AS Sociology For AQA
[2nd Edition]

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Contents

Unit 0:
Introduction To Sociology

Contents

Introduction to Sociology: culture, roles, values and norms.

Defining Sociology: Observations

The first section of this AS textbook is designed to introduce students to both the general subject matter of Sociology (through a brief definitional section) and the "core themes" (socialisation, culture and identity) of the AQA AS course. These themes are developed in greater detail in the text's coverage of the different Modules and the general design of the AS Specification makes it necessary for students to think about how each core theme is integrated into the various Modules.

A visual representation of A Core - not a theme, as such, but the closest we could get (which, to be brutally frank, isn't very close at all)

For some Modules – such as Culture and Identity and, to a lesser extent Families and Households – this integration is fairly clear-cut (the former, for example, requires students to understand socialisation processes, agents of socialisation, concepts of culture and identity and the like while the latter requires students to think implicitly about the family as an agency of primary socialisation). Similarly, the Education Module requires students to apply ideas about secondary socialisation, the education system as a cultural institution and so forth.

Given that this Section is an Introduction to Sociology it's likely the ideas we've just mentioned won't mean that much to the majority of students studying sociology for the first time. However, they're important ideas that need to be grasped and we suggest that once you've finished reading through this section (when you'll have a much better idea about both Sociology and key concepts like culture, roles, values and norms) you revisit the previous paragraph to ensure you've understood how the core themes relate to the Modules you're about to study.

Sociology is the study of human behaviour and relationships and a good "working definition" is provided by **Ritzer** (1979) when he suggests: "Sociology is the study of individuals in a social setting that includes groups, organisations, cultures and societies. Sociologists study the interrelationships between individuals, organisations, cultures and societies".

Sociology, in this respect, involves studying human beings and their *patterns of behaviour* and to do this sociologists focus on the relationships people form (such as between parents and children or teachers and students) and how these are interconnected (how, for example, does our relationship with our parents impact on our relationship with friends?). In other words, the focus of attention is **group behaviour** and, more specifically, how membership of social groups (such as families and schools) impacts on individual behaviour – an idea we can start to develop by thinking about the largest group to which most of us probably feel we "belong", namely a:

Society: One key feature of this concept is that people see themselves as having "something in common" with the other members of "their society" – and, by extension perhaps, as seeing themselves as being different to members of "other societies". In this respect, different societies can be considered to occupy two types of *space*:

1. Physical **Space** in the sense of a distinctive **geographical area** marked by either a *physical border* (such as a river) or a *symbolic border* (an imaginary line, for example, marking where one society ends and another begins).

2. Mental **Space** – the various beliefs we hold about the similarities we have with those who belong to "our society" and the differences between us and people who belong to a different society. We can express these ideas in terms of two significant concepts:

Firstly, the concept of **culture** which, in general terms, refers to a distinctive "way of life" characteristic of a particular society.

Secondly, the concept of **identity** – a sense that we both know "who we are" and, by extension, "who we are not". In this particular context we're talking about a sense of **national** and **cultural** identity but, as we will see, there are many other types and sources of identity.

> **Module Link**   **Culture and Identity**
>
> The concepts of **culture** and **identity** are discussed in much greater depth in this Module and you should familiarise yourself with its content –even if you're going to study either Families and Households or Wealth, Poverty and Welfare as your Unit 1 Modules.

If you think for a moment about the idea of "a society" (or any social group, come to that) it should become apparent that even its *physical characteristics* are actually *mental constructs*; that is, they are "in reality" just names we give to something in order to describe and make sense of it. The physical borders of societies, for example, may change over time and if you think about the border between, say, England and Scotland it is, when all's said and done, just a line on a map. A "physical border" exists – and is understandable to us – because we (individually and collectively) give it a particular *meaning*. **Anderson** (1983) captures the flavour of this idea when he uses the concept of an:

Imagined community: A "society" is an imagined community "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.". We can extend this idea to social groups generally to argue that, just as each of us *imagines* we belong to that community we call "our society", we also *imagine* we belong to social groups (such as a family) within that society. We can develop this idea by thinking about how and why we imagine ourselves to be part of a community:

Relationships: Whenever we enter into a relationship with someone - either through choice or necessity - we create an *invisible bond*. For example, when you say something like "That person is my friend" you recognise some kind of special relationship between the two of you. This relationship is different to the one created when you say something like "That person is my mother". There are many hundreds – if not thousands - of different social relationships we could identify if we had the time and inclination; some of these are *personal* ("This is my boy / girlfriend") and some are *impersonal* (such as when you watch television). However, the important thing here is they all affect our behaviour in some way because we behave towards other people *as if* these relationships are real (which, in a sense, they are for as long as we believe they are).

The purpose of thinking in this way about relationships is to get you thinking sociologically, in the sense that if the social world is not *physically real*, but *mentally real* it follows we cannot be born with a knowledge of "society" and human relationships. We're not, for example, born knowing our society's history or geography, its music, language, customs and traditions. Neither, of course, do we know how and to whom we are related. The fact that we develop a

knowledge and understanding of these things suggests that what's important here are two things:

Nature: As human beings we're born with the *capacity* to learn.

Nurture: We can exploit our *ability* for learning to create an incredibly complex "way of life" (a culture) filled with a wide variety of different relationships.

For sociologists, therefore, *cultural behaviour* is *learned behaviour* and we can explore some of the basic ideas behind this concept by thinking about *what* we learn and *how* we learn it.

Defining Sociology: Explanations

Our personal experience of the social world tells us that life is not simply a series of random, purposeless or unstructured events. Wherever we look we're surrounded by *patterns of behaviour*, some of which have a long history (family groups, for example, have been a feature of our society for thousands of years), others of which have a history far shorter than we might imagine (compulsory State education, for example, is only something that has really taken root in our society over the past 50 years).

The fact that *institutionalised behaviour* exists (a **social institution**, such as the family, marriage, the education system and so forth, can be simply understood as a "*pattern of shared, stable, behaviour*") suggests it must have a *cause* – something that encourages people to behave in ways which, while not necessarily entirely predictable, are "predictable enough" on a general day-to-day basis (we know, for example, that we may "go to school" or "go to work" each day, without necessarily knowing exactly what we will be doing once we get there). We can start to think about the "causes of human behaviour" in two basic ways – non-sociologically, in terms of the concept of **instinct** and sociological in terms of the concept of **culture**.

Instinct

The idea that human beings have "instincts" that guide their behaviour is a fairly common one in our society, for a couple of reasons:

Firstly, we tend to be taught that animal behaviour is guided by instincts (by which, for the moment, we generally mean to be some sort of genetic programming that tells animals how to behave without their having to think about such behaviour). Since people are essentially animals too, it's only a short step to believe that some – if not necessarily all – human behaviour has a similar instinctive basis.

Babies - cute maybe, but not exactly the brightest stars in the night sky are they?

Secondly, the concept is frequently used in our everyday language. For example, we hear or use phrases like "The striker's instinct for goal" or "She seemed to instinctively know they were talking about her". This everyday-usage gives it a *taken-for-granted* quality, through which it enters the realm of "what everybody knows" (it becomes, in effect, part of our common sense store of knowledge).

Whatever the merits of using the concept of instinct in the context of explaining the behaviour of cats, dogs and frogs, the usefulness of the concept– when applied to an understanding of human behaviour – is one that tends to be questioned by sociologists and to understand why this should be the case we need to be clear about its meaning.

Instincts have three main features; they tell an animal *what* to do, *when* to do it

Kittens - even cuter than babies but total non starters in the intelligence stakes?

and, finally, *how* to do it. To clarify these ideas, consider this (admittedly a little bizarre) example from the bird world:

What: Every year for as long as I can remember, blue tits have nested in my garden, in the bird box I've so thoughtfully provided for them (except, I should add, when my garden was being redesigned and I took the box down – they nested in my barbeque instead). This is evidence of instinctive behaviour because the adult blue tits know what they've got to do each year.

When: Aside from nesting every year, the blue tits also know at what point in the year to start nest-building, egg-laying and chick-rearing. Again, this is instinctive behaviour because it doesn't have to be taught or learned – they just seem to know when to start nesting.

How: Without fail, these birds build exactly the same sort of nest each year (a single-story "everyone-in-it-together" affair). This, again, is instinctive behaviour because the adult birds have no choice in the matter – they build the type of nest they've been genetically-programmed to build.

Or Culture?

In terms of our "bird world" example, sociologists tend to be sceptical about the idea of instinct as the basis for human behaviour, for three main reasons:

Choice: Instincts, by definition, involve a lack of choice (their purpose, after all, is to create order by explicitly removing choice from the agenda). Human behaviour, on the other hand, involves an almost limitless set of choices, some of which are fairly banal ("Should I do my Sociology homework or watch TV?") and some of which aren't ("Should I buy this very interesting book or

steal it from the bookshop?"). The fact we are able to make behavioural choices, contributes to the:

Diversity of our behaviour: One of the fascinations of Sociology (I'm certain there are others, but as I'm writing this none jump immediately to mind) is the fact that people develop different (or diverse) ways of doing things. If human behaviour was simply based on instinct we would expect to see much the same sort of behaviour wherever we were in the world - and while there are numerous similarities and continuities in people's behaviour, there are also a vast range of differences that stem from our ability to make choices.

Adaptation: We live in a vast and complex world that is constantly changing and people need to be able to adapt to such changes. A simple example to illustrate this idea might be the recent and rapid development of computer technology that, through things like the Internet, is changing the way people both see the world and interact in that world. Instinctive behaviour is, as we've suggested, something that does not and cannot change. If human behaviour was guided by instinct, therefore, we would find it difficult (if not impossible) to either initiate or adapt to change…

Before we move on to consider an alternative explanation for the underlying causes of human behaviour (cultural learning) we can note, by way of clarification, a further concept, frequently confused with the idea of instinct:

Biological drives are those aspects of human behaviour that are biologically desirable or necessary - examples of which might include eating and sleeping, We should note that even though such drives are part of our biological make-up, they can be regulated though our social experiences (in other words, we may exercise some degree of *choice* about when and how we do them). Eating, for example, can be regulated through dieting and sleep patterns can be fairly-easily adjusted, depending on social circumstances (new-born babies in our society, for example, are slowly taught when to go to sleep and when to stay awake).

This slight digression into the realm of instinct is useful in the sense that it allows us to contrast this type of explanation with sociological explanations for patterned human behaviour that focus on the general idea of culture as a type of shorthand for learned behaviour. In this respect the idea of culture as a "way of life" refers, for our present purpose, to the general way human behaviour is patterned and although different people at different times and in different places may behave in quite different ways (for reasons we explore in the **Culture and Identity** Module), the general principle that this behaviour is structured holds true. In other words, human cultural development follows a set of very

general and very basic "rules" that have to be both taught and learned by generations of individuals.

Cultural Learning: Observations

The first point to note here is that if behaviour is learned, it follows it must also be taught – which leads to the idea our membership of social groups is the initial key to understanding behaviour sociologically. We need, therefore, to understand the concept of a *social group* and how belonging to groups affects our behaviour. As you probably appreciate from your prior cultural learning, there are various types of social group we can identify. These include:

Family groups, consisting of people related to each other through *kinship* (a direct biological relationship – such as mother and daughter) or *affinity* (their relationship is by marriage or some other living arrangement).

Educational groups, which could include people studying together in the same school / college or class.

Work groups - people who do the same type of job, for example.

Peer groups*,* consisting of people of roughly the same age (*teenagers*, for example) who share common interests, such as music and fashion.

Our individual lives, therefore, are surrounded by social groups – some of which we actively join and others we may merely observe. Their significance to us, however, needs to be considered in terms of how membership of these groups affects two things:

The peer group - frightening to think these people might be connected to you, isn't it?

Firstly, how we think about the social world (our personal "sociological perspective") and,

Secondly, how we behave (in other words, how our behaviour is both learned from and shaped by the behaviour of others). Cultural learning, in this respect, is a two-way process (my behaviour towards you affects your behaviour towards me which, in turn, affects how I behave towards you…).

We can start to illustrate and develop these general ideas by returning briefly to the concept of society we noted earlier, for two main reasons. Firstly, because it allows us to illustrate one of the problems faced by sociologists in their attempt to explain human behaviour and secondly because it allows us to explore and explain the concept of cultural learning in more detail.

If we accept **Anderson's** (1983) idea that society is an "imagined community" it both helps us to understand the various dimensions (or indicators) of "a society" and highlights a potential problem. In the case of the former, for example, "a society", as we've suggested, has a number of physical and mental dimensions which, for the sake of illustration, include things like:

Geographic boundaries (as we've previously noted).

Government, which may involve things like a monarchy, parliament and civil service, for example.

Language, **customs** and **traditions** which people within a society share (speaking the same language, for example, or celebrating a particular religious festival).

Identity: We develop an awareness that "our society" is different to other societies and "We", in turn, consider ourselves different to "Them" (for example, the English may see themselves as different to French or American people).
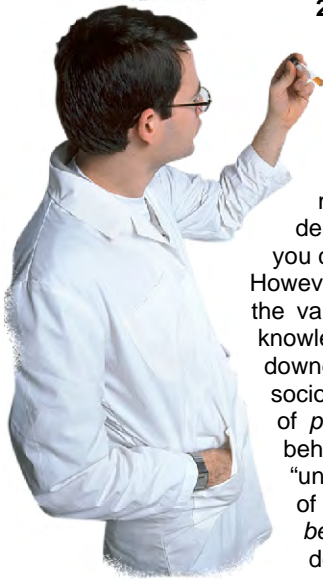
It's not just a language difference...

The problem, as far as sociologists are concerned, is that these indicators point to something that doesn't actually have a physical existence. "Society", in other words, can't be seen, smelt, touched, tasted or heard (even those aspects that have a physical existence – such as a geographic border – are, as we've suggested, just another aspect of our vivid imaginations; borders, for example, can be moved (through warfare and conquest) so that a physical feature of the landscape that marked a border yesterday is no-longer a marker today).

The border between Tanzania and Kenya...

This problem, as you might imagine, has a couple of consequences relating to:

1. Arguments: Our inability to point to something solid and say "This is society" means sociologists have developed different opinions about the nature of society - how it's organised or how it affects our behaviour, for example. In addition, not all sociologists agree about how to define "society" or, indeed, how it can or should be studied.

2. Knowledge: Sociologists are often accused of not being "real" scientists (unlike Physicists or Chemists, for example). Whether this matters probably depends on how important you consider this *status* to be. However, it does tend to mean the value of sociological knowledge is generally downgraded, mainly because sociologists seem incapable of *predicting* human behaviour. Whether this "unpredictability" is a quality of *Sociology* or of *human behaviour* is a matter for debate (and not one we need to venture into at present).

A Real Scientist, doing Something Very Important. Saving millions of lives. Probably.

For the moment, we can note there are plenty of things in the natural world that can be studied without the scientist being able to physically or personally sense them. Gravity, electricity, radiation and oxygen, for example, are all things we know exist, but they are not things you could easily pick-up and physically examine. The important point here, therefore, is we know these things exist (or, if you prefer, we can *theorise* their existence) not because we can physically sense them but because we can *feel* their *effects*.

This is a significant idea because it starts us thinking about something like "society" in terms of it being a *force*, rather than a physical object – just like, to take an example from the natural world, gravity is a force rather than a "thing". We can't see it, but we know it's there because we feel its effect. In a similar way, if we think about society as an invisible force, it should be possible to study its effects and, by so doing, demonstrate it's existence.

What norms surround the relationship between adults and children in our society?

Cultural Learning: Explanations

We can develop our ideas about the "invisible forces" that act upon us as human beings by thinking in terms of the concept of **culture** and how it is learned through a process of **socialisation**.

Module Link   Culture and Identity

The concepts of **culture** and **socialisation** are discussed in much more detail in the context of culture and identity and it would be useful to read through these sections even if you're going to study Families and Households (which involves explicit reference to socialisation) or Wealth, Poverty and Welfare as your Unit 1 option.

We can start by thinking about **culture** in terms of *what* we need to learn as part of the process of developing as a human individual and about **socialisation** as *how* we learn these things. In this respect, the idea of being born into - and living in - a society is an important one, not simply because this happens to be true (everyone is born into an existing society) but also because it suggests "a society" involves some sort of organisation. In other words, for a society to exist it must have *order* and *stability* and for these to exist people's behaviour must display *patterns* and *regularities* – ideas we can initially understand in terms of:

Culture: At its most basic, a culture is, as we've already noted, a "way of life". It consists, in other words, of the behaviour and beliefs that characterise people of different societies and we can initially identify three major aspects or dimensions of culture:

1. **Social Institutions**: We can think about "our culture" (or indeed any culture) in terms of general patterns of behaviour based around four different categories: politics, economics, family life and culture (which includes areas like education and religion). The technical term for these large-scale, persistent ("long-term") patterns of behaviour is a social institution and these organised patterns of behaviour represent one important dimension of social order and stability.

2. **Norms**: When we think about "typical" forms of behaviour (such as going to school or working) we are referring to *norms* (short for normative or normal) These can be defined as expected forms of behaviour in a given situation. For example, it might be a norm in our education system for students to sit quietly and listen when their teacher is talking to the class. Norms contribute to a sense of social order and stability because they represent behavioural rules others expect us to follow in particular situations and social spaces (such as the classroom, the workplace, the street and so forth).

3. Values: When we think about beliefs associated with institutions and norms (such as the belief someone is "innocent until proven guilty") we are expressing a *value* - a belief about the way something *should* be. Thus, when you catch yourself saying what you believe someone *should* - or indeed *should not* - do, this is evidence of your values. Again, values are a significant dimension to order and stability because they represent general ideas about how people in a particular society or social group should behave.

> **Module Link**   **Culture and Identity**
>
> This Module examines different aspects of culture (**material** and **non-material** in particular) in more depth.

So far we've touched on the idea of societies and cultures being characterised by certain behavioural patterns. The main question to address next, therefore, is that if we are all individuals, unique in our own small ways, and without instincts to guide us, how is it possible for these patterns of behaviour to exist?

> **Module Link**   **Culture and Identity**
>
> This Module looks in more depth at various aspects of the **socialisation** process – **primary** and **secondary** forms in particular. You should familiarise yourself with these general ideas because they will make the remaining ideas in this section more understandable.

We can develop these dimensions of culture in more detail by thinking about how we learn the rules of cultural behaviour – something that involves a general process of **socialisation**.

For sociologists, the answer to this question is behaviour patterns are culturally created; that is, individual behaviours are shaped by the groups – and culture – to which we belong and with which we identify and this "shaping process", created through different forms of socialisation, involves thinking about how the rules of cultural behaviour are expressed through three key initial concepts – **roles**, **values** and **norms** – we can briefly explore in the following terms:

> **Social Roles**

The concept of **role** is one borrowed from the theatre in that it refers to the idea of "playing a part"; just as an actor "performs a role" in a play, people take on and perform various roles (student, sister, brother, friend, employee and so forth) in their day-to-day life – ideas that come together quite neatly in **Shakespeare's** (c.1598) famous observation that:

> "All the world's a stage,
> And all the men and women merely players:
> They have their exits and their entrances;
> And one man in his time plays many parts".

Roles are a basic building block of any culture because they give us a sense of how we are *expected* to behave in any given social situation - think, for example, about how a teacher is *expected* to behave in relation to a student (and *vice versa*) – and because of the idea of common expectations they provide order and predictability in our relationships. This follows because role-play is governed by certain behavioural rules (sometimes termed a *prescribed aspect* of a role – general beliefs about how you *should* behave when playing a particular role) that involve, as we'll see in a moment, things like **values** and **norms**. Sociologists generally distinguish between two **types of role**:

Achieved roles are those we *choose* or are *allowed* to play – but we need to have done something to earn the right to play that role. You might, for example, only be allowed to play the role of an "A-level Sociology student" if you have the required GCSE qualifications, whereas playing the role of "friend" will involve a quite different set of "qualifications".

Ascribed roles, on the other hand, are roles we are *given* or *forced* to play by other, (usually more powerful) people. An example here might be the role of a son or daughter since it is "chosen for us" by our parents (we are given the role at the moment of our birth, depending on our biological sex). However, just to add a slight complication here, some types of ascribed role (such as mother or father) have an element of choice, whereas others (such as "slave" or "elderly") do not.

As we've suggested, role play is a source of order and predictability in our cultural relationships because by playing roles we establish some basic ground rules for people's behaviour (I expect, for example, the checkout operator at super my local market to make me pay for the things I buy, just as they expect me to pay for such things) and without them the social world would be a very confusing place - imagine, for example, a situation in which you could not remember what your relationship to everyone around you was supposed to be.

Another happy shopper celebrates successfully negotiating the normative minefield that is Tesco's on a Friday evening.

One benefit of role play, therefore, is that once we've learned what's expected of us in particular situations, we can use that knowledge whenever we play that role - mainly because it helps us accomplish certain tasks. Teaching and learning, for example, is made easier if both teacher and student behave towards each other in ways appropriate to their roles (think about how difficult it is to learn if the teacher is unable to stop students

misbehaving in the classroom). This example illustrates a further quality of roles, namely that of a:

Role-set: Any given role we take-on is generally played out in the context of other, related, roles attached to it. For example, in the role of student you may well play this role (slightly differently in each instance perhaps) in relation to a rage of other roles:

• Students in your Sociology class / school / college.
• Students in other subject classes.
• Your class teacher.
• Other teachers.
• Caretaking staff
• Administration staff.
• Your parent(s) / guardian(s)

How you play the role of student relative to others in your role-set will be conditioned, to some extent, by the concept of:

Social status, an idea that refers to the "level of respect we're expected to give someone when playing a particular role". Different roles have different statuses and different levels of status apply to different people within a role-set (the status of a student, for example, may be generally similar to that of other students in a class, but different to that of the class teacher). As with the concept of role, we can identify two basic **types of status**:

1. Achieved statuses involve doing something to earn that position - a teacher's status is earned, for example, because they have achieved the level of qualification and training necessary to play this role.

Education is a major source of achieved status in our society.

2. Ascribed statuses, on the other hand, are given to you by others (whether you want them or not). An example here might be a teacher's judgment about whether you are a "good" or "bad" student.

Although we play roles because they help us both understand and organise our behaviour in particular situations, the wide variety of roles we play occasionally causes us problems:

Role conflict occurs when the demands (or rules) of one role prevent us from behaving in accordance with the demands of another role. Imagine, for the sake of illustration, you play two roles in your life:

1. A *student role* that, to play successfully, means you have to be in class at 3pm on a Friday.

2. An *employee role* that means you have to start work at 2pm on a Friday.

Role conflict occurs because it is impossible for you to successfully combine these two roles. If you obey the demands of the student role you cannot conform to the demands of the employee role (and *vice versa*).

Norms

A *norm* refers to a socially acceptable way of behaving when playing a role. As the word suggests there are certain behaviours we *take for granted* (or consider *normal*) in particular situations when playing particular roles (every role, for example, has a number of different norms attached to it). It is, for example, the norm in our culture for an employee to be paid by their employer for the work they do, just as it is the norm for a school to have set times when staff and students should be present. We can note three basic types of norm:

Folkways (or informal norms) are a weak kind of norm; if you break them, the *sanctions* (penalties) involved are fairly minor. Folkways relate mainly to social politeness and customs. For example, when you meet someone you know it's polite to greet them ("Hello") and expect them to respond in kind. Similarly, it's customary in our culture to send people birthday cards. In many ways folkways are examples of *situational norms* - they only apply in specific situations. Your failure to send me a birthday card is unlikely to worry me unduly, for the deceptively simple reason I don't know you (it might have been nice if you'd made the effort though); your failure to remember a loved one's birthday, on the other hand, is likely to result in some sort of penalty…

Categories such as age, gender and ethnicity are examples of ascribed statuses

Mores (pronounced "more-rays") are stronger norms and a failure to conform to them will result in a consequently stronger social response from whoever resents your failure to behave appropriately. In some ways it's useful to think of them as *rules* relating to particular situations, such as joining the queue at a bus stop, for example, or a rule that bans talking in an exam (behaviour that in another situation would not be considered deviant).

Laws are the strongest norms in any society; they are expressions of moral feelings that exist to explicitly control people's behaviour. Punishment for breaking legal norms varies in terms of their perceived seriousness. In our society, punishments vary from things like community orders and fines to life imprisonment (although in some societies, such as America or Saudi Arabia, capital punishment may be the most extreme sanction for breaking this type of norm).

Norms, in general, are *specific behavioural guidelines* for playing a role; they are, if you like, the basic rules of behaviour we develop and use to perform roles predictably and acceptably. We don't, of course, have to obey norms (but we lay ourselves open to various penalties – or *social sanctions* - if we don't) and they're not necessarily hard-and-fast. **Goffman** (1959), for example, argues that norms are frequently open to *negotiation* - people playing related roles may be able, for example, to discuss the norms that will apply to their respective roles (going back to the role conflict example, this might be resolved by the student negotiating with the teacher to be excused class on the basis they promise to catch up with any work missed).

A further dimension to the idea of negotiation is that it may be possible to play the same role (such as a student) differently in different situations. For example, when attending one class the teacher may interpret their role narrowly, enforcing all kinds of rules and restrictions (working in silence, for example). However, in a different class the teacher may interpret their role very broadly, allowing their students to behave in ways unacceptable to the first teacher – an idea leads us to the related concept of:

Values

Our values reflect beliefs about what is important, both to us as individuals and to our society as a whole; as such, they are strongly related to both *roles* (how, for example, people should - or indeed shouldn't - behave when playing a particular role) and *norms*; if the latter are *specific* behavioural guidelines, **values** provide very *general* behavioural guidelines or, as **Thio** (1991) puts it: "*While norms are specific rules dictating how people should act in a particular situation, values are general ideas that support the norm*". Values, by definition, always involve *judgements* about behaviour; whenever we think about - or express - the values we hold we're choosing to believe one thing rather than another.

Proxemic Theory

We can illustrate the idea of *cultural learning* (and show how the concepts of roles, values and norms are inter-related into the bargain) using the concept of *Proxemic theory* – the study of the various ways people understand and use space in a cultural context - originally developed by **Hall** (1966). In this respect, although we are all born with the ability to understand notions of space (our eyes, for example, are positioned in such a way as to create three-dimensional images that our brains have the ability to process accurately) **Hall** argued that different cultures create different ways of "seeing space" – the most familiar example, for our current purpose perhaps, being the idea of **personal space** (although it's possible to look beyond the individual to understand how whole societies organise and utilise space in culturally-specific ways – in terms of things like urban development, housing, transport and so forth).

Personal space can be defined in terms of an area (or "bubble") that surrounds each of us which has a couple of important characteristics:

Firstly, the extent of our personal space varies both *between* cultures (in countries like England or the United States, for example, people generally like to maintain a greater sense of personal distance from others than they do in countries like France or Brazil) and *within* cultures – such as gender differences in our society (two women talking to each other, for example, tend to maintain less personal space between them than two men in the same situation).

Secondly, the space that surrounds us is considered to be "our property" and entry into it is regulated in various ways – something we can relate to different roles, values and norms using **Hall's (1996)** classic example of "strangers waiting for a train".

Maintaining personal space in public situations

When waiting for a train at a railway station we are (for the sake of illustration) playing the *role* of "stranger" to the people who are also waiting for the train to arrive. In this situation the role, as with any other role we play, is surrounded by certain *values* (beliefs, as we've seen, about how we should play this role). In our culture there are a range of values that apply (we should not behave towards strangers as if they were our closest friend in

the world, for example) and in this particular example one of the values we bring to bear is that of privacy and, more specifically, the notion of personal space as a way of maintaining privacy. In other words, when playing the role of stranger we value the cultural concept of privacy, both for our own purposes and those of others.

In this respect we understand that privacy is an important concept in our culture and we should not act in ways that invade – uninvited – the privacy of others (just as we expect them not to invade our privacy).

One way this value (or general behavioural guideline) is expressed is through various norms (or specific behavioural guidelines) that apply in particular situations. In this instance, one norm that reflects the role of stranger and the value of privacy is that we do not sit too close to strangers; we do not, in short, invade their personal space.

The ideas we've introduced in this opening section form the basis for a wider understanding of Sociology in the sense that they reflect two significant ideas. Firstly the concept of **social structures** (the idea that social life is structured by rules) and secondly the concept of **social action** (the idea that people can make choices about their behaviour – which rules to follow and which to break for example). We can, therefore, build on this work by developing a couple of ideas:

Firstly, the relationship between "the individual" (as a thinking, acting, being) and "society" (considered in terms of rules designed to guide people's behaviour).

Secondly, the different ways sociologists see and study social behaviour. In other words, the different sociological *perspectives* associated with different groups of sociologists in their attempts to understand and explain people's behaviour.

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Sociological Perspectives

Structure and Action: Observations

The first of these ideas is sometimes characterised as a debate between "*social structure*" and "*social action*" theory– a difference of interpretation that focuses on a central problem for sociologists - the relationship, as we've suggested, between the individual and society:

The Individual: On the one hand we are all individuals, each with our particular histories, hopes, fears and aspirations. We are all uniquely different, not just from our fellow human beings but also, as a species, from all other animals – and the thing we each possess that confers this uniqueness is *consciousness* - our ability to think (both about ourselves and our relationship to others) in ways more highly developed than in any other animal.

The ability to think is both a blessing and a curse; the former because it enables us to create complex technologies (the microwave oven!) and relationships (my mother's sister's brother's aunt's child…) and the latter because, in a sense, we are all prisoners of our own individuality - we can never really know what other people are thinking. We can, of course, make educated guesses (based on how someone talks to you, their body language and so forth), but we can never know for sure…

The Group: On the other hand we all live in a large social group we call a society. Although all societies are different, one of the striking things about human behaviour is that, for all our unique individuality, we do a surprising number of things with a regularity and general predictability that can't just be the result of accident or chance. Something, in other words, forces us to behave in routinely predictable ways (going to school; going to work; going shopping…) and for sociologists that "thing" is *social structure*.

What sociologists have to do, therefore, is to note the fact of human individuality (and our ability to act in almost any way we care to imagine) and square it with human predictability (the fact our behaviour is generally characterised by almost mundane similarities) – and this is where the concept of *structure* and *action* come into the equation.

Feeling the Force

Social Structure: It sometimes helps to visualise a social structure as a "*framework of rules*" - a rule being something you're supposed to obey and a framework being the way such rules are created, maintained and policed. We can illustrate the general principles behind this idea by thinking about how your everyday behaviour is governed by laws - we can talk about a *legal framework* (or structure, if you prefer) involving: the government making laws (formal, legal rules), a police force enforcing these rules, a judicial system deciding whether or not you've broken the law and prisons in which to lock you up if you're judged to be guilty. The idea of a *legal structure* is a good way of thinking generally about the concept of a social structure, for a couple of reasons:

Are we prisoners of our own individuality?

Firstly, even though we may never personally "break the law" or become subject to the power of the legal system this doesn't mean that our behaviour is not influenced by the existence of legal rules; on the contrary, I may *consciously* choose not to break the law precisely because I understand the possible consequences of such a course of action.

Secondly, while we can't actually see, smell or hear a "legal rule" (because it has no real, physical, existence) we know such rules exist if (or when) we experience their effect. We may, for example, personally experience the (police) force of the law if we are caught stealing something from a shop – although the majority of us probably only experience legal structures "second hand" through the behaviour of others (reading about what has happened to people who have broken the law, for example).

Keeping this idea in mind, if you think about the variety of ways your behaviour is governed by informal rules

(norms), the idea of a social structure surrounding you and your behaviour should become a little clearer.

All our relationships are based around roles.

Every relationship you enter into (such as with family, school, work and friends) involves playing a role, which in turn involves values relating to the role and, of course, norms associated with the role; every time you play a role, therefore, you are experiencing (however unwittingly) the effect of social structures – rules which shape your potential behavioural choices.

Social Action: If the concept of social structures focuses on how behaviour is governed by rules designed to constrain (limit) and control, the associated concept of *social action* focuses on our ability to make *choices* about how to behave. Just as, for example, we make choices about such things as who will be our friends, so too, ultimately we can make choices about the rules we obey or disobey - although, because we're talking about social structures there may well be consequences, in the form of **negative social sanctions** (punishments), for choosing to disobey.

Be that as it may, the important point – regardless of how "society" or people try to influence our behaviour - is we always have a *choice* about how to behave. To put this another way, in terms of social action our choices are potentially unlimited – we are free to act in whatever way we choose. However, our actual choices about how to behave are limited by the effects of social structures – by the framework of rules that characterise our relationships, our culture and our society. This early in the course the introduction of these quite complex ideas can be a little daunting, but we can make things a little clearer by using an *analogy* (identifying and comparing the features of something we know a lot about to something we know little or nothing about).

If, therefore, we liken society to a game such as chess - although you could use any game with which you're familiar (Football, Battleships, Connect 4, Twister…), it can help us understand the relationship between structure and action in the following way:

Structure: Thinking about chess, for example, we know it has certain *physical boundaries* (the playing area). It also has *rules* governing how the game is played: these are both *technical* (relating to the basic mechanics of the game - the starting position of each playing piece, how different pieces are allowed to move, taking it in turn to move and so forth) and *cultural* (it's a competitive situation, with the main objective being to beat your opponent). This represents the basic structure of the game – or, if you prefer, the basic *framework of rules* within which the game is played.

Action: Each player can choose their own particular *strategies* and *moves*, based on an assessment of how to successfully play the game. In chess, therefore, structure and action come together in that each player's behaviour (action) is limited, in some ways by:

Rules: If one player decides to change or break the rules, their opponent will react to this deviant act in some way (by protesting or refusing to continue playing, for example).

Conditions: Each player must, in this competitive environment, take note of how their opponent is playing - by responding to certain moves or moving in ways that produce particular responses from their opponent.
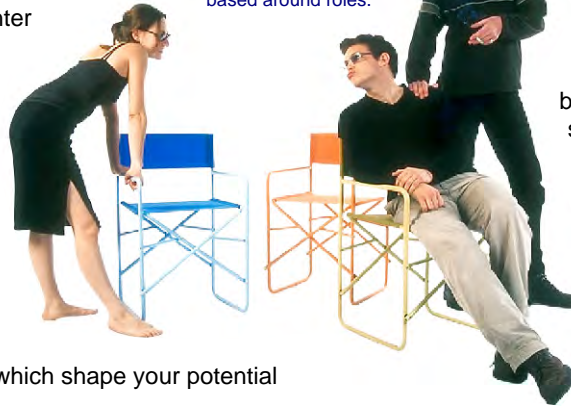
Structure and Action: Explanations

We can dig deeper into concepts of structure and action by both developing them in more detail and exploring the relationship between the two ideas.

Social Action: **Weber** (1922) drew an important distinction between the concepts of *behaviour* and *action* on the basis that behaviour becomes action when it is directed towards other people in such a way that it takes account of how others act. If this is a little unclear, think about the following ideas:

• **Behaviour**: **Weber** argued the animal world was governed by *behaviour*, rather than action because animal behaviour is not based on any understanding of how it might affect other animals. When a dog barks, for example, it does not understand how this behaviour affects other dogs or indeed other animals.

• **Action**: The social world, on the other hand is, for **Weber**, governed by action. Whenever we act, we do so in the knowledge of how our behaviour might impact on people at whom the action is directed. For example, whenever you have a conversation you're engaging in *social action* because you're interacting – how you behave is influenced by how the other person behaves and vice versa.

In this respect, social action involves a range of things that simple behaviour excludes. For example, it involves:

Your move?

Meanings: Whatever we say or do means something to both ourselves and others. When I'm getting ready to boogie-on-down at the local disco on a Friday night after a hard week teaching, for example, I choose what clothes to wear carefully. This is because I aim to make an impression on my disco-buddies – my choice of clothes has meaning to both me ("How cool do I look!") and the people with whom I interact ("Why would anyone think they looked good in those clothes?"). This is not, of course, to say we always fully understand what our actions mean to other people (as my disco example probably demonstrates), nor that our actions will mean the same things to others as they mean to us. This, however, leads to the idea of:

Interpretations: Our behaviour is constantly open to interpretation, both by ourselves ("Why did I wear that tie with that shirt?") and others ("Nice tie, shame about the dancing"). In addition, interpretation reflects back on meaning since, as we've suggested, how I interpret the behaviour of others is going to depend on what it means to me.

Negotiations: Thinking about how people interact involves a certain level of negotiation; that is, we are able to "discuss" (in the widest sense of the word) the meaning of our actions and how others should interpret them. Social life and social interaction, in this respect, doesn't simply involve obeying rules without question since the meaning of our behaviour to others can change, depending on the circumstances surrounding our behaviour.

For example, whenever I start to teach a new class we lay down some basic rules of behaviour, one of which is that when I set homework I specify the date for its completion. The first piece of homework is, normally, dutifully completed on time by all my students (they're new and unsure about how I'll act if they try to hand the work in late). By the next piece of work, there's usually one student (who will, for the purpose of avoiding an expensive law suit, rename nameless – but I think you probably know who we're talking about) who asks if they can hand the work in after the deadline. This is an example of how rules are negotiated, since the student is asking the lecturer to *renegotiate* the established rule.

I'm sorry but I'm really going to have to come down hard on you about this homework situation.

This is a crucial point in my teaching since how I respond to this deviant (norm-breaking) behaviour sets the tone for all future homework deadlines – if I extend the deadline for this student (their hamster had, after all, been eaten by their aunt and they were too traumatised by this sad turn of events to even think about completing the work that had been set) then I

send a signal to my students that deadlines are negotiable and rules are flexible. If, however, I say the student must hand in the work on time or leave the course I've sent a different message – one that says "Don't mess with me 'cos I'm a hard, heartless, dude" who cares nothing for hamsters, aunts or indeed traumatic life experiences (or something to that effect anyway).

Social Structure: The concept of social structure, as we've suggested, focuses on group behaviour (usually, but not exclusively, on very large groups – social *institutions* such as education for example) and how social life is *patterned* (in terms of regularities in group behaviour). An easy way to develop our thoughts about social structures is to illustrate this idea using the concept of:
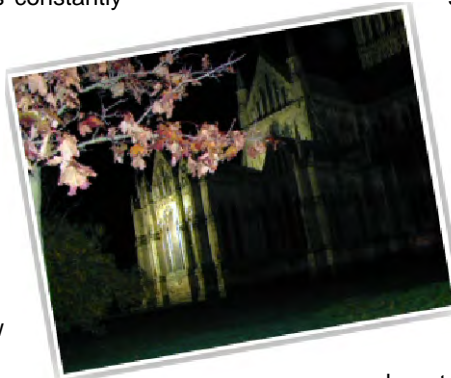
Whoooo-oooooo: Spooky

Haunting suggested by **Meighan** (1981), when he argues social actions are always surrounded by the g*hosts of social structures*. We are all, he argues, *haunted* by things we cannot see but which nevertheless affect our behaviour. For example, when teachers and students enter a classroom (for the purpose of education) the interaction between them is haunted by things like:

• **Physical environment**: Whether the room is warm and inviting or, alternatively, cold, dark and off-putting; whether the classroom resembles a prison cell or a bright, modern, learning lab – such things affect the teaching and learning process.

• **Knowledge** being taught: Classroom teaching reflects what our culture values (or doesn't value, as the case may be). What and how you're taught and the ways you're allowed, as students, to demonstrate knowledge are all evidence of the impact of social structures. Is, for example, *theoretical knowledge* - such as the ability to write essays about Shakespeare - more valued than *practical knowledge*, such as the ability to build a brick wall?

• **Language** of education: The language we speak is structured in terms of both grammatical rules (know what I mean?) and in terms of how it can be used to communicate ideas. At A-level, for example, you're expected to learn the *technical language* of the subjects (such as Sociology, Physics or Media Studies) you're studying if you want to do well in your exams.

• **Demands** of employers: If employers require qualifications from their workforce, teachers are haunted (in terms of what they teach, when they teach it and so forth) by the ghost of examinations. In our education system, for example, students have to be taught against a background of preparation for formal examinations - they have to learn the techniques involved, what constitutes knowledge acceptable to an examiner and so forth.

Meighan's concept of "**haunting**" (in terms of the ideas we've just noted) can be applied to our understanding of the role and purpose of the education system.

Social Structure and Social Action: The concepts of structure and action are both important, in terms of understanding the relationship between society and the individual, and complementary. Although we're all individuals, our behavioural choices are influenced, limited and enhanced by the framework of rules and responsibilities (social structures) that surround us as we go about our daily lives. Just as we cannot conceive of society without individuals (who, after all, but people can create society?) it's very difficult to think about people without needing to refer to the various ways our behaviour is structured. Ideas about structure and action, therefore, are fundamental to sociologists (just as they are, probably unwittingly, to us all) because they reflect two important ideas about social behaviour:

It's lonely being an individual - but at least you can be moody for a reason...

1. Diversity: On the one hand, people are free to make choices about their behaviour and this results in **cultural diversity** (or difference) over how they organise their society and relationships. We can demonstrate this idea by looking at examples of how different cultures view the same behaviour:

In **Britain**, it's legal for an 18 year old to order a pint of beer in a pub. In **America**, an 18 year old exhibiting the same behaviour is committing a criminal offence (you have to be at least 21 for this behaviour to be legal).

In **Britain**, when you meet someone it's acceptable to shake their hand. In **Japan**, it's more socially acceptable to bow when greeting someone. The depth of the bow is important – if greeting someone of a *higher social status* you should bow lower than they do. In **India**, shaking hands with someone of the opposite sex is unacceptable.

In **America**, to beckon someone with the palm facing upwards and crooking your index finger is an acceptable way of calling someone towards you. In **India**, the same action is viewed as an insult (the palm should always face downward, in case you were wondering).

2. Culture: On the other hand, our behavioural choices are influenced by both the society / culture into which we are born and our relationship to other people (whether as family, friends and work colleagues or

simply on the basis of our awareness of sharing things (like a common nationality) with others in our society). A key idea to understand, therefore, is that in order to engage in *social action* there must exist some sort of *framework* (or *structure*) within which that action can take place. For example, in terms of the cultural diversity examples we've just noted, the framework might include things like:

Verbal communication: It's difficult to communicate with someone if you don't share a language with them.

Non-verbal communication, which involves the ability to understand gestures, body language, roles being played and the respective statuses of the social actors.

Sociological Perspectives: Observations

The distinction we've made between the concepts of "social structure" and "social action" represent general observations about the relationship between the individual, on the one hand, and society on the other and we can refine the focus of these ideas somewhat by thinking about the various ways sociologists explain their relationship in more specific terms. To do this we can start to outline a number of different **sociological perspectives** - or, to put it another way, different ways of seeing, thinking about and understanding the social world. However, before we outline how the views of different (individual) sociologists can be broadly grouped into "sociological perspectives", we need to note two things:

Firstly we need to take on board the idea that it's possible for people to view the same behaviour yet "see" it from a different perspective and, consequently, interpret its meaning and significance differently.

Secondly, some sociologists view *social structures* as the most important factor in understanding behaviour while other sociologists see *social action* as the key factor. A third group argue both should be given equal prominence in any explanation of behaviour.

What it would be helpful to do next, therefore, is outline some of the main characteristics of sociological perspectives within these three general categories.

Structuralist Perspectives

For Structuralist sociologists, the key idea, as you might have guessed, is the way social structures shape and, possibly, determine people's behaviour. Structuralist perspectives (which for our convenience can be sub-divided into two further categories – *Consensus* and *Conflict* Structuralism) focus on the following ideas:

Roles, routines and responsibilities: In other words, understanding how the relationships we form "lock us into" orderly and broadly predictable behaviour.

Group, rather than individual, behaviour: The interest here is looking at how cultural rules limit our behavioural choices through the *social pressures* they exert. Just as our behaviour is constrained by *physical objects* (walls and tables for example), it's also constrained by *social objects* (such as roles, norms and values).

Institutions not individuals: Developing from the above, Structuralists argue we should examine large social groups (families, for example) if we are to understand how society works and, for this reason, you sometimes see this perspective called *macro* (or "large-scale") sociology.

Objectivity: This relates to the idea of people being *objects* (in the same way as we refer to things like tables as objects). For Structuralists, people are often portrayed as "puppets", their behaviour being influence, shaped and occasionally determined by the "invisible hand" of society.

Action Perspectives

In some ways social action perspectives are the opposite of structural perspectives and for action sociologists, the emphasis is on the way people create the social world through their relationships and actions. These sociologists, therefore, tend to focus on ideas like:

Individual choices: In some ways, action sociology is a type of *social psychological* perspective, one that tries to understand social behaviour (or action) from the individual's point-of-view - understanding, for example, the different ways people see the social world, their place in it and their relationship to others.

People create society: An obvious point, perhaps, but a significant

one. For action theorists it's important to remember "society" is *not* a thing; rather it consists of people going about their lives on a daily basis, creating and recreating a "sense of society" as they do so. Action sociologists often refer to the idea of seeing society as "a thing" (something that has a real, concrete, existence in the same way that people and objects have a real, physical, existence) as an *error of reification*; "reification", in this context, refers to the idea of giving human emotions to things that are not human (like calling a ship or car "she", for example, or, to use another example, when animated films give human characteristics – speech, emotions and the like – to animals). Action sociologists argue that Structuralists commit a *reification error* by treating something that is not alive / not human ("society") as if it had the kind of characteristics we associate with human beings (such as when **Durkheim** (1895), for example, talks about societies having "personalities"). In general, therefore, the focus on individual behaviours is sometimes called *micro* (or "small scale") sociology.

Meanings: To explain behaviour we must examine what people understand about the social world in which they live. We have, in short, to understand how people "define situations" because how we define a situation (what it *means* to them) determines how we will behave in that situation.

Subjectivity relates to the idea of people being able to think about both their own behaviour and that of others – to make decisions and choices, for example. Rather than being puppets, people are seen more as actors on the "stage" of society.

Structuration

This type of perspective (as developed by, for example **Giddens**, 1998) aims to combine the ideas of structure and action to arrive at a sociological perspective that expresses two main ideas:

1. People make society: As we've already seen, the idea of a society (or, indeed, any social group) is nonsensical without people. Only people can create societies (which reflects the action approach noted above)

2. Society makes people: On the other hand, the idea of social action can only have meaning when we place it in a structural context. For example, the only reason these words have meaning to you is because they exist within a structure of language (rules we need to obey in order to communicate effectively). Although there is a clear structure to our language (based on grammatical norms), we can be *actively creative* in the way we use it – not just through the ideas and emotions we can express, but also in our ability to adapt the structure of language itself – as these two examples demonstrate:

Shakespeare

To be or not to be, that is the question

A rose by any other name would smell as sweet

Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?

One more unto the breech, dear friends, once more

Txt Messaging

2b or not 2b thats ?

a @(---`---`--- by any otha name wd sml swEt

rm rm w4Ru rm?

1nc mr un2 T brech dr frnds 1nc mr

"When a 13-year-old Scottish girl handed in an essay written in text message shorthand, she explained to her flabbergasted teacher that it was easier than Standard English. She wrote:

'My smmr hols wr CWOT. B4, we used 2go2 NY 2C my bro, his GF & thr 3 :- kids FTF. ILNY, it's a gr8 plc.'.

Translation

"My summer holidays were a complete waste of time. Before, we used to go to New York to see my brother, his girlfriend and their three screaming kids face to face. I love New York. It's a great place".

Source: **http://www.bbc.co.uk**

Sociological Perspectives: Explanations

Having identified some broad features of different sociological approaches, we can break these categories down to look in more detail at a number of specific sociological perspectives:

Structuralist Perspectives

For Structuralist sociologists society, as **Jones** (1985) argues, is seen as: "A structure of (cultural) rules", guiding our behaviour and telling us things like: How to behave appropriately in any given situation and what to expect in terms of the behaviour of others. From this general perspective, therefore, individual behaviour is considered both uninteresting (Structuralists are not particularly concerned about why some individuals don't like going to school) and relatively unimportant. The fact some children don't like going to school is what **Mills** (1959) has called a:

Private problem: It's an issue for a small number of people and not very interesting to the majority. If, however, everyone stopped going to school this would represent a:
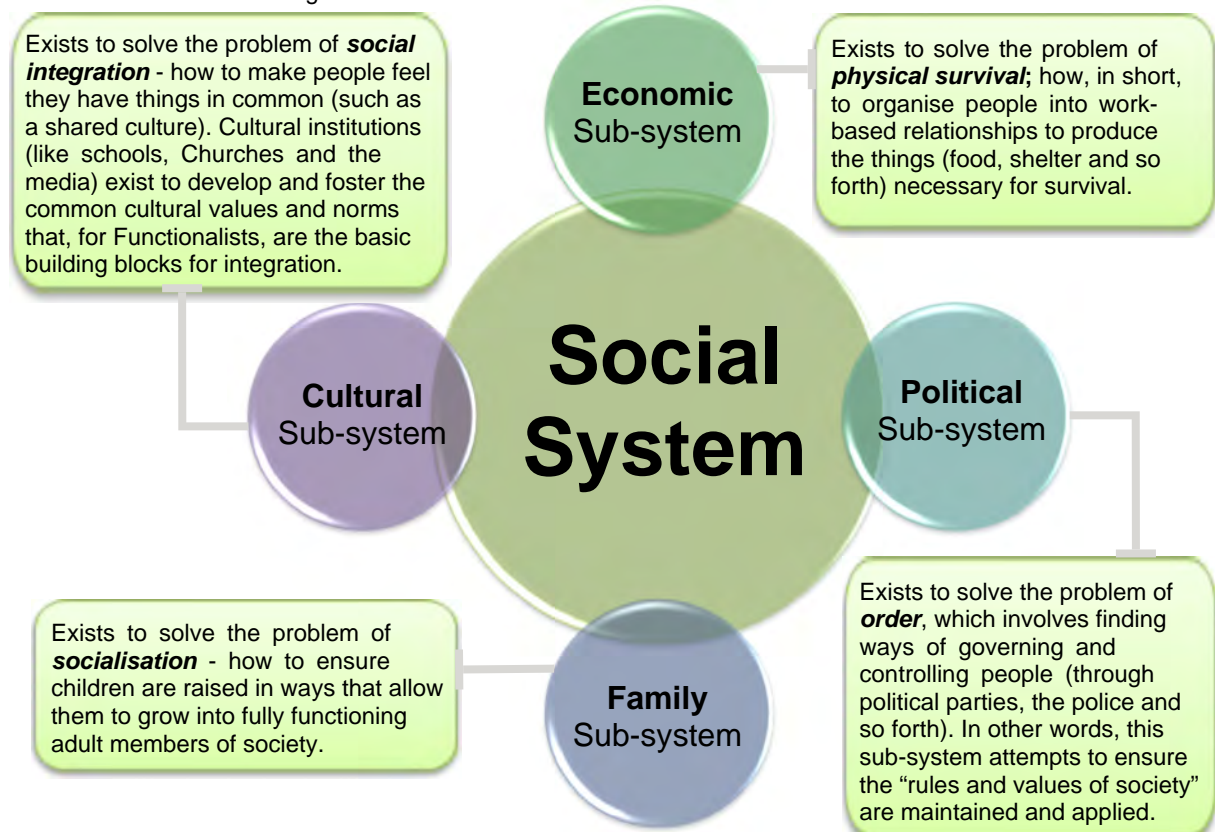
Public issue – something of concern to everyone. Structural sociologists, therefore, start to get interested at the point where *private problems* become *public issues*.

Attention, in this respect, is focused on how society pressurises individuals to perform roles, for example, so social life can continue on an orderly, predictable, basis. This general idea – that sociologists should study the way society impacts on individual behaviour – represents the main way Structuralist sociologists differ from Action sociologists. However, just to complicate matters we can, as I noted earlier, sub-divide structural perspectives into two further categories:

Consensus

Consensus Structuralism focuses on the way social order is created and maintained through agreement ("consensus") - through, for example, the development of shared norms and values. In this respect, one of the main *consensus perspectives* we can outline is:

Functionalism

As with most, if not all, sociological perspectives, one of the key questions for Functionalists is that of how **social order** and **stability** is created and maintained – and the answer is to be found in two areas. The first of these is an explanation of how societies are organised at the level of the:

Social System (sometimes called the "*systemic level of* analysis"): This involves the idea that the various parts of a society work together in harmony, such that each part is dependent on other parts of the system - an idea that is sometimes expressed in terms of an:

Organismic analogy (society is like a living organism): An easy way to visualise both the idea of a social system and the way each part of that system is inter-locking and interdependent is to think in terms of society being like a **human body**. Societies, from a traditional Functionalist perspective, consist of interconnected parts in much the same way the different parts of the body are interconnected - the various parts (heart, lungs, brain etc.) work together to form a living thing. In a similar way, the different parts of a society (family, school. Work...) are interconnected and work together to form a social system.

Keeping both this analogy and the idea of interconnections in mind, we can develop our ideas about Functionalist perspectives by noting that just as a human body has certain vital organs (things like the heart or the brain) that, if injured or damaged, can lead to death, so too does any society have "vital organs" that we can characterise, according to **Parsons'** (1937), as:

Sub-systems: **Parsons** argues every social system consists of four very large groups of people (or, as he puts it, "*functional sub-system*s"), each of which performs a different, but related, set of functions based on certain "problems" faced by every known society. These sub-systems (and the main problem they exist to solve) can be characterised in the following terms:

Exists to solve the problem of *social integration* - how to make people feel they have things in common (such as a shared culture). Cultural institutions (like schools, Churches and the media) exist to develop and foster the common cultural values and norms that, for Functionalists, are the basic building blocks for integration.

Economic Sub-system

Exists to solve the problem of *physical survival*; how, in short, to organise people into work-based relationships to produce the things (food, shelter and so forth) necessary for survival.

Cultural Sub-system

Social System

Political Sub-system

Exists to solve the problem of *socialisation* - how to ensure children are raised in ways that allow them to grow into fully functioning adult members of society.

Family Sub-system

Exists to solve the problem of *order*, which involves finding ways of governing and controlling people (through political parties, the police and so forth). In other words, this sub-system attempts to ensure the "rules and values of society" are maintained and applied.

