

# FINAL SCRIPT - SOC 295

## Class and COVID-19

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### INTRODUCTION

**[Daniela]:** Thanks to our collaborators for providing the last episode which covered the impact race has on covid 19's contaminant measures.

The relationship between covid-19 and intersectionality exists within two dimensions. One being how current unequal structures inhibit the spread of the virus and the second being how outcomes of the virus itself affect those same systems of inequality

In our efforts to address the intersectionality of the covid 19 pandemic, this episode will focus on class, beginning with what it is, and then examining a few sectors in which we can see differential impacts of covid-19

Covid 19 is not only a medical issue but also a social disaster and therefore as people who study life, change, and human behavior, it has never been more important for us to translate the data we have to tangible and comprehensible information for the public

But before we get into specific outcomes class had on impacts of covid 19 and vice versa, we decided it is crucial to have a common understanding of what class actually is...

The common definition of class as we know it will most likely include something about economics. For example, when you google the term "class" the definition that pops up is as follows "the system of ordering a society in which people are divided into sets based on perceived social or economic status" while economic circumstances are not necessarily excluded from the discussion of class, it's not the primary indicator of class. In fact, there isn't one primary indicator of class and that's where the concept of intersectionality comes into play.

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### DEFINITION OF CLASS

**[Erika]:** How do we define class?

**[Athena]:** I would say that class was never really established till like the industrial revolution

**[Autumn]:** America was a totally different society than anything that existed at the time because there wasn't a rigid class hierarchy. Most societies, in the olden days, had very strict social classes in which you could not move from one social class to another, and the fact that you could move social class is a very modern concept

**[Athena]:** Yea it used to be more what you were born into, now I would say it's more about money which leads to education, I think you can define class as seeing how much education you are able to obtain.

**[Erika]:** And it also depends on where you are in the world. Like in the US, social mobility is limited. But I know that in western society it is more attainable than it is in say... India, which has a caste system.

**[Autumn]:** Yea, well places that still have rigid class structures it's going to be much harder for them, for anybody to change their lot in life.

**[Erika]:** But, I mean we could talk about how the American dream is basically to come into the US as a member of the lower class and build your way up.

**[Daniela]:** Well I think that's where intersectionality also comes in because especially in America, what you were saying about the American dream, there is this idea that America is the home of opportunity for people to move upward on the social ladder, and this is the case... if you had the privilege of being born a white, cis-gender person. Class includes race and it includes gender and all of these intersectional pieces that really do both prohibit and inhibit the ability to move upward, which is kind of what we are trying to get at. Class is a combination, culmination of these other aspects so when we talk about class it's essential to understand that these other pieces are present, we are not just talking about wealth.

**[Athena]:** Unfortunately, the definition of class also covertly includes race and gender.

**[Erika]:** Yeah, and if a person is lower-class and is going to move upwards - if you add in the fact that they're a person of color, that makes it that much more difficult. Then add in the fact that they're anything but a cis-gender, binary male or female - that makes it more complicated. And the more intersectional factors you pile on to someone starting in the lower-class, no matter where you are in the world, the harder it is to achieve social mobility.

**[Daniela]:** And you have to think about the reality of being simultaneously members of different minority groups. This situation creates such differential opportunities, and when we talk about class we really tend to just immediately think of monetary wealth, when in this case it's really just so much more than that. In fact, wealth results from various other factors and it's inappropriate to talk about wealth without discussing how you get to that wealth or what's blocking you from getting to that wealth- which in this case could be gender, sexual orientation, or race, or so many other things.

**[Autumn]:** I think it's also important to mention that the categorization of class is not super well defined, so what is poor, we might say oh that is the poverty line, but how do they choose that number? So there is not really great definitions of what is a poor person and what is a wealthy person

**[Athena]:** I think class is based on the resources you can have and how easy they are for you to obtain, so maybe the poverty line is drawn at the point where one can no longer get certain resources, I guess that would be another factor.

