

## Critical Thinking Paper 1

What are the advantages that leaders in any organization or society have that allow them to keep their positions?

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Throughout history there have been rulers and their subjects. It was commonplace for a king and his elites to have slaves. This was part of the feudal system. We are now in the contemporary world. We boast how more advanced technologically, but more importantly, culturally and humanely we are than our ancestors. Yet, equality and peace is still sought around the world. We are still stuck in a system of a few elite at the top, with the masses below them. It seems history does repeat itself. Those at the top have the odds stacked in their favor and influence those around them to keep them at the top. Leaders in any organization or society have greater access to resources and influence over society that allow them to keep their positions.

We live in a society with ongoing conflict. Conflict creates winners and losers. Winners overtime become elite, and the losers follow the elite above them. The question is not if there will be an elite, but how the elite can keep their status and position. As conflict continues, the victors have more resources to continue in victory. The losers find it increasingly difficult to overcome the elite and fall into their place of being under them. This is heightened by the division of labor which Karl Marx wrote will always create leaders with control of others.

Unlike those below them who may struggle to survive, the elite have the resources to protect themselves and remain at the top. According to Marx, "When some people own the means of production, he argues, they will have great power. They will use this power to increase their positions and increase their wealth" (Charon, 2013, p. 79). This ruling class has control over many important decisions in a society, and they tend to make decisions to keep them rich

and powerful. They have, “control over people’s jobs, the communities people live in, the products that are made, and the economic decisions that affect the society and even the world” (Charon, 2013, p. 79). This power further influences the government and many other segments of society including, media, schools, and courts. Society becomes centered around what the powerful desire (Charon, 2013, p. 80). Whoever is at the top will make use of those below them to keep them at the top. As leaders, they have access to more information in the organization, the authority to make decisions, and control over what others in the organization know (Charon, 2013, p. 71). They share their knowledge and power with great care to those around them to ensure it benefits them. The system of inequality is bent in the elite’s favor.

In societies with private property, those with more have more at their disposal than those with less. They have greater opportunities to expand what they already have than someone with less. For instance, someone with more capital has greater freedom to invest, than someone with less, living paycheck-to-paycheck. With control of property, factories, businesses and more, the elite can determine how much they continue to receive and what they dish out to the rest. It is as if they are playing Monopoly but can determine where their piece lands, all the properties they own, control over the bank and what the other players get. As the elite gain power, they gain more privileges, and these combine together to give them prestige in society (Charon, 2013, p. 78). With power, privilege and prestige, they cement themselves in a system of permanence. Society loves to follow the powerful, the privileged, and the prestigious. Presidents, military generals, doctors, lawyers, to name a few, can be known by their elite appearance simply in their dress. If the elite can keep this status, they will always have followers. Followers want to follow those who can protect them. In history, societies survived through strength not weakness. If the elite can give off this impression and actually protect their followers, they hold their position.

Societies contain institutions which are heavily influenced or even led by the ruling class. Institutions legitimize what is done in society. When the elite control them, they legitimize their

power. There are political, economic, educational, religious, health care, military, kinship, and entertainment institutions (Charon, 2013, p. 81). With influence over every angle of society, the elite can permeate their power, privilege and prestige. The elite can use “legitimate instruments of force” through these various institutions to protect and perpetuate their rule (Charon, 2013, pp. 89-90). If they are attacked on one side, they have many others that will come to protect them.

With control of the institutions, the culture in which an elite is a part of molds itself to their ideas. Charon writes, “It should come as no surprise that those at the top try to ensure their ideas, values, and rules prevail in society” (2013, p. 86). Society can believe the superior are more deserving and deserve to be at the top. If culture sways in a way to undermine the elite, the elite can oppose with great force those ideas. Often, the head of an organization or community and those connected to the head, are determined by blood, friendship, or subjective feelings. Those at the top have say over who remains in power and connected to those in power (Charon, 2013, p. 72). They can start and sustain traditions in culture for the elite to be the elite.

For one to be on the top, there must be those below them. The final stone on top of a pyramid can only be that high up because it is built on all the stones below it. The elite hold their positions at the top of organizations and society because they have access to the stones and how to place them. With a much greater access to and control over resources and influence over society, the elite keep the rest of society dependent on them through the decisions they make.

#### References

Charon, J. M. (2013). Why are people unequal in society? E. Mitchell & J. Chell (Eds.), *Ten questions: A sociological perspective*. (8th ed., pp. 66-92). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.