We can develop the analogy by noting that just as a living human being requires the various organs of the body to be connected and working together (the heart pumps blood containing oxygen to the brain and so forth) a functioning social system requires connections to be made between these four sub-systems – and the mechanism that achieves this end is the idea of:

Purpose and Need: Social systems fit together on the basis of *institutional* purposes and needs. For example, for a family institution to exist (and perform its *functions*) it *needs* to be able to survive. The work institution performs this survival function in our society by allowing family members to earn the money they need to buy the food they consume (amongst other things); conversely, in order to fulfil this *purpose*, work *needs* families to produce socialised human beings; in more complex societies, such as the contemporary UK, an education system is also needed to provide the kinds of skills (such as literacy and numeracy) required by more advanced work processes. Considered in this way Functionalism is a perspective that focuses on *consensus*, since each part of society (just like each part of the human body) must perform its functions in cooperation with other parts of society. Everything that exists in a society, therefore, has both *purpose* (what it exists to do) and *needs* (things it requires from other parts of the system in order to fulfil its purpose or functions).

Although this first level of explanation is important, it isn't the whole story – Functionalists need to explain how *individuals* fit into this overall *structure* – and this leads to the second part of the explanation in that they argue each sub system consists of various:

Institutions (a pattern of shared, stable, behaviour) whose existence and behaviour is governed by the fact that any organised social group (such as a family or a whole society) can only hang together if people do not simply pursue their own individual, selfish, self-interests.

In other words, if the millions of unique, thinking, human beings who make up our society simply acted in their own selfish interests things, as they say, would fall apart .

Cooperation is at the heart of Functionalist concepts of social behaviour - people working together to produce "society".

The mechanism that prevents this, according to someone like **Parsons** (1937) is the concept of:

Functional prerequisites: This reflects the idea that for individuals to survive and prosper they need to be part of larger co-operative groups – and for this to happen they must *combine* to solve a number of fundamental problems (or *functional prerequisites* – the things that must occur if society is to continue to function). In this respect, every social institution (such as an *education system*) must develop ways of solving "four problems of existence":

1. **Goal maintenance**: Any institution, if it is to flourish, needs to provide people with goals to achieve and some way of moving people towards their attainment. The education system, for example, provides goals such as academic qualifications and training and a general means towards how these are to be achieved (through examinations, tests and the like).

2. **Adaptation**: There needs to be some way for people to achieve institutional goals and, in terms of an education system, this involves providing some form of co-operative *environment* (such as a school, classrooms and teachers) within which people can work to achieve such goals.

3. **Integration**: People have to be motivated to achieve (educational) goals and one way for this to happen is to encourage a "sense of belonging" (in this instance to both wider society – where educational qualifications have currency in that they can be used to "buy" a career in the workplace – and the education system itself). Integration represents the ways that a school, for example, tries to make people feel they both "belong" to the institution (something like a school uniform might serve this function) and have things in common with other members of the institution (such as working with teachers to achieve a common educational goal). Integration is closely related to the wider function of:

Social Solidarity – a general belief people have things in common (a sense of "Being British", for example) that bind them together. Integration mechanisms (such as the aforementioned school uniforms) represent the specific ways *social solidarity* (a sense of group identity) is encouraged in individuals.

4. **Latency**: This represents a way of managing potential conflicts within an institution – motivating people, rewarding conformity, punishing deviance and so forth. In other words it represents the idea of *rule creation* that allows and encourages a certain institutionally desirable pattern of behaviour to develop and be maintained (hence this prerequisite is sometimes called "*pattern maintenance*"). Schools, for example, have a range of rules governing such things as attendance, behaviour, dress and so forth designed to maintain a particular way of institutional life.

Goal Maintenance

Adaptation

Integration

Latency

Functional Prerequisites: The "GAIL" model

Key Criticisms

Functionalism, like any sociological perspective, has its critics, and we can identify three key criticisms of this general perspective:

Social Change: It's sometimes difficult to explain why anything in a society should change if it performs an essential and necessary function. In this respect, Functionalism is often seen as a politically conservative perspective that lends its support to the *status quo* (the desire to "keep things as they are"). Change, when it does occur, is likely to be slow and evolutionary, rather than rapid and revolutionary.
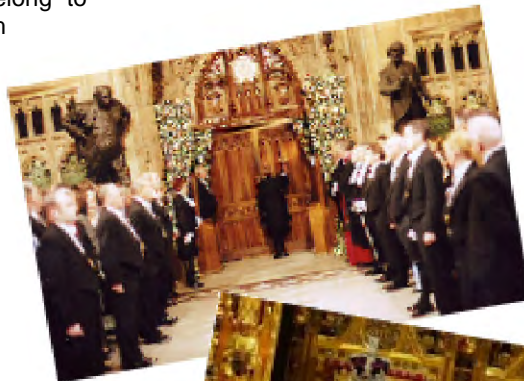
Do ceremonies such as the State Opening of Parliament and symbols - such as the Monarchy - promote a sense of social solidarity in our society?

Dysfunction: Although Functionalists focus (not too surprisingly perhaps) on the idea of function, consensus and harmony, they do recognise some things can be dysfunctional - the idea that too much (or not enough) of something may be dangerous or damaging to society. For example, although crime can have a *social solidarity* function - if it unites people against a common (criminal) enemy - too much crime can leave people feeling uncertain about the rule of law and their own safety (and hence it would be dysfunctional). The main criticism here is that Functionalists tend to place too much emphasis on the "beneficial aspects" of social institutions and groups and downplay the possible significance of any dysfunctional tendencies. Schools, for example, may be places where children learn many useful things – but they're also places where bullying, sexism and racism may exist.

Although crime has a number of functions (you might like to think about what they might be), too much crime in society is dysfunctional (again, you might like to think about possible reasons for this).

Tautology: This a statement that contains its own proof and Functionalists are sometimes accused of producing such arguments to justify their ideas. For example, the claim that "If something exists in society, it has a function" is supported by the argument that "It has a function because it exists…". A tautological statement (such as the one I've just noted), in other words, cannot be disproved.

Conflict

The key idea for this, rather different, perspective is that societies are generally stable and orderly because of the ability of *powerful groups* to impose their ideas on other groups (the powerless). Unlike Consensus theorists who see society as being broadly beneficial, in some way, to the majority of its members, Conflict theorists argue some groups benefit far more than others. Two types of Conflict structuralism we can examine in more detail are *Marxism* (where the basis of conflict is *economic* – different *social classes* constantly battling against each other) and *Feminism*, where the basis of conflict is *gender* - men and women battling it out with each other for supremacy.
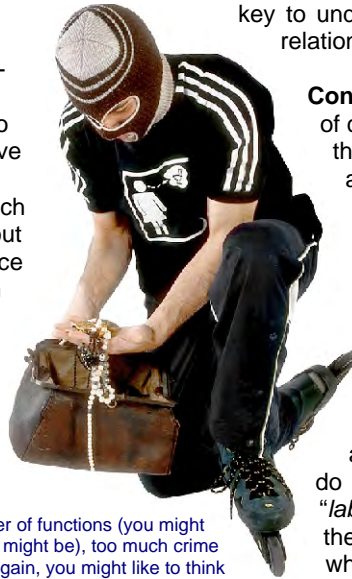
Marxism

We can highlight a number of the key ideas of this perspective in terms of ideas like:

Work: For Marxists, the most important form of activity in any society is work, for the deceptively important reason that all other forms of social activity (politics, family, culture and the like) cannot exist without people first having secured the means to their survival (if you don't have enough to eat or a roof over your head then the lack of anything interesting to watch on TV is probably not going to be your most pressing concern). Thus, how work is socially organised (who does it, what

they do and who benefits from it) is seen as the key to understanding how all other social relationships are organised.

Conflict: The workplace is a key area of conflict in any society because of the way it is organised. Marxists argue that, in our society (called "Capitalist" for reasons that will become clear in a moment) the "*means of economic production*" (things like factories, machinery and land) are owned by one *class* of people (the *Bourgeoisie* or Ruling Class). The vast majority of people, on the other hand, own little or nothing and so are forced to sell the one thing they do own - their ability to work (their "*labour power*"). For Marxists, therefore, we have a situation in which:

• A small number of people *own the means of production* – in Capitalist societies they become very rich because they keep *profits* made from producing goods and services.

• A large number of people own nothing but their ability to work for wages – these people (the working-class or *Proletariat*) are relatively poor (when compared to their Bourgeois employers).

Conflict potentially occurs in this type of society because:

• **Owners** want to keep as much of their profit as possible (the less you pay in wages, the greater the amount you can keep to buy desirable things – like Chelsea Football Club, for example).

• **Non-owners** want a larger slice of the economic pie. The working-class also want the desirable things their society has to offer – it's in their interests, therefore, to demand more from employers.

Competition (and therefore *conflict*) is inevitable. Competition is not simply encouraged in Capitalist societies; it's also

Work - good for the soul (especially when it's pother people doing it).
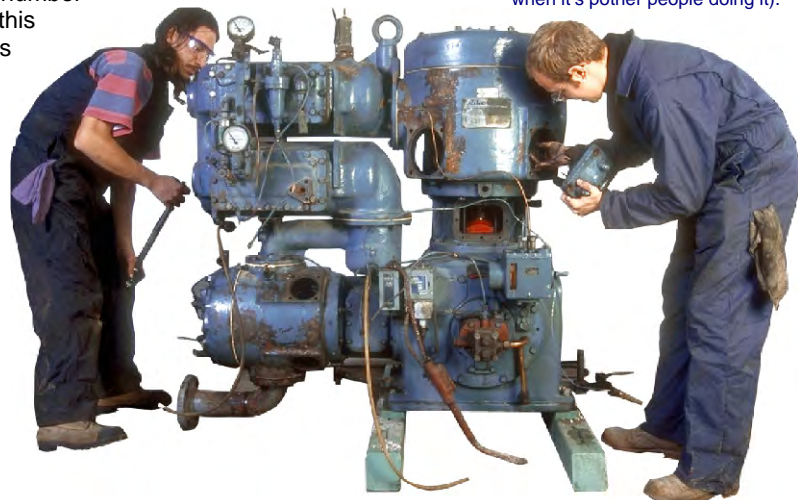
viewed as desirable since it's through competition, the argument goes, that wealth is created and progress made (through the constant invention and reinvention of new ways of doing things, for example). Although, for Marxists, economic forms of competition and conflict are, as we've noted, most significant, competition occurs throughout society - between businesses, between different groups of workers, between men and women and so forth.

Come and have a go if you think you're hard enough...

Social class: This involves grouping people in terms of their "relationship to the means of production". For Marxists, as we've just suggested, two basic classes exist in any Capitalist society:

• **The Bourgeoisie** (sometimes called the ruling or upper class): Those who own the means of production.

• **The Proletariat** (sometimes called the lower or working class): People who own nothing but their ability to work.

The picture is not quite as simple as this, of course; there may be many different relationships to the means of production – *managers*, for example, may not own a business but they can be considered to be a different social class to non-managers (sometimes called the middle class or *petit bourgeoisie*) - but you probably get the basic idea. As you might expect, because of their view of work as the most important social activity, class conflict is considered more significant than other types of conflict (such as between men and women – sex-based conflict - or different ethnic groups – "racial" conflicts)

Power: Amidst all this emphasis on conflict, you could be forgiven for thinking our society is engaged in a war of all-against-all; this, however, is clearly not the case and Marxists explain this by suggesting that those at the "top" of society (the ruling class) are not only *economically powerful*, they are also *politically powerful*. This means they control how laws are made (through politicians identifying with the interests of a ruling class) - and, of course, they can use force (the police and the army for example) – to try to minimise conflict. **Althusser** (1968) characterises these methods of social control as "**Repressive State Apparatuses**" because they represent a way of compelling people to conform. A ruling class is also, from this perspective, able to influence how people generally think about the social world through their political control / ownership of ideological institutions (such as the media and the education system) that deal in ideas (what **Althusser** calls "**Ideological State Apparatuses**").

Key Criticisms

Marxism, as you might expect, has its critics, and we can identify three key criticisms of this general perspective in the following terms:

Conflict: Marxism over-emphasises the level of conflict in society and underplays the significance of non-economic types of conflict (gender or ethnic conflicts, for example).

Some *Feminists* (see below) are especially critical of the emphasis on work-based conflicts.

Communism: For Marxists, class conflict will only end once the economic system on which it's based (Capitalism) is replaced by a Communist form of society - a type of society where work is not organised around private profit. Whatever the short-comings of Capitalist societies, Communism doesn't appear imminent...
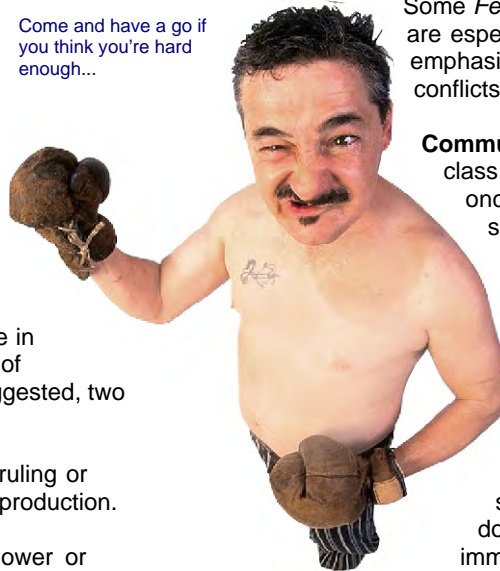
Economic determinism: Marxism assumes work is the most important institution in any society. While this may have (arguably) been true in Britain in the past, some writers (especially, as we will see, *postmodernists*) argue this is no longer the case and, consequently, question the significance of *social class* as a source of people's *identity*.

Module Link   **Culture and Identity**

The concept of identity – and the possible significance of non-class forms of identity such as age, gender and ethnicity is developed in greater depth in this Module.
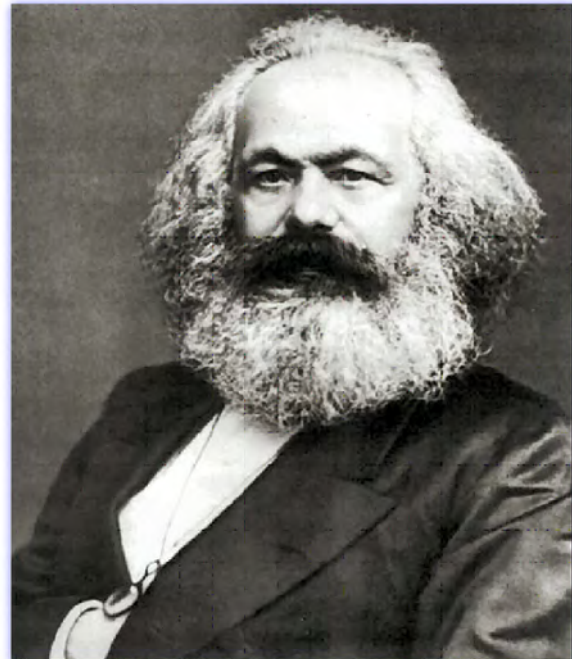
Karl Marx [1818-1883]
He may look like your favourite grandparent but don't be fooled - beneath that beard he's probably hiding a sharp pointy stick.

Feminism

Like people, "Feminism" comes in a variety of shapes and sizes – too many to properly consider here. Instead we can examine four varieties - the *classical feminist perspectives* (the ones every textbook, including, of course, this one, outlines): Liberal, Marxist and Radical feminism as well as a newer variety, sometimes called Post-feminism. The classical forms are sometimes called "2nd Wave feminism", whereas post-feminism ("post" meaning "after") is sometimes called "3rd Wave feminism" to indicate its break with classical feminisms.

Despite their differences, one theme common to all varieties of classical feminism (post-feminism has a rather different take on the matter) is the belief our society is *male-dominated*; the interests of men have always been - and continue to be - considered more important than the interests of women. We can see how this idea influences the basic beliefs of different forms of classical feminism in the following terms:

Liberal

**Liberal Feminism** involves a number of key ideas:

Equality of Opportunity: Liberal feminists are mainly concerned with *equal opportunities* for men and women (not "equality", as such, but rather the chance to compete equally with men); in broad terms, therefore, they want an end to the *sexual discrimination* which denies women the opportunity to compete on equal terms with men - and one way to establish equality of opportunity, they generally argue, is through the:

Legal System: Liberal feminists have been active, in Britain and America for example, in promoting a range of *anti-discriminatory* laws which, they argue, are needed to redress the historical gender imbalance. In the UK, legislation such as *the Sex Discrimination Act* (1975), which made discrimination in the workplace illegal and *the Equal Pay Act* (1970) are examples of this approach to gender inequality.

Dual Role: The idea women increasingly play a dual role (as both carers within the family and paid employees) is, according to liberal feminists, a major area of inequality that needs to be addressed – both in terms of changing male attitudes to family life and through the continued development of anti-discriminatory laws and practices (such as the introduction of child-care facilities for working women, maternity and paternity leave and so forth).

Key Criticisms

Status inequality: Critics (not the least being other feminist perspectives) argue *legal equality* is not the same as *status equality* (the idea of
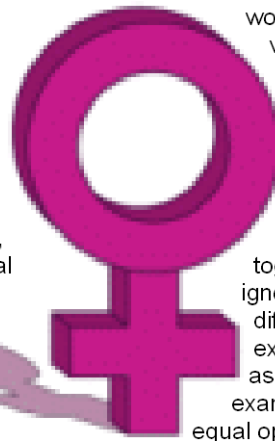
women having equal status to men). In other words, women are still treated in ways that assume they are inferior to men; in the UK, for example, women can expect to earn, on average during their working lifetime, 80% of male income – even when doing roughly comparable work.

Class differences: By lumping all women together as a "class", liberal feminism ignores differences in the life experiences of different women; working class women, for example, do not have the same advantages as upper class women - they face, for example, far greater difficulties in securing equal opportunities. In addition, black women, in general, have different life experiences and chances to white women.

Marxist

Marxist Feminism involves, as the label suggests, the application of Marxist ideas to gender relationships. In this respect we can note the following key ideas:

Class inequality: Marxist feminists see class inequality as the main cause of female oppression, exploitation and discrimination in our society. In a competitive, Capitalist, society men are encouraged to exploit any "weaknesses" in women's market position (for example, the fact women may be out of the workforce during pregnancy) to their own advantage.

Patriarchal Ideology (ideas that support male domination of women): Although patriarchy is an important concept, Marxist feminists use it to show how the social and economic exploitation of women is justified (by both men and women) through powerful *ideas* about masculinity and femininity. For example, ideas that men are "natural breadwinners" and women "natural homemakers" can be strong influences on people's behaviour.

Social class: Marxist feminists argue men and women are not separate (*sex-based*) classes; upper class women, for example, have very little in common with working class women except their biology (the fact they are all physically women). Men and women, the argument goes, both have an interest in creating a form of society (Communism) in which men and women are treated equally.

Domestic Labour is viewed as exploitative (because it is unpaid labour). Women are also sometimes seen as what **Barrett and McIntosh** (1982) call a:

Reserve army of labour - a concept that refers to women who are called into the workforce when the economy expands and "dumped" ("encouraged" to return to domestic labour) when the economy contracts.

Gender socialisation: The development of patriarchal ideas, attitudes and practices (such as sexual discrimination) are seen as the product of differences in the way men and women are socialised – men are not naturally exploitative of women; rather, it is the economic system (Capitalism) that encourages and rewards sexist attitudes and behaviour.

> **Module Link**   **Families and Households**
>
> The relationship between gender and domestic labour is examined in more detail in this Module.

Key Criticisms

Patriarchy: Male domination of women seems to be a feature of all known human societies, not just class-based (Capitalist) societies. Radical feminists, for example, argue this means patriarchal relationships should be given more emphasis than economic (class) relationships.

Patriarchal exploitation: Marxist feminism assumes (rightly or wrongly) men and women have similar "long-term" interests (the replacement of an unequal, patriarchal, Capitalist society with an equal, non-patriarchal, Communist society). Whether or not this is true, the development of a Communist form of society (as we've noted earlier) doesn't look a very likely prospect, in our society at least, for the foreseeable future.

Social change: A major criticism of Marxist feminism is that it ignores the extent to which society – and the respective positions of men and women - has changed and continues to change. Female lives, for example, have altered quite dramatically over the past 50 years, considered in terms of things like family responsibilities, educational achievements (where women now out-perform men at just about every level) and work opportunities.

In the light of these ideas, therefore, we can consider a third form of classical feminism:

Radical   **Radical Feminism has** a number of key ideas:

Patriarchy / Patriarchal Ideology: These are two key ideas for Radical feminists, mainly because, they argue, all known human societies have been - and remain - male dominated (a situation such feminists want to change). Given this idea, improvements in women's lives can only come about through the overthrow of the patriarchal ideas and practices that oppress women in general. This follows because Radical feminists see men and women as having basic *psychological* differences – in crude terms, men are seen to be naturally aggressive and confrontational whereas women have qualities of co-operation, caring (nurturing) and so forth. Given these basic differences,

therefore, males and females are seen in terms of the concept of:

Sex class: This type of feminism sees woman as a class (based on both a common biology and gender) with its own experiences and interests that are significantly different to those of men. Just as Marxist perspectives see the overthrow of the ruling (economic) class as the way to achieve human liberation, Radical feminists argue it's necessary for women to overthrow the ruling *sex class* (men) if they are to achieve liberation - an idea based on the concept of:

Matriarchy (female domination of men): Men are, in effect, the enemy of women because, throughout history, they have exploited women for their own gain. For this situation to end women have to establish a *matriarchal society* in terms of which the current (patriarchal) roles are reversed; instead of men dominating and exploiting women, women dominate men. **Rich** (1980) developed the term '*compulsory heterosexuality*' to express the idea that male-female relationships are the basis of patriarchy (and therefore the source of male domination) and Radical feminists often advocate lesbian relationships and the development of women-only support groups as a way of both developing matriarchal ideas and practices and rejecting their patriarchal equivalents,

Unlike most other forms of Feminism, Radical Feminists generally argue we should replace one form of domination (patriarchy) with another (matriarchy).

Public and private spheres: Discrimination against women takes place in two main areas: the *Public* (for example, the workplace where women are paid less and have lower status) and the *Private* (the home, where women carry out the majority of unpaid domestic work) – a *dual form* of female exploitation not experienced by men.

Key Criticisms

Sex class: As we've noted, female life chances, considered across categories like class, age and ethnicity, are not necessarily very similar; differences clearly exist, for example, in terms of:

• **Age** – younger women, for example, tend to have different life chances to those of older women.

• **Social class**: The life chances of upper class women are significantly different to those of lower class women.

• **Ethnicity**: The life chances of black women are different to those of white women.

We could also, of course, consider combinations of these categories to extend the argument that women – like their male counterparts – are not a particularly homogeneous cultural (as opposed to biological) grouping; young, upper class, black women, for example, have significantly different life chances to elderly, lower class, white women. The question here, therefore, is do all women share the same interests - are they, in short, a sex class or does Radical feminism downplay the importance of class, age and ethnic differences in the exploitation of women?

Psychologies: Differences in male and female psychologies can be seen as the product of *gender socialisation* rather than being *innate* (fixed and unchanging) differences. Given the opportunity women seem just as capable as men of aggressive behaviour, for example.

Are women naturally less aggressive than men - or does the social context of people's behaviour influence how they behave?

Relationships: Not all gender relationships are characterised by oppression and exploitation and the relative position of women in our society has improved / changed over the past 50 years.

Are the differences between women - class, age, ethnicity etc. - more significant than the (biological) similarities?

Criticisms of classical feminist perspectives have, in part, led to the development of a further form of feminist position we can briefly examine:

Post-Feminism

Post-Feminism is a perspective covering many different viewpoints, making it difficult to capture the flavour of all its varieties in a few short paragraphs. As the "Feminism with a Difference" web site puts it: "*The term "post-feminism" has had popular usage in Western society since the late 1980's. It refers to a belief that gender equality has been successfully achieved, while simultaneously castigating the feminist movement for making women frustrated and unhappy*". (www.difference-feminism.com).

We can, however, identify some of the key ideas of this general position in terms of:

Anti-Essentialism: The concept of *essentialism* reflects the belief there are fundamental ("essential") differences between males and females. These relate not simply to *biological differences* but, most importantly, *to psychological differences* in the way men and women think, act and feel. **Butler** (1990) argues this *essentialism* is mistaken, for two reasons:

Firstly, she rejects the claim women are a sex class.

Secondly, and more-controversially perhaps, she questions the usefulness of categories such as "man" and "woman" since, in our society today, they probably involve more *differences* than *similarities*. For example, think about the different forms of male and female identities that exist in our society - from *homophobic* men to *transsexual* women.

Gender, for **Butler**, is considered as a "*performance*" - things we do at different times rather than something we "always are" and her solution to *gender essentialism* is the subversion of separate "male" and "female" identities. She argues we should no-longer see men and women as two distinctive sexes; rather, we should see **gender** as a range of *social processes*, some of

which are similar (such as some gay men who display traditional female traits and women who display traditional masculine traits) and some of which are different.

Choice: This idea – central to **postmodern perspectives** (see below) - reflects the idea that in contemporary societies men and women have a range of choices open to them that were denied to all but the (rich) few in the past. One choice, for example, is expressed in terms of how we define ourselves (our **personal identity**) - men and women have greater freedom to construct gender identities in almost any way they choose. For post-feminists in particular, the "personal construction of femininity" often involves "reclaiming femininity" in the sense women can be both "feminine" (whatever that means in practice) and able to pursue what in the past were almost exclusively masculine preserves - things like a full-time education, a career and so forth.

Transgression: This means "cutting across categories or boundaries" and can be used in two ways here. Firstly, it relates to (traditional) ideas about masculinity and femininity – the idea, in short, you are either "a man" or "a woman". In this respect, post-feminism argues *identity transgression* occurs when women, for example, choose to adopt ways of thinking and behaving traditionally seen as "masculine". Examples here range from *Ladettes* (young women who mirror the (often outrageous) behaviour of young males – "Booze, Bonking and the Beautiful game") to *transgendered* individuals who define themselves as "neither male nor female".

Secondly, it relates to the argument that the traditional concerns of feminism (patriarchy, gender equality and so forth) are now redundant – they are concerns related to a type of society that has disappeared. As society has changed, so too have notions about gender and it's becoming increasingly meaningless to talk about "men" and "women" as if they were two separate and unrelated ideas.

Key Criticisms

Choice: For critics of post-feminism, the idea of women in general being able to exercise choice in their lives is doubtful. For the rich (whether male or female) a massive range of behavioural choices exist. For the poor, behavioural choices are far more restricted.

Class: Leading on from the above, it's clear concepts such as social class, age and ethnicity impact on the range of choices open to both men and women.

Individualism: Post-feminism has been accused of downplaying the problems faced by the majority of women, in the sense most women's lives are not characterised by unlimited choice, freedom and individual self-expression (just as the same is probably true for most male lives). As **Coppock** (1995) argues: "The irony is…that the proclamation of 'post-feminism' has occurred at precisely the same moment as

acclaimed feminist studies demonstrate that not only have women's real advancements been limited, but also there has been a backlash against feminism of international significance".

Action Perspectives

Although there are a range of competing Social Action perspectives (**Ethnomethodology**, **Phenomenology** and **Symbolic Interactionism** for example), for our purposes we can consider this perspective in terms of the catch-all category of:

Interactionism – mainly because it captures the flavour of this general position by emphasising the significance of relationships at the level of individual interactions, For Interactionist sociologists, therefore, the emphasis is on how we construct the social world through our individual relationships – and from this general perspective, "society" is something created and recreated on a daily basis by people going about their lives. In other words, unlike Structural sociologists who focus on the way society pushes and pulls the individual in various directions – "making" us form family groups or develop educational systems – Interactionists want to reverse this picture. Their interest lies in understanding and explaining the various ways human beings constantly and consciously produce and reproduce the social world through their individual and collective behaviour.

From this perspective, therefore, society is little more than a label or name that represents little more than an "*elaborate fiction*" people create as a way of explaining the limits they consciously and unconsciously place on their behaviour – an idea we can illustrate by suggesting that from an Interactionist perspective the
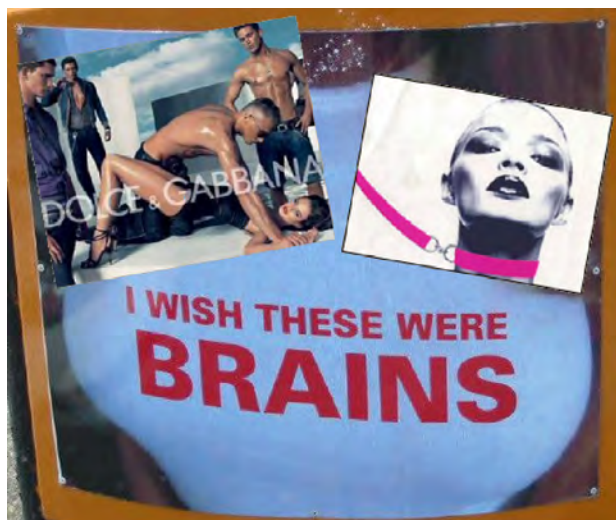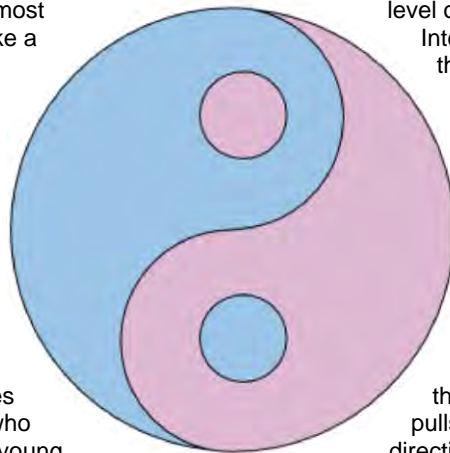
Perhaps advertisers need to be told we live in a post-feminist era...

concept of "society" is a bit like the **Hans Christian Andersen** *(1837) tale of* "The Emperor's New Clothes".

In the tale a vain Emperor is tricked into believing he's wearing a suit made from the finest cloth when, in actual fact, he's wearing nothing at all. As he parades, totally naked, through the streets of his city his loyal (and fearful) subjects all profess to marvel at the wonder and finery of the Emperor's new clothes. It's not until a child points-out that the Emperor is, in fact, totally naked that the illusion bursts.

Interactionist sociologists, in this respect, are a little like the child in the sense that they started to question the prevailing sociological orthodoxy of Structuralism – whether Consensus or Conflict – that painted a picture of "society" as a vast, invisible, all-pervading force acting on people in ways that propel them into particular forms of behaviour. What Interactionism tried to do, in this respect, was to bring the sociological focus back to individual behaviour by trying to understand the various *socio-psychological* processes through which people constructed both social groups and, by extension, a sense of society.

In the process Interactionists such as **Garfinkel** (1967) demonstrated not just how societies were constructed through social interaction but also how precarious the nature of our "taken-for-granted" beliefs about the social world actually are – as evidenced by this classic example of how easy it is to disrupt people's understandings and expectations by simply questioning their everyday use of language…

> "Hi, Ray. How is your girl friend feeling?"
>
> "What do you mean, "How is she feeling?" Do you mean physical or mental?"
>
> "I mean how is she feeling? What's the matter with you? (He looked peeved.)"
>
> "Nothing. Just explain a little clearer what do you mean?"
>
> "Skip it. How are your Med School applications coming?"
>
> "What do you mean, "How are they?""
>
> "You know what I mean."
>
> "I really don't."
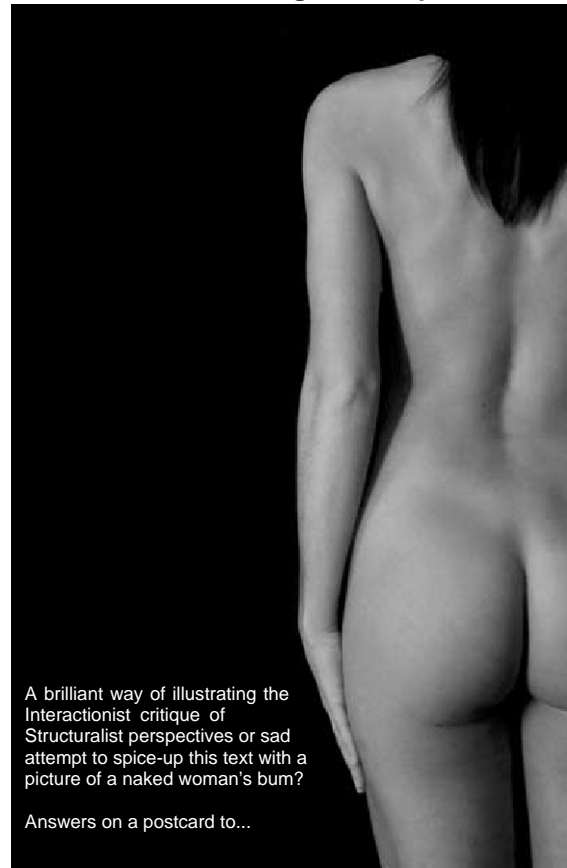>
> "What's the matter with you? Are you sick?"

For Interactionists social life is a series of *encounters* - separate, but linked, episodes in our lives that give the appearance of order and stability - not something imposed on us ("from above", by society). Order and predictability exist, therefore, for as long as we *act* in ways that serve to maintain them.

Key Ideas

Interactionism's key ideas are:

Social Interaction: The social world is created by the "interactions between people", a process that involves:

Meanings: In terms of social interaction, this perspective stresses the importance of what we each understand by something (its *meaning*) that works on two levels.

A brilliant way of illustrating the Interactionist critique of Structuralist perspectives or sad attempt to spice-up this text with a picture of a naked woman's bum?

Answers on a postcard to...

Firstly, to interact socially we must develop shared "**definitions of any situation**" (in the above example one participant deliberately questioned the other's definition of the situation by asking questions that were interpreted as rude and ignorant). To put this another way, if a teacher defines a situation as "education" and her student defines it as a skateboard park, a free-and-frank exchange of views might develop.

Secondly, if the meaning of something is only developed through interaction then meanings can change fairly easily. For example, in terms of gender, the meaning of being "masculine" or "feminine" in our society has changed quite dramatically over the past few years – and if this idea is valid, it means the social world always involves:

Negotiated realities: This idea follows from the above because society and culture are not seen as things that are necessarily fixed or slow to change. On the contrary, because meanings are *negotiated* (or argued over) the social world is fluid and can, on occasions, change rapidly. As we've suggested, Interactionists don't see society as a "thing" acting on our behaviour (since it has no *objective reality* outside of social interaction); rather, society is just a convenient:

Label we give to the pressures, rules and responsibilities that arise out of our social relationships. The idea of labelling (or naming) is an important one since it suggests how Interactionists view social structures as forms of social interaction. *Labelling theory*, for example, argues that when we name something (such as categorising people as "young" or "elderly") we associate the name with a set of characteristics, our knowledge of which is used to guide our behaviour (which, in a roundabout way, brings us

back to the idea of a *definition of a situation*). For example, the characteristics I assign to the label "student" lead me to expect certain things from a person so labelled, in the same way that I would expect something quite different if they were labelled as "criminal" or "shop assistant".

Key Criticisms

Over-emphasis on "the individual": The emphasis on individuals, meanings and interaction ignores the idea social structures do seem to impact on our lives (as we saw when we looked at **Meighan's** idea of *haunting*). In another respect, by focusing on the *social-psychological* aspects of social life, Interactionist sociology fails to explain adequately how and why people seem to behave in broadly similar ways (such as living in families, obeying the law, going to school or work and so forth).

Social structures: A major criticism of Interactionism is that it doesn't explain how individual meanings, definitions and interpretations are affected by social structures. For example, if I define a situation as one thing (a fancy dress party, for example) and others define it as something else (a game of cricket), this will have serious consequences for me (and not just in terms of the fact I can't bat properly in my chicken outfit) – which introduces the idea of **power** as an important concept. We are not equal in our ability to define situations – some groups (or classes) have greater power than others when it comes to defining a situation as "real" (and if you don't believe me, ask a police officer).

Postmodernism

This is a relatively new type of sociological perspective, one developed over the past 15 or so years and although we've characterised it as an action approach, you need to be careful with such a characterisation (as you do, of course, with   any attempt to categorise sociological   perspectives) for a couple of reasons:

Firstly, as you will no-doubt discover, postmodernism doesn't fit neatly into any particular theoretical category.

Secondly, as writers like **Usher and Edwards** (1994) argue, postmodernism "is best understood as a state of mind, a critical, self-referential posture and style, a different way of seeing and working, rather than a fixed body of ideas, a

clearly worked out position or a set of critical methods and techniques". In other words we should be wary of trying to characterise a diverse body of ideas and beliefs as a coherent "perspective" (sociological or otherwise).

Keeping these ideas in mind, however, this isn't to say it's not possible to identify a number of general ideas that both feature in postmodern accounts of social behaviour and provide a general flavour of these approaches to understanding the social world.
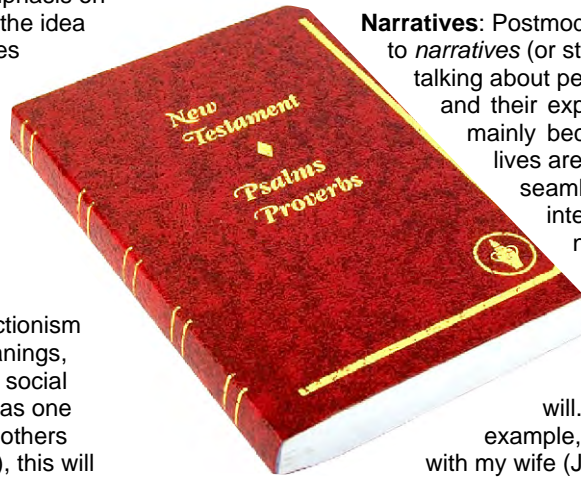
Narratives: Postmodernists refer to *narratives* (or stories) when talking about people's lives and their experiences, mainly because our lives are viewed as a seamless web of inter-locking narratives which we define and move between at will. For example, when I'm with my wife (Julia, since you ask), the narrative I construct is one of a loving, helpful, dutiful, husband, alert to her every need, whim and desire. However, when I'm out down the pub with my mates the narrative I construct is somewhat different (I'll leave it to your imagination). I have no problem moving between these narratives and I am always the person I believe myself to be in each (which means I'm either a fantastic person or a consummate liar).

Metanarratives are "big stories" we construct either individually or, more usually, as a culture to explain something about the nature of the social and natural worlds. Examples of metanarratives might include *religions* (such as Christianity or Islam) and political philosophies (Socialism or Conservativism for example). For **Lyotard** (1979) postmodernism is characterised by an "incredulity towards metanarratives". In other words, he argues big stories about the world are not believable or sustainable since, at some point their claims to explain "everything about something" are challenged, breakdown or co-exist in an uneasy ignorance of each other. If you think about it, Christianity or Islam can't both be "right" since they explain the same thing (religion) in different ways, just as political philosophies like Conservatism or Socialism offer competing explanations of the social world that are believed (or not believed) by millions of people in our society.

Globalisation: The idea we now live in a *global society* (we no-longer behave in terms of national boundaries) means the way we think about, communicate and interact with people is changing rapidly (think about how easily email lets you communicate with people around the globe).

Globalisation - the world in your hands?

Identity refers to "who we believe ourselves to be" or how we define ourselves and in the past, postmodernism argues, identities were more likely to be:

Were identities in the past more centred? Are identities in contemporary societies more likely to be decentred?

Centred: That is, clear, relatively fixed and certain. For example, in the past people in our society had a much clearer ("*centred*") idea about what it meant to be "a man" or "a women" because there were relatively few choices available to them in terms of the meaning of these categories. The same is true for categories like age, class and ethnicity. In postmodern society, however, things have changed (perhaps) to such an extent we now have a wide range of possible choices about "how to be a man" or "how to be feminine" - an idea that leads to the concept of:

Decentred identity: As the range of possible meanings expand (in terms of sexuality, for example, I can choose to be heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, asexual, transsexual…) people become *less certain* ("*decentred*") about how they are supposed to behave (think, for example, about the many possible ways you can play the role of student). Under the influence of *globalisation*, categories such as class, gender, age and ethnicity are easily combined to create a whole new range of identities (such as some young British Asians defining themselves as *Brasian* – a mix of both British and Asian cultures and identities). If identities are changing, under the influence of choice, we need to consider the idea of:

Uncertainty: The downside to "almost unlimited choice" from which we *pick-and-mix* our identities is *uncertainty* and confusion about who we are and how we're supposed to behave. The "old certainties" of class, gender, age and ethnicity no longer have much currency in terms of telling us how to behave "appropriately".

Key Criticisms

Choice: One criticism of this idea, as we've seen, is that for the vast majority of people, "choice" is pretty much an illusion – they simply do not have

Some writers doubt that the marriage between sociology and postmodernism is one destined to last...

the money, power or resources to exercise choice in ways that significantly change their life.

Identity: Despite the claims of postmodernists, a large number of people in our society still define themselves (or are defined by others) in fairly traditional ways when it comes to categories such as class, gender, age and ethnicity.

Disputes: Some sociologists have argued (**Sociology Review**, 1998), the concept of postmodernism is not a particularly useful one when applied to the analysis of social behaviour.

Gershuny for example, argues: "Postmodernists conclude that we have reached the end of the grand theory and that now we must retreat to something altogether less ambitious in our attempts to understand society. My conclusion, by contrast, is that we must search for new theories".

Giddens, on the other hand, disputes the very use of the term "postmodern" when he argues: "I believe we still live in an era of modernity and modernisation" and **Westergaard** offers the following (somewhat scathing) assessment: "In my view, postmodernist approaches constitute neither a theoretical advance - on the contrary - nor even a backward step, but rather a declaration of intellectual bankruptcy".

Structuration

As we've suggested, this type of perspective is based around the idea that it is possible to combine structural and action perspectives in the following way:

Structure and Action: Unlike the previous perspectives (with the possible exception of postmodernism, since this, by-and-large, rejects
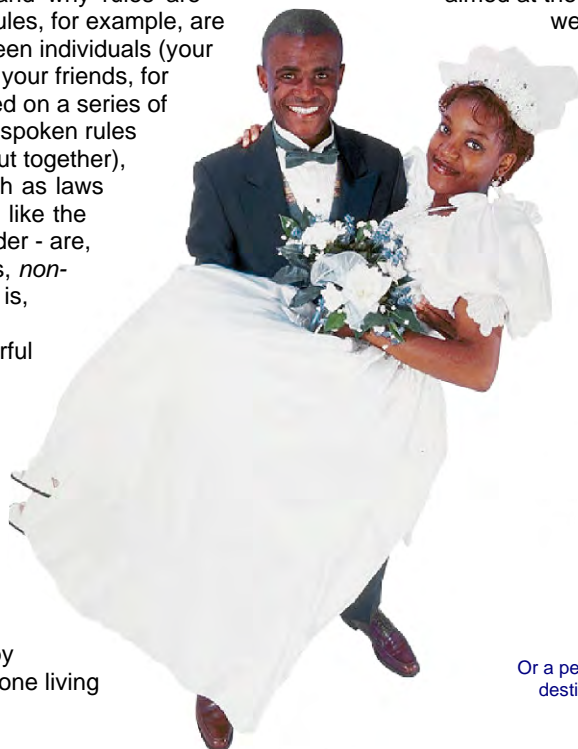
the idea we can think in these terms), *Structuration* argues *both* structure and action are equally significant in terms of our ability to understand human behaviour.

Practices: The key to understanding this perspective is, according to **Giddens** (2003), the idea of *practices* (in simple terms, the things people do). As he explains it: "The theory of Structuration states that the basic domain of social science study is neither the experience of the individual nor the existence of any form of societal totality, but *social practices*. Through social activities people reproduce the actions that make these practices possible"

Structuration theory

A marriage of (in)convenience between two incompatible perspectives?

In other words, as people develop relationships, the rules they use to govern their respective behaviours are *formalised* (as norms, for example) into *practices* – in effect, routine ways of behaving towards each other. Once we start to think of the huge range of practices surrounding our lives we start to develop a sense of structure to the social world, which necessarily involves:

Rules: This concept is important here since it suggests both the way our actions create behavioural rules and the idea such rules become *externalised* (they seem to take on a life of their own, outside of our immediate control and separate from our individual behaviours). In effect, therefore, although we may be involved in rule-making behaviour, such rules "reflect back" on our behaviour in ways that suggest or demand conformity.
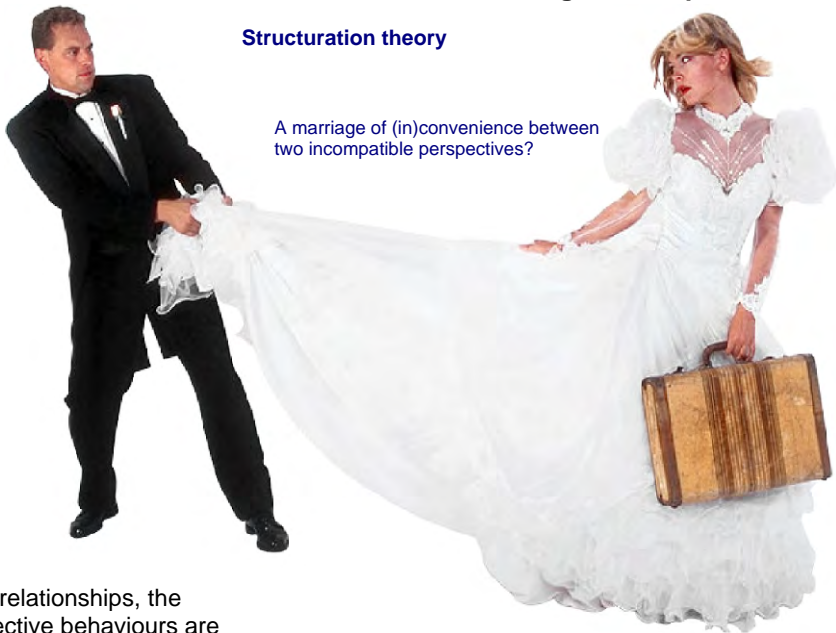
Resources: This idea refers to concepts like *power* and relates to how and why rules are created. Some rules, for example, are *negotiated* between individuals (your relationship with your friends, for example, is based on a series of unwritten and unspoken rules you've worked out together), but others – such as laws governing things like the definition of murder - are, in some respects, *non-negotiable*; that is, some rules are created by powerful groups and are simply imposed on people - whatever your opinion about the European Community, for example, many of its rules apply to the United Kingdom and, by extension, everyone living there…

Key Criticisms

Power: One possible criticism of Structuration is that it doesn't sufficiently take account of the way power in society is unequally distributed (the rich may have more power than the poor, men more power than women and so forth). The practices of the powerful may become entrenched, in the sense they are beyond the ability of the powerless to change. In other words, the relatively powerless do not, through their everyday practices, "create society"; rather, it is through everyday practice that people *experience* the power of "society".
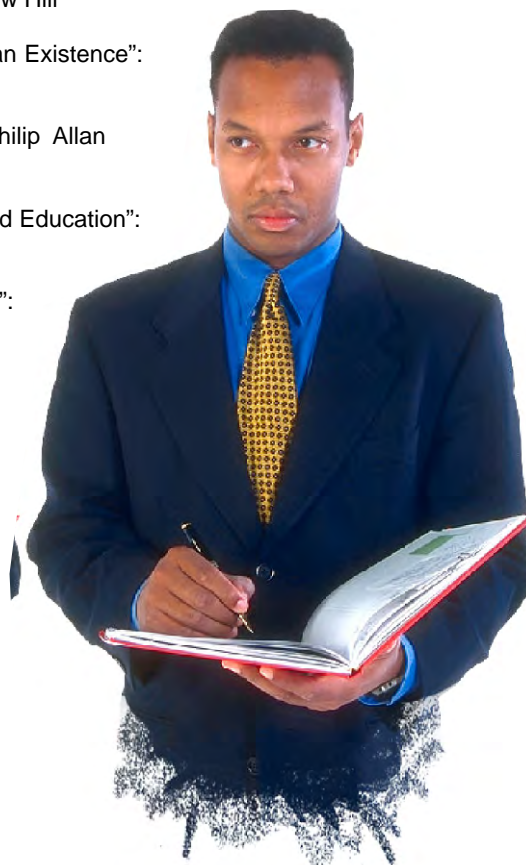
Structure or Action: A number of criticisms have been aimed at the (plausible, it has to be admitted) notion we can easily combine these two very different types of idea:

Clegg (1989), for example, argues that although Structuration theory talks about structure *and* action being equally significant, **Giddens**, in effect, considers human action as being considerably more significant.

Similarly, **Layder** (1987) argues Structuration gives very little attention to the concept of social structures as "determinants of action". In other words, there is little sense that social structures (as opposed to human practices) can have very much affect on people's behaviour.

Or a perfect partnership that's destined to last?

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Unit 1:
Families and Households

Contents

Defining the Family: Observations

It may strike you as a little strange to begin this Module by suggesting we need to define "the family" – the vast majority of us have, after all, years of personal experience of living within a family group (some more than others perhaps…) and we should, in consequence, "know something about it". Personal knowledge, however, is not necessarily the same as sociological knowledge and it's important not to confuse them, for two main reasons:
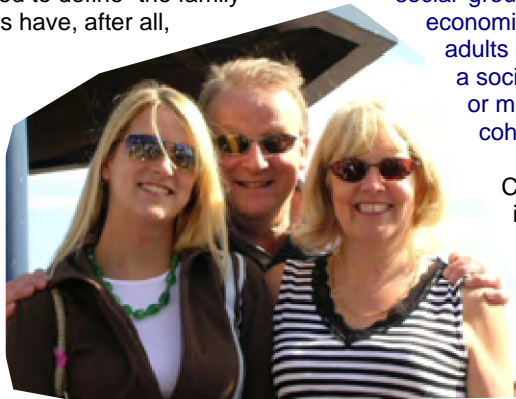
Firstly, although it's possible to refer to "the family" in a general, *commonsense*, way, it's more useful to develop a clearer definition of this particular social group as the basis for understanding things like how it relates to other social groups, the nature of the relationships that exist within the group and so forth. A coherent "definition of the family", therefore, provides a solid basis for further exploration.

Secondly, although we tend, in everyday conversation, to refer to "the family" as if all families were much the same, this is not necessarily the case from a sociological perspective. You're probably aware, for example, of different types of family structure (such as single parent, dual parent, step families and the like) and this suggests, perhaps, that "the family" might actually be
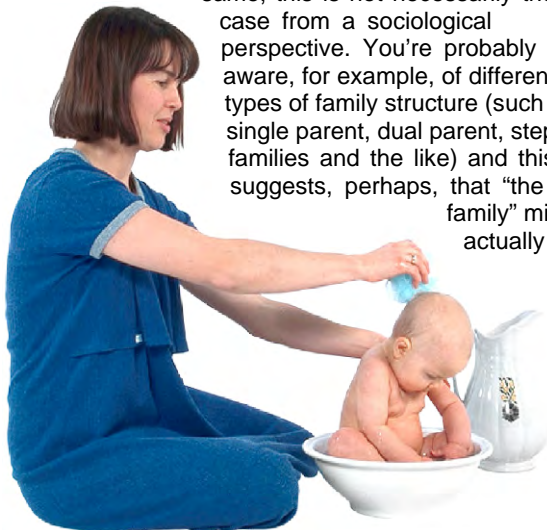
characterised more by its *diversity* (*difference*) than its *uniformity*.

We can begin, therefore, with a "classic" definition - **Murdock's** (1949) observation that: **"The family is a social group characterised by common residence, economic co-operation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially-approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults.".**

Contemporary variations on this theme include **Popenoe's** (1988) argument that a "*minimal family composition*" involves one adult and one dependent person where parents *neither* have to be of the same sex *nor* married. Further definitions edge towards seeing "the family" in terms of both what it *is* and what it *does*, with the focus on the concept of:

Kinship – which involves relationships based on:

• **Biology** - involving, for example, a genetic relationship, such as that between a mother and her child.

• **Affinity** – which involves relationships created through custom, such as two adults living together (*cohabitation*) or

• **Law** – a legal (contractual) relationship with something like *marriage* being an obvious example.

Weiss (1988), for example, defines the family group as: "A small kinship structured group with the key function of…socialisation of the newborn." and **Giddens** (2006) suggests family groups can be defined as: "A group of people directly linked by kin connections, the adult members of which assume responsibility of caring for the children".

Ambert (2003) develops the idea families can be defined in terms of a combination of what they "*are*" (kinship networks) and what they "*do"* (their *functions*) when she argues a family is "...any combination of two or more persons bound together over time by ties of mutual consent, birth and / or adoption or placement and who, together, assume responsibilities for combinations of some of the following:

• Physical maintenance and care of group members;

• Addition of new members through procreation or adoption;

• Socialization of children;

• Social control of members;

• Production, consumption and distribution of goods and service and:

• Affective nurturance - love".

Defining the Family: Explanations

Although it can be initially frustrating to discover that sociologists can't offer a simple straightforward definition of "the family", this apparent failure points us towards the idea that one reason for this is that the institution we call "the family" in our everyday conversation involves a more-complex set of characteristics and relationships than we may at first imagine – an idea that leads to three related observations:

1. The family group is qualitatively different from both non-family social groups (such as a school class) and family-type groups such as a:

Household: This, for example, involves a single person or a group of people (such as students) living in the same location. Technically, therefore, a family counts as a household (because it involves a group of people sharing accommodation); however, not all households are families because the latter must involve *kinship* relations.

2. It is difficult to identify the *essential characteristics* of "the family" because, as we've seen, defining "a family" is not unproblematic (there are arguments over how best to define it). These arguments stretch to two different general *types of definition*:

Exclusive definitions (such as **Murdock's**) focus on the specific characteristics of "a family" that make it different to other social groups. This type has the advantage of being clear about what is - and is not - a family group – but it has a significant drawback in the sense that it's actually very difficult (if not impossible) to produce a definition that applies to all possible types of family.

Defining "the family group" is not always as straightforward as it might at first appear...