**[Allaire]:** *For the sake of this podcast, we will define class as one's accessibility to resources such as material items, education, and living necessities. Class is created and influenced by social factors like race and gender, which compound to determine a person's life chances*

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## RESOURCES AND SCHOOLS

**[Erika]:** When it comes to COVID specifically and resources, online learning is a huge component.

**[Athena]:** in the article “The kids are (really) not alright: A synthesis of COVID-19 student surveys”, there was very disproportionate access to technology for people in lower-income homes. Less reliable internet and WIFI made learning a lot harder for them. In turn, by making learning harder motivation is that much harder and even affects mental health.

**[Daniela]:** Going off of that, looking across the board COVID 19 is a global pandemic and in other cultures, in more impoverished countries the average number of children goes up. You think about families that have 10 children and they don't have 10 computers. Also adds distraction when there is screaming in the background compared to other children who have their own room and space.

**[Athena]:** with lower-income families, the parents are at work. The kids have to take care of their siblings and don't have time to do online school.

**[Autumn]:** Some schools were able to buy chrome books for the students, but my sister had to buy a chrome book because we didn't have a computer at our house. where I'm from is pretty poor and there are a lot of kids who don't have internet because they can't afford it. Being at school is where they could get their assignments done because they had access to a computer and the internet.

**[Erika]:** Also, at the beginning of the pandemic a lot of parents were talking about online learning as homeschooling their kids. When it first started, I didn't quite understand what that meant - but kids can't absorb information online through a computer as easily, so there's a lot more parent involvement. Which is basically impossible for parents that are considered essential workers.

**[Autumn]:** A high schooler can kind of take care of themselves but you have kids that are 5 years old starting kindergarten.

**[Erika]:** You have kids whose first experience of school is online and through a computer screen.

**[Athena]:** It's harder to retain information in that way and the pandemic exacerbated the educational gap between classes and made it so much harder to bounce back. The article pointed out how this has a long-term impact. This isn't just temporary, and we need long-term commitment for these kids that lost years of education.

**[Daniela]:** These young kids come to school to learn but it all comes together, they are learning based on their social interactions with other kids, learning how to exist in a world with other people. Speaking of the long-term commitment, in order for these kids to be able to move forward with the rest of their life and not have this be a ginormous interruption in their development. We need commitment from all different corners to fill in the gap.

**[Allaire]:** A big thing is a lot of kids went to school for their meals like breakfast and lunch and when they couldn't go to school, they didn't have those resources.

**[Autumn]:** I worked at a food pantry last winter break and we would provide boxes of food for kids because they weren't getting their usual meals. This was a huge strain on the food pantry because they would usually provide food for a weekend and now, they had to give three times as much food for these

kids because they needed an extra five days of food. They already have limited resources and now they have to give out even more food.

**[Allaire]:** Stuff like that is usually overlooked. The wealthy just assume that everyone has computers, and everyone is able to get all three meals each day. More attention definitely needs to be brought to these lower-income families.

**[Erika]:** I just looked this up - according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “9 million African Americans in the U.S. received food stamps each month and that represents a quarter of the African American population in the U.S.” That’s one in four.

**[Autumn]:** Factor in the people who are losing their jobs so there are even more people who can no longer afford food. Which puts more strain on the resources.

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## MORTALITY

**[Erika]:** Okay, we’re talking about death. Mortality.

**[Daniela]:** I think death tolls were kind of unavoidable statistics during a pandemic. I don’t know about you guys, but constantly I’m opening up Twitter and social media, and there are giant numbers just in my face. Like “today, this many people died compared to yesterday…” and there are charts showing these trends—it’s in your face, but how do you really interpret those numbers?

**[Autumn]:** The human brain can’t really interpret big numbers—we can understand like… 3, but when it comes to 4000 people dying from COVID today, we don’t really get it.

**[Daniela]:** Yeah, I agree. Breaking it up, like how we’re trying to talk about it in terms of class is important because it contextualizes those numbers. Because we’re not going to be able to understand those—to look at that giant number and know what each individual person’s story was, or why they ended up where they did. So I think in this section we can just touch on why—like contextualize it with class based on those statistics.

