. Due to the fact that Helena, Montana is primarily a middle class community, this survey was purposely stratified to be distributed in four different locations (25 at each) to measure an accurate population of different socioeconomic statuses. The four locations of distributed were the local Food Share and Good Samaritan (a thrift shop) for lower socioeconomic to middle socioeconomic statuses and the Capital Hill Mall and the Last Chance Gulch walking mall for middle socioeconomic to higher socioeconomic statuses. All of the surveys were distributed between the hours of 12:00 PM to 2:00 PM on Monday through Saturday between December 10, 2004 and January 5, 2005.

MEASUREMENTS

Educational level and occupational level were measured as the independent variables. The seven categories used to measure educational level were as follows: 9

years of school or fewer, high school graduate, 1-2 years of college, four year state college, four year private college, master's degree, and beyond master's degree. Later these categories were collapsed into two educational level categories, *higher education level* and *lower education level*.

For occupational level, twelve categories were provided for participants to indicate what their occupation fell under: *professional, educator, service, farm/ranch, technicians, laborers, sales, craft, managers, state, and other*. These occupations were chosen from Table 3-1 (p. 60) in Dennis Gilbert's book *The American Class Structure: In an Age of Growing Inequality*. In his book Gilbert stratifies these occupations into two groups, white collar and blue collar workers (Gilbert 2001: p. 61-67). Gilbert defined "white collar workers as office workers, including the Census categories of managers, professionals, clerical workers and sales workers. Sometimes used to refer to the middle-class, distinguished from blue collar workers" (Gilbert 2001: p. 291). He then defined "blue collar workers as manual workers including crafts workers, operatives, and laborers. Sometimes used as short hand for the working class, distinguished from white collar workers" (Gilbert 2001: p. 282). Later the above occupational categories were collapsed into four categories: white collar, blue collar, state and other. The white and blue collar categories are applied according to Gilbert's definition and use of them. Due to the fact that Helena is a capital city the *state* category was necessary and had to be kept by it self because it was not on Gilbert's list. Dependent variables were used to measure various social factors and institutional factors.

The questions "do you own or rent your home; does your immediate family own a second home," and "which of the following categories best indicates the occupation of

the main breadwinner in your parents' household: *professional, educator, service, farm/ranch, technicians, laborers, sales, craft, managers, state, and other*" were intended to measure socioeconomic status. However, an adequate study was not found in which to relate the socioeconomic findings, and the questions were not used in the results of this study.

Age and gender were used as control variables in questions such as "which of the following do you believe effects equality of opportunity the most; the least? Gender; Age?" and for the question "do you believe there is equal opportunity in Helena for the elderly, the youth and gender?"

The survey data were analyzed using the SPSS Student Version 11.1 for Windows. Chi squared was used to cross-tabulate the independent and dependent variables. However, the true description of chi square was not entirely fulfilled, an example being that this was not a random sample. Therefore it should be interpreted with some caution.

RESULTS

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

Of the 100 participants, 48 were determined to have less than two years of college education, and 52 as having four years of college education or more. Out of the four locations 45% of the participants who were classified as having a lower educational level participated at the Helena Food Share, and 38% of the 100 participants classified as having a higher educational level participated on the Last Chance Gulch walking mall.

The data revealed that the two factors (see Table 1) having an effect on equality of opportunity are *who you know* (24%) and *age* (20%). The lower educational level

participants responses (27%) also reveal that the factor *who you know* has the greatest effect on equality of opportunity with *age* (20%) next.

Table 1: Various social factors relating to perceptions to what are the greatest effects and least effects of equality of opportunity: controlled for educational level.