Inclusive definitions (such as those of **Weiss** or **Giddens**) focus on defining a family group in terms of the general *relationships* (such as biology or affinity) that make it different from other social groups. One advantage here is that this type of definition covers a variety of different family forms, but if the definition is drawn too broadly it may include groups (such as households or two adults living together without children) that are significantly different to families in terms of their relationships.

3. What we term *the* family is, in reality, a complex social institution involving a wide diversity of relationships and experiences and **Goldthorpe** (1987), for example, argues we should think about family structures as "networks of related kin"; that is, as a *social process* based on relationships involving a particular set of:

• **Labels** - such as mother, father, son and daughter.

• **Values** - such as the belief parents should raise their own children.

• **Norms** - such as living together (through marriage or cohabitation) and

• **Functions** - such as primary socialisation.

Tried and Tested

(a) Identify two different definitions of "the family" (2 marks)

(b) Suggest **two** reasons why defining the family might be difficult (4 marks) .

Social Change: Observations

In terms of what we've done thus far, we can note that arguments about how to define, study and understand "the family" reflect two significant ideas:

Firstly, the family group is an evolving institution and the various ways it changes over time reflect its relationship to economic, political and cultural structures in society.

Secondly, as our society experiences greater levels of economic and cultural diversity, these changes are reflected in the observation that the family group has become a more-diverse institution.

What this means, therefore, is that "the family group" (how adults and children live and work together as a unit) is one that is sensitive to all kinds of social change – and to understand the nature of "the family" both historical and contemporary in UK society, it's necessary to consider its relationship to the wider society (with its attendant economic, political and cultural structures and processes) in which it is located.

The basic argument here, therefore, is that we can't really understand the family group in glorious isolation from the rest of society since what is happening in that society – its economic, political, legal and cultural changes – impact in various ways on the content and structure of the family group. As societies change, in short, so do families and for this reason we need to think about some of the ways social changes can be related to the nature of family life in contemporary UK society.

Neale (2000), for example, captures the idea that the family is an evolving institution, in terms of both its general structure and the relationships within it, when he argues families are: "…fluid webs of relationships and practices through which we define our personal, familial and kinship ties" - something that operates "not only historically, in terms of wider processes of social change, but biographically within the life course of individuals". This is a useful starting point for two main reasons:

Firstly, it points us in the direction of thinking about the nature of the family group in terms of its historical development

Secondly, it picks-up on two sociological themes we identified in the Introductory chapter, namely the relationship between social structures (the general economic, political and cultural organisation of the society within a family group is located) and social actions – how particular individuals and groups shape their family relationships within the context of social structures.

With this in mind, therefore, we can, by way of example, note some of the ways economic changes in wider UK society have impacted on family structures.

Families: One feature of contemporary UK society is the *diversity* and *fragmentation* of family life, notwithstanding **Chester's** (1985) observation that the majority of people in the UK still live at least part of their life within some form of *nuclear family structure* (a family type that involves *two generations* - parents and child/ren - living in the same household). In this respect we see a range of structures (from **dual-parent heterosexual**, through **step-parent** and **single-parent** to **dual-parent homosexual** families) and relationships – focused, for example, on areas like the relationship

between adults and children. Family relationships within different structures are likely to be quite different (think about, for example, the different type of relationship that might exist between a step-father or mother and their natural / step-children or between single and dual parent families).

In terms of examples of specific social (economic) changes, new ways of organising work (in the context, for example, of computer technology and networking) open up opportunities for home-working which, in turn, means single-parents with young children are, potentially, no longer "excluded" from the workforce. The relatively smaller size of nuclear families (*average* family size in the UK in 2005, according to **Diamond** (2007), was around 1.5 children) and improved communications (such as the ability to stay in close contact with extended family members using the telephone, email, text messaging and the like) makes this family group increasingly mobile - both in terms of national and international movement.

Households: One of the most striking features of our society is the growth of **single person households**. **The Future Foundation** (2001), for example, notes this household structure became, for the first time in the UK, the most common family or household structure. In addition, on current projections the "**Couple with no children**" household will be more common in our society than the "**Couple with dependent children**" family. The increase in the number of single-person households is also

Young, free and single? One out of three ain't bad...

indicative of how economic changes have impacted on people's behaviour. The single-person household is potentially the most *geographically mobile* of all family / household structures and reflects the changing (increasingly global) nature of work – people are both increasingly willing and able to move within and across national borders in pursuit of work.

Social Change: Explanations

We can think about the relationship between social change and changing family / household structures in terms of two main perspectives:

1. **Historical**, in terms of, for example, general changes in UK society over the past 200 – 300 years.

2. **Contemporary**, in terms of thinking about both the *legacy* of these changes (in terms of, for example, the development and general social acceptance of a range of family structures) and *current* forms of change considered in terms of the increasingly *global* nature of political, economic and cultural behaviour.

Historical

In order to establish a framework for our analysis of social change we can think in terms of the characteristics of three "historical types" of society in the UK:

1. Pre-industrial (or *pre-modern*) society loosely dates as prior to the 17th century and was characterised by agricultural forms of economic production (the main way people earned their living was through farming).

2. Industrial (or *modern*) society began to develop in the late 17th century and continued through the Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries to reach its height in the late 20th century. This type of society is characterised by industrial forms of economic production involving the development of factories, mechanisation and mass production on a huge scale.

3. Post-industrial (or *postmodern*) society: This type developed throughout the 20th century and is characterised by the growth of service industries (banking, insurance, information technology and the like) and the widespread automation of economic production. As a society it is also characterised by its global nature – goods and services, for example, are produced, distributed and traded on a worldwide scale.
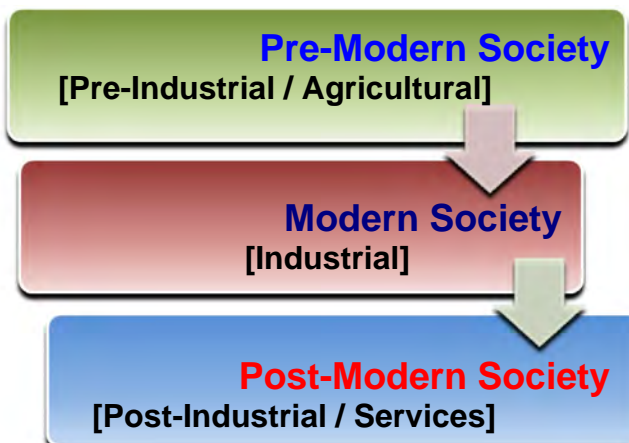

15th century peasants working the land...

towns and cities.
This is sometimes called *social migration* from the countryside (rural areas) to towns (urban areas which developed as industrialisation and factory-type production developed).

These changes can be related to changes in family structures (and relationships) in a number of ways:

Carlin (2002), for example, argues that in pre-industrial society "…most households in early modern Western Europe were nuclear family households, i.e. all the blood relations they contained were one couple and their children". Although extended families existed, the main reasons for this type of family not being more common seem to be:

Life expectancy: Average life expectancy was low (around 35 - 40 years) and, consequently, parents didn't always live long enough to become grandparents. Although this may have been a reason for many families remaining nuclear, we should note calculations of *average* life expectancies in pre-modern societies may be biased by high rates of *infant and child mortality* (large numbers of children dying drags the average down).

Pre-Modern Society
[Pre-Industrial / Agricultural]

Modern Society
[Industrial]

Post-Modern Society
[Post-Industrial / Services]

In this respect, two significant forms of social change (for our current purpose) we can identify are:

Industrialisation - a process whereby machines are extensively applied to the production of goods in society (*mechanisation*). One result of this process is the development of factories and the ability to *mass produce* consumer goods (clothes, cars, mobile phones). Related to this process is the concept of:

Urbanisation, which involves the idea of population movement away from rural (village) living to larger communities based in

Post-industrial society - the rise to dominance of Service industries

Choice: **Carlin** (2002) notes some parts of Western Europe, with similar birth and death rates to Britain, contained more vertically-extended (sometimes called *stem*) families. This suggests, at least in part, people in Britain were choosing not to live in extended family structures.

Retirement: Demographic evidence (information about how people live) from areas where people did survive into old age suggests they were expected to retire into households separated from their children.

Extended households: **Laslett and Wall** (1972) note upper class households frequently included both wider kin and servants (mainly because there was sufficient room for them to live within the household). Lower class households, although frequently nuclear because of high mortality rates among the elderly, probably contained "lodgers" (who are likely to have been kin) staying temporarily within the family group. **Laslett** (1965) however, estimates only 10% of pre-industrial households contained more than two generations of kin.

Modified extended structures: **Gordon** (1972) suggests arguments that the extended family was dominant in pre-industrial society confuse *temporary extensions* to a family (such as a relative living within a nuclear family for a short period) with the idea of a *permanent extended family* structure which, he argues, "…is seldom actually encountered in any society, pre-industrial or industrial".

Anderson (1995) points out there were "many continuities" of family structure during the change from agricultural to industrial forms of production, during which no single family or household structure was wholly dominant. Thus, although we've focused on extended / nuclear family and household structures, this doesn't mean other types (with the possible exception of gay families) were not in evidence. Both *reconstituted* and *single-parent* family structures, for example, existed in pre-industrial societies, mainly because of high adult death rates, especially among the lower classes.

The historical evidence suggests, however, that during some part of the industrialisation / urbanisation process, changes to family and household structures did occur, especially in relation to *social class* and the increasing diversity of family and household structures. **Anderson** (1995), for example, notes the:

Working classes, during the process of industrialisation, developed a broadly extended family structure which resulted from:

• **Urbanisation**: As towns rapidly developed around factories, pressure on living space (and the relative underdevelopment of communications) resulted in extended family living arrangements.

• **Mutual aid:** The lack of State welfare provision meant working class families relied on a strong kinship network for their survival. During periods of sickness and unemployment, for example, family members could provide for each other.

• **Employment**: Where the vast majority could barely read or write an "unofficial" kinship network played a vital part in securing of employment for family members through the process of "speaking-out" (suggesting to an employer) for relatives when employers needed to recruit more workers.

• **Child care**: Where both parents worked, for example, relatives played a vital part in child care. In addition, high death rates meant the children of dead relatives could be brought into the family structure. In an age of what we would now call child labour, young relatives could be used to supplement family income.

Middle class family structures, on the other hand, tended to be nuclear for two main reasons:

• **Education**: The increasing importance of education (for male children) and its cost meant middle class families were relatively smaller than their working class counterparts.

• **Geographic mobility** among the class from which the managers of the new industrial enterprises were recruited weakened extended family ties.

19th century English middle class family

Upper class family structures, according to **Gomm** (1989) have historically been a mixture of nuclear and extended types, although extended family networks, even up to the present day, are used to maintain property relations and for mutual economic aid amongst kin. In addition, wealth meant extended kin (such as elderly grandparents) could be relatively easily accommodated within the family home and the evidence suggests it was - and still is to some degree - relatively common for the vertically-extended family to exist among the upper classes.

Contemporary

If we think in more recent terms about the relationship between the family and social change we can initially note the idea that in **post-Industrial society** family and household structures in the late 20th / early 21st centuries are, arguably, more complex, fragmented and diverse than at any time in our history, ideas we can briefly examine in the following terms:

Diversity: Contemporary UK society is characterised by a wide range of different family and household structures (nuclear, reconstituted, single-parent, gay and extended) apparently co-existing. It is, however, difficult to disentangle this diverse range of family structures, for two reasons:

Nuclear family structures seem to be the dominant family form, although they clearly involve a range of different family relationships; a single-parent family contains a different set of relationships to those in a reconstituted family, for example. The question here, therefore, is the extent to which either or both these family structures can be characterised as nuclear families - an idea that leads to a consideration of how:

Definitions of nuclear and extended family structures determine, to some degree, your view of their relationship. For example, **Willmott's** (1988) concept of a *dispersed extended family* appears to plausibly characterise many types of family relationship in our society - what we have here, therefore, is a basic nuclear

A nuclear family structure - two generations (parents and children) living in the same house (or...err...tent)

family structure surrounded and supported by extended family networks (and whether or not you count this structure as nuclear or extended depends, as we've suggested, on how you define such things).

The above notwithstanding, if family and household structures in the early 21st century are, arguably, more complex, fragmented and diverse than at any time in our history, there are a number of explanations for this situation we can identify:

The Beanpole (or "verticalised") family structure - a "longer and thinner" family structure with fewer family members but increased generational links.

Legal: Relatively easy access to divorce (resulting from legal changes over the past 50 years) has led to greater numbers of step-parent (*reconstituted*)and single-parent families and single-person households.

Social attitudes: Whatever the origins of such changes, *lifestyle* factors such as greater social acceptance of single-parent and homosexual family structures have played some part in creating family diversity.

Life-expectancy: Increased life expectancy, a more active lifestyle and changes to the welfare system (which in recent years has encouraged the *de-institutionalisation* of the elderly) has created changes within family structures, giving rise to the concept of a *new grandparenting* (grandparents play a greater role in the care of grandchildren, for example, than in the recent past).

These trends have led to what **Brannen** (2003) calls the *beanpole family structure* - a form of *inter-generational* (different generations of family members), vertically-extended, family structure with very weak *intra-generational* (people of the same generation - brothers and sisters, for example) links. Similarly, **Bengston** (2001) speculates about the extent to which the phenomenon of increasing bonds between different generations of family members (as represented, for example, by the new grandparenting) represents "a valuable new resource for families in the 21st century".

Ambivalence: **Luscher**, (2000) on the other hand, suggests people are becoming increasingly *uncertain* ("ambivalent") about family structures and relationships in the light of social changes.
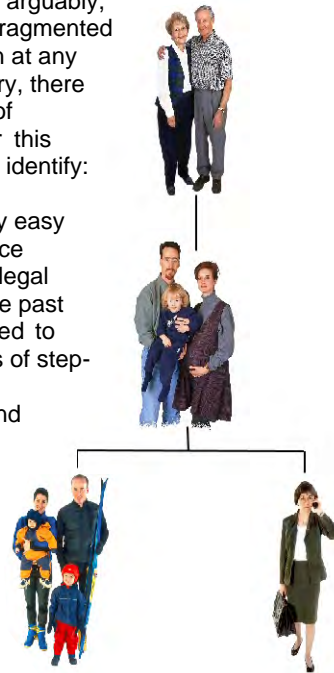
Increases in the number of people divorcing, for example, have led to the widespread creation of single-parent and reconstituted families; this in turn may have resulted in a weakening of personal relationships as family members seek – or are forced - to create new social spaces for themselves away from the relationships that previously existed in their lives. One result of these changes, **Luscher** suggests, is families seeking "geographical distance between different family generations".

> **Module Link   Families and Households**
>
> In the context of changing child – parent relationships **Hendrick** (1992) suggests substantial historical changes were "associated with social policy legislation" – an idea developed in the final part of this section when we examine some of the ways changes in social policy have produced associated changes in family life and living.

Past and Present...

Bringing these two positions – the historical and the contemporary – together we can capture something of the flavour of the relationship between the family and social change by noting that there is a tendency, in everyday life, the media and so forth to contrast the "family in the past" with the "family in the present"; the former is generally associated with stability, long-term, marriage-based, relationships and the like while the latter is characterised as an institution that has been buffeted and battered, bruised and broken by changes in both society (the availability of divorce, abortion and so forth) and attitudes (a decline in religious weddings and vows, increased cohabitation and the like). Writers such as **Cheal** (1999) have argued that this picture of family relationships and structures in the past is "a myth" in the sense that there has never been a single, natural and essential family form in our society – there has, historically, been a mix of both structures and relationships.

As **Morgan** (1996) argues: "The imagery of the 'nuclear' family (a heterosexual, married couple and their legitimate children, sharing a household and operating as an economic unit) has dominated the popular imagination throughout the twentieth century. But in Western societies there is a growing recognition of the incongruity between this ideological construct and the rich variety of ways in which people live (and, perhaps, always have lived) their family lives".

What does exist, however, according to **Neale** (2000) "…are fluid webs of relationships and practices through which we define our personal, familial and kinship ties. This fluidity operates not only historically, in terms of wider processes of social change, but biographically within the life course of individuals".

> **Module Link   Families and Households**
>
> The relationship between the family and social change has given rise to arguments about how family groups and relationships have changed and are changing. These are developed in the section dealing with "**Family Diversity**".

Debates over how to both define "a family" and the precise ways the family group is affected by wider social changes are reflected in the various ways different sociological perspectives look at and understand the nature and role of the family group in society. In the next part, therefore, we can examine how a selection of sociological perspectives explain the relationship between the family group, the social structure and social change.

> **Tried and Tested**
>
> (a) Explain what is meant by "family diversity" (2 marks)
>
> (b) Suggest **two** ways economic changes have impacted on family structures(4 marks)
>
> (c) Suggest **three** reasons for changes in family structures over the past century (6 marks)
>
> (d) Examine the ways in which industrialisation and urbanisation have impacted on family structure and diversity(24 marks)
>
> (e) Assess the view that it no longer makes sense to talk about "*the* family" *(24 marks)*

Family Perspectives: Observations

> **Module Link   Introduction**
>
> This Section introduces a range of sociological perspectives and it would be useful to familiarise yourself with this material (presupposing you haven't done so already…) because it will make the following applications more understandable.

Although family groups are generally considered important institutions in any society there are, as we've suggested, disagreements over how we interpret their role and relationship to social structure – a general debate we can outline in the following terms:

Functionalism

This general perspective starts from the observation that the family group is a *cultural universal*; that is, it is an institution that has existed, in one form or another, in all known societies. This suggests the family group performs certain essential functions for both individuals and wider society, which makes families, from this perspective, crucial to the functioning of any social system.

Although these "functions of the family" can be many and varied – and not all Functionalists are in complete agreement about what these functions may be – there is general agreement that the family group has two core or essential functions related to:

1. Primary Socialisation: Families are the main institution for the initial socialisation of children and any institution charged with this responsibility plays a significant part in the reproduction of cultural roles, norms and values.

2. Social Order: The family acts as a *stabilising force* in society. Great stress is placed by Functionalists on things like emotional and sexual stability, economic stability through family co-operation and so forth.

Module Link	Introduction
The family is considered by Functionalists to be one of the four major *functional sub-systems* in any society that together contribute to the maintenance of social order.	

New Right

This general perspective, although closely-related to Functionalism, involves more-directly political (rather than sociological) ideas about the significance of families for both the individual and society. For New Right theorists, whether we define them in terms of *personalities* (politicians such as **Thatcher** and **Bush**), *theorists* (such as **Murray**) or *practices* (issues such as **anti-abortion**, **anti-immigration**, **anti-Europe** and **pro-liberal economic policies**), the family group is seen as the cornerstone of any society. In this respect the New Right generally promote the idea of "traditional family relationships"; families *should* consist of two, heterosexual, adults, preferably married (to each other) and with clearly-defined gender roles and relationships - which normally involves the general idea of men as "providers" (or breadwinners) and women as "carers" (or domestic workers).

Marxism

This perspective reflects a *conflict* view of society by relating what the family group does (socialisation, for example) to how it benefits powerful groups – how a ruling class, for example, benefits from "free family services" (such as bearing the costs associated with raising children to be future employees) or how men benefit from their domination and exploitation of women in their family relationships. For Marxists, it's not what the family *does* that's of overriding importance, but *why* it does it - and one argument here is that the family helps to maintain and reproduce **social inequalities** by presenting them as "normal" and "natural" within the socialisation process.

Feminism

Feminist sociology has traditionally focused on the role of the family group in the exploitation of women, with attention mainly being given to identifying and explaining how "traditional gender roles" within the family are enforced and reinforced for the benefit of men. The family group, therefore, is seen as oppressive of women, imprisoning them in a narrow range of *service* roles and responsibilities, such as domestic labour and child care. In contemporary families, the notion of women's:

Dual role or **double shift** (women as both paid workers *and* unpaid housewives) has been emphasised, the basic idea here being that women are doubly-exploited (in the **public sphere** - or workplace - as paid employees whose labour contributes to ruling-class profits) and in the **private sphere** (or home) as unpaid workers whose labour primarily benefits men. More-recently, the idea of women performing, according to **Duncombe and Marsden** (1993), a:

Triple shift - the third element being **emotional labour** (investing time and effort in the *psychological* well-being of family members) – has been noted as a further way that women are exploited within the family group. The basic idea here is that women, rather than men, are expected to make this investment in their children and partner's "emotional well-being" (with the obvious, if unstated, question here being who – if anyone - makes a similar emotional investment in the psychological well-being of the female parent?).

Postmodernism

This perspective rejects the kinds of views we've just noted (since they're all, in their different ways, seen as promoting narrow (or *prescriptive*) views about what families *are* and how they *should* be). The key ideas of this perspective in relation to family life and relationships are **diversity** and **choice**, two concepts that reflect postmodern ideas about individual behaviours and lifestyles. From this position, sociological perspectives such as **Functionalism**, **Marxism** or **Feminism** are considered to be hopelessly outdated in their portrayal of both societies and individuals, mainly because they claim to understand individual behaviour in terms of the wider social purposes such behaviour supposedly exists to serve.

Functionalism, Marxism and Feminism - as outdated as an antique map (and probably as much use for finding your way around society)?

In the case of **Functionalism**, for example, individual behavioural choices are *generally* (although not absolutely *necessarily*) seen to reflect the needs of "society as a whole" (in the sense of, for example, the behaviour of the

family group being conditioned by social *imperatives* (or commands) such as the need to socialise children); both **Marxism** and **Feminism** are criticised for the way they explain behaviour in terms of the interests of powerful social groups (a ruling class in the case of the former and men in the case of the latter).

New Right perspectives are similarly criticised for their prescriptive arguments about how families *should* be (males and females, for example, forced to perform certain exclusive roles that somehow come together for the mutual benefit of all). This perspective is further criticised for its narrow insistence (in a way that mirrors, to some extent, Functionalist arguments) that males and females are naturally best-equipped to perform the roles assigned to them by New Right theorists.

For postmodernists, therefore, "a family" is whatever people want it to be (whether it involves adults of the opposite sex, the same sex, own children, adopted children or whatever). From this position, therefore, the possible

The "postmodern family" - whatever people want it to be?

relationship between families and the social structure is a largely meaningless question for two reasons:

Firstly, they reject the idea of social structures - which makes trying to identify and isolate any relationship between family groups and something that doesn't exist (social structures) a largely pointless exercise (albeit one Structuralist perspectives, because of their fundamental beliefs about the significance of structures in conditioning individual behaviours and choices are forced to carry out).

Secondly, they reject the idea we can talk, in any useful way, about "the family"; all we have, in effect, is a variety of people living out their lives and lifestyles in ways they believe are acceptable and appropriate to how they want to live.

Family Perspectives: Explanations

In thinking about families and their relationships to social structure we have two distinct viewpoints to consider; on the one hand we have traditional sociological perspectives (such as Functionalism) that emphasise how the structure of society impacts (for good or bad) on family forms and relationships while, on the other, we have postmodern perspectives that suggest the question of any relationship (of whatever type) between families and social structures is not worth posing (let alone trying to answer). Whatever your personal position in relation

to this particular debate, we need to dig a little deeper into different perspectives as we attempt to both explain these positions in greater detail and evaluate their validity as explanations for the possible relationship between families and the social structure.

Functionalism

This type of sociological perspective has tended to view the family as the initial, essential, bedrock of *social integration* in any given society – a theoretical position that involves the idea ways have to be found to make people feel they belong to the society into which they were born (to act, in short, in ways that reflect the belief they have something in common with the people around them).

Core Functions

Fletcher (1973), for example (in a classic illustration of this general idea) linked the problem of social integration to the family by identifying its *core functions* – the things it exists to perform, in ways that cannot be performed by either individuals working alone or by any other institution in society. In this respect **Fletcher** identified three core functions:

1. Procreation and **Child-Rearing**: Family groups provide a vital and necessary context for both childbearing (procreation) and, most importantly, child-rearing; the human infant, for example, is largely helpless in its initial years and requires (adult) care and attention if it is to develop. Child-rearing, therefore, involves ensuring the *physical* and *psychological survival* of the human infant and its development as a member of the society into which it was born (the **primary socialisation** function of the family).

Although there's no strict functional necessity for children to be reared by their natural parents (child-rearing functions can be carried-out by other agents (such as adoptive parents) or agencies) Functionalist theorists generally hold that a child's natural parents are best-positioned to carry-out this process because they have a "personal investment" in ensuring their child survives.

Child-rearing (we were going to show procreation but since this is a family-orientated textbook we thought better of it).

Stabilisation of adult personalities, which involves adult family members providing things like physical and emotional support for each other.

The Core Functions of the family

Procreation and Child-Rearing

Provision of a Home

Regulation of Sexual Behaviour
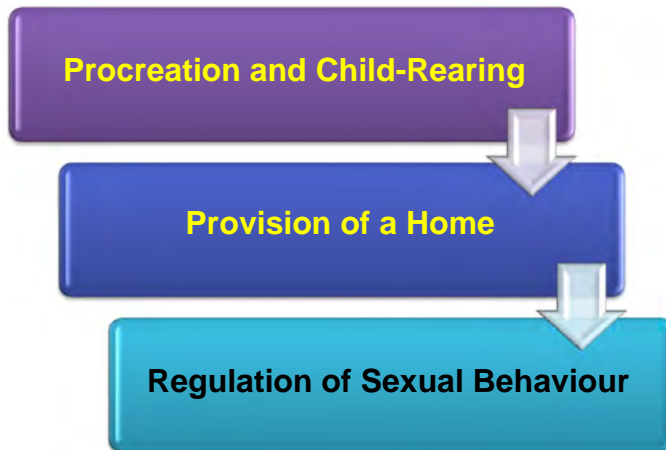
2. Provision of a Home: This idea relates to the previous core function in the sense of the family group providing both a "physical home" (in the sense of providing nurture and shelter for the child) and an "emotional home" in terms of the psychological well-being of the child.

3. Regulation of Sexual Behaviour: All cultures develop rules governing permissible sexual behaviour and sexuality (in England, for example, consenting homosexual behaviour is legal at 16 whereas in other societies (such as Iran) or cultures (such as some of the Southern States of America) this behaviour is either illegal or informally proscribed). Although the precise form of the regulation of sexual behaviour varies between different cultures (the age of sexual consent for male – female relationships in Great Britain, for example, is 16 whereas in Chile it's 12) the vast majority of human societies proscribe *incestuous relationships*. **Levi-Strauss** (1958), for example, goes so far as to claim that the incest taboo – in one form or another (there are cultural variations in how incest is precisely defined) – represents a "**cultural universal**".

Peripheral Functions

In addition, **Fletcher** argues families perform certain **non-essential functions**, many of which provide linkages with the wider social structure. These include, by way of example:

- **Consumption** of goods and services.

- **Basic education**.

- **Health care** (both physical and psychological).

- **Recreation** ("the family that plays together stays together". Or something).

For **Parsons** (1959), on the other hand, the modern family has become increasingly *specialised*. He argues it performs only two *essential functions*:

Primary socialisation: Families are "factories whose product is the development of human personalities".

Neo-Functionalism

More-recent writers in the Functionalist tradition have, as you might expect, modified, developed and applied some of the ideas at which we've just looked in their analysis of the role played by the family in contemporary societies. **Horwitz** (2005), for example, has argued that Neo-Functionalist perspectives contribute to our understanding of the functions of the family in terms of it representing a:

Micro-Macro Bridge: The family is an institution that connects the "micro world" of the individual with the "macro world" of wider society (the "anonymous social institutions" such as work, government, the education system and so forth that develop in complex, large-scale, contemporary societies). The linkage between, on the one hand, *social structures* (the *macro* world) and on the other *social actions* (the *micro* world) is significant because it represents a way for Neo-Functionalists to explain the relationship between the individual and social structure (in terms of, for example, the family's role in the primary socialisation process).

As **Horwitz** argues "Families help us to learn the explicit and tacit social rules necessary for functioning in the wider world, and families are uniquely positioned to do so because it is those closest to us who have the knowledge and incentives necessary to provide that learning".

Families are crucial for Neo-Functionalists because parents have the incentive to make the sacrifices (time, money...) required to ensure the social development of their children...

He further suggests that it is precisely because the family group plays a crucial part in linking the individual to wider society that accounts for its historical persistence - "The family has survived because it provided social benefits" to both the individual and society.

More specifically, the role of the family in relation to the social structure can be explained in terms of:

Rule learning: The family is an institution where children learn social rules in an environment that is generally supportive; rewards and punishments for conforming and deviant behaviours can also be "individualized to the greatest degree possible" because of the intimate, face-to-face, relationship between parents and children.

Rule-following: **Horwitz** argues "It is within the secure base of the family that children can learn both explicitly, through instruction, and implicitly, through experimentation, the rules that do and should govern behaviour in the broader social world".

The family group, in other words, represents both a sounding-board for behaviour (whereby children come to understand what is and is not permissible) and a buffer-zone whereby children can make (and learn from) their mistakes.

Children need to be taught rules of behaviour...

Social relationships: The family is "a school for learning tacit social norms" whereby children first experiment with social interaction and relationships; by initially learning the rules of social interaction with family members children create a template "for other intimate relationships and the more anonymous relationships" found in wider society.

Social order: The family serves as the means whereby general social rules (such as "instructing children in general concepts of right and wrong and explaining appropriate behaviour in various social situations") are transmitted to each new generation.

The New Right really love the sound of (strictly heterosexual) wedding bells...
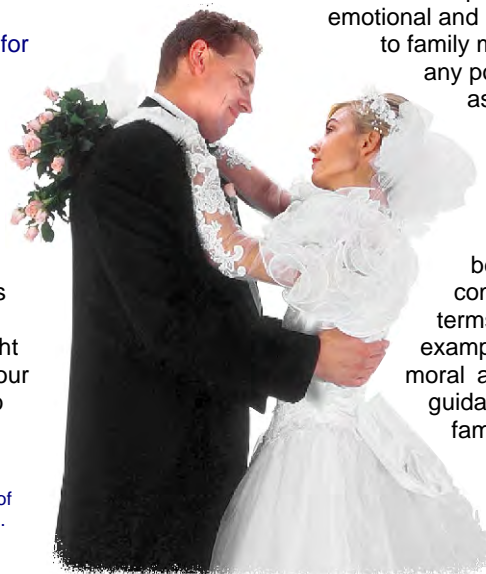
Although these lessons and behaviours can be – and are – taught by other social institutions **Horwitz** argues "The family is a superior site for learning these rules of behaviour" for three reasons:

1. Intimacy: Where rules of behaviour are transmitted and enforced by people who share a deep, emotional, commitment to each other, such rules are more-likely to be effectively taught and learnt.

2. Incentives: The closeness of a family group provides incentives for both adults and children to behave in ways that make their interaction "smoother" (one of the greatest incentives perhaps being the fact that a family lives together in an environment where cooperation is desirable if people are to avoid too much personal stress and strain). A further incentive for "good behaviour" is the idea that "other family members may suffer negative external reputation effects due to the misbehaviour of children".

3. Subconscious learning: In many situations it is difficult, **Horwitz** argues, for people to articulate and express their reasons for doing something. For example, it may be difficult to explain the rules that underpin why we love or trust someone. However, within a family group such rule-learning can be articulated "subconsciously" by children observing and imitating the behaviour that goes on around them. "A parent", for example "might be unable to explain the rules that guide her behaviour when interacting with a stranger, but the child can observe and later imitate the behaviour and in so doing, adopt the implicit rules that are at work".

New Right

In some ways we can characterise New Right approaches to family life as a form of **Neo-Functionalist** perspective; that is, a general position that both reflects and in some ways updates traditional Functionalist perspectives. **Neale** (2000, for example), characterises this general perspective in terms of:

Community: Stable family relationships - such as those created within married, heterosexual, dual-parent nuclear families - provide significant emotional and psychological benefits to family members that override any possible dysfunctional aspects. In addition, a sense of personal and social responsibility is created which is translated into benefits for the community in general, in terms of children, for example, being given clear moral and behavioural guidance within traditional family structures.

Commitment to others is encouraged by the sense of moral duty created through stable family relationships. Within the traditional family, for example, each adult partner plays a role - such as breadwinner or domestic worker - that involves a sense of personal sacrifice and commitment to other family members.

Morality: The notion that any type of family structure is just as good - or bad - as any other (what New Right theorists call "*moral relativism*") is mistaken since it questions the concept of moral commitment to others that sits at the heart of social responsibility. The emphasis here is on social policies that encourage "beneficial" forms of family structure and "discourages" forms - such as single-parenthood - that are damaging to both individuals and communities.

A further illustrative example here is the work of **Morgan** (2000) who argues that *marriage*, rather than *cohabitation*, is something that should be encouraged by governments. For **Morgan**, cohabitation is not simply, to paraphrase **Leach** (1994), "Marriage without a piece of paper". On the contrary, she argues cohabiting relationships are:

Unstable: She notes, for example, the fragility of cohabiting relationships in terms of the idea they "…are always more likely to fracture than marriages entered into at the same time, regardless of age and income". In addition, cohabiting couples tend to behave in a more sexually promiscuous way than married couples ("Cohabitants behave more like single people than married people " as she puts it) - another reason, she argues, for the instability of this type of family relationship.

About as much sexual promiscuity as we're allowed to show (i.e. None at all...)

Fragmentary, in the sense their instability means cohabiting couples with children who marry are statistically more likely to divorce. Of those who never marry, "50% of the women will be lone unmarried mothers by the time the child is ten". One reason for this, **Morgan** argues, is that unlike marriage cohabitation for women is "…not so much an ideal

lifestyle choice as the best arrangement they can make at the time".

Abusive - both women and children, **Morgan** notes, are at greater risk of physical and sexual abuse "than they would be in married relationships".

> **Module Link** **Families and Households**
>
> The relationship between marriage and cohabitation is examined in more detail in the section "**Changing patterns of marriage, cohabitation, separation, divorce, child-bearing and the life-course**".

Marxism

This perspective has been generally more critical of the role of the family group than either Functionalist or New Right positions; as you might expect, this Conflict model focuses on issues of exploitation and oppression (particularly as they relate to economic activity) whereby the family group in Capitalist society is portrayed as a:

Safety valve for (male) frustrations: The majority of men are relatively powerless in the workplace and this condition is disguised by allowing males to be powerful figures within the family group. This serves as a safety value for the build-up of tension and frustration at work and directs frustration away from criticism of employers, workplace conditions and so forth. In this respect, we could also note the family is a fairly:

Violent institution in our society (domestic violence accounts for 15% of all reported violent incidents): The **Home Office** (2007), for example, documents the range, risk and consistency of family-related violence in terms of the fact that: "Every year, around 150 people are killed by a current or former partner" (just over two-thirds of victims are female and just under one third male). The scale of domestic violence is indicated by the fact that "One incident of domestic violence is reported to the police every minute" (a substantial total given that domestic forms of violence are among those least likely to be reported to the police). In addition "One in four women and one in six men will suffer from domestic violence at some point in their lives". Of repeat victimisation (where one partner is subjected to move than one assault over a given time period) women are victims around 90% of the time.

Channelling and **legitimising** the exploitation of women. Within the family, for example, many women are still generally expected to do the majority of domestic labour tasks (a situation that mirrors, for Marxists, the exploitative work relationships experienced by many men). This situation is, to some extent, considered "right and proper" (or legitimate) by many men and women because it's seen as being part of the female role in (patriarchal) society.

Free services: The basic idea here is that the majority of children raised within a family group will grow-up to be future workers who will, according to this perspective, be taking their place amongst those

exploited by Capitalist owners. The costs of replacing "*dead labour*" (a concept that includes both those who literally die and those who become too old or sick to work anymore) are, in the main taken-on by the family group in a couple of ways:

• **Economic costs** involved in raising children to adulthood fall on the family group. Employers make little or no contribution to these general family costs.

• **Emotional costs** are also involved because the family group is an important socialising agency. If children are to be future workers they need to be socialised in ways that orientate them towards seeing their future in such terms.

> **Module Link   Families and Households**
>
> The Section on **childhood** outlines some of the consumption costs associated with the raising of children

Complimenting the idea of free services, we can note how Marxists relate such ideas to that of the family group as a:

Stabilising force in Capitalist society: This reflects the argument that the responsibilities people take-on when they create family groups locks them into Capitalist economic relationships. In other words, family members have to work to provide both the basic necessities of life - food, clothing and shelter - and the range of consumer goods that goes with modern lifestyles (Personal computers, DVD's, the family car and so forth). The requirement to take responsibility for family members (both adults and children) also acts as an emotionally stabilising force in society. Leading on from this idea we can note the role of the family group as:

Consumers: Marxists note how the family group has, historically, moved from being active producers of goods and services to passive consumers of these things - someone, after all, has to buy the things that make profits for a ruling class and the family, with all its expenses and expectations, represent an increasingly important source of consumption.

Feminism

These perspectives on family life (taken as a whole) tend to stress things like:

Service roles: Women, by-and-large, take on the role of "unpaid servants" to their partner and children. This is sometimes done willingly - because they see it as part of the female role - and sometimes unwillingly because their partner can't, or is unable to, take it on. This type of role - especially when it's part of a female **double shift** involving both paid and unpaid work - contributes, according to feminists, to female:

Exploitation: In this respect, feminists point to the idea women in our society increasingly suffer from dual forms of exploitation:

1. Patriarchal exploitation as domestic labourers within the home.

2. Capitalist exploitation as employees in the workplace - an idea that's related to the concept of women as a:

Reserve army of labour: **Bruegal** (1979) notes how women are called into the workforce at various times when there is a shortage of (male) labour and forced back into the family when there is a surplus. One aspect of this "reserve status" is that women are generally seen to be a marginalised workforce – "forced" into low pay, low status, employment on the basis of sexual discrimination.

Oppression: Feminists also point to the idea women's lives within the family are oppressive when considered in a couple of ways.

Are women a reserve army of labour?

Firstly, in terms of the "housewife role" effectively forced on women (even though many women seem to perform this role quite happily it could be argued this willingness to identify domestic labour with femininity is a result of both socialisation and patriarchal ideologies).

Secondly, in terms of violence within the family, women as we've suggested tend to be the main victims.

Postmodernism

In opposition to the structural approaches of perspectives such as Functionalism, Marxism and Feminism, postmodern approaches generally view family groups in:

Individualistic terms - as arenas in which people play out their personal *narratives*, as it were. In this sense, we can identify two basic forms of individualistic experience:

1. Choice, in the individual sense of the word, whereby people are increasingly able to make decisions about their behaviour - from the basic choice of whether or not to form a family group to the variety of extended choices now available in terms of how people express their "lived experiences" in family relationships; think, for example, about the multitude of different family / household forms and relationships in our society - from childless couples, through step-families, to gay couples with children and beyond. This notion of choice links into the idea of:

2. Pluralism as the defining feature of postmodern societies. In other words, such societies are increasingly characterised by a plurality of family forms and groups which coexist - sometimes happily and sometimes uneasily. Within this context of family pluralism, therefore, postmodernists argue it's pointless to make judgments about family forms (in the way we've seen other sociological

Do we live in an era of almost unlimited choice about our family relationships?

perspectives make such judgments about the form and function of family groups). From this perspective, therefore, each family unit is, in its own way:

Unique and involves people working out their personal choices and lifestyles in the best ways they can. As **Stacey** (2002) puts it when discussing same-sex relationships "Under the postmodern family condition, every family is an alternative family". Because of this uniqueness, families are:

Difficult to define: As we've seen in the opening section, one of the problems we encounter when discussing families is the difficulties involved in trying to precisely define this group; *exclusive definitions* appear much too narrow and restrictive, in the sense they generally fail to account for all types of family structures, whereas *inclusive definitions* may be so widely-drawn in terms of what they include as "a family" as to be somewhat less-than-useful (to put it kindly) for students of AS Sociology (and their teachers, come to that). In this respect, **Elkind** (1992) has suggested the transition from modern to postmodern society has produced what he terms the:

Permeable Family which, he notes "…encompasses many different family forms: traditional or nuclear, two-parent working, single-parent, blended, adopted child, test-tube, surrogate mother, and co-parent families. Each of these is valuable and a potentially successful

family form". In this respect he argues: "The Modern Family spoke to our need to belong at the expense, particularly for women, of the need to become. The Permeable Family, in contrast, celebrates the need to become at the expense of the need to belong".

While **Elkind** doesn't necessarily see this latter state - the idea individual needs and desires override our sense of responsibility to others (and, in some respects, the "denial of self" in favour of one's children and their needs) - as generally desirable **Suematsu** (2004) is not so sure: "A family is essentially a unit of support. There were days when human beings could not survive without it. Those days are over".

Family and Social Policy: Observations

We can begin by noting that, according to **Calvert and Calvert (**1992), **social policy** refers to: "...*the main principles under which the government of the day directs economic resources to meet specific social needs*" and we can add some flesh to the bare bones of this definition using **Morris'** (2004) observation that social policy involves the government identifying and regulating three main areas of society:

1. Problems – an example of which might be something like an increase in the level of crime.

2. Needs - such as those of the long-term unemployed, single parents or the disabled.

3. Conditions - such as the provision of health care through something like a National Health Service.

This deceptively-simple characterisation, if you stop to think about it for a moment, tends to obscure the fact that social policy is a potentially vast area to cover, even if we restrict ourselves to considering only those polices *directly* affecting families. It involves, for example, thinking in terms of three broad perspectives:

• **The Past - i**n the sense of identifying and evaluating polices from both the distant past (such as the various *Factory and Child Labour Acts* of the 19th century) and the recent past (such as the *Child Support Agency*, created in 1993 to ensure parents living apart met "their financial responsibilities to their children") that have impacted on family life, relationships and structures.

• **The Present -** in the sense of identifying policies currently being *implemented* by the UK government (such as the creation of Civil Partnerships in 2005 that gave homosexual couples similar legal rights married heterosexual couples) and assessing their impact, thus far, on family life.

child support agency

Since its creation in 1993 by the then Conservative government the CSA has had a "troubled history". The National Audit Office (2006) found the agency spent "70p to collect every £1 of child support" (an improvement on the previous year when it cost more to collect monies owed than it received). It is currently (2007) due to be replaced after a costly series of reforms...

• **The Future** - something that involves thinking about polices currently (2007) being *proposed* - such as placing strict limits on the smacking of children – whose possible impact on family life cannot, as yet, be adequately judged.

Rather than trawl through this vast ocean of social policy, this section looks initially at some illustrative examples of government polices in the post-2nd World War period – material we can use to provide a flavour of the range and scope of social policy in the UK as it relates specifically to families. In this respect social policy has historically involved attempts to "manage social problems, needs and conditions" – with arguably the most significant policy development in the UK of the 20th century being the development of:

The Welfare State: The 1942 **Beveridge Report** proposed a range of polices that had a profound impact on family life in a wide variety of ways – from improved health care (a *National Health Service*), through the "extension of childhood" as children were compelled by law to remain in education (*compulsory State Education*) to economic provision for old age / retirement through State pensions (a *National Insurance system*).

Compulsory education was recommended by the **Beveridge Report** as part of the Welfare State (so now you know who to blame...)

Within the general context of the Welfare State (the umbrella term for social policy that's generally been adopted in the UK) we can note a range of polices aimed specifically at the family group:

Family planning: Things like the availability of **contraception**, **abortion** (available for a period of 24 weeks under the 1967 Abortion Act, 1967) and **fertility treatments** (IVF) under the National Health Service have variously impacted on birth rates and family size.

Pregnancy: Working women are entitled to **maternity leave**, *Statutory or Contractual Maternity Pay* and the right to resume their former job. *Statutory maternity leave*, **before April 2007**, ran for 26 weeks with the option of a further 26 weeks if certain conditions were met. Since this date leave is now consolidated into 52 weeks. For women in employment there is an entitlement to *Statutory Maternity Pay* "for up to 39 weeks of the leave". Statutory or contractual maternity pay after April 2007 is paid by the employer at 90% of the individual's weekly earnings with no upper limit for the first 6 weeks of leave. For the remaining 33 weeks maternity pay is either £112.75 or 90 per cent of the individual's average earnings. This payment is, however, subject to income tax and national insurance. Where an employer is not party to the Statutory maternity leave scheme the alternative is **Maternity Allowance** paid by the government (the payments are the same as we've just noted, although the payment isn't liable for income tax or national insurance, with the maximum payment fixed at £112.75 per week). After April 2007 this allowance is paid for 39 weeks.

In 2003, fathers gained the right of up to two weeks of **paternity leave**, during which they could claim *Statutory Paternity Pay* from their employer (from 2005, £106 a week or 90% of their average weekly earnings). Also in 2005 the right to "adoption leave and pay" was introduced and a range of social policies govern adoption rules for prospective parents.

From **April 2007** *Statutory Paternity Pay* was set at "£112.75 or 90 per cent of the individual's average weekly earnings if this is lower". Tax and National Insurance is deducted from this amount in the normal way. However, a range of

exclusionary conditions apply for Statutory Paternity Pay (including things like employment status – whether or not you are employed or self-employed - the length of an individual's current employment, their current level of weekly earnings and so forth).

Childhood: Government both pays a range of benefits to parents with children (including *Child Benefit* paid to parents raising children under 16) and also regulates parental behaviour through the **Child Support Agency** (CSA) created in 1993 (although currently (2007) in the process of being replaced by a "new Agency"); the CSA was given the power to ensure non-resident parents made a financial contribution (*Child Maintenance*) to the care and upbringing of their child/ren.

The **Childcare Act** (2006) was designed to improve the general level of childcare services available from local authorities in areas like health, social services to parents and prospective parents and so forth.

Education: Although educational policies (since 1944) are not directly designed to impact on family life they do have a number of *indirect* effects – from allowing individual parents to work, through the provision of **free school meals** to those in poverty, to things like **Educational Maintenance Allowances** (introduced in 2004 and paid to those aged 16 – 19 staying in full-time education whose parents have a combined income of less than £30,810) and **Child Benefit**. In relation to pre-school education, *free nursery provision* was introduced for all 3 year olds in 2004.

> **Module Link**   **Education**
>
> The nature and impact of post-war government educational polices is discussed in the section "**State Policies**".
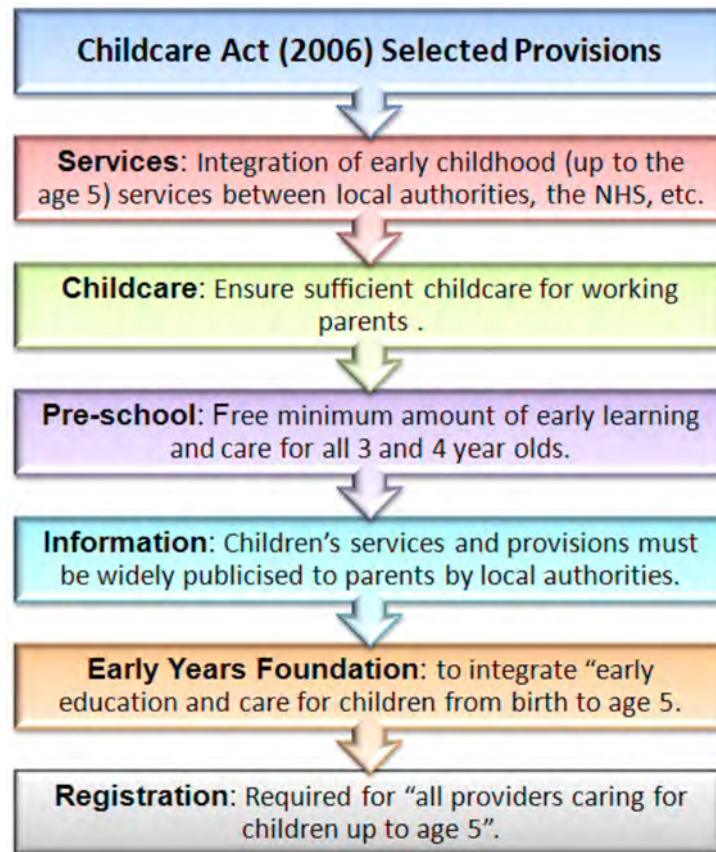
On a more general level we find a wide range of social policies designed to regulate family behaviour in a very broad sense. Examples here include:

Marriage rules governing things like who can marry whom (both *bigamy* – being married to more than one person at the same time – and *incest* are illegal), at what age people can legally marry (16 if both parents agree, otherwise 18), the legal rights and responsibilities involved in a marriage contract and so forth. Although gay couples cannot legally marry, since 2005 they have been allowed to form a **Civil Partnership** that gives each partner legal rights similar to married heterosexual couples.

Divorce: This is legal in the UK, but not in all countries throughout the world.

Economic Policies: Although things like taxation, insurance and pay / inflation policies (amongst many

other things) impact indirectly on family life, we can note further examples of economic policies that had - or continue to have – a more-direct impact:

Childcare Act (2006) Selected Provisions

Services: Integration of early childhood (up to the age 5) services between local authorities, the NHS, etc.

Childcare: Ensure sufficient childcare for working parents .

Pre-school: Free minimum amount of early learning and care for all 3 and 4 year olds.

Information: Children's services and provisions must be widely publicised to parents by local authorities.

Early Years Foundation: to integrate "early education and care for children from birth to age 5.

Registration: Required for "all providers caring for children up to age 5".

Council housing: As part of the post-war housing reforms the government built and rented out good quality, affordable, housing ("council housing") to those on low incomes. Over the past 20 years, however, successive governments have progressively sold this housing to private owners (at large discounts from the market price) and housing associations.

Housing: A combination of polices (ranging from the abolition of *Mortgage tax relief* in 2002 to control over interest rates) contribute to the contemporary phenomenon of adult children living in their parents' home – as demonstrated by **Self and Zealey** (2007):

Tax Credits and Benefits: A wide range of economic benefits are available to family members (too many to explore in any great detail here). These include things like:

Job Seeker's Allowance (between the ages of 18 -24). If this is claimed continuously for 6 months the recipient must enter the New Deal scheme which involves a choice from subsidised employment; work experience with a voluntary organisation / environmental task force or full-time education. Refusal to take any of these options results in the Allowance being stopped.

Child Tax Credit paid to parents caring for children in full-time education or training.

Working Tax Credit is paid to individuals and couples on low incomes (the exact levels and benefits are assessed according to a **means-tested** formula)

Old Age / retirement: State pensions currently (2007) start at 65 for men and 60 for women and payments depend on National Insurance contributions paid throughout the individual's working life. Pensioners who rely solely on a State pension are one of the most likely groups to experience poverty (roughly 20% of all pensioners are classed as poor). Means-tested Income Support is available for pensioners who, at 52%, are the largest recipient group of Social Security expenditure (the next largest group - 26% - are the sick and disabled).

Pensioners receive some free services (such as a Buss Pass, television licence and help with heating). Home help, district nurse / health visitor, day centre care, social workers and meals-on-wheels are also provided for those aged 65 and over. Where the elderly are unable to care for themselves there is the choice of entering a private nursing home or being forced to rely on their children for care and accommodation ("*Care in the Community*").

> **Module Link**   **Crime and Deviance**
>
> Family life is covered by *general social policies* relating to the criminal law. Although, for example, we tend to talk about things like domestic violence as if it represents a special legal category, it's actually a form of criminal assault. Areas such as child abuse, rape and bigamy are also covered by crime policies. We should also remember that areas such as marriage and civil partnerships involve legally-binding contracts…

Family and Social Policy: Explanations

"The family", as we've suggested throughout this section, is a complex institution – not just in terms of its different structures (nuclear, extended, single-parent…) but also its relationships (marriage, cohabitation, the roles played by adults and children and the like). The picture is further complicated, as far as social policy and social change is concerned, by the fact that although the family, in its broadest sense, has generally been seen by successive UK governments (both Labour and Conservative) as a:

Private institution - one in which family members should, as far as possible, be left alone to work-out their relationships and differences, the family is also a social group influenced by both:

Legal norms – marriage, for example, is a form of legal contract between two adults of the opposite sex and:

Moral norms – in the sense that our ideas (both as family members and in the wider sense of sociological theorising) about what a family *is* and *should be, what*

it does and *should do,* influence the way we look at, understand and, in some instances, try to influence its shape and development.

In this respect, just as most of us (probably) have some sort of opinion about "families" and "family life", governments (and sociologists) also have opinions about this institution. In this final section, therefore, we can look briefly at a range of social policies that have – or continue to – affect family life in the UK as a way of illustrating a general "ideology of the family" in our society.

To this end, therefore, although it's something of an oversimplification, we can for the sake of argument characterise post-war government polices in the UK as conforming to what **Dean** (2006) characterises as a:

Managerial State: That is, the role of government, in terms of social and economic policies, has broadly been one of trying to *manage* the various ways family groups and relationships have developed in our society. Policy, in this respect, has been formulated and enacted within the general ideology of "*privacy*" we've just noted. In other words, governments have attempted to set general *boundaries* for people's behaviour by trying to encourage some forms of behaviour (such as marriage) and discourage others (such as single-parenthood) without necessarily becoming directly and coercively involved in how people live out their family relationships.

An example of a *coercive state policy* is something like China's "one child" system, introduced in 1979, that **Rosenberg** (2007) notes "…limits couples [in cities] to one child. Fines, pressures to abort a pregnancy, and even forced sterilization accompany second or subsequent pregnancies".

> **Module Link**   **Power and Politics**
>
> The concept of "The State" and theories about its role in contemporary societies is discussed in more detail in the section "**The Role of the Modern State**".

The notion of "family management" (in basic terms the idea that the role of social policy in UK society, as it relates to the family, is one of attempting to specify certain conditions under which stable family groups can flourish) is a significant one for a couple of reasons:

Successive UK governments have generally adopted a "hands-off" approach to family life.

Firstly, it maintains the idea that "families" are, by-and-large, *private institutions* that are able to function in ways that benefit both individual members and society in general.

Secondly, however, it recognises there is a *public role* for government that, in general, consists of attempting to create the general social conditions under which this private institution can flourish.

These two ideas are, up to a point, complimentary in that, as we've suggested, social policy within a managerial context is just that – an attempt to manage people's behaviour by indirectly encouraging some forms of behaviour and discouraging others.