**[Erika]:** This chart by the CDC categorizes mortality in an interesting way. Instead of talking about numbers, it compares certain races to white deaths as a baseline. So it’ll say, like—American Indian or Alaskan-native non-Hispanic persons died 2.2 times more often than white people. And then black or African American non-Hispanic persons died almost 2 times more often, and Hispanics and Latinos died 2.1 times more often. So going back to what you said about small numbers—yes, they’re smaller in that they’re easier to grasp, but I feel like they make the visualization of the number of people who’ve died clearer. Because 2.2 times… for every 1 white person that died, 2 people of color died.

**[Daniela]:** And we can talk about how this is kind of inevitable—it’s not really hidden, either. Throughout COVID-19 there are a lot of aspects of it that have been kind of ambiguous and that were often on purpose… but when it comes to deaths, everything is now recorded. It’s mandatory. For that reason, I don’t think looking at the mortality rate and other statistics it’s pretty clear on any website that non-whites are more affected. It’s just so clear.

**[Athena]:** I think if anything, there can be an under-representation of lower-income people and especially lower-income people of color who have died from COVID.

**[Daniela]:** Yeah, totally.

**[Athena]:** Like—are the statistics and data taking into account the people without homes population?

**[Erika]:** Oh, yeah.

**[Athena]:** A lot of them are off the radar with this stuff and aren't really accounted for.

**[Erika]:** Elderly populations, too.

**[All agree]**

**[Athena]:** They're basically seen as less important in the medical field—treating them, so they might not have been tested to see how they died.

**[Autumn]:** From experience, I know people that had at-home tests for COVID and tested positive, but did not report it to the state or the county because they didn't want to deal with contact tracing. So there are probably lots of people that tested positive for COVID or maybe died from it but never had an official test.

**[Erika]:** Or people that just never got tested at all. Maybe thought they had a cold and then it got exponentially worse way too fast for them to handle.

**[Daniela]:** Exactly. We don't think of the homeless population, or the home-insecure, or the elderly population on a class level. And we don't usually look at how age mixes with class.

**[Erika]:** One way to look at it could be through nursing homes vs assisted living facilities.

**[Autumn]:** Unfortunately there are a lot of people in nursing homes on Medicare and Medicaid because their families can't afford to take care of them at home.

**[All agree]**

**[Autumn]:** If, you know, they're going to get government support, have them in a nursing home. Where they can have an around-the-clock nurse instead of having to pay for a nurse out of pocket to come to your house every day and take care of your mother.

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## GENDER AND WEALTH

**[Autumn]:** When they're looking at the jobs figures each month, the net increase in women who are going back to work is close to zero. The number of jobs that women are losing and gaining is about the same, so the number of women in the workforce is the lowest it's been since the 1980s. When it comes down to it, unfortunately, we're still a pretty patriarchal society, and when you have to decide whether you're going to pay a couple thousand dollars to have kids go to daycare or just stop working, for some people, it's just more financially sustainable to stop working, and that falls on the mother a lot.

**[Erika]:** When I think of gender, I don't really feel that the conversation strays very far from the binary male/female. I went to look up statistics for COVID deaths based on gender, fully expecting to find a graph of all gender identities, and I didn't realize that all of the graphs were male/female or, for example, male/female/other, and there was no data compiled on male-identifying/ female-identifying/ non-binary/ genderfluid people.

**[Autumn]:** Yeah, there's nothing on that.

**[Erika]:** It could be broken down so much further, and there's no research on it.

**[Autumn]:** And maybe that's something that won't happen until years later

**[Allaire]:** It's also really hurtful to the lower class, there are people in the lower class that are not just male and female, and there's no research on it, so that makes them go unseen and unheard.

**[Autumn]:** Let's be honest, we know it's going to affect probably that population more because that's just how the world works. Everything affects them negatively because it's not a fair society. But we don't know by how much, so they're going blind into a pandemic, not knowing how it's going to affect them.