<i>Factors</i>	<u>Effects the Most</u>			<u>Effects the Least</u>		
	<i>2 Years of College Education or fewer</i>	<i>4 years of College Education or more</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>2 Years of College Education or fewer</i>	<i>4 years of College Education or more</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
<i>Race</i>	6%	7%	7%	16%	1%	9%
<i>Gender</i>	12%	5%	9%	6%	3%	5%
<i>Age</i>	20%	19%	20%	6%	7%	7%
<i>Religion</i>	2%	1%	20%	35%	46%	41%
<i>Who you Know</i>	27%	21%	24%	10%	7%	9%
<i>Family background</i>	6%	3%	5%	20%	32%	27%
<i>Other</i>	4%	26%	16%	2%		1%
<i>All</i>	4%	1%	3%			
<i>Education</i>	10%	9%	10%			
<i>More than one</i>	6%	1%	4%			
<i>TOTAL</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
			<i>x² 11.702*</i>			<i>x² 10.766*</i>

Most of the higher educational level participants (26%) indicate *other* in response to this question, 5% of whom wrote in *education* as the *other*. Of the various factors, higher educational level participants also indicate *who you know* (21%) to most effect equality of opportunity in Helena and *age* (19%) as the next most significant factor.

The data also revealed what participants perceive to least effect equal opportunity. Overall, 41% of the data in this sample shared the response (see Table 1) that *religion* had the least effect equal opportunity and *family background* (27%) as next. Both the lower educational level (35%) and higher educational level participants (46%) perceive

religion as the factor to least effect equal opportunity. Both groups also perceive *family background* (lower educated 20%/higher educated 32%) as the next factor to least effect equal opportunity. Lower educational level participants perceive *race* (16%) to be the third factor to least effect equal opportunity in Helena.

The next set of questions measured (see Table 2) perceptions on equal opportunity for various social factors (*minorities, elderly, youth, religion, gender, and choice of political affiliation*). The set of questions was measured on a five point scale from *agree* to *disagree* and later was measured on a three point scale.

The first question measured *minorities'* equality of opportunity in Helena. Overall, the data supports that the sample responded *agree* to equal opportunity in Helena for *minorities*. The data also revealed the lower educational level perceiving *minorities* to have higher equality of opportunity (68%) than those with higher educational levels (63%).

The second question measured equal opportunity for the *elderly* in Helena. Overall, the data did not reveal a relationship between this factor and level of education. Of the total population, 51% responded *agree* to equal opportunity in Helena for the *elderly*. Those with a lower educational level (29%) responded *undecided* to this question in relation to those with a higher educational level (17%). The control factors for this question were *gender* and *age*. The only relationship between these factors and the responses was that the 46-60 age group responded *disagree* by 18% difference compared to the other age groups.

Table 2: Perceived factors related to various social factors: controlled for educational level.

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>2 years college education or fewer</i>	<i>4 years college education or more</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
<i>Minorities</i>				
	Agree	68%	63%	66%
	Undecided	16%	21%	19%
	Disagree	14%	15%	15%
$x^2 2.645^a$				
<i>Elderly</i>				
	Agree	43%	57%	51%
	Undecided	29%	17%	23%
	Disagree	27%	25%	26%
$x^2 4.445^a$				
<i>Youth</i>				
	Agree	54%	53%	54%
	Undecided	18%	23%	21%
	Disagree	27%	23%	25%
$x^2 2.030^a$				
<i>Religion</i>				
	Agree	79%	78%	75%
	Undecided	22%	15%	19%
	Disagree	6%	5%	6%
$x^2 9.380^a$				
<i>Gender</i>				
	Agree	66%	71%	69%
	Undecided	18%	15%	17%
	Disagree	14%	13%	14%
$x^2 3.107^a$				
<i>Political Affiliation</i>				
	Agree	62%	65%	64%
	Undecided	10%	13%	12%
	Disagree	10%	13%	12%
$x^2 5.178^a$				
TOTAL		100%	100%	100%

The third question was in relation to equal opportunity for the *youth* in Helena. Again there was not much of a relationship between the two educational levels and this question. Of the total population 54% responded *agreed* to equal opportunity for *youth*. A 4% difference revealed that those with a higher educational level responded *undecided* to this question more than those with a lower educational level. However, 4% of those with a lower educational level responded *disagree* over those with a higher educational level. This question was also controlled for and again there wasn't a huge relationship between *youth* equality of opportunity and the *age* categories. However, the age group 61 and over responded *disagree* to this question by a 15% difference compared to the other *age* categories.

The fourth question related equal opportunity to choice of *religion* in Helena. Of the entire population 75% replied *agree* to this question, 70% of those with a lower educational level and 78% of those with a higher educational level. The only major inconsistency between the two educational groups was that those with a lower educational level were more likely to reply *undecided* by 7% than those with a higher educational level.