Finch (2003), however, highlights a central assumption of this idea when she notes: "Governments are always in danger of presuming a standard model of family life for which they can legislate, by making the assumption that most families do in fact operate in particular ways. In reality it is very difficult to detect a standard model, in either a descriptive sense (what people do) or a normative sense (what they ought to do)".

This "standard model" assumption characteristic of post-war governments in the UK, has led, **Finch** argues, to the further assumption that: "The aim of policies should be to facilitate flexibility in family life, rather than shape it into a particular form...to ensure that people have maximum opportunity to work out their own relationships as they wish to suit the circumstances of their own lives. It is not the proper role of governments to presume that certain outcomes would be more desirable than others".

Finch's arguments strongly suggest that social policies are created and enacted within the context of certain *ideological beliefs* about the family group, the relationship between its members and its general relationship to wider society and groups.

Barlow and Duncan (2000), for example, argue that New Labour family policy was initially underpinned by the desire "to encourage what are seen as desirable family practices, and to discourage other, less-favoured, forms". This desire was, in turn, based around what they identify as a combination of two intellectual frameworks (**Libertarian** and **Communitarian**), the basic beliefs of which have shaped family policy over the past 10 years.

Following Neale (2000) we can identify the basic beliefs contained in each framework in the following terms:

We can note a couple of things about the ideas we've just identified:

Firstly, although the ideological fit is by no means exact, New Labour family policies have reflected a general mix of **Functionalist**, **Neo-Functionalist** and **New Right** principles.

Secondly they represent ideals that, in practice, may not be fully enforced or subscribed to by governments. In addition, where government policy on the family is a mixture of different intellectual ideals (a Communitarian belief, for example, in a Welfare State system

Libertarianism	Communitarianism
Focus	
The relationship between individual and the state (national orientation).	The relationship between the individual and their community (local orientation).
Individuals	
People behave rationally and are driven by self-interest (for both themselves and their families).	People (should be) driven by moral consensus, shared values and sense of belonging to part of a wider community.
Politics	
Emphasis placed on individual choice, independence from "State interference", self-reliance and provision.	Emphasis on ideas of commitment to welfare of others (not just immediate family) and duty (based on notions of common good – individuals benefit from community involvement).
Diversity	
Encouraged – people develop family forms and relationships that are "right for them". A non-judgmental approach (no type of family is inherently better than any other).	Discouraged – some types of family are dysfunctional and damaging (to both individuals and communities). A judgmental approach (some forms of family are encouraged, others discouraged).
Control	
Family relationships and structures controlled by legal contracts (marriage for example), rights, incentives, sanctions.	Family relationships and structures shaped by "collective moral prescriptions" (ideas about how people should behave). These originate at government level.
Welfare	
State welfare systems should be restricted to enforcing legal / social obligations (for example, using the law to ensure maintenance payments by an absent parent). Families encouraged to "provide for themselves" through insurance etc.	State welfare system is a tool through which social polices and changes can be effected. Welfare systems have both a practical dimension (providing help and support for families) and moral dimension (channelling most support to particular types of family arrangement).

combined with a more-Libertarian belief in individuals taking responsibility for their own welfare – through personal insurance schemes for example) we frequently see polices developing that attempt to straddle the two frameworks. For example, in terms of health individuals have free access to hospital consultants – but they can also pay for private consultations if they have the money and inclination.

Dental treatment in the UK involves a mix of Private and NHS provision.
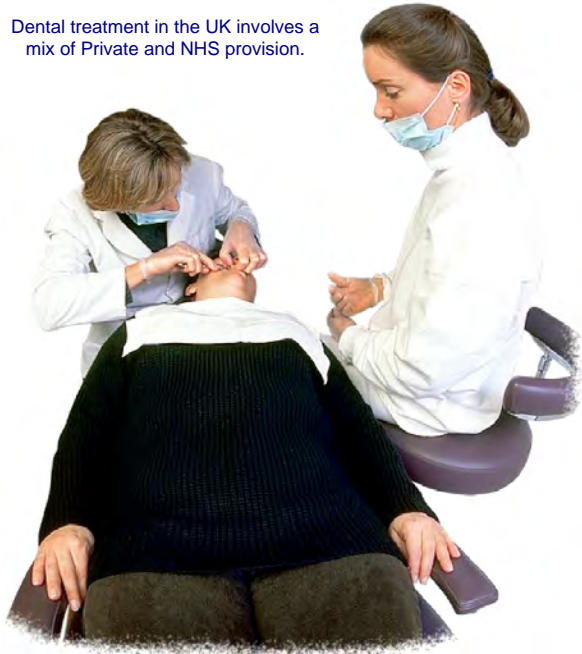
Neale (2000) goes slightly further by arguing "In developing policies for families, new labour appears to have combined the most negative aspects of these two frameworks…there is a libertarian assumption that people are inherently individualist in their behaviour but a communitarian requirement that they behave in uniform fashion. The welfare response is to combine 'carrots and sticks' forms of persuasion with top down, moral prescriptions on how to live the 'good' life'".

In general terms, therefore, the relationship between the family and social policy in contemporary UK society can be broadly expressed in terms of two processes:

Direction: Firstly as a relatively simple one-way process whereby governments create polices and people – within family groups in this instance – react to, adapt to and cope with the implications and effects of such polices.

Outcomes: Secondly as a rather more complex process in terms of policy outcomes (the consequences of various social policies relating to the family) in that because the family, as we've noted, tends to be seen as a private institution into which governments do not directly involve themselves, the intended policy outcomes are not entirely predictable. We should also note here that not all sections of the UK population are treated equally in this respect. Some sections– largely the poor and the powerless – are subject to greater levels of government intervention in family life than others (not just the obvious rich and powerful candidates, but also the vast majority of middle class families).

The idea that social policy outcomes can be unpredictable leads us to our final observation here – that unpredictability partly results from the fact that social policy is not necessarily a one-way "top-down" (from government to individuals) process.

As **Neale** (2000) notes: "Families are also sources of change in themselves that can impact on wider society and on state policy. They are bound up with changes in the way individuals…perceive and negotiate their personal relationships and seek to mould their identities as partners, parents, friends, employees and so on".

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by "social policy" (2 marks)

(b) Identify and explain **two** needs (other than those noted in the text) addressed by social policy (4 marks)

(c) Suggest and explain **three** beliefs that have shaped family policy over the past decade (6 marks)

(d) Examine the ways in which social policies and laws may influence families and households (24 marks)

(e) Assess the view that the family should be a private institution *(24 marks)*

The various ways that individual and family relationships develop can have an impact on how governments develop social policy - the recent introduction of Civil Partnerships in the UK, for example, is a good illustration of this process.

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2. Changing patterns of marriage, cohabitation, separation, divorce, child-bearing and the life-course, and the diversity of contemporary family and household structures.

Family Diversity: Observations

n the opening Section of this Module we noted, at various points, the argument that "the family" is not (and, more-controversially perhaps, has never been) a simple, homogeneous ("all the same"), social grouping. We can develop these ideas a little more in this section by looking more closely and explicitly at the concept of **family diversity** as it operates across a range of areas – from *organisational diversity* focused on family structures, through the concept of *life course* focused around changing family roles and relationships, to the evidence and implications of changing patterns of marriage, divorce, cohabitation, separation and child-bearing on both family structures and relationships.

Organisational

For **Rapoport and Rapoport** (1982), organisational diversity refers to a broad category of differences relating to both the *internal* and *external* organisation of family life. In terms of external (structural) differences, for example, we can develop our ideas about a range of different **family** and **household structures** based around identifying differences in the way people relate to each other. We can, for example, identify a number of different basic family / household types:

Nuclear families involve *two generations* of family members (parents and child/ren) living in the same household. Contacts with wider kin (aunts and cousins, for example) are usually infrequent and more likely to involve "impersonal contacts" such as the telephone or email. This type is sometimes called an *isolated nuclear* family (reflecting its physical separation from wider kin and it's "economic isolation" from the rest of society) or *conjugal* family - a self-contained economic unit where family members are expected to support each other socially, economically and psychologically.

Extended families, involving additional family members, involve a range of basic types, three of which we can briefly outline:

1. Vertically-extended family structures consist of three or more generations (grandparent/s, parent/s and child/ren) living in the same household (or very close to each

here in that they involve (or are *focused* on) women (a female grandparent, female parent and child/ren, for example). Conversely, *patrifocal* families (quite rare in our society) are focused around men.

Horizontally extended families - involving aunts, uncles and the like - are relatively common in our society.

2. Horizontally-extended structures involve relations such as aunts, uncles, cousins, etc. - *extensions* to the family that branch out *within* generations - a wife's sister and her partner, for example, living with the family group (or in close proximity). *Polygamous* families (where one man lives with many women or vice versa) sometimes take this form.

3. Modified extended structures refer, according to **Gordon** (1972), to the idea wider family members keep in regular touch with each other. This may be both *physically* (visiting or exchanging help and services) and *emotionally* (contacts by telephone, email and the like). Related to this idea is a distinction drawn by **Willmott** (1988) when he talks about:

• **Locally extended** families, involving "two or three nuclear families in separate households" living close together and providing mutual help and assistance.

• **Dispersed extended** families, involving less frequent personal contacts.

• **Attenuated extended** families involving, for example, "young couples before they have children", gradually separating from their original families.

Modified Extended Types

Locally

Dispersed

Attenuated

Single-Parent family structures consist of a single adult plus their dependent child/ren. This type is sometimes called a "*broken nuclear*" family, because it often - but not always - arises from the break-up of a two-parent family. **Self and Zealey** (2007) note that around 24% of all children currently live in single parent family units (90% of which are headed by lone mothers), compared with 7% in 1972.

Reconstituted (or "*step*") family structures result from the break-up of one family (through things like the *death* of a marital partner or *divorce*) and its *reconstitution* as a unique family by *remarriage* or *cohabitation*. It may, therefore, involve children from a previous family as well as those from the new family.

Homosexual families: Usually nuclear in form, this type involves adults of the same sex plus children (own or adopted)**.** Gay couples cannot currently legally marry in the UK but since 2005 they may form a **Civil Partnership** that gives each partner legal rights similar to married heterosexual couples

Households

Although *family* diversity is important, we also need to note the increasing significance of *household diversity* in our society and, as with family groups, **household structures** involve a number of organisational types:

Single person households involve an adult living alone. Historically, death and relationship breakdown have been the main reasons for this type of household, although there's increasing evidence people in our society are *choosing* to live this way. **Self and Zealey** (2007) note there were around 7 million single households in Great Britain in 2005 "compared with 3 million in 1971". They further note some interesting features of this type::

• **Proportion**: One-person households now comprise around a quarter (28%) of all British households.

• **Age**: Half of all single person households currently involve an adult in receipt of a state pension (in other words, they consist of elderly males or, more-likely in our society, females). Of the remaining 50% their proportion of all households has more than doubled over the past 25 years (up from 6% in 1961).

Half of all UK single person households involve those over 65 - with lone women far outnumbering lone men...

• **Region**: This type of household is more-likely to be found in urban areas, especially large cities.

Couple households consist of two people living without children and **Self and Zealey** note that in 2006, one quarter (25%) of all households in our society were of this type, making it the second most common *household* type after couples with dependent children (37% of all households). Within both single and couple households we could note differences in:

• **Income:** Important distinctions can be made between employed and unemployed single people, for example, as well as between dual and single-income couples.

• **Age and lifestyle** - a young single person is likely to have a very different lifestyle to an elderly single person.

• **Region**: Urban areas such as Brighton, Manchester and London have large gay communities which contributes to their high percentage of single person households.

Shared households are not particularly common and involve, for whatever reason, a group of people living together. This may be a temporary arrangement (such as students sharing a flat) or a permanent arrangement whereby families / individuals live together as a *commune* (as with the *kibbutzim* of Israel for example).

Students...

In relation to both family and household structures a further level of organisational structure we need to note here is the idea of their internal organisation – in basic terms, differences within family and household structures based around:

• **Roles:** For example, the division of labour (who does what) within families and households.

• **Status differences** such as married or cohabiting, natural or step-parents and the like.

• **Relationships** involving things like contact with extended kin, the extent to which the group is *patriarchal* (male dominated) or *matriarchal* (female dominated) and so forth.

Life Course

As the above suggests, one of the things that comes through clearly when thinking about family diversity is its general complexity; diversity covers a wide range of ideas (from the structural to the relational and all points in between) and operates on both the long-term, large-scale, societal, level (such as changing family

structures) and the relatively short-term, small-scale, individual level (such as the different personal experiences of family members at different stages in their life cycle). One way of trying to make sense of family diversity patterns, therefore, is to think in terms of both individual and family *life course* - something that, according to **Foster** (2005). "provides a framework for analysing individual's experiences, at particular stages of their lives".

For our purposes we can think about family life courses in terms of the different ways the behaviour of family members is affected by both their:

Interpersonal relationships - such as how the relationship between adult partners is changed by the introduction of children into the relationship and:

Intrapersonal relationships – such as how family life changes through interaction with wider social structures (such as the workplace).

Bunting (2004): The UK has the longest working week in Europe (44 hours compared to 40 hours per week) - and the second longest in the world...

A simple way to illustrate the significance of life course as a mode of analysis is to think about how people experience "family life" from a variety of different perspectives. Thus, as people go through the process of biological ageing, a couple of things should be apparent. Firstly, on an individual level, as people grow older their personal experiences of family life change – from a situation of total dependence on others (babies) to one, perhaps, where they assume the independent roles of mother or father. Secondly, looked at "from the outside", each family group contains a range of diverse roles and responsibilities that shift, shuffle and change over both long and short time periods. Although no two individuals will ever have exactly the same experience of family life, this isn't to say we can't identify an illustrative range of general types of family diversity based around the concept of different life courses, since these will be affected by things like *class*, *age*, *gender* and *ethnicity*.

Class

Class diversity is manifested in areas like:

Relationships between the sexes: Middle class families, for example, are more likely to be *symmetrical* rather than *patriarchal*.

Socialisation of children (upper and middle class families, for example, tend to stress the significance of education in a way that's not necessarily shared by working class families). **Reay et al** (2004) also highlight the importance of the *emotional labour* middle class women (in particular) invested in their children's education; they note, for example, the active involvement of many middle class women in monitoring school progress, questioning teachers about their children's school performance and so forth.

Kinship networks and their importance, considered in terms of the different level and type of help (financial, practical and the like) family members can provide. Working class families, for example, are generally better-positioned to offer *practical* forms of help (exchanging various services between family members for example) whereas upper and middle class families tend to be better-positioned to offer both *financial* and *networking* help to their children and other family members. An example of the former might be something like Tony **Blair**, in common with many middle class parents, buying a flat for his student son to live in during the latter's time at University; an example of the latter might be the ability to introduce family members to influential people in the business world.

Age

This involves differences occurring at *different stages* of both an individual's and a family's life span; *generational differences* can be evidenced in terms of how people of *similar generations* have broadly shared experiences whereas the family experiences of different generations may be quite dissimilar.

For example, family members raised during the 1940's have the experience of war, rationing and the like; family members raised during the 1990's, on the other hand, may have developed very different attitudes and lifestyles forged through a period of economic expansion.

The extent to which the generations are linked (such as the relationship between parents and children, grandparents and

Victims of the 1970's Style Wars...

grandchildren) is also relevant here. We could also note that the family experience of a young couple with infant children is different to that of an elderly couple without children.

Education: Changes and differences in education also have an impact on family life through things like employment opportunities, career development, earnings over the course of a lifetime and the like. These impact on areas like family:

- F*ormation* (when to start a family);

- *Size* (the number of children born and raised within the family) and

- *Structure* (the likelihood, for example, of a family group experiencing geographic mobility as a result of career-based work changes and, as a result, drifting apart from their extended family).

Johnson and Zaidi (2004), for example, point to wide differences in educational experience when they note "The 30 year old worker in 1970 was very different from the 30 year old worker in 1990" on the basis of different educational and work careers (only 4% of those born in 1940 "gained a university qualification before entering the labour force…Among the 1960 birth cohort, by contrast, roughly 13 per cent progressed…to… university, and they subsequently entered the graduate labour market with relatively high salaries").

The number of people graduating from University in the UK has increased rapidly over the past decade...

Attachment: Families with children of school-age may become, in **Rapoport and Rapoport's** (1969) characterisation, *dual*-income families – ""One in which both heads of household pursue careers and at the same time maintain a family life together". This family's experience will be very different to that of a single-parent family or even a dual-parent family where one partner is in paid employment while the other performs domestic labour.

Children: Age and family structure come together when we think, for example, about children living in different family structures. According to the **Office for National Statistics** (2005) around three-quarters (76%) of dependent children in the UK live in a dual parent nuclear family (of which 90% were married couples, the remainder cohabiting couples – something

that is itself indicative of a further level of diversity) while one-quarter (24%) lived with a lone mother (22%) or lone father (2%). In 1972 around 7% of dependent children lived with a sole parent, a change that perhaps indicates both the relative growth of single-parent families in our society and their establishment as a significant family structure.

It's also important to note that we can include a couple of further diverse elements into the equation here by noting that a statistically small (but in terms of raw numbers quite large) number of children in our society do not live in families at all. In 2001, for example, around 140,000 children were living with adults who were not their parents, while a further 50,000 children lived in "communal establishments such as a children's home".

Life expectancy: People in our society are, in general, both living longer and enjoying a more physically active old age. Longer life expectancies produce a range of impacts on family life – and it's diversity - from the greater likelihood of divorce (where the length of marriage increases, so too does the likelihood of it ending in divorce) through changes to child-bearing and raising patterns (family formation is, on average, starting later and women are producing children at a consequently later stage in the life cycle) to the potential for changing patterns of grandparenting (where the latter, for example, are more-likely to survive into old age and be in a position to make an active contribution to family life through things like child-minding services).

Gender

Paid employment: **Johnson and Zaidi** (2004) note what they term "both huge change and remarkable continuity in the experience of paid work over the life course for men and women in twentieth-century Britain". Over the past 150 years, for example, the average working life for men has dropped from 50 years to 41 years while for women the reverse has occurred; "the 1860s cohort worked on average for only 16 years between the ages of 15 and 69, whereas the 1970s cohort can expect to work for at least 32 years".

These changes have impacted on family life and relationships in a number of ways – from changing patterns of marriage (the trend in the early 21st century, for example, is for marriage to occur at a much later stage in the life-cycle than even 50 years ago), through differences in male – female family roles (the family group is distinctly less patriarchal and domestic labour – while not by any means shared equally (women still

do the majority of work around the home - is "less-unequal" than in even the recent past).

Changing patterns of female work, in particular, have resulted in internal changes in contemporary families as compared with families in the past. Over the past 35 years, for example, the proportion of women of working age in either paid employment or activity looking for such employment has risen from 60% in 1971 to 75% in 2006 and one outcome of this is that women are much *less likely* to leave paid employment, never to return, once they marry or start a family with their partner (although, of course, the fact that some women do leave paid employment to become "full-time mothers / domestic labourers" adds further to the family diversity mix). A further interesting aspect of female involvement in paid employment "as a career" (that is, as a long-term commitment to the workplace) is that the concept of **retirement** from paid work – something that has, historically, been largely associated with men – is now increasingly associated with women.

Roles: Increases in both the number of women working and the likelihood of their spending a substantial proportion of their working life in full-time work has opened-up changes and differences within families. The **Office for National Statistics** (2001) argues, for example, that the "traditional division of family labour allocated fathers the role of primary breadwinner and mothers the care of home and family. This has changed as the representation of women in the UK labour force has increased steadily and the proportion of couples with dependent children in Great Britain where only the man is working has decreased".

Children: There are significant family differences in the relationship between child care and work; the **Labour Force Survey** (2005), for example, indicates that women with dependent children are slightly less likely (32%) to be in paid employment than those without dependent children (27%). In addition, the age of dependent children is a factor in the paid employment of mothers – those with children under 5 are less likely than those with older children to combine childcare with paid work. This reflects, perhaps, the fact that women are still by-and-large responsible for child care within the family, although once again the fact of differences points to significant levels of diversity amongst family groups in our society.
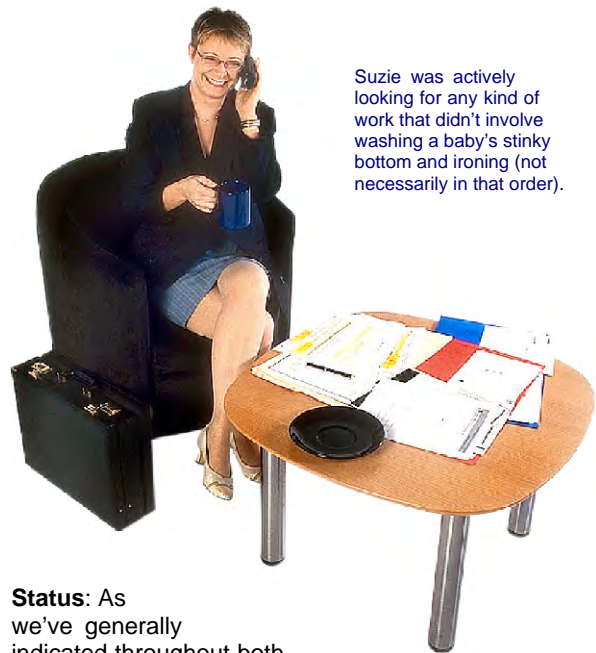
Suzie was actively looking for any kind of work that didn't involve washing a baby's stinky bottom and ironing (not necessarily in that order).

Status: As we've generally indicated throughout both this section and module, a variety of status differences exist within and between families in the contemporary UK. These differences are focused, for example, around distinctions between different types of family (single and dual-parent, for example), the status of individuals between families (married, divorced, separated or cohabiting, for example) and, of course, within families (differences, for example, between the roles performed by family members – such as paid employment, domestic employment and combinations of both).

Attitudes: **Weinshenker** (2006) has pointed to an area in which class and gender overlap (or *intersect* if you prefer) when he explored the balance between work and motherhood in middle-class, dual-earner, families. Of his 194 respondents (male and female) "Nearly all expected new mothers to quit their jobs or reduce their hours temporarily".

Ethnicity

This type of diversity relates to differences within and between different cultural (or *ethnic*) groups in terms of things like:

• **Size**: The number of children within the family.

• **Marriage**: Whether the marriage is arranged by the parents or "freely chosen" by the participants, for example.

• **Division of labour**, considered in terms of whether family roles are patriarchal (the male in paid employment and the female as housewife) or *symmetrical* (where roles and responsibilities are shared equally among family members).

Marked ethnic group differences are also found in the relationship between female paid employment and family roles and responsibilities. **Dale et al** (2004) found clear differences between ethnic groups - Black women, for example, are generally more-likely to

I've got a window in my diary to do the washing next Wednesday...

"remain in full-time employment throughout family formation" than either their White or Asian peers. Within different broad ethnicities differences were also apparent; whereas Indian women generally opted for part-time paid employment once they had a partner both Pakistani and Bangladeshi women were more-likely to cease paid work once they married and produced children. These differences reflect a range of processes that affect and shape family relationships, structures, behaviours and, of course, diversity – from patriarchal attitudes and beliefs about the respective roles and responsibilities of men and women, to the preponderance of single-parent family structures headed by single Black women in our society

Berthoud (2004) identifies some key differences within and between selected ethnic groups.

Additional statistics: **Self and Zealey** 2007

Black Caribbean Families	South Asian (Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi) families
Marriage	
Low marriage rates.	High marriage rates. Greater likelihood (especially amongst Muslims and Sikhs) of arranged marriage.
Separation, Divorce and Single-Parenthood	
High rates of separation, divorce and single parenthood. In 2006, 18% of Black Caribbean families with dependent children were headed by a lone parent.	Low rates of separation, divorce and single-parented. In 2006, 9% of Pakistani / Bangladeshi and 5% of Indian families were headed by a lone parent.
Mixed Partnerships	
Relatively high levels of mixed partnerships.	Lower rates of mixed partnerships.
Family Size	
Smaller family size (average of 2.3 people)	Larger family size (Bangladeshi households average of 4.5 people). Grandparents more-likely to live with son's family.
Structure	
Matriarchal: Absent fathers (not living within the family home but possibly maintaining family contacts).	**Patriarchal**: power and authority more-likely to reside with men. Majority of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women look after home and family full-time.

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by family diversity (2 marks)

(b) Suggest **two** ways in which class diversity is expressed in our society (4 marks)

(c) Suggest **three** reasons for contemporary UK family and household diversity (6 marks)

Family Diversity: Explanations

From the evidence we've examined so far it's clear that wide differences exist in areas like family and household structures and relationships and, this being the case, it would be useful to identify some reasons for contemporary forms of family diversity.

Economic

Explanations in this area include ideas like:

Female Independence: In terms of relationships *within* the family group one of the most noticeable changes in our society in recent times has been the increase in female partners taking-on paid employment outside the home. Thus, according to **Abercrombie and Warde** (2000), "One of the most significant changes in the labour market in the 20th century is the rising proportion of married women returning to work after completing their families…Greater participation by women in paid work and changes in family structure thus seem to be closely related".

Reynolds et al (2003) note that "Concerns that mothers' increasing labour-market participation means that they are becoming more rooted in their work life and more 'work-centred' at the expense of their family responsibilities were not borne out" and they generally found, from both partners, a positive attitude to female working and its impact on family relationships. As one (male) respondent suggested: "I couldn't imagine myself with a partner who chose to stay at home and who didn't have a life outside our family. For starters, what would we talk about? ... [It's] good for the family because we can sit down together and plan financially for the future because we have two incomes to work with".

"My husband doesn't understand me". "Quarter past nine".

Among women they found a general belief that "The mother's employment provided skills and resources that meant they could meet their children's emotional, developmental and material needs better. Their relationship with their partner was enhanced because they shared the financial burden of providing for their family and had more common interests".

Affluence: The relationship between poverty and family size is well-documented (poorer families tend to have more children), so it's little surprise to find a relationship between increasing affluence and smaller families.

Globalisation: As our society becomes ever more open to influences from other cultures, we're presented with a greater range of choices about how to behave. This has a couple of dimensions: Firstly, family and household arrangements from one society may be introduced into another (different ideas about male and female roles, for example) and, secondly, it opens-up the potential for a *hybridisation* of family and household cultures - a situation in which two different cultural family forms combine to produce a new and slightly different form. In addition, global cultural influences have an impact on how people view their individual and family relationships (in terms of ideas like divorce or homosexual families).

Attitudes and Lifestyles

Cultural changes in people's attitudes and lifestyles also contribute to family and household diversity in a selection of ways:

Sexuality: Increasing tolerance of "alternative sexualities" (such as homosexuality, bisexuality or transsexuality) and lifestyles (such as transvesticism) serves to increase household diversity.

Religion: The decline in the power of organised religion (*secularisation*) amongst some ethnic groups may account for:

• Increases in cohabitation.

• A decline in the significance of marriage.

• Increases in divorce.

• The availability of remarriage after divorce and so forth.

Conversely, amongst some ethnic groups the reverse may be true - their religion may put great emphasis on marriage and disallow divorce.

Femininity and Masculinity: Changes in the way we view our bodies (and our sexuality) create changing *meanings* for male and female lives. Women in the 21st century are less likely to define their femininity in terms of child-rearing and domestic labour than their grandmothers, for example. Similarly, changing perceptions of masculinity have resulted in changes to how some men view family roles and relationships.

Legal and Technological

These forms of change make important contributions to diversity in some illustrative ways:

Divorce: Legal changes relating to both the availability and cost of divorce encourage diversity through the development of different family structures. Similarly, changes in attitudes to divorce, step and single-parenting have resulted in less *stigma* (social disapproval) being attached to these statuses.

Medicine: The availability of *contraception* (enabling planned families) and *abortion* change how people relate to each other in terms of creating families.

Work: Workplace changes over the past 25 years have also impacted on family life; **Bynner** (2001), suggests that "The transformation of the labour market through the rise of information technology-based industry and the decline of unskilled work has led to an extension of the transition from school to work and this itself has impacted on the timing of such personal goals as marriage and parenthood".

> **Module Link**   **Families and Households**
>
> Technological changes and their impact on both the labour market and the family can be applied to an understanding of the relationship between family structures and social change.

Has the ability of organised religions (such as Christianity) to influence our behaviour declined in recent times?

Demographic Changes

"Demography" is the study of human populations and covers changes relating to areas like birth and death rates, life expectancy and family size (amongst other things).

Changes in these areas can be linked to family and household diversity, family structures and the like and are identified and explained in more detail in the final Section ("**Demographic trends in the UK since 1900**") of this Module.

Optimism or Pessimism?

Thus far we've outlined a number of observations about family and household diversity and suggested a range of social and economic factors contributing to this process. As you should be aware however, the concept of diversity doesn't simply involve listing examples and offering general explanations; sociologically, it has a moral dimension, in the sense it would be useful to understand the social and psychological implications of family diversity.

In this respect, **Neale** (2000), poses the question "How are we to view the diversity and fluidity of contemporary patterns of partnering, parenting and kinship?" and answers it in terms of two further questions: "Should we view these transformations with optimism or, at least, accept the reality of them and attempt to work with them, or should we view them as a cause for concern?". To complete this section, therefore, it would be useful to outline some of the views associated with these two basic perspectives on diversity.

Cause for Concern?: The New Right

New Right perspectives can generally be characterised as seeing family diversity – in terms of both structures and relationships – as a source of social problems and, in consequence, advance a view of "family uniformity" that can be summarised as follows:

Family structures: The traditional (heterosexual) nuclear family with family relationships based around marriage is seen as more desirable than other family structures - such as single-parent families - because it provides a sense of social, economic and psychological stability, family continuity and primary socialisation. It is, for New Right theorists, an arena in which, according to **Neale's** (2000) characterisation, "traditional family values" are emphasised and reinforced, thereby creating a sense of individual and social responsibility that forms a barrier against "rampant, selfish, individualism". In other words, within the traditional family children and adults learn, as **Horwitz** (20005) argues, certain moral values that are continually reinforced through their relationship with family members. In this respect,

Family relationships are seen as a crucial source of both individual happiness and, perhaps more importantly, *social stability* because of the moral core at the heart of such relationships - a sense of morality that includes things like:

- Caring for family members.
- Taking responsibility for the behaviour of children.
- Economic provision for both partners and children.
- Developing successful interpersonal relationships.

The argument here is not that "non-traditional" family structures and arrangements are incapable of performing such roles; rather, it is that a traditional

family structure provides a much stronger moral foundation for their performance. In this respect, New Right perspectives (as evidenced through the work of writers such as **Murray and Phillips** (2001) and **Morgan**, 2000) equate both structure and relationship diversity with *family breakdown* which, in the case of the former, is considered symptomatic of a social *underclass* characterised by an "excessive individualism"; where family structures and relationships breakdown the individual is forced back on their own resources for survival and, in consequence, develops a disregard for the needs and rights of others.

Module Link   Families and Households

These general ideas can be linked into the New Right family perspectives discussed in the opening Section.

Or Celebration?: Postmodernism

One of the key attributes of postmodern world views is the celebration of "difference" and postmodernist perspectives on family life reflect this particular attribute in a range of ways - family diversity should be embraced, either because it points the way towards an optimistic realignment of family roles and relationships or, to be brutally blunt about it, because it's going to happen whether we want it to or not...

Postmodern perspectives see family diversity in widely different ways to other approaches...

Postmodern approaches are neatly summarised by **Zeitlin et al** (1998) when they note: "The post-modern world is shaped by pluralism, democracy, religious freedom, consumerism, mobility, and increasing access to news and entertainment. Residents of this post-modern world are able to see that there are many beliefs, multiple realities, and an exhilarating but daunting profusion of world views - a society that has lost its faith in absolute truth and in which people have to choose what to believe".

A range of ideas about family diversity follow from this type of viewpoint, examples of which we can identify and summarise in the following terms:

Economic changes: Global economic changes impact on national and local economies in numerous ways, one of which, according to **Zeitlin et al**, is the breakdown of "economic forces underlying social conformity". In the past, for example, women generally needed to marry (as advantageously as they could) because they were either barred from the workplace or consigned to low-pay forms of work which made their financial survival difficult without male support. In addition, inheritance laws focused on the need to produce children within marriage if they were to inherit land and property. Increasing *economic independence* and gradual changes in legal norms relating to inheritance (amongst other developments) no longer makes marriage an economic necessity for women; such changes have, therefore, given women much greater freedom of choice in their social relationships – and where choice is freely available, diversity naturally follows. Given that this process of economic and social change is unlikely to be reversed, structural and relational diversity is, from this general perspective, inevitable.

Political changes: One feature of *globalisation* - as it relates to political ideas - is the "questioning of the old order" as people are increasingly exposed to new and different ways of doing things. In situations where the possibility of choice develops, it's hardly surprising to find people exercising such choices in their personal relationships and lifestyles - which, as the "established political and legal order" changes, results in family and relationship diversity.

Cultural changes: Related to the above changes, the media contributes to relationship diversity by both exposing people to new ideas and, in some ways, endorsing and "failing to condemn" (as it were) new types of family structures and relationships. People become, in this respect, generally more accepting of "single-parents, surrogate-mothers and gay and lesbian families". In this globalised context, **Jagger and Wright** (1999) argue that attempts to "turn back the tide of family diversity" and "recapture an idealised 'nuclear' version of family life where time stands still and traditional values are re-vitalised" is no longer a possibility or an option (presupposing, of course, it ever was).

For postmodernists, therefore, changing family structures and relationships reflect the wider economic, political and cultural changes in our society that have become characterised by things like:

Choice: Just as when we go to the supermarket we expect a choice of things to buy, so too do we increasingly expect our personal relationships to be governed by our ability to make choices.

Uncertainty: **Smart and Neale** (1997) draw our attention to the idea that, although the downside of increased choice is *uncertainty* ("Have I made the right choice?") we shouldn't simply assume *marriage*, as opposed to, for example, *cohabitation*, involves greater personal certainty because it is legally sanctioned (it is, for example, legally more difficult to break away from a

marriage than from a cohabiting relationship). On the contrary, perhaps, it's our knowledge of uncertainty - that a family relationship is not backed up by

legal responsibilities and sanctions - that makes people work harder within such relationships to "make them work".

Have economic changes made women less-dependent on men than in the past?

Finally, we can note how **Neale** (2000) summarises the general postmodern position, in terms of a "*relational approach*" to understanding family and household diversity that involves:

Commitment: Family (and other personal) relationships are increasingly played out in *micro networks*. That is, people are increasingly likely to *negotiate* their relationships with other individuals in ways that take more account of personal needs and responsibilities, rather than, perhaps, worrying about what "others in the community might think".
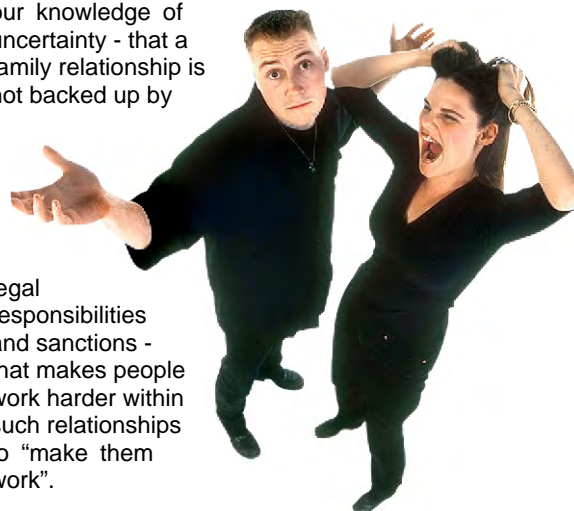
Morality: In situations where a wide diversity of family roles, relationships and structures exist, morality-based judgements (that one way of living is better than any other) become much weaker and harder to justify. In this respect, society in general becomes "less judgemental" about how others choose to form family relationships (the idea of gay family structures, for example, being a case in point).

Tried and Tested

(d) Examine possible causes and reasons for family and household diversity in 21st century Britain (24 marks)

(e) Assess the view that the contemporary diversity of family structures and relationships is indicative of family decline (24 marks).

Thus far we've considered "family and household diversity" in fairly broad terms and we can now refine the focus a little by examining "**Changing patterns of marriage, cohabitation, separation, divorce and child bearing**".

Marriage: Observations

When examining changing patterns of marriage the picture is complicated by *serial monogamy* (in our society people can marry, divorce and remarry) which makes simple comparisons between past and present difficult. However, this doesn't mean marriage statistics tell us nothing of importance.

In the following table ("UK Marriage Patterns") we can identify a number of broad changes:

1st marriage: A steady and absolute decline in the number of people marrying over the past 50 years.

2nd marriage: Remarriage (which includes 2nd and subsequent marriages - some people either never learn or they have a touching faith in marriage) peaked in the 1980's and has since slowly declined. Remarriage, as a percentage of all marriages, has doubled in the past 50 years.

Marriage was most popular just after the Second World War and during the 1970's (the two events are not unconnected and relate to the **post-war baby boom** – see below), since when it has generally declined. According to the **Office for National Statistics** (2007) for example "The proportion of married couple families has decreased over the last ten years, (accounting for 71 per cent of families in 2006, compared with 76 per cent in 1996)".

Marriage: Explanations

There are a number reasons we can consider for changes in the popularity of marriage:

Alternatives: The main "alternatives to marriage" in 21st century Britain are:

Cohabitation (see below), something that has increased in popularity in recent years; although many cohabiting couples eventually marry, many do not. The **Office for National Statistics** (2007), however, argues that any *decline* in marriage is not necessarily accounted for by an *increase* in cohabitation; rather, any comparative decline can be largely accounted for by the increase in the numbers of young women and men choosing to delay partnership formation (marriage or cohabitation) until later in life.

Single-parenthood: In 2007 (**Office for National Statistics**) around 2.5 million families in the UK were headed by a single parent (around 90% a lone female).

Staying single: There has, in recent times, been a significant increase in the numbers of those choosing to remain single (and childless) as an alternative to marriage.

Social Pressures: There is less *stigma* attached to both "being unmarried" and bearing / raising children outside marriage. These ideas, coupled with the easy availability of contraception (allowing sexual relationships outside marriage relatively free from the risk of conception) mean social pressures to marry have declined. There is also, as we've suggested, less economic pressure on women, in particular, to marry in order to secure their financial security.

Secularisation: For some (but by no means all) ethnic groups, the influence of religious beliefs and organisations has declined (*secularisation*), leading to changes in the meaning and significance of marriage. **Self and Zealey** (2007), for example, note that "In England and Wales in 2005, 160,000 civil marriage ceremonies (marriages performed by a government official rather than by a clergyman) took place and accounted for more than two-thirds (65 per cent) of all marriages…over half of all civil marriages, took place in approved premises (as opposed to places of worship or registry offices)".

UK Marriage Patterns: Source - adapted from Self and Zealey (2007)

Year	All Marriages ('000s)	1st Marriage ('000s)	Remarriage ('000s)	Remarriage as % of all marriages	UK Population (Millions)
1901	380	-	-	-	38
1950	408	330	78	19	49
1960	394	336	58	15	51
1970	471	389	82	17	53
1980	418	279	139	33	53
1990	375	241	134	36	55
1999	301	180	128	43	56
2000	308	180	126	41	57
2001	286	180	106	37	58
2004	311	190	115	37	59
2005	284	180	110	39	60

If people fail to see marriage as special or important, this opens the way to the development of other forms of partnership (such as cohabitation). In addition, if some men and women are increasingly choosing to remain childless, the legal and moral aspect of marriage may lose its significance, making it less likely for people to marry.

Lifestyle: The decision not to marry may have become something of a "lifestyle choice". Amongst women especially, increased financial, career and personal independence may be reflected in decisions about alternative relationships - something related to both male and female expectations of marriage (questions of who, for example, is expected to perform child care and domestic labour roles). The argument here is that women are increasingly less-likely, for a range of reasons, to enter into a relationship (such as marriage) that restricts their ability to work and develop a career. As **Oswald** (2002) argues: "Women are now more highly educated and can look after themselves financially. They do better at school than boys. They go to university in equal proportions to men and often go into better jobs. Their skills are in demand in the workforce. Nobody needs brute strength any more, and certainly having brutes in a high-powered white-collar office, where teamwork matters, is worse than useless. In a sense, the modern world of work is better suited to females. In 2002 a lot of women do not depend on men".

Risk: **Beck** (1992) has argued that, in contemporary society, people's behaviour is conditioned by their knowledge of *risk* - in other words, we increasingly reflect on and assess the likely consequences of our actions. In this respect, knowledge about the statistical likelihood of divorce - with all its emotional, legal and economic consequences - may lead people to the simple step of avoiding the risk by not marrying (by cohabiting, for example, – although this type of relationship does, of course, carry it's own level of risk – or remaining single).

State support: Until recently, the State offered a range of tax incentives (Married Man's (sic) Tax Allowance and Mortgage Interest relief, for example) for couples to marry; these are no longer available.

Demographic Changes

Although the explanations for the decline in the popularity of marriage just noted are significant - either alone or in combination - we also need to consider that an understanding of demographic factors and changes are equally – if not more so - important in any evaluation of the relative popularity of marriage. In this respect we can note that the numbers of people marrying in any given year or decade are sensitive to population changes – something we can illustrate in two ways:

1. Baby Booms: During the 2nd World War in Britain people - for various reasons - delayed starting a family. In 1950, the average span for family completion (from the birth of the first to the last child) was 10 years and this compression of family formation produced a *population bulge* - a rapid, if temporary, increase in the number of children in society. As these children reached adulthood in the 1970's and '80's we saw an increase in the number of people marrying. We shouldn't, therefore, assume a rise in the number of people marrying means marriage has become more popular – it may simply mean there are more people in the population of "marriageable age".

Is the decline in the number of people marrying simply a lifestyle choice?

2. Marriageable cohorts: In any given population some age groups (cohorts) are more likely than others to marry – and this is significant in a couple of ways:

Firstly, in any population there are "peak periods" for marriage (the age range at which marriage is more likely - in 1971, for example, the average age at first marriage for men was 25 and for women 23; in 2001 the figures stood at 30 and 28 and by 2005 this had further increased to 32 and 29 respectively). The more people there are in this age range the greater the number of likely marriages.

Secondly, the relationship between this marriageable cohort and other age-related cohorts in a population is also significant. For example, if there are large numbers of children or elderly people in a population, this will affect marriage statistics; children, for example, are not legally allowed to marry and the elderly are less-likely to marry. The size of these cohorts will have an impact on marriage statistics. For example, If we focus our attention on the:

Marriageable population rate we can note that, for this cohort, there was a *decline* in marriages (from 7.1 to 6.8) between 1981 and 1989 – something that signifies, perhaps, only a relatively tiny fall in the popularity of marriage.

Cohabitation: Observations

Unlike marriage and divorce data, information about cohabitation is not legally recorded, so anything we say about the number of couples "living together" outside marriage in contemporary Britain will always be limited by **data reliability**. As **Gillis** (1985) notes: "Couples living together 'as husband and wife' have always been difficult to identify and quantify. Informal marriage, however, is not a new practice; it is *estimated* that between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries as many as one fifth of the population of England and Wales may have cohabited".

Having noted the problem of long-term historical comparisons of cohabitation patterns, more-recently (since the mid-1980's) attempts have been made to accurately estimate both the numbers of cohabiting couples in our society and their patterns of cohabitation. **Self and Zealey** (2007), for example, note a number of interesting points about cohabitation trends over the past 25 years:

• An overall increase in the proportion of people cohabiting.

• For men and women under 60, the percentages of those cohabiting increased from 11% in 1986 ("the earliest year for which data are available on a consistent basis") to 24% in 2005 for men and from 13% to 24% for women.

• Cohabiting males are more-likely than cohabiting females to have been married and then divorced.

• The proportion of cohabiting couple families has, according to the **Office for National Statistics** (2007) increased in the past ten years (form 9% to 14% of all UK family types). To put this in context, this represents around 2.2 million families (compared with 12 million married families and 2.5 million single parent families).

Gender: **Haskey** (1995) notes that in the mid-1960's, approximately 5% of single women cohabited at some point in their lives. By the 1990s, this had risen to 70%, a figure confirmed by **Ermisch and Francesconi** (2000). However, they observed that, on average, such partnerships lasted only 2 years, were largely "experimental" and not intended to develop into long-term relationships. **Haskey** (2002) also notes that, of women marrying in the late 1960's, 2% had previously cohabited with their partner. By the late 1990's, this had risen to 80% of all women marrying. According to the Office for National Statistics' **General Household Survey** (2004), cohabitation amongst women aged 18-49 rose from 11% in 1979 to 32% in 2001.

Age: According to **Summerfield and Babb** (2004):

• 13% of adults aged 16-59 reported living in a cohabiting relationship that had since dissolved.

• 25% of the 25-39 age group reported cohabiting at some point, compared with 5% of those aged 50-54.

• In 2002, 25% of unmarried adults aged 16 -59 reported living in a cohabiting relationship.

• In 2005, 39% of single individuals aged 25 to 34 and 30% of those aged 35 – 49 were cohabiting (**Office for National Statistics**, 2007). These figures are in line with the **General Household Survey** (2004) which found that 25 - 29 year olds represent the main age group for cohabitation in our society.

Ferri et al (2003) noted a trend for younger people to cohabit, not simply as a prelude to marriage (approximately 60% of cohabiting couples subsequently marry) but also as a possible *alternative*.

The **Office for National Statistics** (2007), for example, notes that "Cohabiting couple
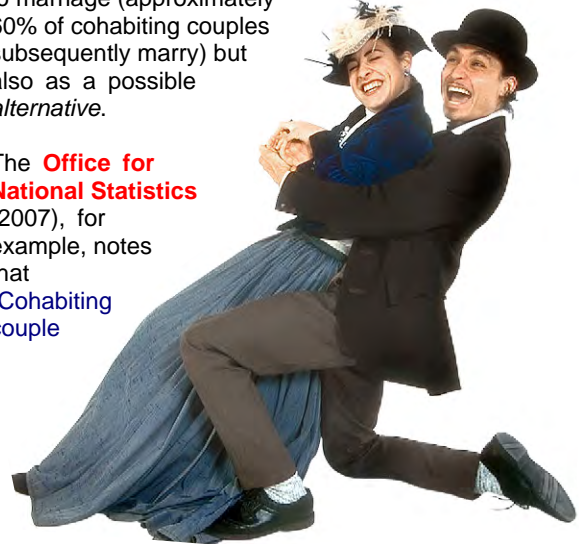
Cohabitation isn't just a feature of contemporary British society...

families are much younger than married couple families. In 2001, half of cohabiting couple families in the UK were headed by a person aged under 35, compared with just over a tenth of married couple families".

Among older age groups, **Berrington and Diamond** (2000) found cohabitation was most likely in situations where one or both partners had been married before. The likelihood of cohabitation is also increased in situations where one or both partners had parents who cohabited.

Current figures (2005) for male and female cohabitation (a snapshot, as it were, of those in a cohabiting relationship at any given point in our society) are summarised in the following table:

Great Britain: Percentage of non-married people cohabiting, by marital status and sex, 2005
Source: **Self and Zealey** (2007)

	Men	Women
Single	23	28
Widowed	24	06
Divorced	36	29
Separated	22	11

Cohabitation: Explanations

Given that cohabitation (or a *consensual union* as it's sometimes termed) is a similar form of living arrangement to marriage it's not too surprising to find the explanations we've examined in relation to marriage generally apply to cohabitation. Having noted this, however, we can briefly explore reasons for cohabitation in a little more depth:

Smart and Stevens' (2000) interviewed 40 separated parents and identified the following reasons for cohabitation:

Attitudes to marriage: These ranged from indifference to marriage to being unsure about the suitability for marriage of the person with whom they were cohabiting.

"Trial marriage": For some of the mothers involved, cohabitation represented a *trial* for their partner to prove they could settle-down, gain and keep paid work and interact successfully with the mother's children. In other words cohabitation for these female respondents was intended to be a test of their partner's behaviour and intentions and, in consequence, a trail period prior to any possible marriage commitment. Related to this idea **Self and Zealey** (2007) suggest that one reason for the general rise in cohabitation in the UK over the past 25 years may be the trend for both males and females to marry later in life; prior to marriage (which still seems to be a long-term goal for the majority) both males and females move into and out of **serial cohabitation** (one cohabiting relationship followed by another).

How we interpret the significance of this situation depends, to some extent, on our general perspective on family life and relationships; on the one hand it could be seen as indicating a general unwillingness to commit to long-term marriage-type family relationships (either through choice or some other intervening factor), while on the other it could indicate a desire on the part of both men and women to take appropriate steps to ensure that when they do commit to something like marriage it is with a partner they already know a great deal about (sometimes referred-to as a **contingent commitment** – couples are willing to commit to each other in the long-term depending on how their relatively short-term cohabiting relationship works out).

Legal Factors: Many cohabiting parents were either unwilling to enter into a legal relationship with their partner (often because they were suspicious of the legal system) or because they believed it easier to back away from a cohabiting relationship if it didn't work-out as they'd hoped.

Opposition to marriage as an institution was also a factor, with some parents believing cohabitation led to a more equal form of relationship.

Smart and Stevens (2000) note two basic forms of "commitment to cohabitation" :

1. **Contingent commitment** involved couples cohabiting "until they were sure it was safe or sensible to become permanently committed or married".

2. **Mutual commitment** involved the couple feeling as committed to each other and their children as married couples.

Finally, we can note that **Lewis et al** (2002) found three distinct *orientations* to cohabitation in their sample of 50 parents who had cohabited, had a child and then separated:

1. **Indistinguishable**: Marriage and cohabitation were equally preferable.

2. **Marriage preference**: One or both partners viewed cohabitation as a temporary prelude to what they had hoped would be marriage.

3. **Cohabitation preference**: Each partner saw their relationship in terms of a moral commitment on a par with marriage.

Commitments to Cohabitation
Source: **Smart and Stevens** (2000)

Contingent Commitment	Mutual Commitment
Characteristics	
The couple have not known each other long.	The relationship is established before cohabiting.
Absence of legal / financial agreements.	There are some legal / financial agreements.
The children are not planned (although they may be wanted).	Children are planned and / or wanted by both parents.
Pregnancy predates cohabitation.	Both parents are involved in childcare.
Significant personal change is needed if the relationship is to work.	There are mutually-agreed expectations for the relationship.
There is no presumption that the relationship will work - only a hope.	There is a presumption that the relationship will last.

Divorce: Observations

Callan (2002) notes that for most of British history divorce has been beyond the reach of the majority of the population - "The first divorce [in Britain] took place in 1551 and, over the next 187 years, 300 marriages were dissolved by private acts of parliament…" - and It wasn't until the mid-20th century that divorce became a viable possibility for both men and women, rich or poor.

Some basic UK "divorce trends" (the number of couples divorcing and the average age at which they divorce) are as follows:

Divorce in the UK
Source: **Office for National Statistics**

Year	No. Of Divorces ('000s)	Average Age at Divorce	
		Males	**Females**
1921	3	-	-
1941	7.5	-	-
1947	47	-	-
1951	29	-	-
1961	20	-	-
1971	80	39.4	36.8
1981	160	37.7	35.2
1991	180	38.6	36.0
1999	170	-	-
2000	155	38.6	36.0
2001	157	41.5	39.1
2004	167	43	40
2005	155	43	40.6
2006	148	43.4	40.9

We can draw a range of conclusions from this data in terms of the past:

• **40 years:** divorce has become increasingly popular and rates for both sexes have increased.

• **30 years:** divorcees, both male and female, have been getting older (reflecting, perhaps, the later average age of modern marriage partners).

• **20 years:** divorce peaked (at around 180,000 each year) and then returned to its previous level (a result of the post 2nd World War baby boom bulge).

• **10 years:** we've witnessed a slight decline (and "evening out") in the numbers divorcing.

Three further patterns we can note occur in terms of:

1. Age, where patterns of behaviour related to this concept include:

• The 25 -29 age group has, historically, the greatest likelihood of divorce.

• The incidence of divorce declines with age (those aged 60+ have the lowest levels of divorce our society).

• Divorce rates for all age groups have risen significantly over the past 50 years.

• Marriage at a later age reduces the risk of divorce (**Chan and Halpin**, 2001)

2. **Gender**: Behaviour patterns here include:

• Over the past 50 years the **divorce rate** (the number per 1000 in a population) for women has been higher than that for men.

• Both men and women in the age range 25 – 29 are most likely to divorce in our society.

• Divorce rates for both men and women peaked in the first three years of the 21st century and have since declined slightly.

3. Social Class: If we take social class to reflect a range of *socio-economic factors* (family background, levels of education and income and the like) there appears to be an *inverse relationship* between social class and divorce; that is, the *lower* your social class the *higher* the statistical likelihood of your marriage ending in divorce or, as **Clarke and Berrington** (1999) put it: "Adults from poorer socio-economic backgrounds have previously been found to experience higher rates of marital dissolution in Britain". **Chan and Halpin** (2001) also found that "Having a degree reduces divorce risks".

Divorce: Observations

Just as people decide to marry for a range of reasons, the same is true of divorce and we can, therefore, look at an illustrative selection of possible reasons, divided for convenience into two categories:

1. Social reasons identifies and outlines a range of factors (such as demographic, legal and economic changes) that operate at a *society-wide level*, beyond the control of any one individual or family. These factors represent, if you like, *structural* influences on people's behaviour that influence decisions about divorce (just as they influence decisions about marriage, cohabitation and the like).

2. Individual reasons acknowledges that one aspect of divorce that's frequently neglected by sociological analysis is the reasons people give for their personal behaviour. While structural factors are clearly important in explaining both levels of - and reasons for - divorce on a society-wide basis, the "individual dimension" should not be neglected as part of any general analysis / explanation of divorce in our society.

Social

In this particular category we can begin by noting:

Demographic factors as explanations for changes in the rate of divorce in our society. In a similar way to marriage rates being affected by population movement and change, divorce rates are also sensitive to these influences. In a general sense, for example, divorce is related to marriage in a couple of ways. Firstly, divorce is a *cultural choice* in that some societies allow it while other do not. In the latter, of course, just because there are no recorded divorces we shouldn't simply assume that all marriages are happy and fulfilling unions.