**[Erika]:** Healthcare, when it comes to transgender people - a lot of transgender people have anxiety around seeing their primary health providers in the first place, never mind when it comes to reporting COVID symptoms. The same thing happened in that video we watched about the black woman who was a doctor and was trying to explain to doctors around her that she was in a lot of pain that she needed XYZ treatments, and then she died because they wouldn't give them to her. That same kind of prejudice would apply to someone who doesn't fit the gender binary, being afraid of prejudice, so they might avoid seeking medical treatment in the first place, which then would lead to under-reported cases of COVID

**[Autumn]:** It also doesn't help that what was considered elective or nonemergency surgery was paused in many places. So any surgeries like top surgery or bottom surgery were considered non-emergency, so people just had to continue on with a body that was making them uncomfortable

**[Allaire]:** I can't even imagine how that affected their mental health.

**[Daniela]:** And that can lead to death sometimes. We're talking about life-threatening reality. Like I know it's not urgent to most people because you're not bleeding out, but in a lot of cases, it pushes people to take their own life.

**[Autumn]:** And you don't know how long a pandemic is going to be so the idea of...

**[Erika]:** Indefinite waiting, not knowing if you'll physically fulfill the identity that is most comfortable for you.

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## WEALTH AND DISASTER RELIEF

**[Erika]:** I think the last thing we should talk about is wealthy people contributing to disaster relief.

**[Autumn]:** What I thought was kinda interesting from the Forbes list was that a lot of it was people like Mark Zuckerberg on there who donated money to covid but he runs a platform of which made covid worse because of the misinformation he was actively spreading on his platform

**[Erika]:** Can we talk about how Jeff Bezos, in the middle of a global pandemic, decided to go to space... Think about that. Yeah, he donated some money but what if he took *all* the money he used to go to space and donated that?

**[Allaire]:** We also mention how they're all the ones with the power but they're the most reluctant to change or contribute to disaster relief.

**[Daniela]:** it goes back to the fend for yourself ideology like what we were talking about in the beginning, everyone must fend for themselves, and it's been a consistent theme through the pandemic.

**[Autumn]:** In total Jeff Bezos donated 107 million dollars

**[Allaire]:** Who donated more, him or Dolly Parton?

**[Autumn]:** He's worth over 200 billion dollars and he donated 107 million dollars

**[Erika]:** Why didn't he take just at least one full billion of that of all those billions? Even if we took 10 billion he wouldn't notice.

**[Daniela]:** have you seen like that pile of rice thing that people like there was a little like show or podcast like some little episode of something where it was showing these billionaires wealth in piles of rice and they take one little bit away that was like a million dollars in one grain of rice and they still had a whole stack

**[Erika]:** And it infuriates me that the wealthy are the ones that are so against higher taxes because they wouldn't even notice... Like, if you make 10 billion dollars, even if someone took a whole billion away, I really don't think there'd be that much damage to your lifestyle if any at all.

**[Athena]:** like a 10% tax cut affects people who make 30,000 a year much differently than people who make a million a year

**[Erika]:** Or the fact that the highest tax bracket is \$250,000 and that anybody above that who makes 8 billion dollars pays the same rate for their taxes.

**[Autumn]:** Warren Buffet didn't donate money but he used his corporate jets to fly masks from china to new york

**[Everyone]:** What a hero.

**[Autumn]:** Bill and Melinda gates foundation donated 305 million dollars which is better because he's not worth 200 billion dollars but it's still not great. Donald Trump donated 100,000 dollars to the department of health and human services for coronavirus related efforts

**[Daniela]:** He's such a piece of shit, 100,000 is like his fingernail

**[Allaire]:** Dolly Parton donated one million to Moderna research

**[Autumn]:** Oprah Winfrey donated 10 million dollars, thanks queen

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## CONCLUSION / INTERSECTIONALITY

**[Daniela]:** So for the last section why intersectionality matters I wanted to reiterate that it's impossible to discuss class without considering the characteristics and qualities that compose class. It's not all about wealth and in fact, wealth is not, I don't think, even the most appropriate determinant without considering what composes wealth which is gender, sexual orientation, identity, geographical proximity, race, and so many other factors. I just think class even more so than race and gender is an intersectional concept. In and of itself it is an intersectional concept.

**[Athena]:** yeah we haven't been able to talk about class without also bringing in some form of another group identity.

**[Allaire]:** Hopefully this discussion of covid-19 and class opens the doors to thoughts, ideas, conversations, and long-term commitment regarding understanding the intersectional nature of inequality

**[Daniela]:** That's all for our episode on covid, class, and intersectionality. We'd like to turn to the next episode focusing on Gender and Covid.



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