The fifth question was in relation to equal opportunity in Helena for *gender*. There was not much of a relationship between *gender* and the two educational levels. However, 69% of the entire population did *agree* that there is equal opportunity for *gender* in Helena. This factor was controlled for and did not have a large relationship between female and male responses. The only difference being that more males responded *undecided* by 6% than females.

The sixth and final question in this category related equal opportunity to choice of *political affiliation* in Helena. Overall, 64% of the population replied *agree* to equal opportunity in Helena for *political affiliation*. Again those with a lower educational level represented the larger percent in the *undecided* category, and those with a higher educational level had a larger percent of difference between *agree* and *disagree*.

The next set of questions asked participants if they perceived equal opportunity to be influenced by those who control *city, county, school board, federal and state institutions* (see Table 3).

When this question was related to the two educational levels, there was not a large difference in the way these classifications replied. To both *city* and *county* factors the entire population responded *agree* between 50-60%, responded *undecided* between 20-25%, and they both responded *disagree* between 20-21%. The only inconsistency being that within both groups those with a lower educational level had higher percentages of *undecided* than those with a higher educational level, and also those with a higher educational level had higher percentages of *disagree* than those with a lower educational level. This pattern continued throughout the entire set of questions.

There was not a strong relationship on the *school board* influence question. Again there was inconsistency in the responses among the two educational levels between *undecided* and *disagree*. Overall the entire population replied *agree* (45%) that those in control of *school boards* did influence equal opportunity, but 40% of the population also responded *undecided* to this question.

The relationship between those in control of *federal* and *state* institutions and educational levels remained the same as *city* and *county* but happened to be much

stronger. Overall the entire population replied *agree* between 69-70% to this question. The inconsistency between the two educational levels responding *undecided* or *disagree* remained the same with these variables as well.

Table 3: Perceived factors related to the significance of institutional influence: controlled for educational level.

<i>Institutions</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>2 years of college education or fewer</i>	<i>4 years of college education or more</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>City</i>	Agree	54%	57%	56%
	Undecided	29%	19%	24%
	Disagree	16%	23%	20%
x^2 2.686 ^a				
<i>County</i>	Agree	52%	53%	53%
	Undecided	31%	21%	26%
	Disagree	16%	25%	21%
x^2 2.011 ^a				
<i>School Board</i>	Agree	41%	48%	45%
	Undecided	47%	32%	40%
	Disagree	10%	19%	15%
x^2 3.633 ^a				
<i>Federal</i>	Agree	66%	73%	69%
	Undecided	23%	15%	19%
	Disagree	10%	11%	11%
x^2 1.247 ^a				
<i>State</i>	Agree	70%	71%	79%
	Undecided	21%	15%	18%
	Disagree	8%	13%	11%
x^2 1.639 ^a				
<i>Total</i>		100%	100%	100%

OCCUPATIONAL LEVEL

Of the 100 participants, 61% were categorized as white collar, 17% as blue collar, 3% as state employees, and 17% as other or had responded to more than one factor. Of the four locations, the largest percent of white collar applicants participated on the Last Chance Walking Mall (28%), while the largest percent of blue collar applicants participated at the Good Samaritan (41%). The largest percent of State (40%) workers participated on the Last Chance Walking Mall and the other categories largest percent was found at the Helena Food Share (40%).

The data revealed that the two factors having the greatest effect on equality of opportunity are, *who you know* (24%) and *age* (20%) with *other* (16%) as third (see Table 4). White collar participants responded *who you know* (21%) as the factor to most effect equal opportunity and *age* (19%) as the second most important factor. Blue collar participants were split among three factors: *who you know* (23%), *age* (23%), and *other* (23%). The state employee's responses were also *who you know* (60%). In the other category *who you know* (29%) was the most effective variable with *age* (17%) second.

The data reveals that the two factors to have the least effect on equality of opportunity are (see Table 4) *religion* (41%) and *family background* (27%). Both white and blue collar participant's revealed *religion* (41%) as the variable to least effect equality of opportunity in Helena. The second response was *family background* by both white collar participants (24%) and blue collar participants (35%). State participants also responded *family background* as the variable as having the least effect on equality of opportunity (40%) with *religion* (20%) next. The other category continued to have the same pattern as the white and blue collar participants.