Secondly, just as marriage rates are affected by population factors (the number of people of "marriageable age" for example) divorce rates are sensitive to marriage rates. **Clarke and Berrington** (1999) note that "crude divorce rate measures" (such as the absolute number of people divorcing each year) are sensitive to social factors such as the "age and marital status structure of the population" – as we've suggested, those who "marry young" are statistically more likely to divorce while "populations with a large proportion of married couples will have more individuals who are at risk of divorce".

Legal changes: Just as we always need to take account of underlying demographic factors when analysing population movements and changes (such as the numbers marrying / divorcing each year), we need to be aware of potential *reliability* problems with divorce statistics. Although, because all divorces are recorded by law, we can be reasonably certain these statistics are recorded accurately the *legal definition* of divorce

has changed many times over the past century (it wasn't until the **1923 Matrimonial Act**, for example, that the grounds for divorce were made the same for men and women) and each time divorce is made *easier*, the number of people divorcing *increases*.

Legal changes, although significant, are not necessarily a *cause* of higher divorce; rather, an increase in divorce after legal changes probably indicates the number of people who *would* have divorced - given the opportunity - before the change (**Self and Zealey** (20007), for example, note a doubling of the numbers divorcing following the **1971 Divorce Reform Act**). This includes, for example, couples who had *separated* prior to a change in the law and those living in *empty-shell marriages* - couples whose marriage had effectively ended but were still living together because they could not legally divorce.

Divorce - a sign of the times?

Economic changes: In 1949 **Legal Aid** was made available for divorcing couples. This created opportunities to divorce for those other than the well off.

If we take account of how the removal of legal barriers influences divorce decisions, the fact that divorce tends to be higher amongst the lower social classes can be explained in terms of the idea that family conflicts over money are much more likely to occur in low, rather than high, income households.

Divorce in the UK: Selected Legal Changes

Year	Act of Parliament	Main Change
Pre-1857	Divorce only possible by individual Act of Parliament	
1857	Matrimonial Causes Act	Available through Law Courts for first time (but expensive to pursue). "Fault" had to be proven. Men could divorce because of adultery, women had to show both cruelty and adultery.
1923	Matrimonial Causes Act	Grounds for divorce made the same for men and women.
1937	Herbert Act	Added range of new grounds for divorce (desertion, cruelty etc.) and no divorce petition was allowed for the first three years of marriage.
1969 - 1971	Divorce Reform Act	The "irretrievable breakdown of marriage" (established by proving adultery, desertion, separation or unreasonable behaviour) became the only requirement. Divorce could be obtained within 2 years if both partners consented and 5 years if one partner contested the divorce. Time limit on divorce reduced from three years of marriage to one.
1996 - 2000	Family Law Act	Introduced range of ideas, ("no-fault" divorce, counselling, cooling-off period to reflect on application for divorce - not all of which have been applied). Idea was to make divorce a less confrontational process.

A further economic dimension to divorce is that increasing *female financial independence* (as greater numbers both worked and developed a strong career structure) has meant that the "economic costs" of divorce for women have declined. Whereas in the past, for example, a wife might have stayed married because she couldn't afford the economic consequences of divorce, financial independence has lowered these potential costs and, in consequence, lowered a potentially significant barrier to divorce.

This idea illustrates an important *methodological point* when considering the significance of statistical data. When **Chan and Halpin** (2001), for example, note that "Women with a greater degree of economic independence face a higher divorce risk" we need to think about the relationship between "economic independence" and the "likelihood of divorce"; for example, does the "risk of divorce" among economically independent women increase *because* of their financial situation or is it the case that women whose marriage runs into difficulty (for whatever reason) are more-likely to divorce because their personal economic consequences are likely to be lower than for women who are financially dependent on their partner?

Two further factors we could mention as possible reasons for an increase in the numbers divorcing in our society include:

Firstly, as **Clarke and Berrington** (1999) argue, although factors such as socio-economic background (income, education and the like) can be **correlated** with divorce the push towards divorce itself may be related to demographic factors rather than social class per se; as they suggest "It is those factors which are more volitional, such as the timing and sequence of marriage and family formation, that are most important in predicting marital dissolution". In other words, although lower class marriages may be more "at risk" of divorce than those of their middle and upper class peers it is because of the tendency for the former to marry at a

"At Risk" Relationships...

Statistically, those marriages most "at risk" of ending in divorce involve:

Different social backgrounds	Pressure from family and friends can create conflict within the marriage that makes divorce statistically more likely. Differences in class, religion and ethnic background also correlate with a higher risk of divorce.
Short acquaintance	before marriage.
Separation	for long periods.
Teenagers	A range of reasons apply here (length of potential marriage, low incomes, shared accommodation with parents and so forth).
Remarriage	Divorcees are twice as likely to divorce again.
Pre-marriage	Cohabitation increases the risk for those who subsequently marry.
Children	Couples with children are more likely to divorce than childless couples.

• **Religion**: Couples are less-inclined to stay together for religious reasons in the sense that the normative hold of religious beliefs in our society has gradually loosened over the years – an idea related, after a fashion, to:

• **Stigma**: The social disdain that was once attached to divorce is no-longer strong enough to keep couples together.

Although the kinds of "social factors" relating to divorce we've just noted are significant in terms of explaining changes in the pattern of divorce in our society, they don't tell the whole story, for a couple of reasons:

Is there as much social stigma attached to divorce in contemporary societies as there was in the past?

much younger age, for example, that is the **causal factor** in this equation. Thus "…factors such as the social background of parents may play a part in constraining behaviour and opportunities. For example, poor parental circumstances are related to poor educational achievement and an early age at marriage…When age at marriage is included into the analysis, social class may no longer be significantly associated with the risk of marital dissolution".

Secondly, although family relationships are clearly influenced by socio-economic or demographic factors it's important to look at the nature of individual relationships themselves if we are to produce a well-rounded analysis of explanations for divorce in our society.

Individual

We can note a range of individual factors and circumstances that are potentially significant in terms of explaining why people divorce:

War-time marriages have a high probability of ending in divorce. **Becker et al** (1977), for example, argue that stable marriage relationships are likely to be those where each partner is well-matched (in terms of

whatever each is looking for from the relationship) and that divorce or separation is likely to occur if either partner fails to live up to the other's initial expectations or "if either partner meets someone that is considered as a better match".

Marriage during war-time is more likely to have been entered into in haste and without either participant having taken the time to ensure they were well-matched (a situation that also, of course, applies, to marriages entered-into after a very short courtship).

Attitudes to marriage: The weakening of the religious significance of marriage (people probably no-longer view it as "Until death do us part") also goes some way to explaining attitudes to divorce - there is little moral stigma attached to it anymore (or, if you prefer, less stigma attached now than in the past).

Lifestyle choices: Some couples see marriage as a search for personal happiness, rather than a moral commitment to each other (which, as an aside, may also explain the increase in *remarriages*; divorcees (90% of whom remarry) are not unhappy with marriage as an institution, just the person they married…).

Social position: As individual women experience increased financial opportunities and independence they have become more willing to end an unsatisfactory marriage.

Romantic individualism: The arguments here are two-fold:

Firstly, that family relationships have, over the years, become stripped of all but their individual / personal functions - if people "fall out of love", therefore, there's nothing to hold their marriage together.

Secondly, that we increasingly have (media-fuelled) illusions about love, romance and family life - once the reality hits home (so to speak) many people opt for divorce as a way out of an unhappy marriage experience. **Becker et al** (1977), for example, argue that a mis-match between what someone *expects* to happen in a marriage and what *actually* happens is likely to result in divorce...

Britney Spears - her first marriage (to "childhood friend" Jason Alexander) lasted 55 hours (give or take a minute or two). Her subsequent marriage, to Kevin Federline, lasted substantially longer (nearly two years, give or take a month...).

Strange Reasons For Divorce

Anita **Davis**, a family law solicitor has identified some odd reasons for divorce:

• A husband was divorced because he made irritating noises with Sellotape.

• A wife divorced her partner because he crept into bed for sex during her hospital treatment for sexual exhaustion.

• A woman divorced her partner for refusing to let her buy her own underwear.

• A man sued for divorce because his wife used their Pekingese dog as a hot water bottle.

Separation: Observations

Our ability to understand changing patterns of separation is complicated by::

Divorce: In the past - before divorce was either available or affordable - it was not uncommon for married couples to end their relationship by separation. However, we have no reliable data about those who separated (or those who would have separated had divorce been possible). The best we can do is make educated guesses - based on the number who currently divorce and the fact that, every time it's made easier more people divorce - about the prevalence of separation. Once divorce became readily available, of course, separation as a way of ending a relationship became much less common.

Personal Factors in Divorce
Source: Loughborough University (2004)
"Let's Talk" Magazine
www.fjg.co.uk/lets-talk/documents/family%20issues.doc

Factor	Percentage
Extra-Marital Affairs	30
Couple Growing Apart	26
Family Strains	11
Emotional / Physical Abuse	10
"Workaholism"	5

The **1969 Divorce Reform Act**, however, introduced the concept of separation into the divorce process itself; a divorce could be granted after two years of separation if both partners consented and 5 years if only one partner consented. In terms of married couples therefore, separation is, as the following table suggests, likely to be a *prelude* to divorce rather than, as in the past, an *alternative.*

Percentage of first marriages in Great Britain ending in separation within five years: by year of marriage and gender. Source: **Summerfield and Babb** (2004)		
Year of Marriage	Males	Females
1965 - 1969	7	7
1970 - 1974	10	10
1975 - 1979	14	13
1980 - 1984	10	14
1985 - 1989	13	16

One area where we do have reliable data for contemporary separation is for marriages that breakdown in the first 12 months. This is because of:

Judicial separation decrees**:** Although couples cannot divorce - and they remain legally married - they can apply to the family courts for a legal separation. All marital obligations are ended and it can be granted for things like adultery or unreasonable behaviour, although it's not actually necessary to show the marriage has irretrievably broken down. The numbers are relatively small, only 387 separations were granted in 2005 (**Judicial Statistics**, 2006) and they tend to be granted to couples where things like religious beliefs forbid divorce.

Separation: Explanations

When thinking about separation (as you do), we can note two points. Firstly, we can't *reliably* establish comparative historical patterns of separation, mainly because there are no official statistical records and secondly, the concept itself is largely redundant in our society given the easy availability of divorce.

If we change the focus slightly to briefly examine the possible *consequences* of separation for the breakdown of marital or cohabiting relationships. **Rodgers and Pryor's** (1998) review of research reports in this general area showed children of separated families had a higher probability of:

- Poverty and poor housing.
- Poverty during adulthood.
- Behavioural problems.
- School underachievement.
- Needing medical treatment.
- Leaving school / home when young.
- Pregnancy at an early age.

They also identified a range of factors that influenced these probabilities:

- Financial hardship.
- Family conflict.
- Parental ability to recover from stress of separation.
- Multiple changes in family structure.
- Quality of contact with the non-resident parent.

Finally, **Lewis et al** (2002) noted, in their sample of 50 parents who had cohabited, had a child and then separated:

- 40% gave "irresponsibility of their partner" as the main cause of separation.
- 70% of separations were started by the woman.
- Mothers initially took primary responsibility for the child (which is similar to the pattern for marriage breakdown).

Sign here? The number of couples separating in our society has never been officially recorded...

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by a "baby boom" (2 marks)

(b) Suggest **two** ways in which cohabitation has been made easier in the past 50 years (4 marks).

(c) Suggest **three** reasons for the increase in the divorce rate since 1969. (6 marks)

(d) Examine the ways in which social policies and laws may influence decisions about marriage, co-habitation, separation and divorce (24 marks).

(e) Assess the view that marriage, as an institution, is no-longer as popular as it was in the past (24 marks).

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3. The nature and extent of changes within the family, with reference to gender roles, domestic labour and power relationships.

The focus, for much of the previous two sections has been on examining the institutional features of family life in our society. With a couple of exceptions – such as considering a range of specific, individual, reasons for divorce – we've tended to examine "family life" as almost being something "set apart" from the lives of the people who live it.

In this and the following section, therefore, we can both redress the balance and refine the focus somewhat to look a little more closely into the family group and the relationships we find there; in this section the focus is largely on adult relationships (gender, power in particular) while the following section looks more specifically at the nature of childhood.

Gender Roles: Observations

When think about both the nature of - and possible changes to – gender roles within the family the first thing we can usefully do is outline the distinction sociologists generally make between "sex" and "gender".

• **Sex: Giddens** (2005) notes that "sex" refers to the physical characteristics that lead to people being labelled "male" or "female". Sex characteristics are, in a sense, *biologically determined* and for the majority of human history "fixed" - in the sense that biological sex could not be physically changed (although it is now possible in our society to change sex).

• **Gender**, on the other hand, refers to the *social characteristics* assigned by any given society to each biological sex (whatever these may actually turn out to be). In other words, *gender* represents the things we, as a society, associate with being biologically male or female.

The classic expression of these ideas is **Stoller's** argument (1968) that "Gender is a term that has psychological and cultural connotations; if the proper terms for sex are "male" and "female", the corresponding terms for gender are "masculine" and "feminine"; these latter may be quite independent of (biological) sex". Although, in recent times, this distinction has been challenged (by feminist writers such as **Butler** (1990) for example) it is arguably a reasonable starting-point for our current purposes.

> **Module Link   Culture and Identity**
>
> For an outline of **Butler's** argument, see the Section: "**Sources and Different Conceptions of the Self, Identity and Difference**"

While all societies (considered both in historical and comparative terms) have "men and women", the *meaning* of gender can vary considerably in the same society over time and, of course, between different societies:

Masculinity (what it means to be "a man") for example is a concept that has a different general meaning in our society than it does in places like Australia or Peru. In addition, its meaning changes to reflect different stages in our physical development - "boy", for example, is a different gender category to "man" and, in consequence, represents a different form of masculinity.

Different forms of masculinity...

Femininity (what it means to be "a woman") similarly has different meanings at different times and in different places although, as **Beattie** (1981) notes, there are significant differences in the way we use language to describe gender: "...'girl' like 'lady' is often used for 'woman' in contexts where 'boy' or 'gentleman' would not appear for 'man'. We find Page Three 'girls' (not women) in The Sun. Calling a nude male pin-up a 'boy' would be derogatory. Our tendency to call all women 'girls' is enormously significant. We stress their positive evaluative properties (especially the physical ones) and suggest a lack of power. We are to some extent creating immaturity and dependence through linguistic devices [language]".

In terms of the above, therefore, when we start to talk about gender roles generally (and gender roles played out within the family group specifically) we are talking about the various ways our society assigns certain roles to males and females. On one level, for example, we can talk about:

Ascribed gender roles that involve labels like "mother" or "father" and:

Achieved gender roles – such as who performs domestic and paid labour or the balance of power within different families based on the way various gender roles are defined and performed. With something like *domestic labour*, for example, it would be useful to understand who performs it and why – is it seen as behaviour closely associated with particular male or female roles, for example, and, if so, how is the gendered division of labour created, maintained, policed and enforced?

When we start to think about gender roles within the family group, therefore, we must understand their content (what people do and how do they do it, for example) and, by extension, how such roles have changed over the years (something that links into ideas about social change in general and its possible effects on family life and relationships).

> **Module Link** **Culture and Identity**
>
> Gender is an increasingly significant aspect of personal identity in contemporary UK society and this Module outlines and discusses a range of ideas about gender identities and their formation.

Gender Roles: Explanations

As we've just suggested when noting the distinction between *ascription* and *achievement*, gender roles have a couple of significant dimensions; firstly, a **social dimension** that relates to the very general way any society *expects* men and women to behave within the family group (something that relates to the values any society brings to bear on the content and performance of gender roles). We've met this idea before, for example, when we noted that the "traditional division of family labour allocated fathers the role of primary breadwinner and mothers the care of home and family".

Secondly, however, we need to note a personal dimension to gender roles, one that gives individual family members the leeway to interpret their family roles in particular ways that may deviate from the "gender norm". – an idea, once again, we've previously encountered in the argument that the traditional division of family labour outlined above may be breaking-down and changing in the contemporary UK.

Changing gender roles and identities - are the two connected?

Thus, rather than simply seeing gender roles *one-dimensionally* (as a set of *prescriptive practices* or things people *must* do when playing a particular gender role) an alternative way of thinking about gender roles (which we can, of course, relate to *domestic labour* and *power*) is to see them in terms of *identities*. That is, how family members organise their relationships on the basis of two concepts noted by **Hogg and Vaughan** (2002), namely:

1. Social identity - which relates to how our membership of social groups (such as a family) influences our perception and performance of certain roles. For example, in our culture the roles "male" and "female" carry general social characteristics that define the meaning of "being a man or a woman". These ideas are important because they represent a *structural* aspect to our relationships - I know how men and women are *expected* to behave, for example, because my cultural (gender) socialisation has taught me the general characteristics of such roles.

Social identities, therefore, reflect the way a "society in general" sees certain identities (which, in a family context, includes both gender identities and also those identities related to such roles as mother / father / son / daughter / adult / child and so forth). In other words when we play such roles and take on certain identities we are subjected to a range of **social pressures** that tell us roughly how we are expected to perform such roles.

2. Personal identity, on the other hand, works at the level of *social action*. How someone actually plays "the male or female role" (or, in a specifically family context, the roles of mother or father) is, according to **Goffman** (1959), open to *interpretation* and *negotiation*.

Thus, how individuals interpret and play the role of "husband" is conditioned by their perception of what this role means in general cultural terms (what husbands are expected to do) and in the more-specific, personal, context of the individual's family relationships. In this respect, as **James** (1998), argues, "The home is a spatial context where identities are worked on" - which, in plain English, means family identities are not fixed, but, on the contrary, fluid - they are, as **Fortier** (2003) puts it, "continuously re-imagined and redefined". If we think of gender roles in terms of *identity*, therefore, we can note two things:

1. Change: In the past - for various reasons that we don't need to explore here - social identities relating to gender roles were dominant; they provided clear, unshakeable, guidelines for roles within the family (the classic idea of husband as breadwinner and wife as domestic labourer / carer, for example). There were few opportunities to develop *personal identities* that differed from the social norm - and the penalties for trying were severe (in terms of, for example, male violence against women who attempted to reject or renegotiate her role within the family) – mainly because there were few, if any, alternative ways to be "a mother" or "a father" for people to reference. In contemporary families, although we are aware of social expectations about gender behaviour, we have far more sources of reference for our personal identities - and far more opportunities for the successful renegotiation and reinterpretation of our roles within the family.

2. Diversity: Gender roles within contemporary families – although clearly having a degree or consistency (the role of "a mother" may still be marked-out differently to that of "a father) – are not constrained as they were in even the recent past; people have more personal freedom to work-out their own particular interpretations of gender roles and identities and, in consequence, we see a range of different interpretations of their roles and identities.

A time when Men were men and women were Women?

Family groups with very similar social and economic circumstances, for example, may display marked differences in the way gender roles are allocated and performed and the meaning of "motherhood" in one family may be quite different to that of their next-door neighbour.

Evidence for the type of changes we've just described comes from a variety of sources: **Allan and Crow** (1989), for example, suggest "The creation of the home is an active process which is an integral part of people's family projects" and **Stacey** (1998) observes that in "postmodern society" both the *public domain* (the workplace) and the *private domain* (the home) have undergone radical changes in recent times to become "…diverse, fluid and unresolved, with a broad range of gender and kinship relations".

In a wider social context (structural changes to the family group in contemporary UK society) **Reich** (2001) links such changes to interpersonal family relationships on the basis that the "incredible shrinking family" is one where: "People spend less time together, couples are having fewer children, financial support between spouses is eroding, and care and attention are being subcontracted…living together remains a conjugal norm, but there is no longer adherence to permanent monogamous family units as the basis for family life, or

of heterosexual relationships composed of male breadwinner and female homemaker".

From a feminist perspective **Scott** (2006) develops this theme by noting a "general pattern of change in household and family structures in Western European families" that can be linked to "the changing role of women, both in terms of individual autonomy [freedom] and in terms of female emancipation". These, in turn are connected to demographic changes in our society "since the 1960s including high divorce, decreasing fertility, increased cohabitation and delayed marriage" and "changing ideologies concerning the importance of marriage and motherhood".

Finally, **Willmott** (2000) argues: "It no longer makes sense to rely on traditional roles when dividing up tasks in the home. Instead, new roles must be negotiated by every couple depending on their individual circumstances. In the future, the important thing will be who has the time or the inclination to do the housework, and not whether they are a man or a women".

Although it's possible to argue that gender roles and relationships within the family have changed over the last few decades, the question here is what have they changed from and what have they changed to – and, as you might expect, there is no clear sociological consensus over these the answers to such questions.

Patriarchy or Symmetry?

Traditionally, sociological perspectives on *conjugal roles* (the roles played by men and women within a marriage or cohabiting relationship) have fallen into two (opposed) camps characterised by their different views on the essential nature of gendered family roles:

Patriarchy: This view, mainly associated with **Feminist** and **Conflict** perspectives, generally sees the family group as male dominated, oppressive and exploitative of women. Over the past few hundred years the form of patriarchy may have changed (it no-longer takes the aggressive form of the Victorian family, with the father ruling the family roost through a mixture of violence and economic threats), but both violence and more-subtle forms of male control (in relation to who does housework, controls decision-making and so forth) are still characteristic of family life from this perspective.

Symmetry is the other side of this coin, and is associated (mainly) with **Functionalist** writers such as **Willmott and Young** (1973), who argued it was possible to track historical changes in family relationships, from the:

• **Pre-Industrial Family,** an economically-productive unit with the father as *patriarch* (head of household), exercising complete physical and economic control over his family, through the:

• **Asymmetrical Family** characterised in terms of *segregated conjugal roles* involving a separation between home and work - both for the husband, who spent long periods away from the home and the wife, whose role as mother and domestic labourer started to become established - to the:

• **Symmetrical Family** which they characterised as involving *joint conjugal roles* that demonstrate greater levels of equality between males and females in terms of both paid and domestic (unpaid) work.

Whatever the reality of the situation, as we've briefly characterised it, a third way of looking at gender roles within the home is one that (sort-of) straddles the two:

New Right perspectives argue family relationships should be "symmetrical" in the sense of husband and wife (this perspective doesn't particularly like non-marriage family relationships) performing "different but complementary" roles within the family; roles supposedly attuned to male and female *biological capabilities* - men as the traditional family breadwinner and women as the family carer and domestic labourer. In other words, a *patriarchal* form of family relationship based around a biological (as opposed to social) *symmetry*.

One way to explore these ideas is to look at what happens "within the family group" using an indicator (*domestic labour*) that allows us to measure "who does what" both:

Quantitatively (such as measuring the amount of time each family member spends on particular household tasks) and:

Qualitatively, such as by identifying the kind of tasks (for example, physical and / or emotional labour) each family member performs.
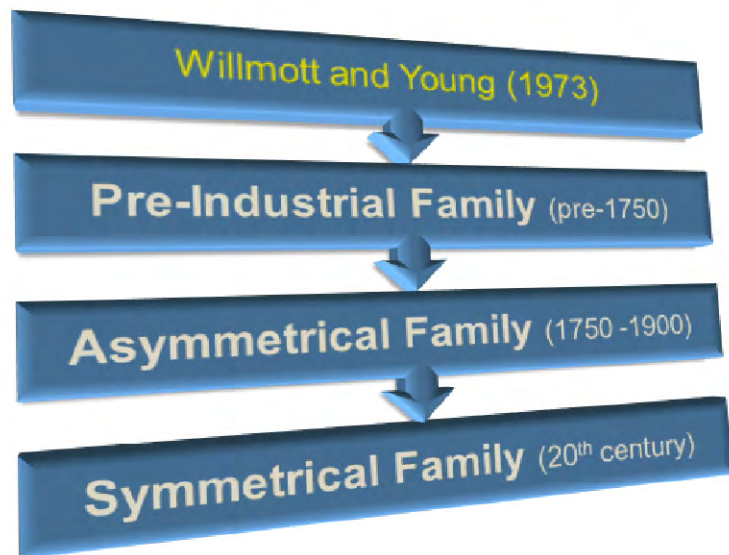
Willmott and Young (1973)

↓

Pre-Industrial Family (pre-1750)

↓

Asymmetrical Family (1750 -1900)

↓

Symmetrical Family (20th century)

Domestic Labour: Observations

For our purposes, domestic labour refers to *anything* that needs to be accomplished in order to ensure the running of a home and family; it includes stuff like cooking, cleaning and shopping as well as things like household repairs (mending the microwave!) and chores; it may also include things like care of children, the sick and the elderly. We can outline recent evidence about domestic labour in our society in the following terms:

Time: Although we should note that statistical estimates of the amount of time spent on housework are highly-dependent on how this activity is both *defined* and *measured* (hence we frequently find quite wide variations between studies in the respective labours of different partners), official government measures and estimates do give us an insight into this behaviour.

The **UK Time Use Survey** (**Gershuny et al**, 2006), for example, suggests that men (100 minutes) perform less domestic labour per day than women (178 minutes). The respective figures for **2000** were 140 minutes, as against 240 minutes, per day.

Module Link   **Research Methods**

Our ability to measure domestic labour statistically is a useful example of quantitative data. It also allows sociologists to make comparisons, both historical (in the same society over time) and cross-cultural (between different societies) and links into questions of data reliability (are we always measuring the same thing?) and validity.

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by "masculinity" (2 marks)

(b) Explain how the concept of "sex" differs from that of "gender" (4 marks)

(c) Suggest **three** reasons for gender role diversity in the contemporary UK (6 marks)

(d) Examine the ways gender roles have changed over the past 100 years (24 marks).

Type: Men and women not only take on different levels of housework, they also, by-and-large, perform different tasks for different lengths of time. Thus, while women generally spend far more time on routine domestic tasks (such as cooking,

The male breadwinner in his natural environment...

shopping, cleaning and washing), men spend more time on tasks like repairs and gardening – something that suggests a broad division of sexual labour based on the association of women with "caring roles" (for themselves, their partner and their children) while men are more-closely associated with active labour (fixing electrical goods and so forth). Women, for example, spend twice as much time as their male partner on childcare duties. Interestingly, where there is no clear gender association with particular tasks (such as pet care) such tasks tend to be performed equally between men and women.

> **Module Link** **Education**
>
> This type of "gender association" (whereby makes and females are associated with different activities and choices) is mirrored in the education system where males and females tend to follow different academic and vocational courses when given the choice.

Age: **Ramos** (2003) notes how the amount of female housework increases with age - younger women do less housework than older women - an idea confirmed by **Gershuny et al** (2006) when they note that both men and women in the 16 – 24 age group spend around half as much time on housework as those in the 45 – 64 age group. Where children are involved, care for the youngest (0 – 4 years old) falls disproportionately on women (they spend nearly twice as much time as their partner on such care); somewhat surprisingly, perhaps, the gender gap *increases* in terms of care for 11 – 15 year old children – women spend three times as long on such care as men.

Comparative: According to the **Future Foundation** (2000) there has been a slight decline in the amount of housework done by women and an increase in male housework. They estimate 60% of men do more housework than their father, while 75% of women do less housework than their mother. As **Gershuny et al** (2006) suggest, this trend has continued into the early years of the 21st century.

Employment: Although **Kan** (2001) found levels of female housework were marginally reduced by paid employment (151 minutes to 177 minutes according to figures from **Gershuny et al,**2005), retirement or unemployment increased female housework hours and reduced those of her partner – a trend that, once again, is confirmed by **Gershuny et al**. Throughout the 1990's, *total family workload* (paid and domestic labour) stayed roughly constant for men, whereas for women it decreased (an increase in paid work was off-set by a decrease in domestic work). However, **Ramos** (2003) noted that, where the man is unemployed and his partner works full-time, domestic labour is more-likely to be equally distributed.

Income and Education: **Kan** (2001) noted how levels of both male and female housework decreased by income and level of education (high earners with a good level of education perform less domestic labour than lower earners, for example) and one reason for this is likely to be the former pay others to carry out some forms of domestic labour (such as cleaning).

Gender Beliefs: **Ramos** (2003) found that, in families with "traditional gender beliefs", women do more housework than in families where beliefs reflect sexual equality. In households where partners hold conflicting beliefs, men do less domestic work.

Children: One area of domestic labour often overlooked is that performed by children – even though they contribute to domestic tasks in a variety of ways (from washing and cooling to cleaning and ironing). Interestingly perhaps, a gender divide exists between male and female children (albeit less-pronounced than amongst adults) with males more-likely to do things like lawn-mowing and females slightly more-likely to cook, clean and tidy. **Bonke** (1999) notes that children generally make a relatively small contribution to domestic labour - contributions peak at 20 (approximately 2½ hours a week). In lone-children families, girls averaged 5 times as much housework as boys (2.5 hours / week as against 30 minutes).

Grandparenting: A final area we should note is the role played by grandparents in the care of children. **Anderson et al** (2000), for example, suggested almost 50% of working parents in the UK rely on grandparents for child care, for any of four main reasons:

> • More working women.
>
> • Long and unsociable working hours.
>
> • More active grandparents.
>
> • High cost of child care.

Are grandparents an increasingly important resource in contemporary families?

Gershuny et al (2006) summarise the general pattern of domestic labour in the contemporary UK in terms of the fact that:

• Women of all ages, ethnicities and classes do more domestic labour than men.

• Men, on average, spend more time in the paid workforce than women.

• More domestic labour is carried-out at weekends than during the week, reflecting perhaps the number of women now in paid employment.

• Around 90% of women do some housework each day (compared with around 75% of men).

• Families with dependent children do more housework than those without (with the main burden of the extra work falling on women).

Domestic Labour: Explanations

As we've suggested, debates about domestic labour can be a **methodological** minefield in terms of:

Reliability: There is no clear and uncontested definition of "housework" - some researchers focus on domestic tasks such as cooking and cleaning, whereas others, such as **Duncombe and Marsden** (1993), have included "emotion work" (the work women do to "make their partners and children feel good", as they put it) as part of the definition.

Validity: We need to be aware of *observer effects* (when housework is recorded in diaries by respondents) and *interviewer effects* (when people are questioned about their housework chores). A general problem here is men over-estimate - and women underestimate - the amount of time spent on domestic labour.

While it is, of course, necessary to understand and take into account potential methodological problems, the broad consensus of sociological research opinion is as we've outlined it above – that women do the majority of domestic labour in our society. While there may be arguments over the respective amounts and types of domestic labour performed by men and women, what we have to examine here is possible explanations for this general pattern of behaviour – and to do this we can return to the distinction, noted earlier, between social and personal identities:

Social Identities

It's clear that, in some respects, cultural beliefs about male and female abilities and roles are significant in terms of explaining differences in domestic labour, an idea initially tied up with notions of:

Patriarchy: Ideas about gender roles and behaviour reflect patriarchal attitudes mainly - but not exclusively - amongst older age groups in the population. **Pleck** (1985), for example, noted the "more traditional" the views held by couples about gender roles, the greater the level of domestic labour inequality. **Pilcher** (1998) found similar views among her respondents; Older respondents - unlike their younger counterparts - didn't talk about "equality" but thought instead in traditional ways about gender roles, responsibilities and relationships – something that reflected, she argued, their socialisation and life experiences and which reflected a situation where "Men undertook limited household work, married women had limited involvement in paid work and a marked gendered division of labour was the norm". Within this general patriarchal context we can note two distinct forms of social identity that seem to exert a powerful influence on perceptions of male and female identities:

Femininity: Although changing, notions of what it *means* to be a woman are still, to some extent, tied up with ideas about caring and nurture. To "be a women", in this respect, means adopting both a certain way of thinking (in terms of the welfare of others) and behaving - as **Gershuny et al** (2006) demonstrate, responsibility for child care within the family still falls mainly on the female partner.

Masculinity: Conversely, traditional notions of masculinity are still, to some extent, bound-up with ideas about providing for a family by taking-on the main economic role. **McDowell** (2001), for example, noted the "…continued dominance of a 'traditional' masculinity" in her study of young working class men. Notions about how to "be a man", in this particular context, were intimately bound-up in being able to look after the economic well-being of both partner and children.

These "traditional" or "conventional" notions of femininity and masculinity are both powerful in terms of the hold they still exert over people and complimentary in the sense that ideas about one are reflected in ideas about the other – something that serves to continually reinforce such ideas by what *postmodern sociologists* term their:


Binary opposition: Men, for example, understand something about their masculine identity because it is defined in opposition to its mirror-image alternative– femininity (and *vice versa*, of course).

The evidence we've previously examined lends a degree of support to this general argument, both in terms of how domestic labour is distributed and performed and, more significantly perhaps, how this distribution has changed in recent times. The general trend for a more-equal distribution (with the gap between male and female labour gradually declining) reflects social changes in our society; economic changes have brought more women into the full-time workforce; political changes have given women greater rights within both the public and private domain (laws relating to sexual discrimination and equal pay, for example) and cultural changes have brought a change in general attitudes to both work and family life.

> **Personal Identities**

While social identities can be both powerful and influential in determining how men and women see and think about such things as their gender status and abilities, it's evident that a further dimension we need to consider is how gender roles are interpreted and negotiated according to the specific family circumstances of those involved.
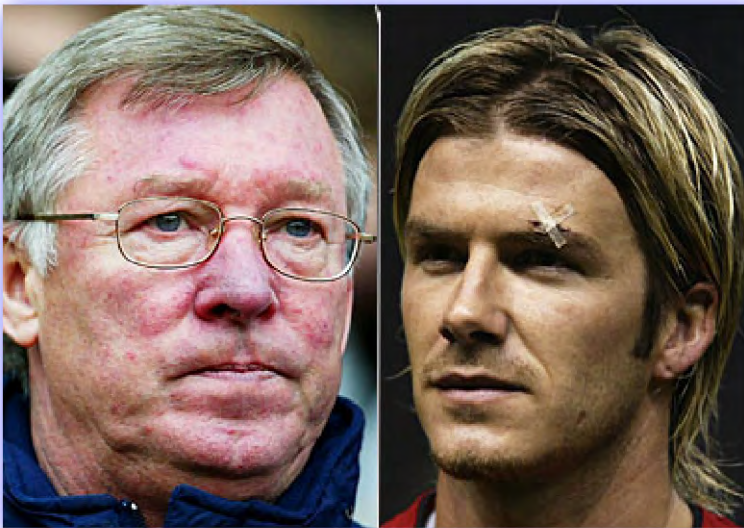
Fergie and Becks - Two different types of masculinity and personal identity?

We've seen, for example, how gender roles shift and change under certain conditions (such as unemployment, full / part time working and the presence or absence of children within the family). This idea is especially clear when we consider how class, age and educational differences impact on such roles. **Callaghan** (1998), for example, highlights the importance of considering these factors when thinking about how gender roles are created and performed within the family and **Dench** (1996) argues younger men, as a group, believed "couples should share or negotiate family roles" and resist conventional ideas that men should be the main breadwinners.

Speakman and Marchington (1999) however are more sceptical about "changing attitudes" filtering down to changing roles. They noted, for example, how some men used *learned helplessness* when trying to avoid domestic tasks - their "inability" to work domestic machinery (such as that technological imponderable,

the iron) served to throw domestic tasks back into the hands of their partners.

Two further points we could note here involve:

Over-estimations of male domestic labour when (male) subjects are required to self-asses the amount of housework they do.

Cherry-picking domestic tasks: As we've seen, the evidence suggests that the majority of female domestic labour involves the routine and mundane tasks required to keep the family functioning. Men, on the other hand, are more-likely to get involved in activities that are more interesting and personally rewarding; a case in point, for example, is that while women are more-likely to be involved in things like washing and dressing their young children, men are more-likely to count things like "reading a bedtime story" or "playing with their children" as part of their domestic labour.

To sum-up these general ideas we can identify three main reasons for the generally unequal distribution of domestic labour in our society:

1. Social identities relating to deep-seated cultural beliefs about male and female "natures" exert a powerful pull, through the gender socialisation process, that leads to the reproduction of traditional forms of gender relationship (women as "carers" for example).

2. Socio-Personal identities involving the way personal identities are *pragmatically* ("reasonably") shaped by social identities. For example, in a family where the man is the main breadwinner, decisions about who will give up work to care for children may be guided by the reality of differences in earning power. The reverse is, of course, also the case; in situations where the female partner is the highest earner and has the better career prospects the male partner may become a "house husband".

3. Personal identities involve looking at quite specific relationships between family members and may be played-out against a background of complex personal and cultural histories. For example, some men may be able to get away with doing little or nothing in terms of domestic labour (even where his partner works full-time); on the other hand, a man's personal relationship with his partner may not allow him to shirk his share of family responsibilities.

The above ideas suggest, therefore, that questions relating to domestic labour – such as who does it and why – revolve around a complex interplay of social and interpersonal relationships. On the one hand, the fact that women still do the majority of domestic labour in our society suggests social identities that influence male and female *self* and *other* perceptions remain strong (how you, for example, see your family role and, by extension, that of your partner). On the other hand,

the fact that differences in the amount of domestic labour performed by each partner have declined (and continue to decline) suggests that, at the very least, social changes are filtering through to personal identities and relationships.

A case in point here might be **Baxter et al's** (2005) research which suggests that "…time spent in a cohabiting relationship prior to marriage leads to fewer hours on housework after marriage, but only for women". In other words, the **pathway** taken into marriage "affects the level of gender equality within marriage. Specifically couples that cohabit prior to marriage were found to adopt more equal divisions of labour than those who married without a prior period of cohabitation".

The pathway taken into marriage impacts on gender inequalities.

Gender roles and relationships, in this respect, are shaped by both wider social factors (from gender socialisation through economic circumstances to cultural attitudes) and the various ways in which the respective partners personally relate to one another. Like any social institution, however, family groups involve **power relationships**. In other words, they involve "struggles for dominance" between family members - both adults and children - in areas like:

Physical resources (such as food, clothing and shelter) considered in terms of who provides and consumes these things.

Social resources - things like decision-making, control over family resources (such as money) and so forth.

Psychological resources (ideas like love, trust, affection, responsibility and care); in short, the range of emotional securities (and insecurities) that surround our relationships.

The idea that the family is an institution that involves struggles for domination (in areas such as domestic labour) leads us to consider next the nature and extent of power relationships within the family.

Power Relationships: Observations

In any discussion of power relationships it is useful to begin by broadly defining what we mean by:

Power: According to **Giddens** (2006) power involves "… the ability of individuals or groups to make their own concerns or interests count, even where others resist. Power sometimes involves the direct use of **force**, but is almost always also accompanied by the development of ideas (**ideology**) which justify the actions of the powerful.". In terms of this type of definition, therefore, power has *two dimensions* we need to note:

1. Force: This is probably the dimension that springs most readily to mind when you think of power because it involves *making* someone do something against their will - usually through the act or threat of violence.

2. Authority, however, is an important dimension of power because it suggests we can get people to do what we want because they think it's right - or they feel they want - to obey us.

Module Link　　　　　**Power and Politics**

If you want to know more about the key concept of **power** this Module discusses various aspects and applications of power.

We can identify examples of how power is exercised within families in the following contexts:

Domestic Violence

This covers a range of behaviours (physical and emotional), the aim of which is to aggressively control the behaviour of a family member (adult and / or child). It can involve things like *physical violence* (assault), *sexual violence* (such as rape) and *economic sanctions* (denying a family member something they need, for example). The one common thread linking these examples is the desire for power and control on the part of the perpetrator.

The extent of domestic violence is difficult to reliably estimate since it generally happens "behind closed doors" within the privacy of the family group and victims may be reluctant to admit to or acknowledge their victimisation.

Module Link	**Research Methods**
The difficulties involved in defining, identifying and measuring domestic violence can be used to illustrate problems of **reliability** and **validity** in sociological methodology.	

Keeping this in mind, **Abrahams** (2002) has identified some significant facts about domestic violence:

Extent:: **Jansson** (2007), based on research carried-out for the **British Crime Survey**, notes that 3% of all women and 2% of all men in Britain had experienced either minor or severe violence at the hands of their partner in 2005 and **Dodd et al** (2004) report that 16% of all violent incidents involved domestic violence. The general trend in domestic violence over the past 25 years has a slightly unusual trajectory; according to **Jansson** in 1981 around 275,000 incidents of domestic violence were picked-up by the British Crime Survey – a figure that is currently around the same number of cases picked-up in 2006. However, domestic violence incidents peaked in 1994 at around 1.2 million cases.

In 1995, 10% of 16 -29 year old disabled women were assaulted within the home. Women are most likely to be sexually assaulted by men they know, and 45% of reported rapes were carried out by a current partner.

Repeat victimisation: **Coleman et al** (2007), again using British Crime Survey data, note that domestic violence is one of the main forms of criminal behaviour that is highly prone to repeat victimisation (with around 40% of victims suffering further victimisation and 25% suffering prolonged – 3 or more attacks - victimisation). High rates of repeat victimisation for domestic violence occur for two main reasons:

Firstly, victim and perpetrator are likely to live in the same household which leads to increased opportunities for violence and victimisation.

Secondly, although there has been a general increase in the willingness of victims to report domestic violence it remains, by-and-large, one of the more under-reported crimes. Part of the reason for this, **Kirkwood** (1993) argues, is that domestic violence has psychological consequences, including low self-esteem, dependence on the perpetrator and a tendency to minimise or deny the violence.

Module Link	**Research Methods**
The problems of **validity** and the **interview effect** are clearly illustrated by domestic violence data. **Jansson** (2007), for example, notes that in face-to-face interviews carried out for the British Crime Surveys 0.6% of women and 0.2% of men admitted to victimisation – compared to the figures of 3% and 2% gained through anonymous self-reporting.	

Gender: According to **Nicholas et al** (2007) the majority of victims of domestic violence (77%) are female. They also note that this form of violence was the only category of violence for which the risks were slightly higher than for men.

Reported crime: In 2000, just over 40% of female murder victims (92 women) were killed by present or former partners. The comparable figure for men was 6%.

Child Abuse

This is a further aspect of power within family groups, with writers such as **Humphreys and Thiara** (2002) claiming a strong link to domestic violence. In terms of statistical evidence:

• One child dies each week from adult cruelty. Roughly 80 children are killed each year, mainly by parents and carers - a level that has remained constant for almost 30 years (**Office of National Statistics**: 1998-2001)

• 25% of all *recorded* rape victims are children (**Home Office Statistical Findings**,1996)

• The most likely abuser is someone known to the child (**National Commission of Inquiry into the Prevention of Child Abuse**, 1996)

• According to the **NSPCC**, around 30,000 children are currently on child protection registers for being at risk of abuse.

Power Relationships: Explanations

There are a number of different aspects to power relationships within the family. Some - domestic violence and abuse, for example - rest on the expression of physical *force* as a form of power that creates control through fear and intimidation; others rest on concepts of *authority* (who has the right to make decisions, for example). When we think about the patterns of domestic labour and power relationships we've previously examined, we can see decision-making (in its widest sense to include things like how family life is organised) involves a complex interplay between the "*private domain*" (the domestic arena of relationships within a family) and the "public domain" (work, for example). This distinction is useful because:

Exercising power involves access to sources of power. The greater the access to (and control over) a variety of sources, the greater your level of power.

Major sources of power in our society originate in the public domain, mainly because it's where family income is earned and We can explore the theoretical side of these ideas by applying **Lukes'** (1990) argument that power has three main dimensions:

1. The Ability To Make Decisions: Although women exercise power within families, it's mainly in areas where they're traditionally seen to have greater expertise (the micro-management of family resources to which we've previously referred). Major decisions

tend to be monopolised by men, mainly because men tend to earn more money and this "public domain resource" gives them power within the family. Where both partners work, women have more control over the wider decision-making process (which supports the idea power is substantially dependent on control over a wide range of social resources). Having said this, female power depends on such things as the status of female work, relative level of income, domestic responsibilities and so forth.

2. The Ability To Prevent Others Making Decisions involves the "ability to manipulate any debate over the kinds of decisions that actually reach the stage of being made'". In terms of gender roles, the personal identities of family members are important (for example, how each partner sees their role within the family). Gender socialisation is significant also, since if males and females are raised to have certain expectations of both their own social role and that of their partner then the ability to make decisions affecting the family group takes on a "natural" quality. It appears "right, proper and natural" for women to raise children and men to have paid employment, for example. In this instance, decisions about family roles never reach the stage of actually having to be discussed or made, simply because the right of the stronger partner to take those decisions goes unquestioned.

3. The Ability To Remove Decision-Making From The Agenda involves the idea that "who does what" inside and outside the family group is conditioned by various social factors (gender socialisation, male and female social identities, the realities of power distributions in society and so forth) that reflect our personal experiences. For example, decisions about paid employment, domestic labour and the like may be "removed from the decision-making agenda" (the respective partners don't actually have to make conscious decisions about them) for a variety of reasons: they may share the belief women are better at child-rearing than men. Alternatively, where one partner earns more than the other, has higher career expectations and so forth, this partner may remain in work while the other cares for the children .

Family Economies

As the above suggests, power relationships within family groups are not always played out in terms of violence or abuse; the vast majority of family groups experience neither of these things (the rate of child deaths from abuse / neglect each year is less than 1 in 100,000, for example).

Morgan (2001) suggests, therefore, that we should consider power relationships within the family in terms of "three economies":

1. The Political Economy relates to the **economic** aspect of family life which **Pahl** (2007) suggests involves understanding how money is received

Major Sources of Power: Lukes' (1990)

To Make Decisions

To Prevent Others Making Decisions

Remove Decision-Making From The Agenda

"controlled and managed within the household, before being allocated to spending on collective or personal items". More specifically, **Pahl** argues here for a:

Resource theory of power: In basic terms, power struggles are viewed as an inevitable aspect of our relationships (whether in the family, school, workplace or whatever) and "the greatest power tends to accrue to those who contributes the most resources" (which include money and status, love and affection, or things like "domestic work, child care or sexual services").

This idea links back to **Lukes'** dimensions of power in that it can be conceptualised and expressed in terms of **decision-making** – those who control the greatest family resources have the highest levels of power and, in effect, are in the most advantageous decision-making position.

Financial decision-making, in particular, is a significant indicator of where power lies within a family, since these types of decision - buying a house, a car or a holiday for example - involve concepts of authority.

Edgell's (1980) influential study of middle-class couples, for example, suggested men made the most important financial decisions within the family, whereas women made decisions about everyday domestic spending (food, clothing and the like).

Decisions, decisions...

Although **Edgell's** study is over 25 years old, **Pahl and Vogler** (1994) broadly confirmed his argument - although they found the 102 couples in their sample could be grouped into four main categories:

• **Wife-controlled pooling** (27% of couples) involved joint bank accounts with female control of finances.
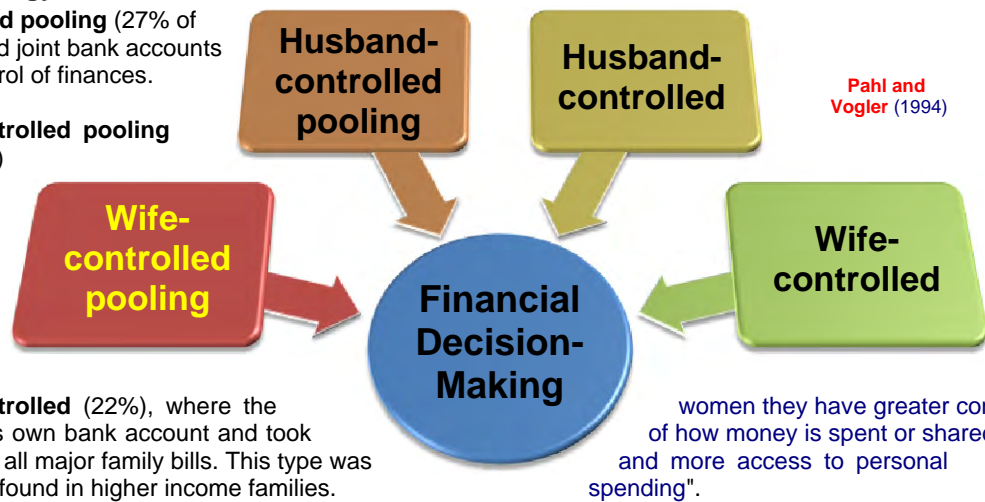
• **Husband-controlled pooling** (37% of couples) involved a joint bank account with the husband controlling financial decisions.

• **Husband-controlled** (22%), where the husband had his own bank account and took responsibility for all major family bills. This type was most commonly found in higher income families.

• **Wife-controlled** (14%) included couples with no bank accounts where the wife controlled the family finances. This type was common in low-income families.

As the above suggests, financial decision-making can be a complex issue, not simply in terms of "who makes decisions" but also in terms of the type of decisions made; men generally take the most important (*macro*) decisions whereas women are given a degree of financial *autonomy* (freedom) to *micro-manage* household accounts. This, in part, reflects traditional gender roles in terms of household management being seen as part of the female role. A further aspect to financial decision-making is added by the existence of:

Secret economies: In a small proportion of families, one or both partners have access to bank accounts of which their partner has no knowledge. **Jayatilaka and Rake** (2002), for example, noted that in 5% of families men had secret accounts and in 10% of families women kept such accounts. Most families in their study reported a strong belief that financial decisions should be shared, but this didn't always seem to be the case in reality - particularly for women with low personal incomes (less than £400 a month); 25% of these women said their husband controlled family financial decisions. In general, the study suggested women *believed* they had some control over or input into financial decisions that were, *in reality*, taken by the male partner. As they noted: "Bringing money into the household brings with it a sense of entitlement to decide how it is spent. Because men earn more than

Husband-controlled pooling

Husband-controlled

Wife-controlled pooling

Financial Decision-Making

Wife-controlled

Pahl and Vogler (1994)

women they have greater control of how money is spent or shared, and more access to personal spending".

Work and Relocation: Other areas of major decision-making in dual-earner families include those involving paid work and relates to things like whose work has the greatest priority when, for example, the family is forced to move because of a change in employment. **Hardill** (2003) found women were more likely to be the 'trailing spouse' - male occupations had greatest priority and the family relocated mainly to follow male employment patterns. This is indicative of greater male status within the family and, of course, higher levels of power – ideas that relate to:

Status enhancement, an interesting - and little-discussed - aspect of authority within families. It involves, according to **Coverman** (1989) "work done by one partner (typically the woman) to aggrandize the other partner's career" (dinner parties, attending work functions and so forth). In extreme cases, status enhancement can take the form of a "*trophy wife*" - a marriage pattern used by some powerful (mainly, but not necessarily, older) men as a form of human *status symbol*, used to demonstrate their wealth and power.

2. The Moral Economy: Although control of economic resources is clearly important, a further dimension is added by the various *values* and *norms* within a family group relating to areas like the roles and responsibilities taken on by different family members. Within a family, for example, it's perfectly possible for, say, the female partner to exercise high levels of power through her ability to organise family resources and behaviours even where she earns substantially less than her male partner. Once again we need to take account of personal identities within family groups – and how the various family members specifically relate to one another – when thinking about power relationships.

3. The Emotional Economy: **Morgan's** third dimension focuses more-specifically on interpersonal relationships (based on love and affection) that are almost unique to family life – a set of attractions that, in themselves, are a source of power (since, at root, if someone is "in love" with you this places you in a potentially strong, manipulative, position since you control what **Dallos et al** (1997) term "**affective power**").

Putting a little bit away for a rainy

Pahl (2007) suggests that this type of "family power" has a number of intriguing aspects:

• **Who 'loves'** the other the most: the partner who 'loves less' can use this to gain power over the one who 'loves more'

• **Who 'needs'** the other most: the partner who needs the other least is more able to leave the relationship.

• **Who best meets** their partner's emotional needs.

• **Who is most able** to resolve conflicts, reduce emotional stress and create emotional well-being within the family.

Finally we can note that the possession and exercise of power within family groups is not necessarily confined to a particular household – just as either partner may draw power from their ability to bring certain economic resources into a family, the same can be true of moral and emotional resources; in extended families, for example, either partner can draw power from their ability to link into a family network of power (involving their parents, brothers and sister, aunts and uncles and so forth). In this situation, therefore, power within the (nuclear) family can be drawn from a reservoir of power existing in the extended family network (whether this involves financial help, the provision of services, emotional support or whatever).

Moral

Political

Emotional

Three Family Economies
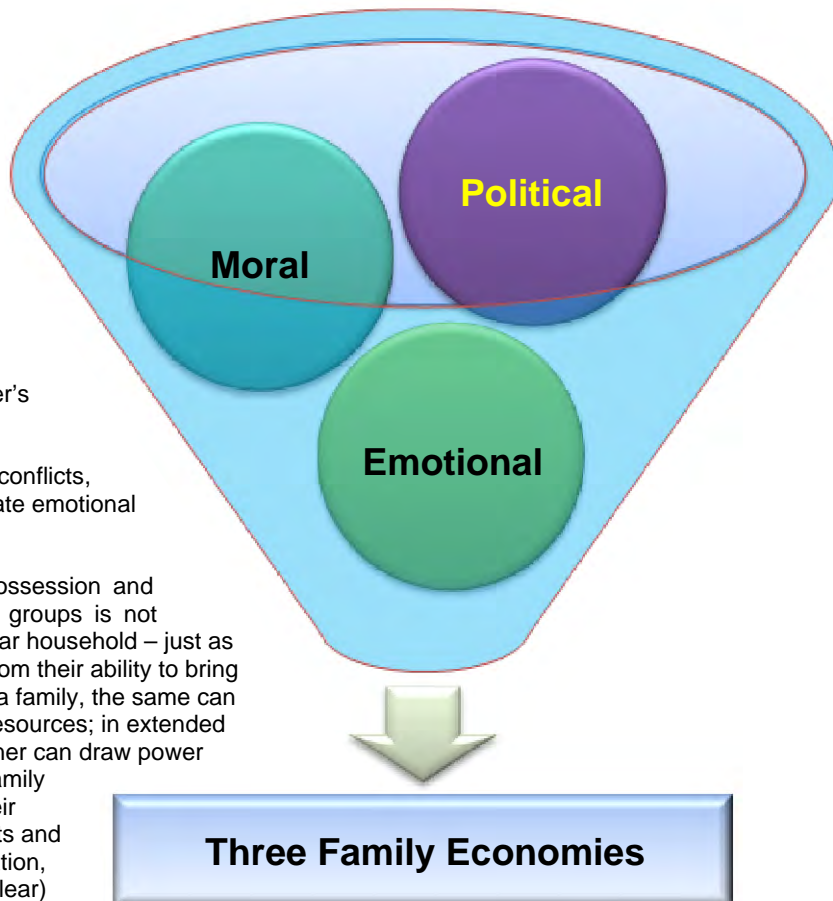
Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by "power" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest **two** ways power relationships impact on family life (4 marks).

(c) Suggest **three** reasons for differences in power within the family group (6 marks)

(d) Examine the different ways power and control can be exercised in modern family groups (24 marks)

(e) Assess the view that domestic power relationships support the concept of the symmetrical family (24 marks)

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4. The nature of childhood, and changes in the status of children in the family and society.

Childhood: Introduction

The concept of childhood might appear, on the face of things, to be a fairly straightforward one in that it seemingly describes what might be considered a clear biological difference between those who are classed as "adults" in our society and those who have not, as yet, achieved this status. The reality is, however, rather more complicated than describing a simple progression through a range of biological stages since concepts of childhood have, both historically and cross-culturally, contained a variety of different meanings – and it is these meanings, relating to both changing perceptions of "childhood" and consequential changes in the status of children in both society generally and the family specifically, that we need to explore in greater detail here.

In this respect it is perhaps useful to keep in mind a distinction made by **Archard** (2004) when he argues that every human society has developed some sort of:

C*oncept* of childhood – the basic idea that "children" are in some way or other different to "adults". Where societies differ (both historically and cross-culturally) is in their:

C*onceptions* of childhood; that is, in the *meanings* they assign to these categories (the length of childhood, the rights and responsibilities assigned to adulthood but not childhood, the significance of the distinction between the two and so forth).

Childhood: Observations

Although ideas about "the nature of childhood" are necessarily connected to changes in the relative status of children throughout our society's history we can begin our exploration by noting that it's not always easy to precisely identify an agreed set of characteristics that serve to define "childhood" (for which reason we sometimes refer to the idea as a "*contested concept*" because there are always arguments about how to define it).

Biologically, we're all young once and, with the passage of time, we all become older - but this simple statement hides a much wider and more complex set of (cultural) ideas.

Culturally, two ideas are significant:

1. Duration: It's difficult to say exactly when child status ends (or even when it begins, come to that). In recent times, for example, the age when people are *officially classified* as "adults" in our society has changed from 21 to 18 (although, just to confuse things further, at

Are concepts of childhood and adulthood rooted in biology, culture or some combination of the two?

16 you can *legally* do some of the things "children" can't do - work full time, marry, join the army and so forth). This simple cultural change (a redefinition of age categories) alters the way we perceive both childhood and, of course, children. In this respect we can see an initial distinction between:

Legal definitions relating to such things as when childhood "officially ends" and adulthood begins and childhood *norms* (what a child is legally able or unable to do) and:

Cultural definitions relating to unofficial ways of defining childhood and adulthood.

Although the two types of definition (official and unofficial) meet at various points they are not necessarily the same – something that serves to confuse both the status of children and childhood and the various ways people are expected to behave (both *as* children and *towards* children).

2. Social categories: "Childhood" actually hides a range of different categorisations of people who are "not adults" (babies, toddlers, infants, teenagers, youth…). The status and experience of being a teenager, for example, is very different to being an infant - so should we classify them all as children? In addition, the status of "teenager" - as **Hine** (2000) argues - is a relatively modern invention (the concept was first used in America during the 2nd World War - "teenagers" didn't make much of an appearance in Britain until the mid-to-late 1950's).

What this suggests is that although concepts of childhood and adulthood involve a biological element (at its most basic, perhaps, the latter is older than the former) of much greater significance is the meanings a culture assigns to the concept of age; both different societies and different cultures develop *beliefs* about age categories and our understanding of their meaning helps us to interpret not only age differences, but also concepts of *age appropriate* behaviour (for example, while it may be considered appropriate for a male child to cry, crying may be considered inappropriate for an adult male, although just to confuse things further, there are times - at a funeral for example - when it *isn't* inappropriate for a man to cry). Although this makes tracking changes in our general perception of childhood a little difficult (actually, it makes it *very* difficult), we can begin by looking at an:

Child mineworkers in Victorian (19th century) Britain.

Historical Dimension

The work of **Aries** (1962) is a useful starting point here, mainly because his work has stimulated extensive debate about the changing nature of childhood and the status of children. Although some of **Aries'** observations and claims have been questioned and criticised in recent times (**Shipman**, 1973; **Hendrick**, 1992) his work is useful because it helps us focus on a number of areas relating to the historical analysis of childhood:

Recent construction: **Aries** argues the idea of "childhood" as a distinctive phase in social development (the idea, in short, that the lives of children are qualitatively different to those of adults) is a *relatively modern* one in Western Europe. He argues, for example, that childhood as both a social and biological category has developed over the past 300 or so years – a significant time-scale because **Aries** links the development of childhood, as a special status, to **social change**. More specifically, childhood developed during the change from **pre-industrial** to **industrial** society. While there were (obviously) "non adults" in pre-industrial society, **Aries** argues they were neither called "children", nor treated in ways we, nowadays, would recognise as "childhood".

Module Link   Families and Households

This general argument provides further evidence to support the sociological contention that changes in family structure and behaviour can be linked to wider social changes.

Religious beliefs: Changing beliefs about children developed as the Christian Church popularised the idea of children as "fragile creatures of god" - in effect, childhood became defined as a phase of "uncorrupted innocence", to be nurtured and encouraged. Children were not to be seen as "little adults", but as something quite different and perhaps highly vulnerable - human beings who needed the *protection* of adults.

Physical and cultural separation: Gradually, children started to live in a separate sphere from adults. As the education system developed (from the mid-19th century onwards) children were treated differently to adults. As **Aries** puts it, they were "progressively removed from adult society".

Whether or not we agree with **Aries'** argument about the "invention of childhood" - **Pollack** (1983) suggests the view there was no conception of childhood in pre-industrial society was mistaken - there seems little reason to doubt that, over the past few hundred years, the status of children has changed in a number of ways. As **Archard** (2004) helpfully notes "Aries claims to disclose an *absence* of the idea of childhood, whereas he should only claim to find a *dissimilarity* in ideas about childhood between past and present".

Initially, therefore, we can observe a number of historical changes in the status of children:

Attitudes: If we accept that, according to **Jenks** (1996) "childhood is not a natural but a social construct", it follows that its status is, to a large degree, *determined by adults*. In this respect, **Jenks** notes two basic historical statuses of children that have existed, in one form or another, over the past 300 years:

1. The **Dionysian child** is one constructed as "a wilful material force....impish and harbouring a potential evil". This view suggests adults must control children in ways that prevent them falling victim to their essential "badness".

2. The **Apollonian child**, on the other hand, is constructed as "angelic, innocent, untainted by the world it has recently entered. It has a natural goodness and a clarity of vision that must be encouraged, enabled, facilitated, not crushed or beaten into submission". This view suggests the role of adults is to create the conditions under which children can develop their essential "goodness".

Adult attitudes towards childhood and children (which are not necessarily the same thing) tend to veer between these two extremes of characterisation. As **Fionda** (2002), for example, suggests children in the contemporary UK are variously seen, especially by the State, as:

Objects of concern who need protection: This mainly involves protection from adults – at one extreme visualised in terms of child abuse and at the other seen in terms of not exposing children to the kinds of things that commonly exist in adult society and conversation (depictions of violence or sexuality, for example).

Autonomous possessors of rights: That is, as individuals in their own right who should enjoy similar levels of freedom to adults and who should not be denied the kinds of rights that adults take for granted. A case in point here might be laws relating to assault – the slap around the legs given by a parent to a child is generally seen as an adult right to discipline their child in our society (the same slap given to another adult could be prosecuted as assault). This is not, however, necessarily true in other cultures; Denmark, for example, banned all forms of corporal punishment in 1997 and **Holm** (2005) argues that hitting children not only represents physical abuse but also a form of sexual abuse…

Lacking moral consciousness: Children are exempted from some forms of responsibility to which adults would be made accountable. The age at which an individual becomes morally responsible for their actions (such as theft or even murder) is a mater for some dispute since it can be argued that one important aspect of childhood that differentiates it from adulthood is the fact that adults are adults because they have developed an understanding of morality.

Accountable for their actions: On the other hand, if children are to be given similar rights to adults then they must take responsibility for their actions.

These ideas reflect a basic uncertainty, as a society, about how to understand the status of children - at one and the same time we feel they need to be both controlled by adults and given the freedom to develop "naturally", away from the corrupting influence of adult society. Contemporary ambivalence towards how children should be seen and treated is, however,

Children seen as "little angels" or "little devils" - with nothing much in between the two extremes.

nothing particularly new. **Hendrick** (1990), for example, has identified a range of transformations in the status of children and childhood since 1800:

• The **Delinquent child** started to appear in the mid 19th century, reflecting concerns about how to deal with law-breaking children and provide protection and care. One solution was:

• The **Schooled child**, involving ideas about the need for education (moral and spiritual as well as technical - the skills of literacy and numeracy required for the newly-emerging industrial culture).

The transformation of childhood status (**Hendrick**, 1990)

The Delinquent Child	The Schooled Child	The Psycho-Medical Child	The Welfare Child	The Psycho-logical Child

• The **Psycho-medical child** was constructed towards the end of the 19th century with the development of psychological theories and techniques. This perception stressed the uniqueness of childhood status and constructed childhood as a time of biological and emotional "stress and turmoil". At this time the concept of *adolescence* as a distinctive phase of childhood started to develop, through the work of writers like **Hall** (1904).

• The **Welfare child** emerged in the 20th century, stressing both the vulnerability of children and ideas about delinquent behaviour being shaped by neglect, poverty and so forth.

• The **Psychological child** has emerged in the late 20th century and focuses on the idea of children having their own needs which, in turn, should be protected and encouraged.

Fionda (2002) sums-up this general progression when she suggests that "Concepts of who and what children are and what childhood consists of have changed over time. Our historical and contemporary notions of childhood also change according to the context of the interaction between the child and the state". In other words, the status of children in our society is conditioned, to some extent, by the way governments have sought to establish and enshrine "childhood" as a legal status. Thus, changes in the perception of children (from unruly delinquent brutes to people with their own specific needs and rights) has been mirrored in terms of:

Legal Protections: The changing status of children has been reflected in their changing legal status - not simply in terms of legal definitions of "children" (an 1833 Royal Commission, for example, decided childhood officially ended at 13) but also through laws designed to either protect children or control their behaviour. The 19th century, for example, saw the introduction of *Factory Acts* designed to limit the type and length of work done by children as well as laws governing a child's education. Children are no-longer, for example, employed as chimney sweeps (ask your grandparents) on down mines (ask your parents) – work that it was relatively common for "children" to perform in Victorian Britain (ask your – oh, never mind).

The regulation of childhood has, of course, continued throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century - in 1972, for example, the minimum school-leaving age was raised to 16 (with a suggestion it may soon be raised to 18 or even 19). Children aged 13 to 16 can legally work 12 hours a week during school terms and not after 7pm. Sexual behaviour is also regulated by law and the following table demonstrates cultural variations (even within the UK) in the age of consent.

Age of Consent: Selected Countries

Country	Male-Female	Male-Male	Female-Female
Canada	14	18	14
Chile	12	18	18
France	15	15	15
Guyana	13	Illegal	Illegal
Iran	Must be Married [Age 9 for women]	Illegal	Illegal
Korea	13	13	13
Saudi Arabia	Must be Married [18]	Illegal	Illegal
Spain	13	13	13
Tunisia	26	Illegal	Illegal
G. Britain	16	16	16
N. Ireland	17	17	17

Children's Rights: The latter part of the 20th century has witnessed moves - both official and unofficial - to develop concepts of "Children's Rights" - the idea children, like adults, have fundamental human rights requiring both statement and protection.

The **United Nations** "Declaration on the Rights of the Child" (1959), for example, defined the minimum rights a child should expect and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) laid down a range of universal rights for children.

United Nations "Convention on the Rights of the Child" (1989): Selected Articles
Source: http://www.un.org/

Article 6	All children have the right to life. Governments should ensure children survive and develop healthly.
Article 16	Children have a right to privacy. The law should protect them from attacks against their way of life, their good name, their families and their homes.
Article 31	All children have a right to relax and play, and to join in a range of activities.
Article 34	The Government should protect children from sexual abuse.

Childhood: Explanations

Heywood (2001) argues that "childhood", as a social construct, is "the product of assorted historical, geographical, economic and cultural forces" and, with this idea in mind, we can look briefly at a range of possible reasons for the changing status of children over the past 300 – 400 years in our society:

Late 17th - 18th Centuries

[The **Early Industrial** period]

Economic roles: As the family group stopped producing things (and turned into consumers), children lost their economic role.

Separation of home and workplace: "The home" became a place different to "the workplace" and, with the loss of their economic role, women and children developed new and different statuses. In part these new statuses can be broadly characterised as "dependent statuses" in that both women and children came to rely on men to provide for their daily needs.

The sexual division of labour: The removal of women's economic role led to an increasing focus on their "natural" role as mother and child-rearer, responsible for primary child-care within the family.

Changing perceptions of children: Hand-in-hand with altered adult statuses, the social identities and status of children changed - they became people in need of "care, attention and nurture" (something which, rather conveniently, fitted the new role assigned to women).
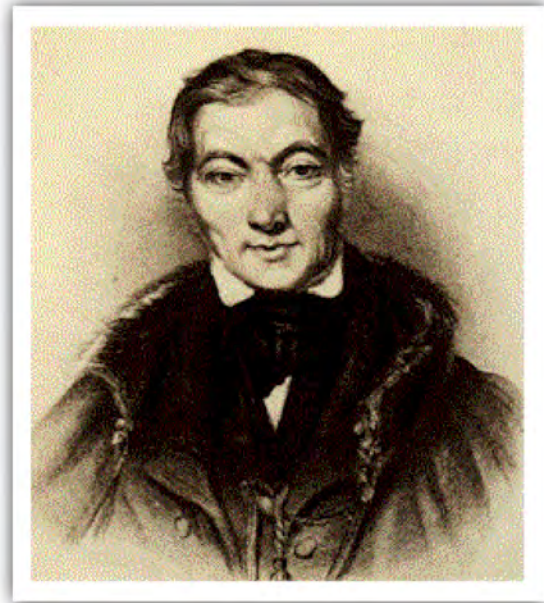
19th Century

Governments in the 19th century also took an interest in the status of children, for a number of reasons:

Education was needed to establish basic levels of literacy and numeracy for the new industrial enterprises. Since families were largely unable to perform this task, separate institutions developed (schools) which served to define and prolong childhood.

Moral conformity: Education was also seen as a way of socialising the unruly working classes.

Economic productivity: The use of machinery in factories made adult workers more productive and reduced the need for (unskilled) child labour.

Moral entrepreneurs (people and organisations who take it on themselves to "protect the morals" of others) protested about the exploitation of children. This, coupled with ideas about the "uncorrupted innocence" of childhood, led to legal and attitude changes to their status.

Robert Owen (1771-1858)
19th century social and educational reformer.

This general situation – of long-term social development spread over 200 – 300 years - is an interesting example of how wider social changes (such as the major economic changes introduced by the Industrial Revolution) feed into attitude changes. As it was progressively stripped of its economic function the family group no-longer worked together to produce the means for their continued existence; rather, one partner (for various reasons we don't need to examine here, usually the male) began to work outside the home (in factories, for example) which meant they could no-longer perform their former (shared to some extent) childcare function.

The development of manufacturing industries outside the home relegated women, by and large, to a domestic labour and childcare function – they were no-longer instrumental in providing for the economic well-being of their family. As their role changed, however, so too did beliefs about and attitudes towards female abilities and capabilities.

As women (lower and middle class women at least) increasingly became "homemakers" perceptions of children started to change; they became perceived as objects in need of care, control and attention (something which fitted neatly into the new female family roles) – or in **Robertson's** (2001a) evocative characterisation, children gradually became to be seen as "economically worthless and emotionally priceless"

19th Century Britain: Child Labour and Selected Acts of Parliament

Year	Act	Selected Provisions
1802	Health and Morals of Apprentices Act	Apprentices to work no longer than 12-hour day (and not to start before 6 am). The Act was not enforced...
1819	Factory Act	12-hour day limit for children in cotton mills. Ban (not enforced) on employment of children under 9.
1833	Factory Act	Employed children must be over 8 years old. Maximum 9-hour working day for those aged 9 - 13, increasing to 12 hours for those 14 - 18. Ban on night working for children.
1834	Chimney Sweeps Act	Ban on apprenticeship for children under 10. Children under 14 banned from employment as chimney sweeps unless apprenticed. Act not enforced.
1842	Mines Act	Ban on women, girls, and boys under 10 working underground. Ban on boys under 15 working machinery.
1840	Chimney Sweeps Act	Ban on anyone under 21 being forced to climb chimneys
1844	Factory Act	Children under 13 limited to working 6 1/2 hours per day. Children aged 13-18 limited to working 12 hours per day.
1847	Factory Act	Children under 18 limited to 58-hour working week.
1860	Mines Act	Ban on boys under 12 working underground (unless they could read and write).
1875	Chimney Sweeps Act	Licensing of chimney sweeps - only those not using children as "sweeps" granted license.
1878	Factory and Workshops Act	Ban on employment of children under 10.
1891	Factory Act	Ban on employment of children under 11.

20th Century

Social science developed to underline the concept of childhood as involving various stages of social, psychological and biological development. This hardened the division between full adult membership of society and the period in which the child "learns how to achieve full adulthood".

Attitudes: In some ways, contemporary attitudes to

Module Link   Crime and Deviance

Some Functionalist theories of youth subculture argue that "youth" is a period that develops in contemporary societies to help individuals "mange the transition" between childhood and adulthood.

childhood reflect an extreme reversal of pre-industrial concepts; moral concerns about the "increasing corruption of childhood innocence", through such things as child abuse and exposure to sex and violence in the media, reflect how childhood is seen as an idyllic period before the cares and responsibilities of adulthood.

Education: This is increasingly promoted - especially at the post-16 level. The 2004 Labour government set a target of 50% of all 18 year olds attending University

(compared with approximately 15% 30 years ago). This, again, serves to redefine notions of childhood, based on the dependent status of children.

Contemporary Trends

Earlier we noted **Archard's** (2004) argument that concepts of childhood (the meanings a culture gives to this phase in biological development) have varied both *historically* and across *different cultures* – although, following **Jencks** (1996) lead, it's arguable that in our society basic concepts of children have variously veered between stressing the need for tight adult control of "unruly youth" and arguing for the corrupting influence of adult controls on "innocent youth".

Heywood (2001) captures something of the flavour of this when he notes that "Childhood, according to the seventeenth-century cleric Pierre de Bérulle, 'is the most vile and abject state of human nature, after that of death'. It is tempting to agree – not least as an antidote to all the sentimental nonsense surrounding the supposedly pure and innocent child of the Victorian era...Such extremes serve to remind us that childhood is a social construct, which changes over time and, no less importantly, varies between social and ethnic groups within any society".

Given this general situation, therefore, it's not too surprising to discover that contemporary trends in the understanding of childhood reflect a number of different viewpoints which, for the sake of convenience, we can categorise in terms of three broad interpretations:

1. Disappearance: This position reflects the idea that "childhood", as we've generally understood it over the past 50 or so years, is changing at an increasingly rapid pace and the major motor of change, according to **Postman** (1985) is the development of modern communication systems. Initially this involved the development of television but increasingly we can extend this trend to include mobile phone and Internet technology.

Television, for example, represents "open admission technology" - it cannot differentiate between adults and children; the latter, therefore, are exposed to images of adulthood (sex, violence, news and so forth) that, according to **Postman**, diminish both adult and child abilities to decide where childhood ends and adulthood begins. Children, in this respect, become more like adults in terms of their criminality, sexuality and dress and adults, in our culture at least, become more-like "children" in their equation of "youthfulness" with health, vitality and excitement.

Is what was once an adult world now available to all?

New technologies – such as the mobile phone and modern computers with fast access to the Internet - have arguably closed this gap further. The Internet, for example, effectively allows children access to information and images that, in former times, were denied (if at all revealed) until adulthood. Two further aspects can be usefully noted here:

Firstly, cyberspace – unlike physical space – is one where distinctions of age can be difficult to maintain under certain conditions; in other words, it is much easier for both adults and children to interact "on equal terms" in ways that would not necessarily be possible in the physical world.

Secondly, the cyber world is not necessarily compartmentalised in the same way as the physical world – children and adults can, under certain circumstances, freely mix – blurring distinctions (such as status differences and the norms of interaction that normally govern adult – child relationships) that generally apply in the physical world.

Although, as you're probably aware, a lot of recent media (and government) attention has been focused on the potential for adult sexual exploitation of children through Internet technologies, there are much broader

issues of identity in play here. As we've noted above, in the cybernetic playground "children" can behave as adults (or, at least, how they believe adults behave) and vice versa – adults are free to express their "childishness" in a relatively safe (virtual) environment. **Robertson** (2001b) adds a range of further ideas to the "disappearing childhood" mix when he notes idea like:

Consumption: From an increasingly young age children are taught to see the world through the eyes of consumers as they're encouraged to buy goods and services that were formerly the preserve of adults (mobile phone technology being a case in point). Advertisers target "children's markets" in ever more sophisticated ways, leading to the development of a "consumption culture" amongst children that mirrors that of the adult world.

Rights: In a situation where children start to be seen as "autonomous individuals" in their own right (rather than as, in former times, "parental property" or dependent beings) they acquire the kinds of "rights" that were formerly only extended to adults. The flip-side to the acquisition of such rights is their treatment as "adults in miniature" which, in turn, leads to the development of more sophisticated ways of living and behaving.

Autonomy: The flip-side to autonomy is the exercise of choice, whereby children become more rebellious, sexually precocious and, indeed, active. In other words children become submerged into an adult world that requires they become ever-more sophisticated in their outlook.

Permissiveness: In addition, with autonomy and rights comes a change in the way children are raised – they are given greater control over their own social development and, of course, held to be responsible for the mistakes and misconceptions they make in a similar way to adults.

2. Reappearance: **Postman** (1985) argues that we are seeing a blurring of the distinction between childhood and adulthood – one where the status of children is rapidly changing to a situation, as he describes it, where "…adults have a different conception of what sort of person a child is, a conception not unlike that which prevailed in the 14th century: that they are miniature adults".

This perception, **Robertson** (2001b) suggests, is mirrored by such things as changes in child-rearing practices – where children are allowed to develop in ways that are less "adult directed" and more focused on allowing them to find their

Are contemporary societies characterised by the idea of "Children but not Childhood"?

own general way in life – and the various ways children are drawn into (and included in) the adult world (through things like conspicuous consumption). Where the status of children changes so too does the way they are both defined and treated by adult institutions (such as the legal system, schools and the workplace).

When we think about "child labour", for example, the conventional perception is that it involves children in developing countries (such as India or China) "forced" to work in factories under adult conditions for little or no pay (and there is, of course, a great deal of both truth and irony in this perception – irony in the sense that many of the fashion items young children in the UK are encouraged to consume are produced by children of a similar age…). However, as **Dottridge and Stuart** (2005) have pointed-out, "child labour" also exists in developed countries like the UK: Around 70% of children currently work part-time and "This is usually nothing more sinister than dropping newspapers through letterboxes, clearing café tables or shampooing hair. The young people involved are learning how to operate in the adult world and are gaining independence and some sense of responsibility". As one 15 year old respondent working as a part-time waitress said ""I enjoy working as it makes me feel independent. I don't always have to rely on my mum to give me the money to go out".
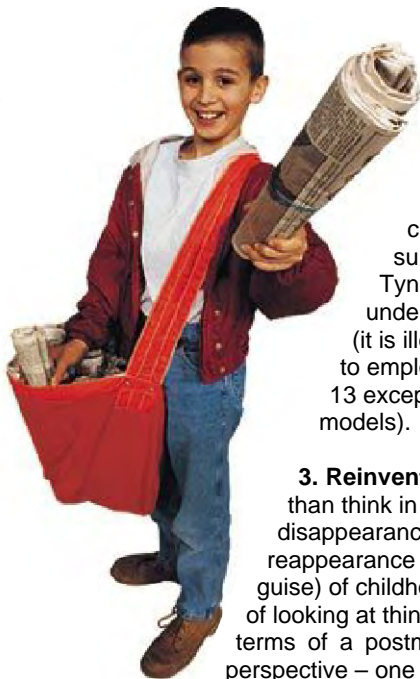
However, as **O'Donnell and White** (1998) discovered, around 25% of working children in their survey of North Tyneside were under the age of 13 (it is illegal in the UK to employ those under 13 except as actors or models).

3. Reinvention: Rather than think in terms of the disappearance or reappearance (in a former guise) of childhood, a third way of looking at things is in terms of a postmodern perspective – one that argues that although changes are taking place in the way children are perceived and treated this is neither *one-way* (children effectively becoming "little adults") nor necessarily evidence of childhood's disappearance. Rather, as with many things, childhood is being reinvented, so the argument goes, as it accommodates itself to wider social changes.

Thus, on the one hand we have clear (and probably lasting) changes to the nature of childhood; children, as we've suggested, are increasingly consumers of products but they're also shapers of these products; rather than seeing them as passive receivers of "adult culture" an alternative way of understanding is to see this in terms of the development of relatively sophisticated "childhood cultures" (in much the same

basic way as children, over the past 50 or so years, have always taken fragments and elements of adult culture and shaped them in ways that fit their own particular needs and preconceptions). The postmodern child, in this respect, inhabits a world that is quite different to that of their modern predecessor (of even as recently as a generation ago) in that they are exposed to a far wider and richer range of experiences; this world is, however, still markedly different to the adult world, in range of (restrictive) ways.

Are children increasingly encouraged to adopt adult identities and behaviours?

Postmodern Paradox

Children remain subject to restrictions and practices that are not apparent in the adult world. For example, they still experience various spatial and cultural segregations - as **Robertson** (2001b) observes "children are segregated into age graded institutions (schools)" and it's arguable that the period we currently classify as "childhood" has been extended in ways that outreach those of any previous historical epoch – one of the *paradoxes* of the postmodern world is that childhood in the contemporary UK is *longer* than at any time in human history while simultaneously appearing to be *shorter*

One consequence of this *postmodern paradox* (children "growing up more quickly" while at the same time being considered dependent on adults for longer) has been the growth in professional / expect opinion – people whose job it is to both understand children and, by extension, explain their needs and requirements to adults. The "professionalisation of childhood" is further evidence of the adult confusion surrounding childhood; where the boundaries are sufficiently blurred we require experts to tell us exactly where they are to be drawn (or not, as is sometimes the case with expert opinion). Finally, of course, we should remember that children in our society lack a range of rights that adults take for granted – the vote, to ability to drive, marry, have sexual relationships and the like.

Tried and Tested

(d) Examine the ways childhood is "the product of assorted historical, geographical, economic and cultural forces" (24 marks)

(e) Assess the arguments for the " disappearance of childhood" (24 marks).

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5. Demographic trends in the UK since 1900; reasons for changes in birth rates, death rates and family size.

Demographic Trends: Observations

We can begin by thinking about birth rates, death rates and family size in the UK during the 20th century in a relatively discrete way; that is, we can identify a number of general trends for each in isolation from one another (even though, as we will see, it is probably more sociologically useful, once we've established basic trends, to understand how these demographic factors are both interrelated and the general consequences this interrelationship has for family life).

Birth Trends

According to **Chamberlain and Gill** (2005), the total number of live births in the UK fell from a peak of just over 1.1 million at the *start* of the 20th century to around 700,000 at the *close* of the century. Although live births had risen to around 720,000 by 2005, **Self and Zealey** (2007) note this represents "34% fewer births than in 1901 (and 20% fewer than 1971)". Statistically, therefore, the general picture is one of an overall **decline** in UK births, even when we allow for the major "data spikes" (significant increases in live births) that followed both the 1st and 2nd World Wars ("**baby booms**") and a further spike in the mid-1960's as the post-war baby boom worked it's way through the general population.

In terms of birth *rates* the general picture is one of similar, if perhaps more-pronounced, **decline**.

Live Births per 1000 UK Population
Source: **Tiffen and Gittins** (2004)

1900	29
1950	16
2000	12

Over the past 40 years, changing patterns of child-bearing in our society can be summarised in terms of the ideas that:

General fertility has substantially declined, including both the number of live births and the birth rate.

Family size has declined from an average of 3 to around 1.6 children.

Motherhood: The average age at which women have their first child is increasing.

Births outside marriage now account for nearly half of all births - a substantial increase over 40 years ago.

Death Trends

Notwithstanding the existence of a couple of notable "data spikes" between 1914 -18 and 1940-45 (so-called "death booms" reflecting the effects of World Wars), the number of people dying each year in the UK throughout the 20th century has, *as* **Penneck and Lewis** (2005) note, remained roughly constant. At the start of the century, for example, there were around 640,000 deaths per year, while this figure had fallen slightly to around 605,000 deaths by the century's close. These figures, however, hide a rather different story once we allow for *population increases* (around 20-odd million) over the course of the century. As with birth trends, therefore, we get a more valid picture by looking at:

Death rates rather than raw numbers::

Deaths per 1000 UK Population
Source: **Penneck and Lewis** (2005)

1900	16
2000	10

As this more-valid form of statistical analysis demonstrates, the general trend over the past one hundred years in the UK is for a substantial fall in the death rate.

Module Link   Research Methods

When analysing any form of demographic data the **validity** of such analysis will normally be increased by looking at **rates** (the number per 1000 in a population) rather than raw numbers. By way of further example, a case in point here is the analysis of crime statistics.

Family Size Trends

One way to check the validity of birth rate statistics is to compare them with statistical trends for average (*mean*) family size – and when we do we find that, as predicted, there has been a steady, long-term, *decrease in* average family size. **Diamond** (2007), for example, identifies the following changes in the **fertility rate** (the number of children born per woman) from the mid-19th century to the present:

Grenham (1995) summarises the general trends in UK fertility / average family size in the following terms:

UK Fertility Rate
Source: **Diamond** (2007)

Year	Act
1901	3.5
1911	2.8
1921	2.4
1931	1.8
1941	1.8
1951	2.4
1981	2.6
1971	2,0
1981	1.7
1991	1.8
2001	1.6
2005	1.7

Trends in UK Fertility / Average Family Size
Source: **Grenham** (1995)

1870s	Between 5 and 6 children.
1930s	2 children
1950s	Post 2nd World War baby boom creates an increase in average family size.
1960s	"Baby bust" – gradual decline in fertility rates until 1970s.
1980s	Continuing decline in fertility rates and gradual fall in average family size (between 1.8 and 1.6 children).
2000s	Slight rise in fertility and average family size (product once more of post-war baby boom as the grandchildren of the original baby-boomers start their own families).

There are a couple of interesting points we can note in relation to fertility / average family size. Firstly, the sensitivity of these trends to social changes - the most obvious of which is the 2nd World War and the "ripple effect" this has produced in terms of "Baby Booms" and "Baby Busts" (but we could also note changes like the introduction of reliable female contraception in the 1960s as a further example of important social changes).

Secondly, **Grenham** notes that the long-term decline in fertility / average family size is something that "has

been shared by the rest of the industrialised world.". This suggests that any explanation for the general decline in fertility needs to take into account that this phenomenon is not unique to the UK.

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by "birth rate" *(*2 marks).

(b) Summarise UK trends in fertility and family size over the past century.(4 marks).

Demographic Trends: Explanations

It's possible to specify a range of reasons that, in alone and in combination, have contributed to the respective falls in birth rates, death rates and family size.

Birth Trends

A number of explanations for changes in UK birth rates over the course of the 20th century can be noted:

War / Economic Depression: As we've suggested, UK birth rates have been sensitive to both war and economic depression (such as that seen in the 1930s). During the 2nd world war, for example, the birth rate fell significantly – symptomatic of a general reluctance to marry and start families during the period of violent upheaval and uncertainty. **Tiffen and Gittins** (2004) note how this relationship holds true across just about every developed industrial nation during the 20th century.

Birth Control: They also suggest a couple of specific reasons for a decline in birth rates over the past 40 or so years; firstly, the increased availability and reliability of **contraception** (the female contraceptive pill, for example, entered mainstream use in the mid 1960s) and, secondly, the legalisation of **abortion** (available free and on demand under the National Health Service) in 1967. For **Botting and Dunnell** (2000), legal abortions have "contributed to the falling birth rates" amongst various age groups. Over the past 25 years, for example, 35% of all conceptions for the 18 - 19 age group ended in terminations. Overall, around 20% of all conceptions are currently legally terminated. Although birth control techniques are significant reasons for the declining birth rate they don't, of course, explain why people want to limit the size of their family in the first place.

To explain this, therefore, we need to note a further set of explanations.

Lifestyle Choices and Changes

One feature of the latter part of the 20th century, as **Abercrombie and Warde** (2000) note, has been an increased female participation in the workforce, both as part of what the **Rapoport and Rapoport** (1969) termed "**dual-career families**" - both adult partners being economically active at the same time and

therefore contributing *dual incomes* to the household / family – and as **single career** men and women.

Part of this changing economic process involves a delay in the average age of 1st marriage and a consequent delay in conception and childbirth. This, as the **Office for National Statistics** (2005) notes, involves a change in fertility patterns: "In 2004, for the first time, the fertility rate of women aged 30-34 overtook that of women aged 25-29". This trend towards "later family formation" goes part-way to explaining a general decline in birth rates (given that women have a limited fertility span - usually estimated, for official statistical purposes, at ending around 45 years of age – and are unlikely to have large families during their 30s / early 40s).

Childbirth within marriage is, of course, only part of the story; as **Self and Zealey** (2007) note, 42% of UK live births now take place *outside marriage* (to single or cohabiting parents) and these statistics tell us little or nothing about why the general birth rate has remained low. We need, therefore, to consider a further reason:

Childlessness: An interesting feature of modern households is both the number of childless individuals / couples and the general increase in childlessness over the past half century (as evidenced by the following table):

Childless Women Source: Adapted from **Self and Zealey** (2007) and **Summerfield and Babb** (2004**)**	
Year	**Percentage childless at age 25**
1969	**11**
1975	**12**
1995	**25**
2000	**25**

Self and Zealey (2007) note that "The proportion of women reaching the end of their childbearing years (age 45) who remained childless" rose from 11% in 1985 to 18% in 2005 and **McAllister and Clarke** (1998) identified two main reasons that help explain why people "choose childlessness" (and perhaps provide further pointers to understanding why women are having fewer children):

1. Risk: "People choosing lives without children held conventional views about partnerships and parenting - but were averse to taking risks". This idea, in turn, was related to a couple of further points:

• **Life course**: "For women living alone, single parenthood was not considered a viable option" and highly qualified career women are more likely to remain childless.

• **Security**: Parenthood was identified with disruption, change and poverty; the childless chose independence over the constraints of childcare and material security over financial risk.

2. Financial Pressures: When we think about concepts like risk and security we are perhaps getting closer to explaining both current birth rates and, by extension, the trend towards smaller family sizes. A significant consideration here is the:

Cost of children, summarised by the studies in the following table:

Average Cost of Children: Selected Studies	
Study	**£ per week per child**
Davies and Joshi (1999)	117
Family Expenditure Survey (2000)	52
Pregnancy and Birth magazine (2001)	64
Middleton et al (2002)	49

Although these figures raise questions of both reliability and comparability (different costs are included and excluded by different studies), they do, perhaps, give us a general view of potential childcare costs – and while it's arguable as to whether potential parents rationally calculate the "costs of children" in any specific way, they will have, at the very least, a general picture of costs in a couple of areas:

Education: The introduction of compulsory education post-1944 added to childcare costs by extending the period of "childhood dependency" (the school leaving age was raised to 16 in 1972). It also meant restrictions were placed on the economic activity (and income) of children. More recently, the introduction of University tuition fees has added to (mainly middle and upper class) family costs.

When looking at how something like "childcare costs" are calculated by different studies we always need to ask whether "like is being compared with like" (a reliability problem) - in other words, do different studies include the different costs under "childcare"?

Work: One parent is effectively removed from paid work during pregnancy and pre-school child development (although both private and state nursery care is available, the cost of such care has to be off-set against the earning power of the parent).

Aside from the general "costs of children" **Grenham** (1995) notes a couple of additional child-related factors in the explanation for declining birth rates and family size.

Firstly, he argues, contemporary families have **"**Less need for children as a protection against old age and illness" and, secondly, for many families there is a competitive trade-off between having children and maintaining a higher general standard of living.

New car or new child?

In other words, the money that would have been spent on raising children is available to spend on consumer goods and services instead and in dual-income families the decision to have a child potentially means the loss of one partner's income. We could also note **Tiffen and Gittins'** (2004) argument that many women now have different *aspirations* to both their mothers and grandmothers, in the sense they are less likely to accept personal and social identities built around the home and motherhood.

Finally, the explanations for declining birth rates we've just outlined are framed in terms of the various ways people *act* (such as using contraception or wanting to maintain a particular lifestyle and living standard) or *react* (the experience of life during wartime, for example). An alternative reason for this phenomenon can be framed in terms of the historical characteristics of successive:

Birth cohorts: We can relate the idea of childlessness to the fact of increased life expectancy for both men and women. Where (crude) birth rates are calculated as an average for all women, **Tiffen and Gittins** (2004) note that if "a higher proportion of the population live well beyond the normal childbearing years of 15–45, the birth rate falls for that reason alone". Similarly, **Johnson** (1993) points-out that a decline in the birth rate for any given birth cohort ("a group of people born in a given year") has a cumulative effect - successive birth cohorts are smaller than the one before. The effect, he suggests, "is for the number of…children in society to decline, followed by the number of young adults as the lower fertility rate works its way up the age structure".

In other words long-term birth rate decline, although affected by short-term factors such as **war** or **population migration** (**Office for National Statistics** (2005) figures show around 20% of births in England

and Wales are currently to mothers born outside the UK – the birth rate would be significantly lower than it currently stands without this intervening variable) is an almost automatic consequence of an original birth rate decline.

Death Trends

As with birth rates, the general trend in the UK throughout the 20th century has been for a *decline* in death rates. While **macro events** like the 1st and 2nd World War increased the general death rate at various points, **Chamberlain and Gill** (2005) argue that the stability of **crude death rates** (defined by **Grenham** (1995) as "the number of deaths in a year expressed as a percentage of the average population") is a consequence of two basic factors: Firstly the aforementioned increase in the size of the population and, secondly, "the decline in mortality and its increasing concentration at older ages".

Penneck and Lewis (2005) note two distinct phases in the age distribution of death rates throughout the 20th century.

Firstly, by the end of the century many more people are surviving into their 60s and secondly, far higher numbers are now surviving into "later old age":

Average Life Expectancy (years) at Birth by Sex
Source: **Self and Zealey** (2007)

Year	Make	Female
1901	34	49
1951	64	70
1981	72	78
2001	77	81

We can outline reasons for this general trend in terms of two, not necessarily unrelated, broad categories (medicine and public health).

Medicine and Health Care

Self and Zealey (2007) note that "developments in medical technology and practice" help to explain declining death rates and it's possible to identify examples of medical developments that have improved people's chances of both staying alive and enjoying a relatively long life span. These include:

Vaccination against diseases like polio and diphtheria that steadily reduced their death toll amongst infants and children. In 1913, for example, the **Department of Health** (2004) notes there were around 8,000 deaths attributed to diphtheria; over the past 20 years it has caused just 2 deaths.

Medicines: The development of antibiotics, for example.

Practices: Developments in surgery (such as heart by-pass operations) have meant those who would, in former times, have died can continue to lead a relatively active life.

Prevention: Penneck and Lewis (2005) argue that "In the first half of the 20th century, advances in the prevention of infectious and respiratory diseases led to a great reduction in infant and child mortality" – something confirmed by the following table:

UK Infant Mortality: rates per 1,000 live births
Source: Self and Zealey (2007)

Year	Rate
1921	84
1945	49
1956	25
2005	05

Self and Zealey (2007) attribute the fall in infant mortality rates – "one of the major factors contributing to an overall increase in life expectancy" – to three "areas of improvement":

- Diet and Sanitation.

- Antenatal, postnatal and medical care.

- Vaccines and immunisation programmes.

Module Link   Stratification and Differentiation

An interesting point to note here is that despite the National Health Service and the provision of free health care "on demand", major inequalities still persist in infant mortality rates between *social classes*:

UK Infant Mortality rates per 1,000 live births, 2005
Source: Self and Zealey (2007)

Occupational Class	Rate
Class 1: Large employers / higher managerial occupations	3
Class 5: Routine occupations	6
All occupations	5

Public Health Measures

While advances in medicine and health care are clearly significant, of arguably more value in terms of increasing general levels of life expectancy are a raft of improvements in the **physical environment**. Examples here include:

- **Housing** - such as slum clearance and the development of cheap, good quality, public housing after the 2nd World War.

- **Public sanitation** - this includes, for example, steps to ensure public exposure to sewage / waste is minimised as well as things like ensuring people understand basic sanitation principles (how, for example, disease can be spread by unsanitary practices).

- **Sewage / waste disposal** - including improvements in the treatment of sewage / waste.

The development of clean water supplies has been one of the key factors in the improvement of public health in the UK during the 20th century

- **Clean water**: The Department of Health (2004) suggests that, over the past century, "the two most significant contributions to better health have been clean water supplies and vaccines".

To this general list we could also add things like the development of the **Welfare State** (post-1944) and its provision for a:

- **National Health Service** involving an integrated network of General Practitioners and hospitals.

- **National Insurance and Pension** provisions that ensured some level of financial security for the retired.

Module Link   Wealth, Poverty and Welfare

To explore developments in the Welfare State in more detail, see the section on "**Welfare Provision**"

Lifestyle Choices and Changes

Towards the end of the 20th century we can note subtle, but significant, developments in these areas in the sense that there is a greater awareness and recognition of a range of "behaviours" that contribute to both individual health and longevity. Examples here include:

Smoking: Penneck and Lewis (2005), for example, note the "dramatic reduction in death from circulatory diseases (in part caused by the decline in smoking)".

Stage 1 Pre-industrial	Stage 2 Early industrial	Stage 3 Late industrial	Stage 4 Post-industrial

Cleaner air: The **Clean Air Acts** (1956 and 1993), for example, placed restrictions on smoke emissions (both from private and industrial premises).

Health Education – a greater awareness, for example, of the importance of balanced diets, daily fruit and vegetable intakes, limits on alcohol intake and the like.

Finally, a couple of significant ideas we need to note in the context of death rates are:

Poverty: The poor generally suffer greater health problems (and, as statistics for life expectancy show, die younger) than those who are not poor. The general UK trend throughout the 20th century has been for the population, on average, to experience higher levels of affluence and, in consequence, there were fewer people living in desperate poverty at the end of the century than at the beginning. We would, therefore, expect to see a decline in death rates to reflect the fact fewer people suffered the life-threatening effects of poverty.

Affluence: On the other hand, increasing *prosperity* brings into play a different range of life-threatening problems – **obesity**, for example, is now a major cause of premature death in the UK (around 30,000 people die each year from health problems related to obesity).

Thus far we've examined birth and death rates in relative isolation from each other and while it's possible to see falling birth and death rates as unconnected, it's also possible to suggest this relationship (or **correlation**) is not coincidental; in other words, to argue that changes in *both* are related to wider processes of **social change** – an idea that is given some credence by the fact that this phenomenon is not unique to the UK.

As **Tiffen and Gittins** (2004) demonstrate, the trend throughout the industrialised nations of the world (Western Europe, Scandinavia, Japan, Australia, the United States and so forth) during the 20th century has been consistently the same: falling birth, death and fertility rates coupled with rising life expectancy.

> **Demographic Transition**

Although a range of different interpretations of this theory exist we can, for the sake of convenience focus on **Notestein's** (1945) contention that the historical development of any society is characterised, as **Newson et al** (2005) put it, "by a progression from high mortality and high fertility to low mortality and low fertility". In other words,

demographic transition theory suggests the trends we've identified are part and parcel of a *general demographic change* that occurs in the transition between four basic social stages in a society's historical development:

> **Stage 1**:
> **Pre-industrial** (or *pre-modern*) society *transforms* into:
>
> **Stage 2**:
> **Early industrial** (or *early-modern*) society *transforms* into:
>
> **Stage 3**:
> **Late industrial** (or *late-modern*) society *transforms* into:
>
> **Stage 4**:
> **Post-industrial** (or *postmodern*) society.

Types of Society (Britain): Selected Characteristics

	Pre-Modern	Early-Late Modern	Post-Modern
Time Scale	Pre-16th century	16th - late 20th century	Late-20th century to present
Main Economic Activity	Pre-industrial (Agricultural)	Industrial (Machine-based mass production)	Post-industrial (Goods and services)
Scale	Local	National / International	Global

Broad social transitions in UK society: Mid-16th to 21st century

The following table demonstrates how, according to **McFalls** (2003) birth, death and population rates correlate with the above stages across all industrialised nations.

Demographic Transitions: All Industrialised Countries
Source: **McFalls** (2003)

	Birth rate	Death rate	Population
Stage 1	High	High	Low
Stage 2	High	Falling Rapidly	Growing
Stage 3	Falling	Low	Increasing
Stage 4	Low	Low	High

In terms of the general theory, a key variable here is:

Industrialisation - a process whereby machines (*mechanisation*) are extensively applied to the production of high volumes of consumer goods. One result of this process is the development of factories and the ability to *mass produce* consumer goods (such as clothes or cars). Industrialisation, therefore, is seen to be the initial "motor of social change" (it effectively drives the *process of change*).

As **McFalls** (2003), for example, argues: "Most societies eagerly accept technological and medical innovations, as well as other aspects of modernization, because of their obvious utility against the universal enemy: death…Social attitudes, such as the high value attached to having many children, are slower to change. It can take generations for people accustomed to high childhood mortality to recognize that low mortality means that they no longer need to have eight children to ensure that four will survive to adulthood".
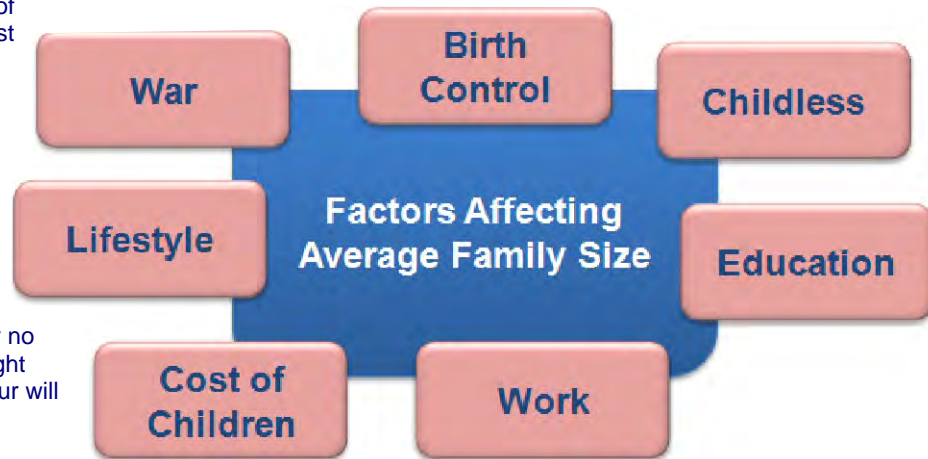
Birth Control: The availability of cheap and reliable contraception allows limits to be placed on family size.

Lifestyle choices and changes: For example, increased female participation in the workforce has meant less time being given to the development of large families.

Childlessness: Where large numbers remain childless, this has an impact on average family size.

Cost of children: Part of the decision to limit family size relates to the cost of raising children, especially in the light of:

Factors Affecting Average Family Size: War, Birth Control, Childless, Lifestyle, Education, Cost of Children, Work

Family Size Trends

We can start the final part of this section by noting an obvious relationship between falling birth and death rates and family size. The former, for example, suggests a decline in average family size for completed families, while for the latter "family size" relates more to the long-term survival of its members as a relational group; that is, for example, the contemporary survival of grandparents into an increasingly-lengthy old age means they contribute, in some way, to the overall size of families in the UK (in a way they did not in, say, the 18th century, where life expectancy was much lower than it is today).

In terms of explaining why family size in the UK (and the majority of the developed world) has declined over the past century **Self and Zealey** (2007) provide a neat summary when they suggest the following "contribute to the trend of smaller families":

- Changing attitudes to family sizes.

- Delayed entry into marriage or cohabitation.

- Increased female participation in education and the labour market.

More specifically, we can note how many of the factors affecting birth rates also play greater or lesser parts in limiting average family size:

War: In the UK, for example, average family size declined slightly during the 2nd World War and increased during the post war "baby boom".

Education: The period of "dependent childhood" being lengthened by changes to the education system.

Work: Limits on when and where children can work contributes to both the lengthening of childhood and the economic effectiveness of children. Whereas in the past children contributed to family income, in the contemporary UK they are far more likely to represent a drain on that income.

Theories

We can complete this Section by picking-up on some of these ideas and outlining a selection of general theories that have been advanced to explain the decline in average family size in the UK during the 20th century.

Wealth Flow theory: The general idea here is that the decision to have children (and how many) is sensitive to both the specific *economic circumstances* of a family group and a wider sense of economic advantage or disadvantage.

Caldwell (1976), for example, suggests the general outcome of the transition from agricultural to industrial society is that children come to be seen as less of an economic

The increasing number of couples who choose to remain childless in our society has contributed significantly to a decline in average family size.

asset (through their ability to work) and more as an economic *liability*. In basic terms, therefore, where wider economic and social changes turn children from a source of wealth (flowing from the child to the parent) into a drain on family resources (family wealth flowing from adults to children) people take the **rational decision** to limit the number of children they produce.

Related to this general theory, albeit in a way that argues rational decisions about family size are taken in the light of a slightly different set of economic and social considerations, is the idea of:

Optimal Investment: This proposes that decisions are made on the basis of a "cost / benefit" analysis that takes account of both *economic factors* (the likely costs of raising a child set against benefits that might accrue to the family through the productive work a child might do) and *social / psychological factors* (such as the comfort and care – or simply pleasure – family members derive from the presence of children). Calculations over family size, therefore, are influenced by factors such as:

• **Psychic income**: According to **Becker** (1991) the *psychological pleasures* to be gained from children potentially increase their demand (the more children, the greater the psychic income accruing to parents). However, the increased economic costs of children means parents "limit their investment" by producing a smaller number in whom they invest a great deal of time, money and effort.

Consumption choices: **Newson et al** (2005) note that (potential) parents now have a greater range of consumption choices, such that "They can compare the costs and benefits of a child with those of, for example, a new car. As the range of opportunities to acquire consumer durables increases, there is a decline in the relative importance of children in the range of goods to choose from".

Support Networks: **Sear et al** (2003) argue modern families increasingly lack the **kin support networks** (relationships with people such as grandparents, aunts and uncles) that potentially provide the resources - a grandparent looking after children while both parents work, for example - to allow for larger families. **Anderson** (1989), however, disputes the idea kin relationships have declined throughout the 20th century (he argues that despite smaller family sizes "lower mortality meant that adults would have had roughly the same number of brothers and sisters alive" now as in the past). He further argues that, in the late 19th / early 20th centuries, "those on whom demographic fortune shone favourably had much larger kinship universes than almost anyone alive in Britain today".

However, the key variable here is probably the *quality* of those relationships and **Luscher** (2000) uses the concept of **ambivalence** ("uncertainty") to suggest that in the light of family changes over the past 40 or so years – such as increased rates of cohabitation – people are increasingly reluctant to either commit to having children with their partner or they limit the number of children in case of family breakdown.

Status Objects: The general idea here is that parents - consciously or otherwise – view children (partly) as measures of their own status; the success of children in their subsequent adult lives reflects back on parents who use this as a means of measuring their own self-worth. Family size is consciously limited to make the greatest possible economic and emotional investment in a small number of children. An alternative, related, explanation here is:

Are children more-likely to be an economic liability to their families than in the past?

Elite self recruitment: In modern societies parents (especially wealthy ones) invest financial resources in their offspring (through things like private education or loans to help establish a home, business or career) to ensure sons and daughters are recruited into the same, or higher, occupational levels. While writers such as **Nicholas** (1999) have tracked the way "a high status education precipitated unequal access to leading business positions", **Reay** (2000) has noted how middle and upper class parents invest large amounts of time and effort (*emotional labour*) in their children's education to try to ensure educational success.

Prestige Influence theory: A final explanation to consider focuses on the idea that the behaviour of those "lower down the social scale" is influenced by the behaviour of those at the top. Thus, as the industrialisation process generally took hold in the UK the initially most successful entrepreneurial families (the middle classes) were seen to gain status and wealth through investment in both the education and future work roles (such as the developing managerial professions) of their children– and this investment meant, as we've suggested, smaller family sizes amongst this class. For those lower down the social scale there was, so the argument goes, a gradual realisation that improved **life chances** for their offspring came from imitating the behaviour of their economically successful counterparts.

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by "demographic trend" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest **two** ways lifestyle choices may affect death rates (4 marks).

(c) Suggest **three** reasons for the changes in birth rates during the 20th century (6 marks).

(d) Examine explanations for the change in average UK family size over the past 50 years (24 marks).

(e) Assess the view that demographic changes are the result of structural changes in UK society (24 marks).

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Unit 1:
Culture and Identity

Contents

1. Different conceptions of culture, including subculture, mass culture, high and low culture, popular culture, global culture.

Culture: Introduction

Culture is a significant concept for sociologists because it both identifies a fundamental set of ideas about what sociologists' study and suggests a major reason for the existence of Sociology itself – that human social behaviour can be explained in the context of the social groups into which people are born and within which they live their lives.

In this Chapter we're going to explore a range of ideas relating to both **culture** and its counterpart, **identity** and to do this we need to develop both a working definition of culture and an understanding of its different dimensions.