Table 4: Various social factors relating to perceptions to what are the greatest effects and least effects of equality of opportunity: controlled for occupational level.

<i>Variables</i>	<u>Most Effects</u>					<u>Least Effects</u>				
	<i>White Collar</i>	<i>Blue Collar</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>White Collar</i>	<i>Blue Collar</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
<i>Race</i>	8%	8%		5%	7%	9%	8%	10%	5%	9%
<i>Gender</i>	8%		20%	11%	9%	5%	8%		6%	5%
<i>Age</i>	21%	8%	30%	17%	20%	8%	8%		6%	7%
<i>Religion</i>	1%			5%	2%	41%	16%	60%	47%	41%
<i>Who you Know</i>	19%	50%	10%	29%	24%	9%	8%	10%	5%	9%
<i>Family background</i>	5%		10%	6%	5%	24%	50%	20%	23%	27%
<i>Other</i>	18%	25%	10%	6%	16%				5%	1%
<i>All</i>	5%				3%	1%				1%
<i>Education</i>	8%	8%	10%	17%	10%					
<i>More than one</i>	4%		10%		4%					
<i>TOTAL</i>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
					$x^2 17.695^a$					$x^2 11.933^a$

The next set of responses measured responses (see Table 5) to perceptions of equal opportunity in Helena for various social factors (*minorities, elderly, youth, religion, gender, and political affiliation*).

When questioned about equal opportunity for *minorities*, the data revealed that overall Helena has equal opportunity for (66%) *minorities*. The white collar participants split their responses between *agree* (50%) and *disagree* (32%), however, the blue collar participants response was *agree* (52%) and *undecided* (29%). State participants response was *agree* (60%) and *undecided* (40%) and the other category was *agree* (47%) and *undecided* (35%).

Overall, in regard to questions on equal opportunity for the *elderly* and *youth* in Helena, the data revealed similar results. Both white and blue collar participants responded *agree* to the *elderly* and *youth* with factors between 51% and 54%. The second largest sample of white collar participants responded *disagree* to the *elderly* (32%) and *youth* (26%) while the second largest sample of blue collar participants responded *undecided* to *elderly* (29%) and *youth* (23%). State workers also followed the same pattern for *youth* (80%) and *elderly* (60%). The *other* category responded the same to *agree* (47%) for both the *youth* and *elderly* factors.

Taken as a whole, the data supported *agree* (69%) as the response to equal opportunity in Helena for *gender*. All of the occupation categories replied *agree* from 58% to 80% on this factor. *Undecided* was chosen by white collar (26%), blue collar (23%), state (20%), and *other* (17%) second most often in regard to *gender*.

The same pattern fit in the responses to equal opportunity for *religion* and *political affiliation* as was revealed for *gender*. Overall 64% of the data in this sample

Table 5: Perceived factors related to various social factors: controlled for occupational level.

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>White Collar</i>	<i>Blue Collar</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
<i>Minorities</i>						
	Agree	67%	52%	80%	70%	66%
	Undecided	19%	17%	20%	17%	19%
	Disagree	13%	29%		11%	15%
$x^2 8.935^a$						
<i>Elderly</i>						
	Agree	50%	52%	60%	47%	51%
	Undecided	16%	29%	40%	35%	23%
	Disagree	32%	17%		17%	26%
$x^2 8.579^a$						
<i>Youth</i>						
	Agree	54%	52%	80%	47%	54%
	Undecided	19%	23%	20%	23%	21%
	Disagree	26%	23%		29%	25%
$x^2 6.491^a$						
<i>Religion</i>						
	Agree	73%	82%	60%	76%	75%
	Undecided	19%	11%	40%	17%	19%
	Disagree	6%	5%		5%	6%
$x^2 11.146^a$						
<i>Gender</i>						
	Agree	70%	58%	80%	70%	69%
	Undecided	16%	17%	20%	17%	17%
	Disagree	13%	23%		11%	14%
$x^2 10.316^a$						
<i>Political Affiliation</i>						
	Agree	59%	70%	80%	70%	64%
	Undecided	26%	23%	20%	17%	24%
	Disagree	14%	5%		11%	12%
$x^2 6.930^a$						
TOTAL		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

supported *agree* to equal opportunity for *political affiliation* and 75% for *gender*.