Concepts of Culture: Observations

Defining Culture

In the **Introductory Chapter** we offered a general definition of culture by representing it as a distinctive "way of life". We also noted that culture involves teaching and learning (a **socialisation** process). However, in this Section we need to think a little more clearly about what we mean by "culture" and we can do this by noting that the concept encompasses a range of ideas and meanings relating to *roles*, *values* and *norms* as well as *institutional structures* (such as types of family, work, educational and political systems), *beliefs* and the variety of "arts and artifacts" produced by different cultures.

In addition, we can add to this mix both **Dahl's** (2001) argument that culture is "a collectively held set of attributes, which is dynamic and changing over time" and the idea that societies develop *mechanisms* for the transmission of cultural *signs*, *symbols* and *meanings* (ideas we'll develop throughout this Chapter) from one generation to the next.

Cultural artifacts (also known as "books").

Secondly, we can note a basic distinction between two *dimensions* of culture:

Material culture consists of the *physical objects* ("artifacts"), such as cars, mobile phones and books, a society produces and which reflect cultural knowledge, skills, interests and preoccupations.

Non-Material culture, on the other hand, consists of the knowledge and beliefs that influence people's behaviour. In our culture, for example, behaviour may be influenced by *religious beliefs* (such as Christianity, Islam or Buddhism) and / or *scientific beliefs* – your view of human evolution, for example, has probably been influenced by **Darwin's** (1859) theories.

This distinction, while necessary, is not hard-and-fast because physical artifacts (such as mobile phones) have cultural *meanings* for the people who produce and use them. A *house*, for example, is not simply somewhere to live (although that, of course, is it's primary or intended purpose). Houses also have cultural meanings – for both those who own them and those who don't. The type of house someone owns, for example, says something about them and this illustrates a significant idea about the *symbolic nature* of both cultures as a whole and the artifacts they produce.

Some types of housing may mean more to people than others...

There is, for example, nothing inherent in "a house" that tells us its *meaning*, as opposed to its purpose (or *function)*. It can mean different things to different individuals and groups within a particular culture, just as it could conceivably mean different things to different cultures.

In this respect **Merton** (1957) argued the purpose of something can always be considered on two levels:

A manifest function that relates to an apparent or obvious purpose (the manifest function of a mobile 'phone, for example, is to communicate with people).

A latent function involving the idea something may have a hidden or obscured purpose (one that may or may not be intended).

One way to illustrate this idea is through the concept of **social status**, in the sense that cultural artifacts such as cars, mobile 'phones or whatever can be:

Status symbols –the idea that owning something people feel is desirable (or, indeed, undesirable) says something about you to others (think, for example, about how you react to seeing someone using a sadly-outdated mobile phone).

Identity

In general terms questions of identity refer to three basic ideas:

1. **Who am I?** – how, for example, do I define myself?

2. **Who are you?** – how do "I" define other people?

3. **How** are my beliefs about *my* identity affected by my beliefs about *your* identity?

These are, of course, complex questions to resolve, but we can simplify them by thinking about how you would respond to the question "Who are you?" – a response that will probably include references to:

**Social characteristics** involving things like:

> • *F*amily (name and general background).
> • *A*ge (whether you are, for example, young or old).
> • *N*ationality (such as English or Scottish).
> • *G*ender (whether you are male or female).
> • *S*exuality (whether you are heterosexual or homosexual for example).

In other words answers to this question will, by and large, be expressed in explicitly social terms and this illustrates two ideas. Firstly, to describe (or *identify*) ourselves we draw on a range of *sources of identity* (others we will consider in this chapter include *class*, *ethnicity* and *disability*) and secondly, in order to define ourselves as *individuals* we draw on a wide range of *cultural* ideas and beliefs – something that illustrates the central importance of culture in our lives.

Subculture

Thus far we've looked generally at the concept of culture in terms of a society having certain beliefs, values and norms that apply to the majority, if not all, of its members. While this is initially useful as a way of understanding culture, we can develop these ideas by thinking about groups within a society (or culture) who, while belonging to that culture, also develop quite distinctive roles, values and norms *not* shared by the culture as a whole.

Subculture refers to the idea of smaller groups sharing a particular way of life. As you might expect, in a relatively large society like the UK a multitude of subcultural groups exist, examples of which might include football supporters, train-spotters, Orthodox Jews, Travellers, A-Level students and so forth. We can use the last example to illustrate the relationship between cultural and subcultural groups.
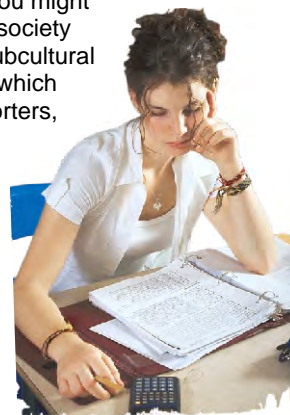
A student doing the sort of things students do (it's not subtle, but it is effective...)

A student is part of a subcultural group with its own particular "way of life" (such as attending classes and doing all the things students are supposed to do.). However, just because someone belongs to a "student subculture" doesn't, of course, mean they can't belong to other subcultural groups or, indeed, the culture of society as a whole.

While some of the *values* of a student subculture (wanting to get an A-level qualification, for example) and the *norms* associated with these values (such as gaining a qualification by passing examinations) may be different to the values and norms of other subcultures, these don't necessarily exclude "students" from membership of the wider culture of society. Indeed, the reason someone might value an educational qualification is precisely because it has a value in wider society. An employer, for example, might offer a job on the basis of educational qualifications.

Tried and Tested

(a) Identify **two** ways in which material culture differs from non-material culture apart from those suggested in the text. (4 marks)

(b) Suggest **two** ways that social characteristics shape our sense of identity (4 marks)

Module Link   Crime and Deviance

The above describes one aspect of subculture and an examination of different types and theories of subculture can be found in this Chapter.

Concepts of Culture: Explanations

We can develop the ideas we've just outlined by applying the **Structure** and **Action** approaches outlined in the **Introductory** chapter to an understanding of the nature and significance of cultural ideas and products.

Consensus theories of culture (such as those elaborated by **Functionalist** sociologists) focus on the role played by **cultural institutions** (the *media* and *education* system, for example) in the creation and distribution of "moral and cultural values" throughout a *social system*.

The focus, therefore, is on the teaching and learning (through the *secondary socialisation process*) of the rules that make meaningful social interaction possible. Cultural rules provide a *structure* for people's behaviour, channelling that behaviour in some ways but not others and, as befits a *Structuralist* perspective, the stress is on how our behaviour is *constrained* by the rules of the society in which we live. We can express this idea more clearly in the following way:

1. **Social structures**: Cultural rules structure individual behaviour by specifying broad guidelines for our behaviour, laying down the boundaries of what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in various situations, backed-up by a range of **positive** (*rewards*) and **negative** (*punishments*) **sanctions** to encourage conformity and discourage deviance. This process allows for the development of a broad:

2. **Consensus** in any society about behavioural boundaries and in turn encourages the development of:

3. **Order and stability** in our relationships, because we understand how we're *expected* to behave in given social situations (such as a school, workplace or bus stop). From this general position culture, as **Fisher** (1997) notes, "… is shared behaviour" that "systematises the way people do things, thus avoiding confusion and allowing cooperation so that groups of people can accomplish what no single individual could do alone" – an idea that suggests cultures performs a range of *functions* for both societies and individuals. **Mazrui** (1996) has, in this respect, identified *seven functions of culture*:

Seven Functions of Culture

Communication: Culture provides the context for the development of human communication systems such as *language* - both verbal and non-verbal (gestures, for example).

Perception: **Matsumoto** (2007) argues that culture gives "meaning to social situations, generating social roles and normative behaviours"; in other words it shapes the way we look at and understand the social and natural worlds. **Offe** (2001), for example, argues that Western cultures generally operate under the belief that "the future" is not predetermined, whereas "Some African societies" are characterised by "the notion of a predetermined future not controllable by individuals".

Identity: Culture influences how people see themselves and others (in terms of things like gender, age and ethnicity). **Durkheim** (1912), for example, suggested societies have a *functional requirement* to develop two things:

> **Module Link**   **Health**
>
> **Offe** suggests differences in "concepts of time and future" have contributed to the relative failure of Western-led health policy programs in the treatment of HIV / AIDS in some African countries. If people believe the future is predetermined then health intervention programs are unlikely to be successful.

1. Social solidarity - the belief we are connected into a larger network of people who share certain beliefs, identities and commitments to each other. For such feelings of *solidarity* to develop, however, societies must create mechanisms of:

2. Social integration: A feeling of commitment to others (such as family and friends) is needed to create a sense of individual and cultural purpose and cohesion. In a general sense, *collective ceremonies* (such as royal weddings and funerals in which we can 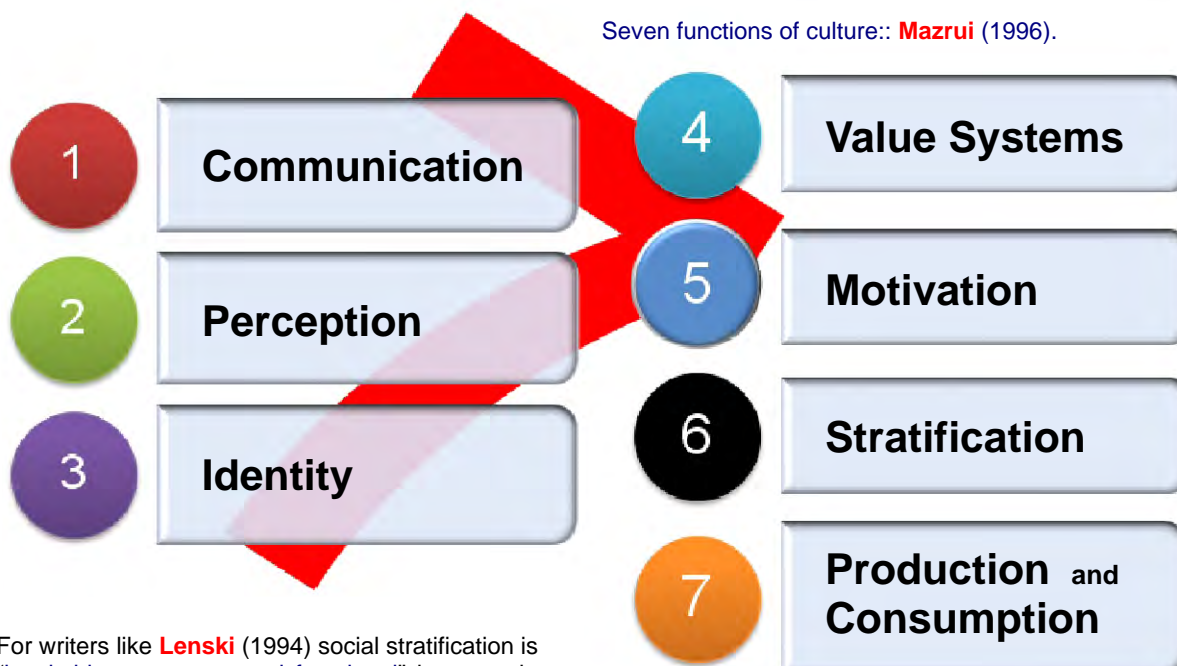"all share") and *collective identifications* (notions of Brit Pop and Brit Art, for example) represent integrating mechanisms. More specifically, perhaps, schools try to integrate students through things like uniforms

Cool Britannia: When Brit Pop waived the rules?

and competitive sports against other schools as a way of promoting solidarity through individual identification with the school. Identities are also shaped through things like an understanding of a society's history, traditions, customs and the like. In **Hostede's** (1991) evocative phrase, culture involves the "collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group…from another".

Value systems: Cultural institutions are a source of values and people's behaviour is, to some extent, conditioned by the cultural values they receive through the *socialisation* process.

Motivation relates to the idea that cultural values and norms involve *sanctions* (*rewards* and *punishments)* for particular behaviours. Cultural values also "set the behavioural boundaries" in terms of maintaining certain standards of behaviour (laws, for example, specify behaviour that is right or wrong, acceptable and unacceptable). A development of this idea relates to Functionalist concepts of:

Stratification: All cultures develop ways of differentiating between social groups on the basis of things like *social class* (economic divisions), *social rank* (political divisions involving ideas like an aristocracy and peasantry), *gender*, *age* and the like.

Seven functions of culture:: **Mazrui** (1996).

1 Communication	**4** Value Systems
2 Perception	**5** Motivation
3 Identity	**6** Stratification
	7 Production and Consumption

For writers like **Lenski** (1994) social stratification is "inevitable, necessary and functional" because it generates the "incentive systems" required to motivate and reward the "best qualified people" for occupying the "most important positions" within a cultural system – an idea that leads to the final function of:

Production and consumption: Culture defines what people "need, use and value" as part of the overall survival mechanism in any society. People need, for example, to be organised and motivated to work (hence the need for a stratification system that offers rewards to those who occupy social roles that, in the words of **Davis and Moore** (1945), are "more functionally important than others") and encouraged to consume the products of the workplace.

> **Module Link   Stratification and Differentiation**
>
> The work of various Functionalist writers (such as **Lenski** and **Davis and Moore**) is analysed and criticised in the section "**Different Theories of Stratification**".

Conflict theories of culture come in different versions but we can look briefly at a couple of these:

Elite Theories

These generally focus on the idea that contemporary societies are characterised by competing cultural groups, each with its own particular affiliations, products and consumption patterns. Within these societies (even those characterised by democratic elections) elite groups emerge to take power because, as **Fisher** (2003) notes the "Masses need leaders to organize them". The idea of cultural leadership (or hegemony) is significant because as **Cooney** (1994) suggests "Elite theories maintain that elites… determine what happens in society". From this we can note that explanations for the role of culture focus on a number of key ideas:

Identity: The cultural identity of competing social groups is not only reflected in the things they produce and consume, it is also bound-up in questions of leadership. Elite theorists, for example, attempt to identify those aspects of a culture that are "the best in thought and deed" and to separate them from the worthless, the mass produced and the artificial.

In his *satirical* take on this type of "cultural division of taste" **Lynes'** (1949) identified three broad categories that help us understand this idea a little more easily:

> 1. **Highbrow:** the *superior* and refined, containing the best qualities of a society. These represent the highest cultural forms to which a society should aspire.
>
> 2. **Middlebrow (upper and lower)**: the *mediocre* that aspires to be highbrow but which lacks originality, subtlety or depth.
>
> 3. **Lowbrow**: the brutal and worthless aspects of a culture that lack any pretence at sophistication, insight or refinement. These lowest cultural forms are characteristic of "the masses".

Elite cultural theories, therefore, are built around the idea that cultural products and tastes are a cornerstone of:

Stratification systems in modern societies because, as **Katz-Gerro et al** (2007) suggest, elite theories see contemporary societies as "culturally stratified" in terms of a basic division between a small, cultured, *elite* and a large, *acultured mass* (literally "without culture" or, in this sense, a culture that is shallow and worthless in terms of the things it values).

High and Low Culture

This idea of social divisions based around the production and consumption of cultural products finds its expression in the distinction made between "high" and "low" culture:

High culture refers to the idea that some artistic and literary products in our society are superior in scope and form to others. An example here might be that classical music is held in higher cultural esteem than "popular music" producers such as David Bowie or the Arctic Monkeys.

Low culture, therefore, refers to cultural products and pursuits characterised by their production for, and consumption by, "the masses". At various times, low cultural forms have included films, comics, television, magazines such as *Heat* and newspapers like *The Sun* and so forth.

In this respect, high cultural products and pursuits correlate with the cultural interests of the rich and powerful whereas low cultural products and pursuits are associated with the relatively poorer and less powerful.

Marxism

This theory is based around the idea that an upper class (or *bourgeoisie*) represents a ruling group in Capitalist societies such as the UK – one whose power and influence is based on their ownership of the means of *economic* production, ability to control and influence *political* and legal processes (the passing and application of laws, for example) and their ability to use cultural institutions to reinforce their overall domination of other social classes.

Cultural institutions, therefore, are seen as *ideological institutions*; they represent the means through which a ruling class impose their view of the world on other groups and, by so doing, influence and shape the behaviour of these groups. In this respect we can look briefly at two ways Marxist sociologists have explained the role of culture in society.

1. **Traditional Marxism** has generally focused on cultural institutions as *instruments* (this type is sometimes called **Instrumental** Marxism) or *tools* used by a ruling class to consolidate their control over the rest of society.

One influential version of this position involves the work of the **Frankfurt School** in the 1930's - a group of Marxists who developed ideas about the nature and role of cultural institutions (such as the media) using the concepts of *mass society* and *mass culture*.

Mass Culture

The concept of *mass culture* is linked to the idea of **mass society**, a type of society, **Ross** (1995) suggests, where "the masses" (as opposed to the ruling elite) are characterised as being:

Social Isolated: People have little or no meaningful daily face-to-face contact and social interaction is largely *instrumental* – we deal with people on the basis of what we can get from them. The strong "cultural and community ties" of "the past" (sometimes called *folk culture* to distinguish it from its modern counterpart *popular culture*) that once bound people together are destroyed by the development of mass cultural ideas and products.

Anonymous: Socially-isolated individuals are bound together by cultural forms *manufactured* by a ruling class that give the *illusion* of a common culture. An example here might be the contemporary (media and public) obsession with the lives and loves of celebrities which creates the impression that we "know" and "care" about such people (when in reality we are never likely to actually meet with or talk to them). Rather than being *active producers* of folk culture - a supposedly vibrant lower class culture (involving music, dance, medicine, oral traditions and so forth) expressed through popular gatherings such as festivals, fairs, carnivals and the like – the masses are *passive consumers* of an artificial, disposable, *junk culture* that has two main characteristics:

Mass Production: **Fiske** (1995), argues: "The cultural commodities of mass culture - films, TV shows, CDs, etc. are produced and distributed by an industrialized system whose aim is to maximize profit for the producers and distributors by appealing to as many consumers as possible" - an idea related to the concept of a:

Lowest Common Denominator (LCD**)**: To appeal to "the masses", cultural products have to be safe, intellectually undemanding and predictable;

The media, religion and schools are all examples of cultural institutions.

in other words, bland, inoffensive and relatively simple to understand. **Davis** (2000), for example, notes that **elite** (or *high*) **culture** is "the preserve of very few in society" that it involves "art, literature, music and intellectual thought which few can create or even appreciate. **Mass culture**, by contrast, is regarded as the mediocre, dull, mundane entertainment to be enjoyed by uneducated and uncritical 'low-brow' hoards".

From this perspective, therefore, mass culture is a way of distracting the working classes from the real causes of their problems in Capitalist society (such as low wages, exploitation, lack of power and status). In simple terms, the development of a mass culture that encourages *passive consumption* of the pre-packaged products of big business not only destroyed vital, communal, aspects of folk culture, it also provides the lower classes with an illusory sense of happiness, togetherness and well-being that prevents them understanding how they are economically exploited by a ruling class.

2. Neo (or **Humanistic) Marxism**: A contemporary version of Marxism, associated with writers such as **Gramsci** (1930). **Poulantzas** (1975) or **Urry et al** (1975), sees cultures as ways of "doing and thinking", in the sense that they are *integrating mechanisms* in society. In other words, cultural beliefs, behaviours and products bind people together by giving them things in common and helps people to establish cultural identities, expressed through a range of *popular cultural* pursuits and products.

> **Popular Culture**

Giddens (2006) defines this concept as "Entertainment created for large audiences, such as popular films, shows, music, videos and TV programmes" and is, as he notes, "often contrasted to 'high' or 'elite' culture" – something that suggests different social classes develop different identities based on their different cultural experiences. Cultures, as a "design for living", therefore, develop to reflect these experiences precisely because they equip people for living and coping in society. For *Neo-Marxists*, popular culture largely defines modern societies – it is the dominant cultural form and, as such, plays a significant role in two areas:

Firstly, it is the "culture of the masses" (as **Meyersohn** (1977) suggests "Popular culture consists of all elements of human activity and life style, including knowledge, belief, art, and customs that are common to a large group").

Secondly it is the means through which a ruling class exercises what **Gramsci** terms:

Cultural hegemony - the right to political leadership in modern democratic societies based on the consent

Who needs a PS3 when you can dance around the Maypole with your mates? Just look at their happy, smiling, little faces!

(willing or manufactured) of those who are led. Unlike in the past when a ruling class could establish its leadership through force, repression or terror, in modern societies leadership has to be *earned.* Members of this class must, in short, convince both themselves and others that they have the "right to rule" – something achieved, for Neo-Marxists, through control of *cultural institutions*.

Rather than a ruling class simply imposing its culture on society, therefore, the process is more complex. This class, for example, must propagate its values throughout society (through the media and education system) since if people can be convinced of certain values this will influence how they behave. The concept of *hegemony* is useful here because it provides a sense of *cultural diversity* and conflict. It can be used to explain, for example, how and why cultural forms (classical music, football, punk rock and so forth) are adopted, used and changed by people of diverse cultural backgrounds. Examples of the *hegemonic role* of cultural institutions can be found in three areas:

Continuous exposure to familiar ideas that reflect ruling class views about the nature of the social world (competitiveness, private ownership, low taxation for the rich and so forth). As **Bocock** (1986) argues, the effectiveness of *hegemonic power* lies in the way people from *all classes* are encouraged to "buy into" ideas ultimately favourable to the interests of a ruling class - a simple, but effective, example being the UK National lottery. Each week millions of people buy a lottery ticket, even though the odds of being struck by lightning (1 in 3 million) are better than their chances of winning the jackpot (1 in 10 million). The point, of course, is that people *want* to be rich (and someone, after all, *will* become rich each week).

Big Brother - Popular culture at its very best or very worst? You Choose! You Decide! (written in dodgy Geordie accent).

Marginalisation and **criticism**: Alternative views are "pushed to the edges" in the sense that world views critical of Capitalism are rarely featured across the education system or mass media.

Reflexivity: Cultural institutions don't simply propagate a single repetitive message along the lines that "Capitalism Is Great"; they are sufficiently *flexible* and *adaptable* to incorporate new ideas and explanations without ever losing sight of the fundamental values of Capitalist society (and, of course, the basic interests of a ruling class).

Social Action

"**Action perspectives**" cover a wide range of writers and theoretical positions that, for our current purpose and convenience, we can consider in terms of three "sub-perspectives", namely **Pluralism**, **Interactionism** and **Postmodernism**.

Pluralism

Pluralist perspectives, like their (Marxist and Feminist) Structuralist counterparts emphasise the idea of **competition** between different groups in society, something that, in turn, reflects a broad concept of:

Cultural diversity: Pluralists see modern societies (such as contemporary Britain) as consisting of a variety (or *plurality*) of different groups, each with their own particular interests and agendas. These groups develop their own cultural values and norms, some of which they have in common with other cultural groups but others of which they do not. As you might expect from this general characterisation, Pluralists *reject* the idea modern societies are characterised by a:

Mass culture in the form put forward by some Elite theorists. For Pluralists cultural forms can't be understood in simple "good or bad" terms – such as the idea that "lower class folk culture" in pre-industrial society was somehow superior to lower class culture in industrial society. **Trowler** (1996), for example, dismisses this general idea as both a gross over-simplification and the product of a romanticised view of lower class life in the past when he argues: "The reality is that for working men and women in pre-industrial society life was usually nasty, brutish and short. Modern society has made most people literate and this has enabled them to be discerning consumers of an ever-expanding cultural output. This includes not only literature in the conventional sense, but also TV and radio output, films, journalism and so on. People are also far more politically literate and aware of the world around them than was the case in the past. This allows them to appreciate and choose from a wide range of options. Class distinctions have become

The Apple iPhone - Isn't Capitalism Great?

less and less important in influencing the choices made by individuals in this respect. Members of the working class are as likely to be watching Panorama as anybody else, while soap operas are now appealing to the middle class as well as the working class.".

One of the main features of Pluralism therefore (something they share, albeit in slightly different ways, with Interactionist and Postmodern positions) is the idea of:

Choice: The general focus here is on the choices people are increasingly able to make from a range of possible cultural forms – something that impacts not just on areas like cultural values and norms but, increasingly on things like lifestyle and identity choices (in areas like sexuality and age, for example). One feature of Pluralism that tends to mark it apart from other forms of social action theory is that such choices are always made in a structural context; that is, against the background of the individual's personal and social circumstances (their cultural socialisation). They reject, however, the idea that cultural activities are simply *passive* forms of *consumption* (in the ay put-forward by mass culture theorists). Rather, the choices people make reflect a complex, changing world in which cultural activities develop or die-out on the basis of their relevance to peoples' lives.
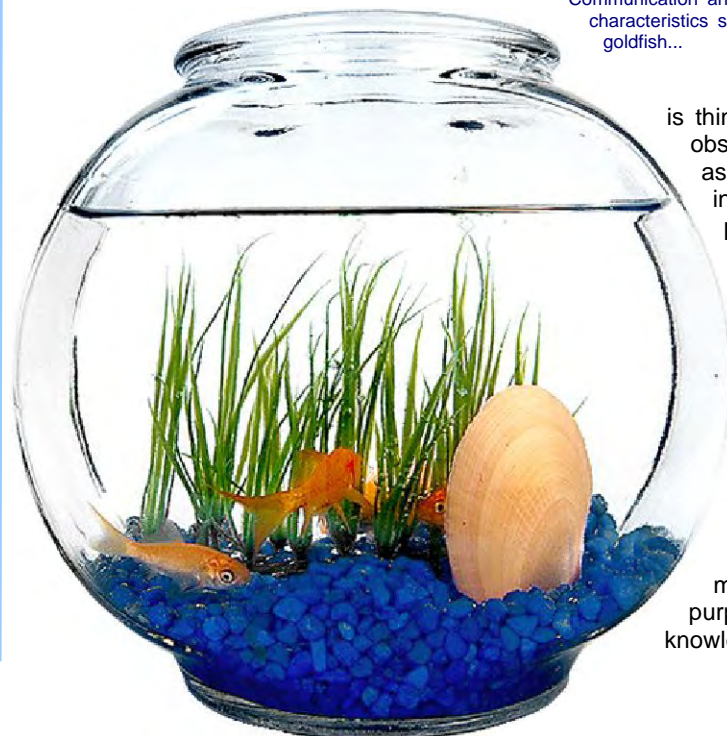
Mass Culture - myth or reality?

Interactionism

Interactionist perspectives generally focus on relatively small-scale levels of social interaction (between individuals, small social groups and so forth) and their theoretical position on culture is informed by the identification of a number of basic characteristics of human cultures.

Interaction: Culture is, first and foremost, a product of social interaction. Broad cultures and specific cultural forms develop out of the way people act towards one another in ways that involves two related ideas:

1. Purpose: A teacher and their students, for example, interact educationally in a way that has some purpose – both social, in the sense that the education system is officially designed to do certain things (teach children literacy and numeracy, for example, or pass examinations and gain qualifications) and individual in the sense that each actor in the educational drama will hold or develop particular reasons for their behaviour. A teacher, for example, may see their main purpose as "changing minds" or "helping children develop their full potential"; alternatively they may see their main purpose as earning the money they need to maintain a certain lifestyle (brown corduroy jackets with leather patches don't come cheap, believe me).

2. Meaning: If interaction always has a purpose, it also has meaning for those involved. At its broadest,

the teacher- student interaction is *probably* interpreted as having some form of educational meaning (as opposed to other forms of meaning that could exist between adults and young people). However, when we dig down to specific individual meanings for the interaction that takes place "in the school" there can, once again, be a wide variety of meanings for those involved. For the teacher, for example, these can range

The education system involves a wide range of different purposes and meanings...

from "education" being a vocation – their mission is to influence and change lives for the better – to the idea that education is "just a job"; something that is to be endured because it pays the bills.

We've used the word "probably" in the above because it illustrates the idea that we can never be certain of the **purpose and meaning** of any form of social interaction. This is because we are unable to know what someone else is thinking. The most we can do, therefore, is observe the behaviour of others and make assumptions (or educated guesses – pun intended) about what they are thinking (their **purpose** and **meaning**) when they do something.

Interactionist theories of culture are built around an understanding of two basic human abilities:

1. **Communication** through language (perhaps the ultimate system of shared meaning). This allows us to develop meaning in our behaviour.

2. **Memory**: The ability to store and recall meanings gives people the ability to act purposefully on the basis of their stored cultural knowledge.

Communication and Memory - two characteristics sadly lacking in goldfish...

These abilities mean we can develop **cultural systems** that can be learned through a **socialisation process**. Thus, our ability to communicate **symbolically** (through words, gestures, looks and so forth) gives us the ability to develop very rich cultures that may be unlimited in scope. This gives us the ability to control and shape our environment (both social and physical) in ways that are unimaginable for animals. Cultures, in this respect, can be said to represent:

Symbolic universes of meaning – a long-winded way of saying that the ability to communicate symbolically is a hugely-significant feature of human culture. In particular, symbols are significant for two reasons:

Connections: They don't need to have a direct relationship to the thing they symbolise. For example, the symbol "elephant" only means "a large animal with four legs, big ears and a long nose" because that is how we have learned to interpret the meaning of this word / concept. Logically, therefore, the word "elephant" could equally mean "a small furry animal with two legs" or "a flat surface with four legs on which you serve food".

Complexity: Symbols can be related to one another to create very complex ideas and meanings.

An example of the way we both communicate symbolically and use this ability to create very complex cultural rules and meaning might be to imagine you were standing at traffic lights waiting to cross the road. If you see a car go through a red light you may interpret that behaviour as "wrong" (because it is dangerous) and "illegal" (because it breaks the law). If, however, the car has a flashing blue light and a wailing

An Elephant

(did you honestly expect anything more sophisticated?).

siren you may interpret that behaviour as "understandable", because you assume the police officers in the car have a very good reason for acting both dangerously and illegally.

This also illustrates the idea of symbolic meanings, since there is no absolute relationship between a "red light" and the action "stop"; it is only because we have been **socialised** to make an association between the two that a red light means "stop" to us.

Someone from a society where cars do not exist would not associate red traffic lights with "stop" because that *symbolic association* between the two would not be a part of their "*symbolic system of meaning*" (or culture as it's probably better known).

The ability to develop shared meanings is the key to understanding human interaction. Our ability to think (our consciousness) is both the problem and the solution, since what we effectively do, according to Interactionists, is to create a sense of society and culture in our minds. We behave "*as if*" these things physically exist. Thus, the world humans inhabit is a:

Social construction, something that involves the idea that society is a product of our ability to think and express our thoughts symbolically. The things that we recognise as being "part of our society" or "part of our culture" are simply products of our mind.

Interestingly (presupposing you find train-spotting interesting) many cultures around the world associate the colour red with "danger".

Except the Chinese who associate it with luck and happiness.

This just goes to prove it's a funny old world.

Or something.

Postmodernism

A starting-point for a discussion of **postmodern** approaches to culture is the idea of:

Cultural globalisation: On a basic level this relates to the free and rapid movement around the globe of different cultural ideas, styles and products that can be picked-up, discarded and, most importantly, adapted to fit the needs of different cultural groups. The variety of cultural products (both material and non-material) available from which to choose are vast and people are no-longer restricted to local or national cultural choices. Cultural products are, in this respect:

Malleable (open to manipulation an change): In situations where people are exposed to a wide range of cultural influences and choices it is possible to develop a "pick and mix" approach to culture; choosing elements of one cultural tradition, for example, and mixing them with elements of another (or several) cultures to create something new, different and unique that postmodernists term:

Cultural hybrids: Examples here might include new forms of music (such as *Bhangra* -Asian (*Punjabi*) music transformed in the UK into dance music that combines traditional rhythms and beats with Western electric guitars and keyboards) and film (*Bollywood* films, for example, combine traditional Asian stories and themes with the western (Hollywood) musical tradition).

These ideas highlight a fundamental difference between Structuralist and Postmodern approaches to understanding the nature and role of culture.

Structuralist explanations suggest the role and purpose of culture is akin to a warm blanket

Areas of UK social life like music, food and fashion have probably been most influenced by cultural hybrids.

that covers and protects us, in the sense that we gather "our culture" tightly around us as a form of "protection against the elements" (the influence of other cultures, subcultures and the like).

Postmodern explanations, while they allow that cultures may perform such a role for *some* people, suggest culture is much looser and more fluid in that it involves the fundamental notion of *choice* – and choice implies *diversity* and *difference*. Postmodern ideas suggest is that globalisation has resulted in a change in the way people both see and use cultural ideas and products. **Clothier** (2006), for example, suggests that the significance of cultural hybrids lies in the fact that they represent a rejection of the idea of culture as:

Tradition – ways of thinking and behaving passed down from generation to generation as if they were a "fixed tablet", an idea **Clothier** illustrates by the following example: "If a local school is having an 'ethnic day' those referring to the fixed tablet simply

reference standing authority on the most appropriate dress. In contrast the hybrid must make a choice". In such situations, therefore, "traditions are loosened, and the capacity to make choices allowed. Cultural hybridity therefore, represents a zone of cultural dynamism… found on the borders, in the overlaps, and the in-between places between two or more cultures".

Global Culture

Although the idea of global influences on local and national cultural behaviours is not necessarily new (different cultural practices and products have influenced "British culture" for many hundreds of years) what is new, perhaps, is the scope and speed of cultural diversity and change (a process hastened by technological develops such as cheap air travel and the Internet). While postmodernists are generally agreed that such changes are accelerating, there is not a similar level of agreement about the direction of change – something we can briefly outline in terms of three general views about the nature and extent of global culture.
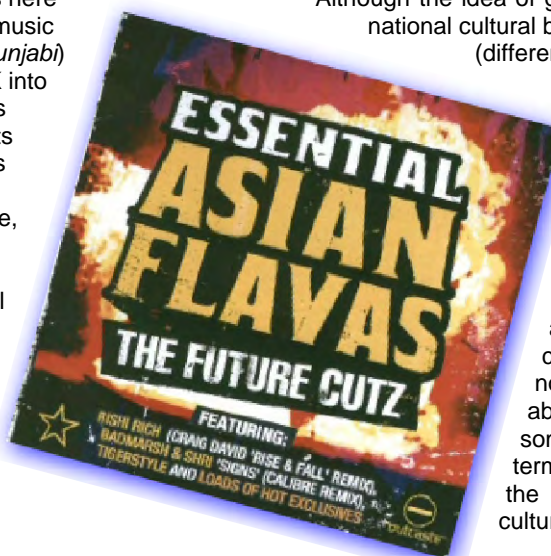
1. **Convergence and Homogenisation**: This strand argues the general trend is for cultural differences to gradually disappear as all societies start to adopt ideas and attitudes that are broadly similar in style and content – the main cause of this being the behaviour and influence of global corporations, media and advertising. **Plumb** (1995), in this respect, suggests that culture has become a:

Commodity where "Knowledge, ideas and other cultural elements are no longer generated to meet broadly shared human interests, but for a multitude of specific purchasers to buy". In terms of the *commodification of culture* **Lechner** (2001) suggests the economic behaviour and power of global companies (like Coca-Cola, Nike and McDonalds) creates a:

Consumer culture where standard commodities are promoted by global marketing campaigns" to "create similar lifestyles" - "**Coca-Colonisation**" as **Lechner** terms it. This idea is related to something like **Ritzer's** (1996) concept of:

McDonaldisation - the idea contemporary corporate cultural products are *standardised*, *homogenised* and *formulaic*; everyone who buys a McDonald's hamburger for example - whether in London or Singapore - gets the same basic product made to the same standard formula. Cultural products are therefore, increasingly predictable, safe and unthreatening. Along similar lines, **Berger** (1997) characterises this strand as:

McWorld Culture, a reference to the idea that global (popular) culture is increasingly Americanised – "Young people throughout the world dance to American music…wearing T-shirts with messages…about American universities and other consumer items. Older people watch American sitcoms on television and go to American movies. Everyone, young and old, grows taller and fatter on American fast foods".

2. Diversity and Heterogeneity: This strand emphasises more or less the opposite ideas about global cultural developments; the ebb-and-flow of different cultural ideas and influences creates hybrid cultural forms that represent "new forms of difference". From this position "culture" is not simply something that's "given" to people (either in the sense of *folk*, *mass* or *consumer* culture) but something that is actively constructed and reconstructed. Globalised culture, therefore, refers to the way local or national cultural developments can spread across the globe – picked-up, shaped and changed to suit the needs of different groups across and within different societies – and to how something like the Internet has changed the nature of cultural movements. A good example to illustrate this idea is:

Social networking: Internet sites such as *YouTube* (youtube.com), *MySpace* (myspace.com) or *flckr* (flickr.com) represent **social spaces** and communities actively constructed and reconstructed by the people who use them (to share videos, pictures or simply information). An interesting aspect of this development is the way the idea of *culture as a commodity* fits with the idea of freeing individuals to both produce and consume cultural ideas and products. While global commercial enterprises may provide the *tools* through which cultural ideas and products can be exchanged, it is the millions of individuals around the world who use these tools to provide the *content* that makes such virtual spaces vibrant and attractive (to both users and advertisers).

3. Homogeneity *and* Diversity: The third stand is one that, in some ways, combines the previous two in that it argues for both convergence and homogeneity *within*

global cultural groups but diversity and heterogeneity *between* such groups. In other words, groups of like-minded individuals share certain cultural similarities across national boundaries, but there groups are potentially many and varied. **Berger** (1997), for example, illustrates this idea by noting two distinct "faces of global culture":

Business cultures in which "Participants…know how to deal with computers, cellular phones, airline schedules, currency exchange, and the like. But they also dress alike, exhibit the same amicable informality, relieve tensions by similar attempts at humor (sic), and of course most of them interact in English"

Academic cultures involving, for example, Western intellectuals, their "values and ideologies". As **Berger** puts it, if business cultures try "to sell computer systems in India", academic cultures try " to promote feminism or environmentalism there".

This strand, therefore, argues for a range of points and spaces where the local and global meet - **Sklair** (1999), for example, suggests understanding global cultures involves thinking about two processes:

The Particularization of Universalism - the idea that some forms of globalised cultural features are adapted and changed by particular (local) cultural behaviours. **Regev** (2003) cites the example of "rock music" – a global product of Anglo-American construction consumed and filtered through many different cultures and cultural influences. As **Rumford** (2003) puts it, rock music "is easily domesticated into 'authentic' local musical forms. Consequently, when we hear rock music produced from within other cultures it can appear both strange and familiar at the same time".

The Universalisation of Particularism - the idea that the features of local cultures (their uniqueness, individuality and so forth) become a feature of globalised cultures; rather than seeing the globalisation of culture as an homogenising process we should see it in reverse - globalisation involves the spread of diverse cultural beliefs and practices across the globe in ways that create new and diverse cultural forms.

However we choose to view the concept of culture, a fundamental sociological principle involves the idea that it is taught and learned and in the next section we can look at some of the basic building-blocks of this process in addition to the various agencies that attempt to influence it.

Tried and Tested

(c) Suggest two ways that mass culture differs from global culture (4 marks).

(d) Examine sociological explanations of the concept of culture (24 marks).

(e) Asses the view that Action, rather than Structuralist, perspectives provide more convincing accounts of cultural relationships in modern Britain (24 marks).

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2. The Socialisation Process and the Role of Agencies of Socialisation.

Socialisation: Observations

We can begin by noting **Podder and Bergvall's** (2004) observation that culture *"isn't something we're born with, it is taught to us. The human being is a social creature and we need rules for interaction with one another"*. The idea that social life requires rules of behaviour that have to be taught and learned leads us into a consideration of the *socialisation process* - learning how to behave in ways that accord with the general expectations of others.

Types

Primary socialisation occurs, according to **Cooley** (1909), within *primary groups* containing relationships that involve *"intimate face-to-face association and cooperation… fundamental in forming the social nature and ideals of the individual"*. For most of us the first primary relationship we form is with our parent(s), followed by primary attachments to people of our own general age (our *peers*) and, subsequently with other adults (such as someone we marry).

Secondary socialisation occurs within *secondary groups where* socialisation is characterised, as **Berger and Luckmann** (1967) note, by *"a sense of detachment…from the ones teaching socialisation"*; in other words, situations where the individual doesn't necessarily have close, personal and / or face-to-face contacts with the people responsible for doing the socialising. Secondary socialisation reflects the idea that we have to learn to deal with people who are not emotionally close to us.

Both types involve:

Agents of socialisation - people responsible for teaching us "the rules" of social behaviour and interaction. The first *agency* of primary socialisation is usually our *family* and the main agents are *parents* (although immediate

While parents are major agents of **primary socialisation** in our society, schools are major agencies of **secondary**


relations such as brothers and sisters and wider relations such as grandparents may also be involved). In most societies the family group initially takes responsibility for teaching the basic things we need to learn as part of growing-up, such as how to walk, talk and use culture-appropriate tools (such as knives and forks). Parents are also influential in teaching basic values, such as right and wrong behaviour, how to relate appropriately to other people such as family, friends, strangers and so forth.

Socialisation, however, isn't simply a process whereby a socialising agent, such as a parent, teaches behaviour that is then copied without question. Although part of a child's socialisation does involve copying the behaviour they see around them (acted out through various forms of play and games, for example), the child is also *actively* involved - they don't, for example, always obey their parents. Children may also receive *contradictory socialisation* messages from differing agents – a kindly relative may reward behaviour that a parent would punish. Many of the things we learn during our initial, family-based, socialisation stay with us for life, mainly because we learn *basic behavioural rules* that can be applied to new and different situations (such as how to behave towards adults – teachers or strangers for example – who are not personally related to us).

Secondary socialising *agencies* may include schools, religious organisations, the media and so forth and the agents include people like teachers, priests, television personalities and pop stars. In some cases, such as in school, we are in daily, face-to-face contact with the people socialising us, without ever developing a primary attachment to them. In other cases, such as admiring a particular film or music performer, we may never meet them, yet we can still be influenced by what they look like, what they do and how they do it.
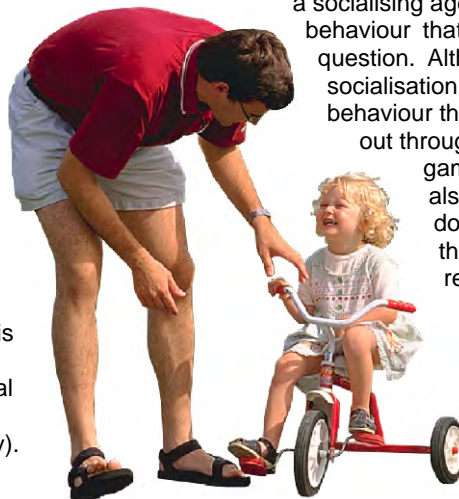
Purpose

Primary socialisation is necessary because human infants require the assistance of other members of society to develop as both people (the walking, talking, bit) and as members of a culture (the learning roles, norms and values bit).

Secondary socialisation is also necessary because, for **Parsons** (1951), one of its main purposes (or *functions*) is to: "Liberate the individual from a dependence upon the primary attachments and relationships formed within the family group". In other words, in modern societies the majority of people we meet are *strangers* and it would be impossible to relate to them in the same way we relate to people we love or know well. This means we need to learn:

Instrumental relationships - how to deal with people in terms of what they can do for us and what we can do for them in particular situations (the opposite of the **affective relationships** we find in primary groups). **Berger and Luckmann** (1967), for example, suggest that while primary socialisation involves "emotionally charged identification" with people like our parents, secondary socialisation is characterised by "formality and anonymity" – you don't, for example, treat a total stranger who stops you in the street to ask directions as your dearest friend in the world.

Order and Control

The ideas we've examined so far have been largely concerned with the ways people try to bring *order, stability* and *predictability* to behaviour through the *control* of that behaviour, something that affects not just the things people do or do not do, but also the way they *think* about the nature of the world in which they live.

Social Control, therefore, involves all of the things we do or have done to us that are designed to maintain or change behaviour. Primary socialisation, for example, attempts to shape the way a child is raised; when we develop certain values and adopt particular norms this too is a form of control since we are placing limits on what we consider to be acceptable ("*normal*") and unacceptable ("*deviant*") behaviour. *Role play* is another a form of control because we are acting in ways people consider appropriate in certain situations. In this respect, social control involves:

Rules: Social life is a life-long process of *rule-learning*. We may not always agree with those rules (nor do we always obey them) but we have to take note of their existence – mainly

because rules, whether **informal** (*norms*) or **formal** (*laws*), are supported by:

Sanctions - things we do to make people conform to our expectations and which can be one of two types:

1. Positive sanctions (or rewards) are the nice things we do to make people behave in routine, predictable, ways. Examples range from a smile, through words of praise and encouragement to gifts and such like.

2. Negative sanctions (or punishments) are the nasty things we do to make people conform. There are a vast range of negative sanctions in our society, from not talking to people if they annoy us to putting them in prison. The ultimate negative sanction, perhaps, is to kill someone.

As with rules / norms we can identify two basic types of social control:

Formal controls generally involve *written rules of behaviour* that, theoretically, apply equally to everyone in a society (*laws*) or particular social group (*rules*). In contemporary societies we usually find people (employed by the government) whose job involves *law enforcement*; the main agencies of formal social control in Britain, for example, are the police and the judiciary (the legal system). Where *non-legal rules* are involved, such as in the school or workplace, enforcement may be the responsibility of those in a position of authority (such as a teacher or employer). Generally, therefore, formal rules and controls exist to tell everyone within a social group *exactly* what is - and is not - acceptable behaviour.

Tried and Tested

(a) Identify and explain two ways in which primary socialisation differs from secondary socialisation (4 marks).

(b) Identity and explain one way instrumental relationships differ from affective relationships (4 marks).

(c) Suggest one positive and one negative sanction teachers use to control the behaviour of their students (4 marks) .

Socialisation: Explanations

Informal controls similarly exist to reward or punish people for acceptable or unacceptable behaviour and cover a vast array of possible sanctions that may differ from individual to individual, group to group and society to society. Such controls apply to informal norms and include things like ridicule, sarcasm, disapproving looks, punching people in the face and so forth.

As we've suggested, socialisation involves learning the roles, values and norms (amongst other things) characteristic of a particular culture (or subculture) and in this section we can explain the role of some of the major **agencies of socialisation** in this general process.

Primary

Family

For most people the family group is one of the most influential socialising agencies in their life, although it's arguably in our early years that it has the most important socialising influence on us, in terms of things like:

Roles: The relatively limited number of roles to learn within the family (both for adults and children) hides a complexity of *role development* (how roles change depending on the way a group develops). Adults, for example, may learn roles ranging from husband or wife to parent or step-parent while for children there is a complex learning process as they come to terms with being a baby, infant, child, teenager and, eventually perhaps, an adult with children of their own.

Values: Parents frequently represent what **Mead** (1934) terms **significant others** – people who's opinions we respect and value deeply – and they are influential in shaping both our basic values (such as manners) and *moral values*   (such as the difference between right and wrong).

Norms: Although these differ between families, basic norms such as how to address family members (*Mum*, *Dad*), when, where and how to eat and sleep, the meaning of "good" and "bad" behaviour and the like are normally part of the primary socialisation process.

Sanctions: Within the family these are mainly *informal* (although it's possible for formal rules to apply - setting times by which children have to be home, for example). *Positive* sanctions range from things like *facial expressions* (smiling…), through *verbal approval / reinforcement* ("You are such a good boy / girl") to *physical* rewards (such as gifts). *Negative* sanctions are similarly wide-ranging – from showing disapproval through language (SHOUTING for example) to things like physical punishment.

Peers

A "peer group" involves people of a similar age who may or may not know each other - "teenagers", for example, are a generally-recognised peer group in our society but not every teenager knows every other teenager, of course. We can, for the sake of convenience, include **friends** in this general category although we should, perhaps, consider them a special type of peer group. Such people exert an important influence on our behaviour in a range of ways:

Behaviour: Peers are influential on both a *primary* level (close friends, for example, who influence what we wear or how we behave) and a *secondary* level (as a **reference group –** what **Hughes et al** (2002) define as "the models we use for appraising and shaping our attitudes, feelings, and actions"). In both cases, peer groups provide "both normative and comparative functions" – the former in terms of direct influences on our behaviour and the latter in terms of the way we compare ourselves with others (such as friends or people we see on TV) and change our behaviour accordingly – an example of **peer pressure** as a form of social control.

A group of peers...

Roles: We play a range of peer-related roles, depending on our age group and situation. "Friend", for example, expresses very personal role play, whereas at school or work we may have a variety of *acquaintances*. In the workplace too, we are likely to play the role of *colleague* to at least some of our peers.

Values: As with roles, the values we're taught within a friendship or peer group vary with age and circumstances. However, something like the value of friendship itself will probably be carried with us throughout our life.

Norms relating to peer group behaviour might involve ideas about age-appropriate behaviour; young children, for example, are not allowed to smoke or buy alcohol. Conversely, it's generally not considered age-appropriate for the elderly to take-part in extreme sports or wear clothes considered more-appropriate to younger age groups.

Sanctions within a peer group are rarely formal and the norms of different groups may differ widely. The same behaviour – in different situations – may also produce different responses. Swearing at your grandmother, for example, will probably be met with disapproval, whereas swearing in the company of friends may actually be a norm. Approving gestures and language, laughing at your "jokes" and seeking out your company may represent positive sanctions; refusing to speak to you, rejecting your friendship and physical violence are negative sanctions.

Extreme cooking - all tooled up and with no place to hide
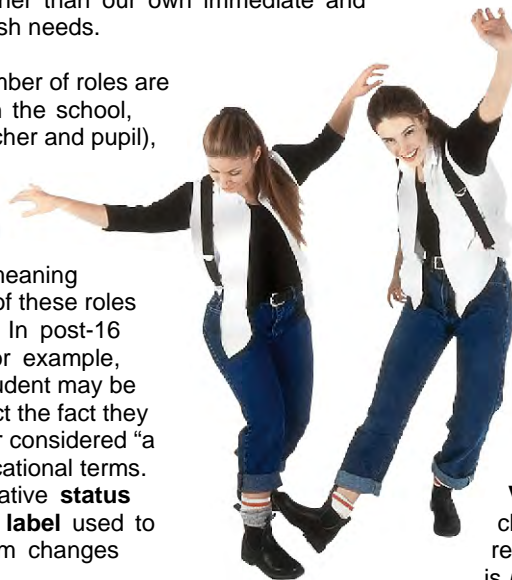
Secondary

Education School is one of the first times children in our society are separated from their parent(s) for any length of time and it provides both *opportunities* (to demonstrate your talents to a wider, non-family, audience) and *traumas* – the need to learn, for example, how to deal with people who are "not family" or *authority figures* such as teachers.

Behaviour: One function of the education system is to teach the skills and knowledge required for adult life. This includes specific *knowledge (*such as history, giving us a sense of our society's past and geography, which confers a knowledge of our own and other societies) and particular *skills*, such as learning to read and write or solve mathematical problems. This **manifest** *function* of education, however, is counterbalanced by certain **latent** *functions*, such as learning how to deal with strangers, the need for punctuality, attendance and the like that will be taken into areas like the workplace in adult life.
The school is also a place where we "learn to limit our individual desires" – to think about the possible needs of others rather than our own immediate and perhaps selfish needs.

Roles: A number of roles are played within the school, (such as teacher and pupil), although at different stages the names, perception, meaning and content of these roles can change. In post-16 education, for example, labels like student may be used to reflect the fact they are no-longer considered "a child" in educational terms. As their relative **status** changes the **label** used to describe them changes accordingly.

Students behaving like children...

Values: Schools project a range of values, some *technical* (pupils should work hard to achieve qualifications) and some *social* - teaching things like *individual competition* for academic rewards, *teamwork* (especially in sports), *conformity* to authority (not questioning what is being learned and why it is necessary to learn it) and *achievement* on the basis of your *merits* – educationally you "get what you deserve". Historically our education system generally values "academic ability" (a talent for writing essays, for example) more highly than "practical ability" (such as being good at sport).

Norms: A range of norms apply specifically within the school and classroom, although as **Bowles and Gintis** (1976) suggest, there is a *correspondence* between school norms and workplace norms. As they argue (2002) "schools prepare people for adult work rules by socialising people to function well, and without

complaint, in the hierarchical structure of the modern corporation". This **Correspondence Principle,** they argue, is evidenced through schooling in areas like the daily need to attend and register and the right of those in authority to give orders they expect will be obeyed.

Module Link   **Education**

The work of **Bowles and Gintis** (1976, 2002) in relation to how schools "replicate the environment of the workplace" is discussed in more detail in the Section "**The Role of Education**".

Sanctions: Positive sanctions include the gaining of grades, qualifications and prizes, as well as more-personal things like praise and encouragement. On the negative side, teachers use sanctions like detentions, suspensions and exclusions; failure to achieve qualifications or gaining a reputation for "stupidity" also function as negative sanctions in this context (at least from the viewpoint of teachers, if not always from that of the pupil).

Work The workplace is often one of the first places we, as adults, start to interact with other adults and although, as we've noted, the workplace has primary socialising elements it also has numerous secondary characteristics.

Roles: The two main workplace roles of *employer* and *employee* hide a range of differences in terms of how such roles are performed; an employee may be a *professional* worker (such as a lawyer) with an associated high *status* or, alternatively, they may perform a low-skill, poorly-paid role with few, if any, future prospects. A professional employee may also occupy a position of trust and responsibility that involves controlling the behaviour of other employees, whereas a casual manual labourer or shop assistant may experience high levels of boredom, frustration and control by others.

Values: One clear work-related value is *payment* – we believe we should get money in exchange for working. Less-obvious values include things like competition and the belief hard work and competence should be rewarded by promotion, increased responsibility and control over the working environment and so forth.

Another bumper pay day for yours truly as sales of this book go through the roof...

Norms: We expect to be paid for working (although some types of work, like housework and voluntary work, don't involve money). As we've seen in relation to the education system, similar norms (attendance, punctuality, obedience and the like) apply here.

Sanctions: Employers have a range of positive sanctions at their disposal - pay increases, more responsibility, freedom (to work at your own pace, for example) and control over both your working day and the work of others, for example. On the other hand, disciplining, demoting or sacking someone constitute the main negative sanctions available.