Undecided remained the second most frequent factor responded to regarding equal

opportunity for these two factors as well. White collar participants replied *undecided* for *political affiliation* (26%) and (19%) for choice of *religion* compared to blue collar participants' choice of *undecided* for *political* (23%) and (11%) for *religion*.

The next set of questions measured (see Table 6) participants' perceptions of equal opportunity influenced by those who control the *city, county, school board, federal* and *state* institutions. In regard to the influence of those who control *city* and *county*, participants answered primarily the same.

The data in this sample supported *agree* that those who control *city* (56%) and *county* (53%) institutions have influence on equal opportunity. Blue collar participants responded *agree* a few percentages higher to both *city* (58%) and *county* (52%) than the white collar participants for *city* (54%) and *county* (50%). The second factor replied to the most by white collar participants consistently remained *undecided* for both *city* (27%) and *county* (29%). The second factor replied to the most by blue collar participants consistently remained *disagree* for both *city* (29%) and *county* (29%). State participants were split in both *city* and *county* between *agree* and *undecided* (40%) while the *other* category responded the same for *agree* (64%) and *undecided* (17%).

Overall the data in this sample supported the proposition that those who control the *school boards* (45%) in society have influence over equal opportunity. However, this response was not as strong as other factors in this set of questions. White collar participants *agreed* (45%) to this factor more consistently compared to blue collar participants who responded *undecided* (41%) more. Blue collar participants were split between *agree* and *disagree* at 29% in response to this question, while the second most frequently chosen factor for white collar participants was *undecided* (42%).

Table 6: Perceived factors related to the significance of institutional influence: controlled for occupational level.

<i>Institutions</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>White Collar</i>	<i>Blue Collar</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
<i>City</i>						
	Agree	54%	58%	40%	64%	56%
	Undecided	27%	11%	40%	17%	24%
	Disagree	18%	29%	20%	17%	20%
$x^2 9.979^a$						
<i>County</i>						
	Agree	50%	52%	40%	64%	53%
	Undecided	29%	17%	40%	17%	26%
	Disagree	19%	29%	20%	17%	21%
$x^2 10.563^a$						
<i>School Board</i>						
	Agree	45%	29%	60%	52%	45%
	Undecided	42%	41%	40%	29%	40%
	Disagree	11%	29%		17%	15%
$x^2 13.374^a$						
<i>Federal</i>						
	Agree	66%	70%	80%	76%	69%
	Undecided	21%	17%	20%	11%	19%
	Disagree	11%	11%		11%	11%
$x^2 4.862^a$						
<i>State</i>						
	Agree	65%	82%	80%	76%	70%
	Undecided	23%	5%	20%	11%	18%
	Disagree	11%	11%		11%	11%
$x^2 9.230^a$						
TOTAL		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

In regard to equal opportunity influenced by those who control the *state* and *federal* governments, the data in this sample supported similar responses to both factors. Overall, in response to the factors 69% *agreed* to *federal* influence and 70% *agreed* to *state* influence. The second largest response to this question by white collar participants

was *undecided* (21%) for *federal* and *undecided* (23%) for the *state* influence. The second largest response to this question by blue collar participants was *disagree* (11%) for *federal* and *disagree* (11%) for *state* influence. The responses by *state* participants (80%) and *other* (76%) participants remained the same for both the *federal* and *state* variables.

CONCLUSION

This study measured a stratified population's perceptions regarding equality of opportunity within Helena, Montana. One important measurement result was that the stratified groups in this sample tended to respond similarly not only to various social factors measuring equality of opportunity but also to various institutional factors measuring equality of opportunity. In both of these items, the two stratified groups (lower/higher socioeconomic classes) were in close agreement on all the variables with the exception of the item about the school board which seemed to have little relationship to the question and study.

In relation to the Marxian concept of false consciousness it is important to recollect the modern Marxian definition of false consciousness that Adams (2000) presents as being the identification of the oppressed in society with the system of those who oppress them (p. 426). It is also important to remember the perceptions by Turner and Starnes (1976) on inequality in America when they explained a similar ideology to Marx, claiming that "middle to lower income groupings function under inaccurate misperceptions as they perceive the wealth fare system as preserving their material comforts" (p. 63). When ideologies such as these are held to the measured population of the Helena area on equal opportunity, an indication of false consciousness can be seen.

The results of this survey provide an indication that through their agreement the blue collar/lower education level participants, or the “oppressed” in society, identify with the system of the white collar/higher education level participants, “oppressors”, perceptions of equal opportunity.

Considering that false consciousness is not a fact but an ideological concept, it is important to regard a rejection of the Marxian concept in the article by Donald Boudreaux and Eric Crampton on “Truth and Consequences; Some Economics of False Consciousness.” They are of the opinion that academic proposals dealing with types of consciousness will often be distorted because of misinformation due to academic superiority. Therefore, “academics social criticisms should be treated skeptically, especially when they are aimed at institutions formed by the decisive choices of individuals who have the ability to make sound decisions” (Boudreaux and Crampton 2003: 39). They also note that due to the superior academic attitude “consciousness raising often overlooks the fact the most people whose consciousness allegedly requires raising are people whose consciousness really does not need raising” (Boudreaux and Crampton 2003: 39). This perspective is valid in relation to false consciousness because it entertains the idea that upper class academics perceiving a situation to be false consciousness related could in reality be a misperception of a content and happy lower class.

The point is that though the Marxian concept of false consciousness may be reasonable it cannot be a fact without extensive quantitative and qualitative research on a subject such as perceptions of equal opportunity. Only through research such as this can false consciousness be seen as a fact.

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APPENDIX

Gender:

- Female
 Male

Age:

- 18-30 31-45
 46-60 61-Over

1. Which of the following categories best indicates the education of the MAJOR breadwinner in your household?

- 9 years of school or fewer 4 year state college
 High school graduate 4 year private college
 1-2 years of college Masters Degree
 Degree beyond Masters (PhD, M.D, LL.B etc.)

2. Do you own or rent your home?

- Own Rent Live with parents Other _____

3. Does your immediate family have a second home?

- Yes No

4. Which of the following do you believe MOST effects ones equality of opportunity?

- Race Age Who you know Other _____
 Gender Religion Family background

5. Which of the following do you believe MOST effects ones equality of opportunity the LEAST?

- Race Age Who you know Other _____
 Gender Religion Family background

6. There is equal opportunity in Helena for?

- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| ▪ Minorities | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Undecided | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree |
| ▪ Elderly | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Undecided | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree |
| ▪ Youth | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Undecided | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree |
| ▪ Choice of religion | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Undecided | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree |
| ▪ Gender | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Undecided | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree |
| ▪ Choice of Political
Affiliation | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Undecided | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree |

7. Equal opportunity is influenced by those who control?

- | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| ▪ The city? | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Undecided | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree |
| ▪ The county? | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Undecided | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree |
| ▪ The school board? | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Undecided | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree |
| ▪ None of the above | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Undecided | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree |
| ▪ All of the above | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Undecided | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree |
| ▪ The federal government? | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Undecided | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree |
| ▪ The state government? | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Undecided | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree |

8. Which of the following categories best indicates the occupation of the MAIN breadwinner in your household?

- | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Professional | <input type="checkbox"/> Farm/Ranch | <input type="checkbox"/> Sales | <input type="checkbox"/> Managers administrators |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Educator | <input type="checkbox"/> Technicians | <input type="checkbox"/> Clerical | <input type="checkbox"/> State, Federal, County, or city employee |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Service | <input type="checkbox"/> Laborers | <input type="checkbox"/> Craft | <input type="checkbox"/> Other_____ |

9. Which of the following categories best indicates the occupation of the MAIN breadwinner in your parent's household?

- | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Professional | <input type="checkbox"/> Farm/Ranch | <input type="checkbox"/> Sales | <input type="checkbox"/> Managers administrators |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Educator | <input type="checkbox"/> Technicians | <input type="checkbox"/> Clerical | <input type="checkbox"/> State, Federal, County, or city employee |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Service | <input type="checkbox"/> Laborers | <input type="checkbox"/> Craft | <input type="checkbox"/> Other_____ |