The Media

This is a slightly-unusual secondary agency in that our relationship with it is *impersonal*; we may never actually meet those doing the socialising.

Behaviour: Surprisingly, perhaps, there's very little evidence the media have a *direct*, long-term, affect on our behaviour (although there may be limited short-term effects), but there does seem to be a number of *indirect* long-term effects. Examples of the way our behaviour is affected by exposure to the media might include areas like *sexuality* - magazines aimed at teenagers arguably perform a socialising role in terms of understanding sexual relationships.

The **Glasgow Media Group** (1982) have argued that the media have an:

Agenda-setting role - it determines how something will be debated (for example, "immigration" is currently framed and discussed in terms of "numbers of immigrants" and Islam is frequently discussed in the context of "terrorism"). As the **Glasgow Media Group**

express it: "…television… has a profound effect, because it has the power to tell people the order in which to think about events and issues. In other words it 'sets the agenda', decides what is important and what will be featured. More crucially it very largely decides what people will think with; television controls the crucial information with which we make up our minds about the world".

Values: The extent to which the media can impose its values on our behaviour is uncertain, but it does represent a potentially powerful force in terms of supporting or marginalising certain values. For example, the media have a (loud) voice in debates over nationality (what it means to be "English", for example). It also has the ability to promote certain values and devalue others – think about the way many English newspapers take an "anti-European Community" stance, for example.

Norms: The media have what **Durkheim** (1912) called a *boundary marking* function; it publicises acceptable and unacceptable forms of behaviour to reinforce perceptions of expected behaviours. This idea does, of course, work both ways – it can act as a way of trying to *preserve* particular ways of behaving and as a way of *promoting changes* in behaviour:

Sanctions: The most obvious way the media exercises social control is through the publicity given to behaviour of which it approves or disapproves. Positive sanctions may involve the use of positive language, praise and so forth, whereas negative sanctions may involve being pictured in an unflattering pose or being harshly criticised. The England goalkeeper David **James**, for example, was the target for a reader's poll in *The Sun* newspaper (2004) asking whether they would "…prefer a donkey or James in goal after his error had presented Austria with the equaliser in Saturday's 2-2 draw" (in case you're interested, **James** came second...).

The media tries to set the boundaries for acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in a variety of ways...

Preserving traditional behaviour?

Promoting social change?

NAMED SHAMED

Still at large here, 126,000 asylum cheats

Stop Harassing Homosexuals

THE TRUTH ABOUT LESBIANS don't want to be cured We

Everyone in Britain has a child sex offender living within one mile of their home. The murder of Sarah Payne has proved

Positive attitudes to homosexuality

Anti-paedophile and anti-immigration campaigns

Religion

Whether or not we particularly see ourselves as "religious", institutions such as the Church of England have played – and continue to play – a significant role in the general socialisation process in our society.

Behaviour: Unless we're a member of a religious group (*subculture*), religion generally plays a *peripheral* role in most people's life (religious beliefs are not central to their personal value system). Indirectly, however, religions play an important socialising role in terms of both influencing general social values and performing certain ceremonial functions (such as marriages, christenings and funerals).

Values: Many of our most important moral values (fundamental beliefs about right and wrong) have been influenced in some way by religious values – think, for example, about how many of the 10 Commandments in Christian religions are reflected through our legal system. In terms of moral beliefs, few people would argue you should be allowed to kill people or that theft is desirable.

Sanctions: The power of positive and negative sanctions for religions probably turns on the extent to which you are a believer in the god – or gods – being promoted.

Hinduism, for example, involves a belief in *reincarnation* - the idea that once you die you are reborn into a new life – based on how well you observed religious laws in your previous life; the reward for good behaviour in one lifetime is being reborn into a higher social position, with the reverse being the case for bad behaviour.

Tried and Tested

(d) Examine sociological accounts of the process of socialisation. (24 marks)

(e) Using material from the text and elsewhere, assess the view that primary socialisation is more significant than secondary socialisation for human development (24 marks)

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http://www.brandchannel.com/images/papers/240_Global_Culture.pdf

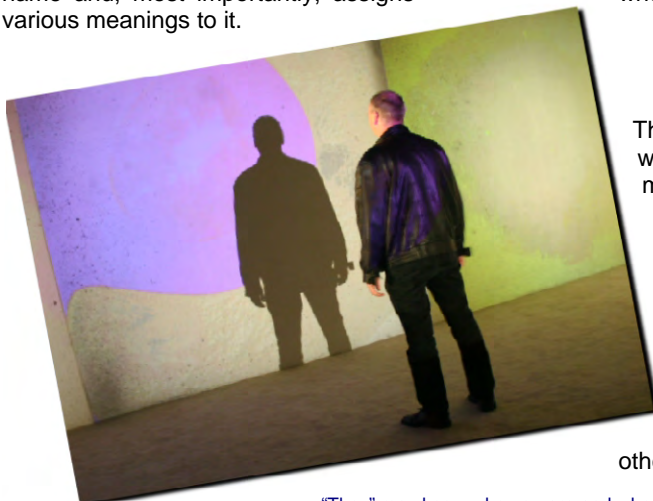# 3. Sources and Different Conceptions of the Self, Identity and Difference

Identity: Observations

We can start to examine questions of identity in more detail by thinking, firstly, about how it can be defined and, secondly about how different sociological perspectives understand its significance in contemporary societies.

Earlier we suggested the concept of identity revolves around how we answer the question "Who are you?" – to which my response would be something like "I'm a 30 year old, white, married, British male". In other words, to tell you something about myself I draw on a set of ready-made social categories (such as gender and age). You could, of course, dig deeper by asking me about things like my *sexuality* (heterosexual, since you ask), the football team I support (rather not say – too embarrassing), my family name, background and life or whatever. *Identity* in this respect, involves understanding the things that are "important to me" and which I use to express a sense of **Self** (who I believe myself to be). On this basis, therefore, we can initially talk about two *dimensions of identity*:
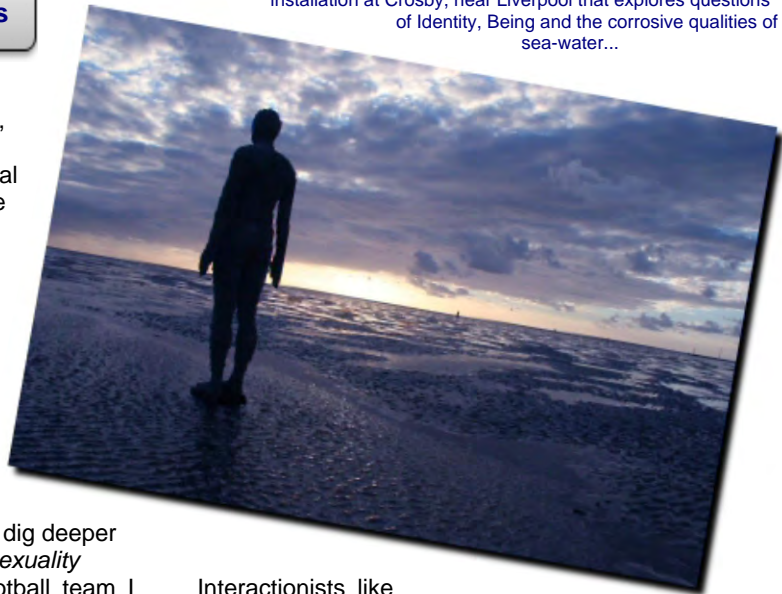

"**Another Place**" - artist Anthony **Gormley's** haunting installation at Crosby, near Liverpool that explores questions of Identity, Being and the corrosive qualities of sea-water...

Interactionists like **Becker** (1963) or **Hayes** (1997) call this a process of *labelling* and an example here is the concept of *gender*. Our culture generally recognises two *biological sexes* (male and female) and assigns to each a set of social characteristics we call *gender* (and these, being cultural in origin, may change over time or differ from society to society). Thus, on the basis of my biological sex (male) a social identity for this gender category is created for me (think about the way our culture "sees" men and women – what general characteristics are each supposed to have?). *Social identities*, therefore, relate to the attributes we are given when we play different (*achieved* or *ascribed*) roles.

Social Identities

Every culture classifies behaviour in some way; it groups similar types of behaviour under a particular name and, most importantly, assigns various meanings to it.

"They" may know who you are and where you live - but do you know "who you are"? (you probably do know where you live, to be fair).

Personal Identities

This type of identity, on the other hand, relates to what we each believe ourselves to be, considered in two main ways:

Firstly, in terms of how I *interpret* the particular role I'm playing at any given time. "Being male", for example, can *mean* something different (or *personal*) to me than to some other men, just as the concept of *masculinity* can have different interpretations and meanings – for some men (and women) it involves traits of toughness, ruggedness, aggression and so forth, whereas for others it has a completely different meaning.

Secondly in terms of what **Marshall** (2003) defines as "A unique core or essence - the 'real me'- which is coherent and remains more or less the same throughout life".

The Self

Identity construction is a process that involves establishing the *credentials* we use to create a sense of our personal identity; in other words, identity formation involves the interplay between social and personal identities. I know, for example, that I am "a man" by comparing myself to others (men and women) and by so doing, I construct and sustain my own sense of male identity. As **Lawson and Garrod** (2003) express it "The construction of a sexual identity such as masculinity is carried out in terms of relationships with females and current notions of what it is to be a man".

Marshall's observation concerning the idea of a "core" or "real" identity is important in this context because it suggests that the two aspects of identity (personal and social) can be separated (at least in our own mind) – that there is, in short, a possible distinction we can make between the:

• **Social Me** – the façade we present to the world as we go about our everyday lives. This plays on the idea of "people as actors" we encountered earlier; when we socially interact we take on and play roles that involve *acting* – we think about the role we're going to play, prepare a script we present to others and, in a general sense at least, "become someone we are not".

• **Real Me**: This idea involves thinking about the fact that if we are acting in our relationships with others, whereby we can happily be "different people" at different times in different situations (you probably behave differently when you're out with friends than when you are work – which of these people is the "real you"?), then somewhere deep within us is the "real me" - the essence of "who I am".

These two ideas are intimately bound-up in what Interactionist writers such as **Mead** (1934) and **Goffman** (1959) term "*The Self*".

Do we create "masks" behind which our "real self" hides?

Weber(1922) argued human beings have two major attributes; the ability to behave (to *react* to their social and physical environment) and the capacity for *social action*; that is, to act in ways that, firstly, have a *meaning* to the individual concerned and, secondly, take account of how others react to our actions. *Social action*, therefore, involves directing our behaviour towards others with the *intention* of influencing their behaviour. The ability to act meaningfully comes about because of two human attributes:

1. Consciousness - the ability to *think*, have an *awareness* of the world around us and *understand* how our behaviour impacts on others.

2. Self-consciousness - which involves an *awareness* of ourselves as unique individuals.

These attributes give us the ability to think about and reflect on the nature of the social world and our position in that world, something that, in turn, allows us to develop values and norms that characterise the culture of a society. However, the fact we are able to do this means that the cultural values and norms we create reflect back upon us. That is, we are forced to recognise their existence and this, in turn, shapes the way we think and act (through the general socialisation process in society). Although people have the *capacity* for *self-consciousness* and *self-awareness*, we do not develop this ability automatically – as evidenced by:

Feral children: There have been many cases of children either "raised in the wild" by animals (such as **Saturday Mifune** discovered, aged 5, in 1987 living in a pack of monkeys in a province of South Africa) or mistreated and locked away from human contact (the most well-documented recent example perhaps being "Genie", a 13-year old girl discovered in 1970 in California who had, according to **Pines** (1997), "been isolated in a small room and had not been spoken to by her parents since infancy"). Such children do not undergo the usual process of human development in the absence of human contact and socialisation.

As **Pines** notes, Genie who "seems to have been a normal baby… was malnourished, abused, unloved, bereft of any toys or companionship…she could not stand erect…she was unable to speak: she could only whimper".

Feral children provide, in this respect, further evidence of the crucial importance of primary socialisation.

Max **Weber** [1864 -1920]

One of the most famous recent cases of feral children is Genie, a 13 year old girl discovered in Temple City, California in 1970.

The "I" and the "Me"

We can take these basic ideas and use them to define two related aspects of The Self.

Mead (1934) argued that our behaviour as individuals is conditioned by two aspects of our *self-awareness* (the ability to "see ourselves" as others see us).
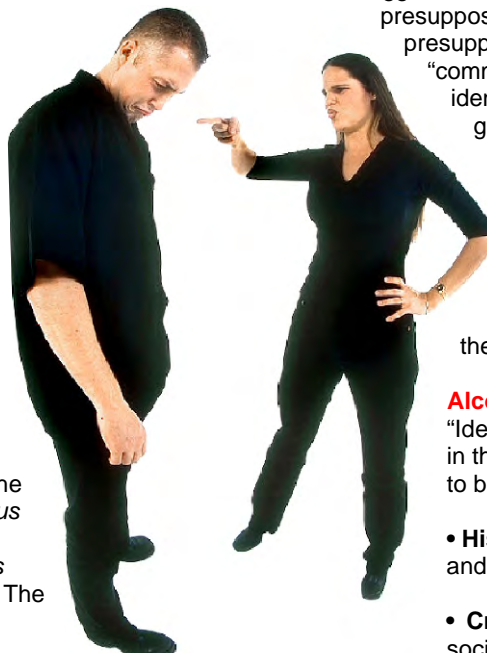
• The "**I**" aspect (what **Mead** (1934) calls the *unsocialised self*") relates to automatic (reflex) reactions. For most animals this is the dominant aspect of the self in that their behaviour (such as a dog growling when it meets another dog) is an unconscious reaction.

• The "**Me**" aspect consists of an *awareness* of how other people *expect* us to behave at any given moment and any given, specific, situation. Before you act, therefore, you take account of a variety of *situational variables* (such as where you are and who you are with) that govern how you behave.

If you accidentally put your hand on something hot, the "I" aspect of the Self is expressed in the way you react to the pain that you feel (a reflex that will probably involve quickly removing your hand). The "Me" aspect, however, specifically conditions how you *choose* to react to the pain you feel – and this will be conditioned by a range of different factors. For example, if an adult male burns himself he may feel it inappropriate to cry – especially if he is with a group of friends who all find his discomfort funny. A young child, on the other hand, may react with tears because they focus on their own feelings (rather than taking into account the feelings of others).

George Herbert **Mead** [1863 - 1931]

realise "our Self" (to define and understand who we are) we draw on a range of social resources (*credentials*) rooted in social identities (such as gender or ethnicity). Although we can only really have "one Self", there are many ways our Self can be expressed since it's possible to take-on many different social identities (often at the same time).

Tried and Tested

(a) Identify **two** ways in which social identities differ from personal identities (4 marks).

(b) Suggest **two** sources of identity in modern societies, other than those noted in the text (4 marks).

(c) Suggest **three** reasons for the view that the example of feral children demonstrates the importance of socialisation to identity (6 marks).

Identity: Explanations

Concepts of culture and identity are, as we've suggested, linked in the sense that the one presupposes the other. Culture, for example, presupposes what **Smith** (1996) terms "communities of identity" – the idea that social identities based around age, ethnicity, gender and the like represent sets of culturally-developed ideas about how to "behave appropriately" when we assume particular identities. Personal identities, on the other hand, can only develop in a cultural context as people "express their individuality" by drawing on a selection of identity sources which they then shape in particular ways.

Alcoff (2000), in this respect, suggests "Identity categories are cultural negotiations" in the sense that what it means, for example, to be young or female differs both:

• **Historically**, in the same society over time, and

• **Cross-culturally**, between different societies.

Self and Identity

This example further demonstrates the idea that the "Me" aspect represents what **Mead** calls the *socialised* part of The Self; we *think*, in other words, about how our actions (such as a grown man crying) will impact on others (such as friends who may be embarrassed) and, in turn, on ourselves (an awareness of how our "hard man" image may be compromised by tears). The combination of *unconscious* (*unthinking* or *reflex behaviour*) and *conscious* behaviour that constitutes The Self relates to the idea of:

Self-concept (who and what we believe ourselves to be) and this relates to identity in the sense that to

Big boys don't cry
(their bottom lip just goes a bit wobbly).

Differences in the way societies interpret the meaning of "being female", for example, suggest that such meanings are neither inherent (we are not born knowing how to behave "as a man or woman" – something that once again relates to *socialisation*) nor unchanging. The general idea that identity is "culturally negotiated", however, hides a range of sociological arguments about the nature and purpose of identity that we can explore in terms of the two broad approaches outlined in the Introductory chapter, namely **Structure** and **Action**.

Social Structures

Although there are differences of interpretation between, for example, *Functionalists* and *Marxists*, this general approach argues that *structural forces*, such as the socialisation process, shape identities in ways that push people into behaving in an orderly and broadly predictable fashion. Socialisation, therefore, is viewed as a powerful guiding force in terms of the way people are made into self-aware beings and categorised into particular forms of cultural identity.

Consensus

Functionalist sociology focuses on the way people are socialised into the norms of pre-existing social identities because it is only by learning *cultural rules* that *social interaction* becomes both possible and manageable. Social identities (such as class) *structure* people's behaviour, channelling it in some ways but not others and the emphasis here is on the way individual identities and behaviours are *constrained* and *controlled* by the rules governing the performance of *social* identities. Identities, therefore, *function* at an **institutional level** of society and ultimately identities such as age or gender develop as a means of:

• Establishing a sense of **order** in an unpredictable (individualistic) world.

• Providing the means by which broadly **predictable** behaviour can take place (through role play, for example)..

• Limiting conflict in our relationships by specifying clear behavioural boundaries.

For **Parsons** (1951) the significance of social identities is also found in the idea that when people take-on certain identities they necessarily **internalise** the basic "rules of society" (behavioural norms are incorporated into our *personality* and we don't question them because they appear self-evident and natural). Thus, once the label
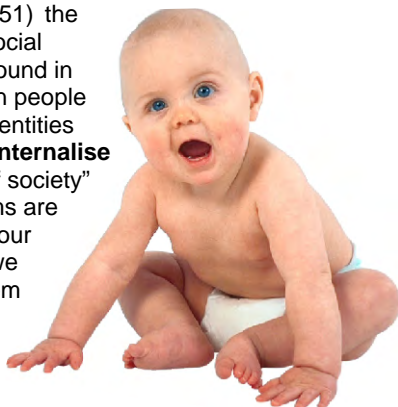
Here's one we made earlier...

"male" or "female" is applied to a child they are subjected to a socialisation process that reflects how a culture interprets and applies the meaning of these categories. Individual identities, therefore, are shaped by the socialisation process in that people are a product of their cultural upbringing. Our socialisation tells us, for example, how to behave as "a man" or as "a woman".

Five Functions of Identity

We can put these general ideas into context by looking at a contemporary application of the idea that identity serves a number of functions for the individual and society. **Adams and Marshall** (1996), for example, have suggested *5 functions of identity* that, as **Serafini et al** (2006) note, focus on what identity *does* "rather than how identity is constructed":

1. **Structure**: Identities function, as **Serafini et al** note, to provide individuals with a structured context for social actions – a "framework of rules" used to guide behaviour when playing certain roles and to understand our relationship to others (as **Adams and Marshall** put it, a "structure for understanding who one is",).

2. **Goals:** Identities provide a sense of *purpose* by setting goals for our behaviour. A "student identity" for example, involves the desire to achieve goals like educational qualifications or a sense of personal achievement.

Not this type of goal. The other type. Obviously.

3. **Personal Control**: Identities provide a measure of "active self-regulation" in terms of deciding what we want and how we plan to achieve it. Where people are faced with a variety of choices in their everyday lives a clear sense of identity enables us to select and process information relevant to particular roles and identities (an A-level student, for example, understands the need to record information to help them remember the things they might be tested on in an exam).

4. **Harmony**: We need to establish "consistency, coherence and harmony between values, beliefs and commitments"; in other words, when we adopt a particular identity (such as a teacher or student) we have to ensure the commitments we make (what others expect from us) are consistent with our personal values and beliefs. A teacher or student who sees "education as a waste of time" is unlikely to be able to successfully perform this particular role.

5. **Future**: As part of the general *goal setting* function identities allow us to "see where we are going" in the sense of likely or hoped-for outcomes. A student identity, for example, has a "future orientation" in the sense of wanting to perform the role successfully in order, perhaps, to achieve a certain type of job.

Conflict

Structure

Personal Control

Goals

?

Future

Harmony

This general approach focuses on the different ways identities are used as the basis for social action; in other words they outline and examine the way *primary forms* of identity (such as **social class** in **Marxist** sociology and **gender** in **Feminist** sociology) form the basis for both personal and social change – an idea we can illustrate by looking briefly at the implications of these two approaches.

Conflict: Both approaches focus on particular forms of *antagonism* as the basis for *primary identities* (a source of identity that is so powerful that all other forms of identity are *secondary* to, or dependent on it). Identities, therefore, are both formed and given meaning through relationships based around ideas like exploitation, domination and subordination.

Marxism

Marxist approaches, for example, see identity formation in terms of the fundamental antagonism between:

Social Classes, defined in *economic* terms (the various ways people create the means to physically survive). The formation of social classes – and their attendant class identities – is seen in terms of how economic production is organised to produce distinctive social groups based on their relationship to the:

Means of Production - the social process whereby goods and services are created. A familiar expression of this relationship might be the existence of three great classes:

• **Upper** or **Ruling** – the class of people (sometimes called the *Bourgeoisie*) who own and control the means of production (such as factories and businesses).

• **Middle class** - professional workers who help to run or control businesses on a day-to-day basis.

• **Working** or **Lower class** - those with no economic ownership (sometimes called the *Proletariat*) who sell their *labour power* (the ability to work) to the highest bidder.

Fraser (1998) notes this situation produces what is traditionally called the distinction between the:

Class-in-itself – the idea we can identify distinctive classes in any society based on their relationship to the means of production (as above).

Class-for-itself – the idea that the members of different social classes may develop a sense of their common group identity and interests.

This approach, therefore, argues social classes involve people who have:

1. Particular roles to play in the way goods and services are *produced* (**Marxism** is sometimes characterised as involving a *production class* theory of social organisation).

2. A particular relationship to other classes in society.

3. Class interests they are organised to pursue.

In this respect **Wood** (1995) argues two things: firstly "Is it possible to imagine class differences without exploitation and domination?" and secondly "The 'difference' that constitutes class as an 'identity' is, by definition, a relationship of inequality and power, in a way that sexual or cultural 'difference' need not be" – an idea that is disputed by:

Gendered approaches: Whereas for Marxists social class is the key (or defining) *marker* of identity, for both **feminists** and **masculinists** (in their different ways) *gender* is the key source of identity in contemporary societies.

Feminism

Feminist approaches to identity and difference start from the assumption of female inequality being the fundamental form from which all other inequalities flow. Where women are generally considered (for whatever reason) inferior to men, this lowered relative status is translated into areas like *family life* (where women perform the majority of households tasks) and the *workplace*, where women, on average, earn less than men and the latter occupy many of the higher status positions of power and influence.

While different feminist approaches put forward different explanations about the way gender differences are exploited by men, writers such as **de Beauvoir** (1949) have argued that *inferior female statuses* stem from the fact that, historically, men have been able to use their *power* (both physical and social) to define female identities in *opposition* to male identities. As she puts it: "She is defined and differentiated with reference to man…He is the Subject…she is the Other". Gender differences are, from this general position, exploited by men for their benefit in a variety of ways:

Liberal

Liberal feminists, for example, see female inequality enshrined in general day-to-day male behaviours and practices – an example here might be **Hammer's** (1997) argument that "gendered language… symbolically excludes women" from male-dominated spheres (think, for example, about how the masculine pronoun "He" is often used in the media to symbolise both men and women). Women, in this respect, routinely suffer **sexual discrimination** in areas like the family and the workplace. From this position biological differences do not automatically translate into gender differences – male domination and exploitation can, for example, be curtailed through the legal system (in the UK, for example, the **Sex Discrimination Act** (1975) made it illegal to discriminate on the basis of sex).

Marxist

Marxist feminists point to the way *class inequalities* are the main cause of female oppression, exploitation and discrimination. Traditional forms of male economic dominance (higher status and pay, for example) allied to women being encouraged to see their main identities as "mothers and carers" within the home (making them economically dependent on men) leads to:

Patriarchal Ideologies - ideas that support male domination of women. Examples here might be the belief that "a woman's place is in the home", men are "natural breadwinners" and women "natural carers" and the like. The development of distinctive masculine and feminine identities is reinforced through primary and secondary socialisation processes that encourage men to exploit women in all areas of society.

Radical

Radical feminists similarly view female identities in terms of *patriarchal* ideas and practices, but a major difference here is the emphasis placed on gender identities being based around fundamental *psychological* differences - women have qualities of co-operation, caring (nurturing) and so forth that sets them apart from men as a:

Sex class: Female identity develops out of the experiences and interests women share (such

It may still be a "man's world" - but for how much longer?

as the common experience of sexual discrimination) and is forged through the experience of patriarchal practices in both the *private sphere* of the home and the *public sphere* of the workplace.– a dual form of exploitation not experienced by men.

Post-Feminism

Post-feminism has a couple of strands, the first of which "refers to a belief that gender equality has been successfully achieved, while simultaneously castigating the feminist movement for making women frustrated and unhappy" (www.difference-feminism.com). Critics of this view point to ideas like:

Complicit sexualities in which young women, for example, are encouraged to develop identities (such as "*Girl Power*!") that while *appearing* to challenge male power actually pander to male desires.

Nicole Richie and **Paris Hilton** - post-feminist icons of complicit sexuality...

Dent (2007) expresses this idea quite neatly when she says: "We've bred this new genre of post-post-feminists (*sic*) who play on acting vacuous and say women should never buy drinks and how their top film is Legally Blonde and **Paris Hilton** is "proper aspirational" and that they know that some big stwong (sic) man will look after them one day and make everything all right. Hint: he won't. Put your clothes on and bloody grow up".

A second strand is elaborated by **Butler** (1990) when she argues that gender is not a quality of something we *are* but rather something we *do*. In other words, gender identities involve notions of:

Performance – the things we do to create and express our identity, rather than something we "always are". Identities, therefore, involve:

Choice: Both sexes have a range of choices open to them in contemporary societies, one of which being how we define ourselves (our personal identity) - men and women have the

freedom to construct gender identity in any way they choose. For post-feminists this "personal construction of femininity" often involves what they see as "reclaiming femininity" in the sense women can be both "feminine" (whatever that may mean) and able to pursue their education, career and so forth independently of men.

Masculinism

Masculinist approaches: Traditionally men have been able to draw on wider range of identities than women in our society for two main reasons:

1. **Power**: Men have, to greater or lesser extents, occupied the most powerful positions in society (in the economic and political system, for example).

2. **Spheres**: Where, traditionally, female roles have been centred on the private sphere of the family, men have had greater freedom in the public sphere and, consequently, have been better positioned to create a wider range of identities.

Male abilities to move easily between these spheres, coupled with higher levels of power within each sphere (as the traditional "head of the household", occupying the higher positions in the workplace and so forth) has meant that men potentially have a wider range of economic, political and cultural sources of identity

Social Actions...

Interactionism

Interactionist approaches focus on how people construct and make sense of the social world, something that involves using identities as a means of establishing a sense of order and predictability in potentially chaotic situations. "Identities", in this respect, are developed for two main reasons:

Social: By adopting particular forms of identity people create a semblance of structure and order. A female identity, for example, keys into a general set of roles, values and norms that provide general guidelines for behaviour. Interactionists, however, take this idea of "structure" one step further by arguing that, firstly, social structures do not exist independently of the people who create them; a "woman", for example, is not automatically a prisoner of whatever others associate with this identity. Secondly, therefore, Interactionists see social identities as *spaces* within which we have the scope to interpret and negotiate the actual, personal, meaning of any identity (someone can be "a woman" in a wide variety of ways).

Personal: Identity structures provide, in **Goffman's** (1959) terms, a means for the presentation and expression of "Self", an idea based around a:

Dramaturgical model of self and identity; social life is a series of connected and unconnected *dramatic episodes* and scenarios into which we fit and directly participate or which we observe from afar. People, in this respect, are *actors* – with all that this concept involves; we write and speak lines (our personal

Preparing for a performance...

identity) or repeat lines written for us - the influence of social identities that tell us how we "should behave" in particular situations and roles. As **Barnhart** (1994) puts it: Interaction is viewed as a "performance, shaped by environment and audience, constructed to provide others with impressions" that match "the desired goals of the actor".

Thus, when we adopt a particular role or identity we "perform" to others in ways that tell them something about who we are – we try, in **Goffman's** words to "mange the impression others have of us". Our performance, therefore, is directed at achieving desired ends (what we want from others). For example, when you want to create a favourable impression with someone you "act" in ways you believe they will like. Every social encounter, therefore, is just one more part of the act. This isn't to say we simply "use people" for our own particular ends; we're not always as cool and calculating as this might suggest. Rather, in the majority of our social encounters we use people, **Cooley** (1909) suggests, as a:
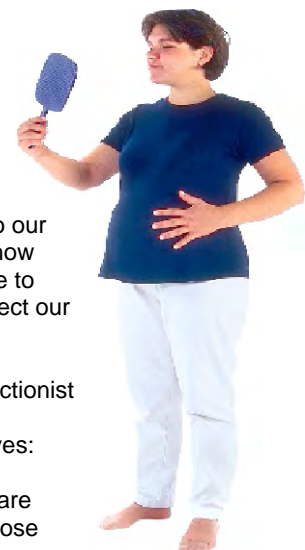
Looking–glass self: People are like *mirrors* we use to "see our self as others see us"; when we "look into the mirror" we see reflected an image of the person *others* think we are by how they respond to our behaviour. Depending on how significant these people are to us, this may or may not affect our *self-concept*.

For **Goffman** (as for Interactionist sociology generally) the "presentation of self" involves:

Interpretation: Identities are broad social categories whose meaning can differ (*historically* and *cross-culturally*).

Seeing our self as others see us...

Negotiation: Identities, because they are socially created, are open to discussion. What it *means* to be male, female, young, old and so forth is constantly changing in contemporary societies as people "push the negotiated boundaries" of these identities.

Postmodernism

Postmodern approaches lead quite neatly from the type of Interactionist ideas we've just noted, in the sense they take on-board the idea of "identity as performance" and develop it in relation to two ideas:

1. Centred identities: This relates to the idea that identities can be clear, relatively fixed and certain in terms of what is expected by others when we take-on particular identities.

In the past, for example, people had a much clearer (*centred*) idea about what it *meant* to be "a man" or "a women" because there were relatively few *choices* available to them in terms of the *meaning* of these categories, for a range of reasons:

• Social groups and communities were much smaller and more closely-knit.

• Travel to and from other countries was only available to a select few.

• People were not exposed, as we are now through *media* like television and the Internet, to new and different ideas.

For these reasons, among others, *social identities* (whatever rules a culture developed governing how to play a particular identity) were incorporated wholesale into *personal identities*. In other words, the rules governing "how to be young or old", for example, were clear, consistent and rigidly enforced.

For postmodern writers a key change has been the development of *global* economic and cultural influences that have opened-up societies, communities and individuals to new and different experiences, behaviours and ideas. Just as we now eat food from America, wear clothes from China and listen to mp3 players from Japan, we have also imported a range of cultural ideas, styles and fashions from around the globe – a cultural trend that has resulted in:

Fragmented identities – something that relates to two main ideas: Firstly, *primary sources of identity* such as class, age and gender have become significantly less important as ways of defining "our Self" and others sources, such as *consumption* ("I shop therefore I am"), *Green* and *Cyber* identities, have become increasingly significant. Secondly, under the cultural onslaught of exposure to different ways of living, behaving and being, traditional identity sources like gender or class can no-longer be sustained as *monolithic* entities (the idea there is only "one" correct way to "be female" or "be elderly"); there are, in contemporary societies, such a wide variety of ways to be these things that relatively

Postmodern identity: I shop, therefore I am?

simple, centred, social identities can no longer be supported, sustained, policed and controlled.

In consequence the rules governing the *correct* way to play-out these identities ("Real men don't cry", a woman's place is "in the home" and so forth.) are relaxed as people develop the freedom to both invent and adapt various sources of identity to their own, personal, tastes and styles (to create, as we've previously seen, *hybrid identities*). In terms of sexuality, for example, where in the past a form of *compulsory heterosexuality* was the norm (with *homosexuality* driven "underground" and hidden from view) we now have a range of sexualities from which to choose - heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, trans-sexual, asexual…

2. Decentred identities: One outcome of fragmentation is that people become *less certain* (*decentred*) about how they are supposed to behave; if there are many ways to be "middle class", for example, which is the "right way"? Identity categories such as class, gender, age and ethnicity are easily combined to create a whole new range of identities (such as young British Asians defining themselves as *Brasian* – a mix of both British and Asian cultures and identities). The downside to "almost unlimited choice" from which we *pick-and-mix* our identities is *uncertainty* and confusion about who we are and how we're supposed to behave. The "old certainties" of class, gender, age and ethnicity no longer have much currency in terms of telling us how to behave "appropriately".

Tried and Tested

(a) Identify **two** ways that social interaction might be considered "a performance" (4 marks).

(b) Suggest **two** ways that social identities help to "establish a sense of order" (4 marks).

(c) Suggest **three** reasons why age *or* class identities in the past may have been more centred than in the present (6 marks).

(d) Examine sociological accounts of how and why we develop identities (24 marks).

(e) Using material from the text and elsewhere, compare Conflict and Postmodern accounts of identity formation in the contemporary UK (24 marks).

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4. The Relationship of Identity to Age, Disability, Ethnicity, Gender, Nationality, Sexuality and Social Class in Contemporary Society.

In the previous section we noted the existence of a range of different possible sources of identity in contemporary societies and in this section we can examine how these sources impact on the formation and development of identity.

Social Class For the sake of illustration, we can discuss the relationship between identity and social class in terms of the earlier distinction we made between three basic class categories (working, middle and upper):

Working Class Identities: Observations

If, as **Crompton** (2003) notes "Employment position has long been used as a proxy for class" we can track developments in *working class* identities through changes in the nature of employment.

Traditional working class identities, in this respect, are fixed (or *centred*) around **manual** work and **manufacturing** industry – both of which, even into the latter part of the 20th century, were in reasonably plentiful supply. In **Willis's** (1997) study of working class boys, for example, "the lads" looked forward to leaving school at the earliest opportunity to enter the adult world of paid work – a situation in which **Harris** (2005) suggests "The idea of gaining qualifications for work gets opposed, discredited and de-valued".

Module Link   Stratification and Differentiation

Traditional ways of **measuring social class** (such as the **Registrar General's** Scale) are based around the relatively simple distinction between manual work (working class occupations) and non-manual work (middle class occupations).

A further dimension to class identity came from the *communities* within which the traditional working class lived; largely urban, relatively close-knit in terms of social relationships and further characterised, unlike their middle class peers, by a lack of home ownership. This "sense of community" – where people of a similar class, occupation and general social outlook could have their cultural identities and beliefs continually reinforced through personal experience and socialisation – represents an important source of class identity, whereby "**The Self**" (working class) could be contrasted with "**The Other**" (the middle classes who lived in "the suburbs" or the upper

A former mining village (Allenheads in Weardale) with the pub at the centre of the community...

classes who resided in the countryside). In the 1960's, however, writers like **Goldthorpe et al** (1968) and **Lockwood** (1966) suggested the emergence of a:

New working class that, **Crompton** (2003) notes, contrasted a traditional working class identity – "male, manual, and working in traditional industry (eg mining, manufacturing)" - with a new form of class identity expressed most clearly in **Goldthorpe et al's** (1968) study of *affluent* car workers. The study questioned the growing orthodoxy (among political parties, the media and public alike) that the class structure was "flattening"; in a new era of economic optimism (characterised by the then Conservative Prime Minister **Macmillan's** (1957) claim that ""most of our people have never had it so good") there existed a belief that class identities were *converging* into a general "middleclassness" (expressed most forcefully by **Zweig's** (1961) "*Embourgeoisement* thesis" – the idea that most people were "becoming middle class").

Goldthorpe et al demonstrated that even those members of the working class who had good, well-paid, jobs were sufficiently different to their middle class peers in terms of attitudes, values and behaviours to make traditional class distinctions valid. They did, however, argue that "affluent manual workers" represented a new development in working class identity.

Manual labour - the traditional definer of working class occupations.

Module Link   Stratification and Differentiation

The theory of embourgeoisement links to ideas about the changing nature of the class structure and relationships in the contemporary UK.

Working Class Identities: Explanations

While traditional working class culture and identity revolved around what **McKibbin** (2000) characterises as "…a fairly distinctive lifestyle and cultural life; industrial villages such as those around coal mining or the industrial areas of the big cities typified this lifestyle with their terraced housing, pubs and working men's clubs, keenness on sports and…a rigid sexual division of labour" (traditional working class female identities were largely constructed around marriage, child-rearing and the home), new working class identities underwent a radical change into what **Goldthorpe et al** (1968) argued was a::

Privatised working class, centred around the *private sphere* of the home, family life and children. A further change, noted by **Peele** (2004), was the idea that "affluence had affected working-class attitudes, making workers more instrumental and less solidaristic"; in other words, new working class identities were less likely to form around "shared experiences" in Trade Union membership and close-knit communities and were more likely to involve expressions of the desire for personal and family advancement.

More-recent changes to working class identities have been attributed to two related developments, one economic and the other cultural. **Peele** (2004), for example, notes that "The shrinking of Britain's manufacturing base and the rise of the service economy created a different social environment even from that of the 1960s"; large numbers of manual, manufacturing-based, jobs have disappeared from the economy under the influence of global economic pressures and changes, to be replaced by a rise in service employment, both a low-skill, low-pay, low-prospects type of work (such as in shops and restaurants) and a more highly-skilled and well-paid type of work in areas like finance, investment, Information technology and the like – the latter reflecting traditional middle class areas of employment that, in consequence, has resulted, **Peele** argues, in "a blurring of traditional class identities".

Consumption

The second development relates to cultural changes in *taste* and *consumption* – the basic argument here being a general *convergence* of working and middle class tastes, such as to make clear-cut class distinctions increasingly difficult. **Fenster** (1989), for example, notes that "even into the 1980's class-based *taste cultures* (defined in terms of a recognisable group "of similar people making similar choices") could be relatively easily identified ". Working class identities were reflected in cultural *orientations* like a "concern with the *present*" and concepts like *immediate gratification* (leaving school at the earliest

opportunity to take paid employment, for example) and *tastes* like pop music, football, television, not "eating out" and the like; middle class identities were reflected in a "future orientation" (*deferred gratification* – staying in education to get qualifications that give entrance to professional careers, for example) and *tastes* that edge into "popular" classical music, theatre and "eating-out".
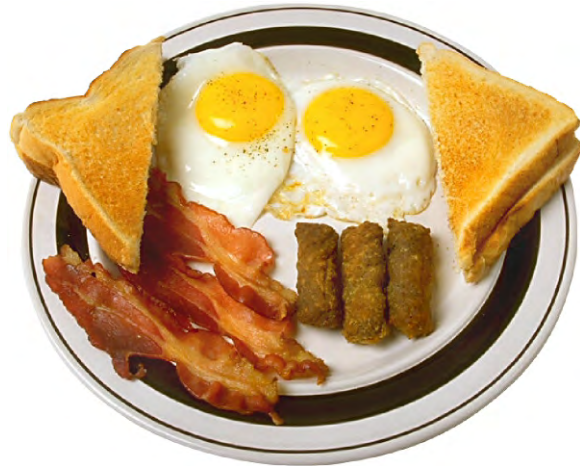
A nice greasy fry-up. Mmmmm. Luvverly.

In the latter part of the 20th century, however, "taste cultures" as indicative of distinctive boundary lines between working and middle class identities have changed dramatically (while, perhaps, not completely disappearing).

While **Prandy et al** (2004) suggest "there is a gradual shift amongst the population from seeing themselves as working class to middle class", **Savage** (2007) argues that although people generally still use class categories as a source of identity, the *meaning* of this identity has changed over the past 50 years – greater emphasis is placed on *individual*, rather than collective, experiences and, in consequence, working class identities have become many and varied (as **Savage** puts it, people talk about class "in ways which emphasise their hybrid class identities"), reflecting the idea that class is a fluid identity based on the "ability of people to make some kind of choice".

Canary Wharf - a modern financial centre built on the site of London's former West India docks

Middle Class Identities: Observations

In terms of occupational groupings, **Self and Zealey** (2007) note those employed in "middle class occupational positions" (both at the higher - managerial and professional – and lower - sales and customer service - levels) now account for around 2/3 (65%) of the UK employed workforce. Following **Crompton's** (2003) lead about the relationship between occupation and class, middle class identities are shaped by economic factors and we can identify a range of "occupational identities" (at both "higher" and "lower" levels) for this general class. Examples here include:

Professionals such as doctors who combine high levels of educational achievement with personal *autonomy* (freedom of action) in the workplace, decision-making and so forth.

Managers involved in the day-to-day running of private and public companies; this role, as **Brooks** (2006) suggests, combines things like career progression, decision-making, power and control over others, the organisation of work routines and the like. This category is sometimes split into *senior* (managing directors for example), *intermediate* (such as marketing managers) and *lower* levels (routine supervisors, for example).

Intellectuals (such as university lecturers) reflect an academic stratum dealing with knowledge and information services (such as research).

Consultants: This grouping focuses on the selling of knowledge, information and skills across both national and global markets. They can be seen as a distinctive sub-grouping here for two reasons: firstly they may be *self-employed* (although this isn't always the case), working on a contract-by-contract basis and secondly high financial rewards are offset by lower levels of job security (unlike their professional counterparts).

Service workers (such as shop assistants or care staff). This group represents workers at the bottom end of the middle class scale. They may have lower earnings and levels of skill than some higher working class occupations but qualify as middle class because of their *non-manual* work and, for occupations such as nursing, higher levels of *social status*.

Self-employed: Although their inclusion here is debateable - this category may include *manual workers* (such as plumbers) through owners of small businesses and financial operatives to high-powered brand consultants, IT contract workers and the like – their ownership role puts them in a slightly different category to "simple employees".

Middle Class Identities: Explanations

Although it's possible, as **Brooks** (2006) argues, to push the idea of a "coherent, stable and unified" *middle class* identity a little too far (higher level professional workers may have little or nothing in common with lower level workers) it's possible to identify three general cultural themes that contribute to middle class identity.

1. **Not working class**: This idea, firstly reflects the observation that "the middle classes" occupy an ambivalent and precarious class position – "above the working class" and wanting to maintain some sort of separation from them and "below the upper class" but aspiring to be like them. As **Brooks** (2006) puts it "The construction of middle class identities has primarily been related to the claim that one is 'not working class'". Secondly, in terms of taste cultures middle class identities involve the consumption of music, food, literature, film, clothing and so forth that are qualitatively different to those enjoyed by the working class (think, for example, about the difference between shopping in Asda and Harrods…).

2. **Disgusted subjects**: **Lawler** (2005) argues that "expressions of disgust at perceived violations of taste [and] white working-class existence" are a consistent – and possibly unifying - feature of middle class identities. She argues that the "ownership of taste" is one way that the middle classes aim to distinguish themselves from those below and, to some extent, those above (since the latter can be categorised in terms of things like "vulgar and tasteless shows of wealth"). As **Bourdieu** (1984) put it "Social identity lies in difference, and difference is asserted against what is closest, that which represents the greatest threat".

The ownership of "taste" represents both a significant source of middle class identity ("the Self") and as a way of differentiating them from other social classes ("the Other").

3. **Social Capital** refers to the ways people are connected (or disconnected) from social networks (who you know) and the value these connections have for what **Putnam** (2000) calls 'norms of reciprocity' (what people are willing to do for each other). It represents what **Catts and Ozga** (2005) call the "social glue that holds people together in…communities and gives them a sense of belonging". The argument here is that the middle classes are better positioned than their working class counterparts to key into significant *social networks* (such as those found in schools or the workplace) that reinforce their sense of identity and difference – and one important aspect of this is what **Bourdieu** (1986) calls:

Cultural capital – the various (non-economic) *resources*, such as family and class background, educational qualifications, social skills, status and the like, that give people advantages and disadvantages over others.

Upper Class Identities: Observations

This relatively small - but immensely powerful – class consists of two *major* groupings:

Landed aristocracy: The traditional source of this group's power is their historic ownership of land and their political connections to the monarchy that, in the past, made them the most significant section of society. During the 20th century it's arguable that their economic power and influence has declined but they remain a not insignificant "upper class cultural rump" – although probably secondary in economic and political importance to the:

Business elite - a section of the upper class characterised by their ownership of significant national, international and global companies. This section is sometimes subdivided into a *financial elite* (those involved in the provision of banking, insurance and knowledge services) and an *industrial elite* focused around manufacturing. Of the two it's arguable that in a contemporary UK context where service industries predominate, the former is now the most significant *class fraction* in terms of its member's wealth, power and influence.

Self and Zealey (2007) provide evidence of the immense economic power of the upper class in the following table:

UK Wealth Distribution	Source: **Self and Zealey** (2007)				
Percentage of wealth owned by:	1991	1996	2001	2002	2003
Most wealthy **1%**	17	20	22	24	21
Most wealthy **25%**	71	74	72	75	72
Most wealthy **50%**	92	93	94	94	93
Total marketable wealth (£Billion)	1,711	2,092	3,477	3,588	3,783

Upper Class Identities: Explanations

Wealth alone doesn't necessarily define upper class identities (some members of the aristocracy are not particularly wealthy while working class National Lottery winners don't automatically become "upper class") and, as with other classes, we need to look at various forms of cultural behaviour "behind the economic definitions" as sources of identity. Such identities, whether based on aristocratic claims to status and title (the *nobility*) or simple economic wealth, are based around:

Privilege regimes whereby the upper classes key into top-level *social networks* that give access to the most powerful decision-makers, high-ranking politicians, top civil servants and so forth. From a *Marxist* perspective **Milliband** (1969) argues that upper class identities are based around common cultural backgrounds that develop out of family relationships and networks and continue through the secondary socialisation process of (private) education. **Heald** (1983) develops this idea to talk about:

Privileged networks and, in particular, the idea of **personal private networks** (an example of which might be the so-called **old boy network** – a range of relationships with wider members of the upper class forged through things like a common educational experience – that could be exploited for mutual benefit). For **Heald**, private personal networks originate within the family, since things like family name and connections give access to wider upper class social networks and, by extension, close these networks to other classes - **Heath and Payne** (1999), for example, argue upper class identities are maintained by restricting and closing *access* to "economic and political networks of mutual self-interest". Such networks develop through an education system that usually involves attending an expensive, high status, public school (such as Eton) and a high status university (such as Oxford or Cambridge). Alongside the idea of privilege networks we can note the idea of:

Privacy as a significant feature of upper class cultures and identities. As **Galbraith** (1977) puts it: "Of all classes the rich are the most noticed and the least studied". *Privacy* involves the idea upper class identities are cemented through *social distance*; members of this class live, work and socialise predominantly with members of their own class.

Privacy extends from private education and health care through employing professionals (such as tax lawyers and accountants) to shield their economic activities from close inspection to creating physical distance and privacy – gated communities, country estates, and mansions where access is tightly controlled, patrolled and regulated.

Finally we can note how concepts of privileged and private networks link to:

Social capital: **Cohen and Prusak's** (2001) observation that "…the trust, mutual understanding, shared values and behaviours that bind the members of human networks" involves a distinctive set of upper class identities that are continually reinforced by both mutual self-interest and cooperation.

Tried and Tested

(a) Identify **two** ways that the "traditional working class" is different from the "new working class" (4 marks).

(b) Suggest two ways in which technology and / or industrialisation have influenced class identities (4 marks)

(c) Identify and explain **three** divisions within the middle classes(6 marks).

(d) Examine the argument that "we are all middle class now" (24 marks).

(e) Assess the view that social classes can be distinguished solely on the basis of "taste" (24 marks).

Gender Identities: Observations

Connell et al's (1987) observation that "**de Beauvoir's** insight "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" applies equally well to men: "one is not born, but rather becomes a man" is a useful starting point for the idea that gender identities are socially constructed. The historical relationship between gender and identity in our society has generally turned on the way each biological sex has been variously socialised into what **Connell** (1995) has suggested are two forms of *dominant* gender identities:

1. Hegemonic masculinity: In the past, for example, a "traditional" form of masculinity centred around a variety of physical and mental characteristics associated with men that **Gauntlett** (2002) expresses in terms of:

Role modelling – the idea that the general socialisation process defined a relatively clear set of roles for men and women (the former as paid workers and providers, the latter as homemakers and carers) from which an equally clear set of identity characteristics could be read: In terms of physical characteristics, for example, men were encouraged to adopt a particular body shape that,

ideally, emphasised physical strength and physique, while in terms of mental characteristics we find ideas about men as "leaders" and "providers" (a source of authority in society), a lack of emotion (men as rational, calm, cool and calculating beings) and so forth. As one of **Connell et al's** (1987) respondents ("Dean, a bus driver") put it: "I've always been brought up that the man is the breadwinner…She stayed at home and cooked'" – an idea that leads into:

2. Emphasized femininity, whereby women were encouraged to orientate their personal identities towards "accommodating the interests and needs of men". In other words, the *dominant* female identity was one that "matched and complimented" hegemonic masculinity. This involved ideas about women being essentially passive, emotional, beings whose sense of identity finds its greatest expression in the service of others (such as men and children within the context of the family and, where work was involved, similar "caring-focused" roles – nursing, teaching, social work and the like). **Kitchen** (2006) suggests this is a type of *complicit femininity* – one that complies with male needs and desires.

Identities in contemporary Western societies can be fluid...

Although, as **Connell** (1995) acknowledges, *hegemonic masculinity* and *emphasised femininity* represent "ideals" (both in the past and, in a slightly different way, the present), **Connell and Messerschmidt** (2005) argue that even in a society where several different forms of masculinity exist there remains a particular type of hegemonic masculinity "embodied in the currently most honoured way of being a man". The idea that gender identities are related to the general division of labour in society also means that contemporary gender identities should, according to **Gauntlett**, exhibit qualities like:

Fluidity: The idea that a range of male and female identities are available in contemporary societies and that the meaning of these identities change over time (as evidenced, for example, by the development of feminist identities during the 1960's).

Non-conformity: Economic and social changes (on both a national and global level) weaken the hold of traditions

Hegemonic masculinity meets emphasised femininity and they both had a jolly good time down at the beach...

on people's behaviour. Without strong, traditional gender reference points it becomes possible for people to develop new and different forms of identity – an idea contained in the:

Knowing construction of identity: This reflects the idea that, in the past, male and female identities were in some way *ascribed*; people were socialised into a relatively narrow, fixed, set of ideas about masculinity and femininity. In contemporary societies, exposed to different cultural ideas about gender, the individual plays a more central role in the construction of their personal identity.

Risk and Uncertainty: One problem, here, however is that where identity structures are no-longer fixed reference points for people's behaviour it becomes more difficult (and *riskier*) to adopt different gendered identities. Thus, where there are no clear social rules governing the "right" or "wrong" way to "do gender" there is the potential for "crises of identity".

> **Masculine Identities: Explanations**

If one form of masculinity is always the dominant form in any society it follows there must be other, alternative, forms and we can identify examples of what **Schauer** (2004) calls "multiple masculinities" in the following terms:

Subordinate masculinities generally relate to gay men in the sense of homosexuality being, at worst, proscribed and, at best, tolerated as an example of a "lower" from of masculinity – think, for example, about images of "effeminate men" perpetuated through some parts of the media. The basic idea here, therefore, is that even in societies where homosexual identities are allowed there is a general feeling that this type of identity is not an *authentic* representation of "all men".

Subversive: **Meuser** (2007), however, suggests gay identities can undermine "traditional" forms of masculinity in that "Certain groups of men are in complete opposition to the hegemonic form". From this position expressions of "gay masculinity" (such as effeminacy, "campness" and the like) become knowing, mocking, expressions of opposition to hegemonic masculinity.
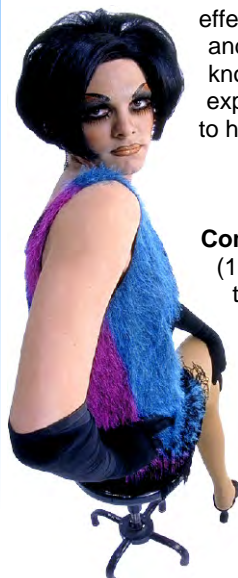
Subversive masculinity?

Complicit: **Connell** (1995) suggests that "as women have become more powerful, male identities have begun to change" and one form of change is reflected in the concept of the:

• **New Man** – an identity that developed during the 1980's (especially in advertising circles) based around men who, according to **Lewis** (1999), are

willing to combine paid work outside the family with their share of unpaid work within the home. Although **Lewis** (1999) wryly notes "There are few sightings of the 'new man'" **McMahon** (1999) goes further by arguing the new man is "fantasy - most men have little interest in changing the patterns of child care and housework". A contemporary elaboration of this idea (again, popular in some advertising circles) is the concept of the *new father* – an individual who,

Rare sighting of the "New Father" in action...

while displaying all the qualities of hegemonic masculinity also finds the time to be "a good, caring and responsible" father to their children. Sightings, outside advertisements, are however rare…

Marginalised: Some sociologists have argued that economic changes (such as the long-term decline in manufacturing and the rise of a service economy) have impacted on working class male identities as they struggle to cope with things like unemployment and an inability to play the traditional breadwinner role within the family. **Faludi** (2000), for example, documented American male feelings of disillusionment and despair that their "sense of masculinity" and self-worth was being eroded and that they were "becoming marginal" to the lives of women. In the UK **Willott and Griffin** (1996) discovered similar "marginalised masculinities" among the long-term unemployed working class as traditional beliefs about "the good family man" providing for wife and kids collided with the reality of a (current) inability to provide.

Partly as a result of these challenges to hegemonic masculinity (both structural - in terms of changing economic practices - and cultural, in terms of male - female relationships) writers such as **Mac an Ghail** (1994) and **Benyon** (2002) have suggested a **crisis of masculinity** in contemporary societies that has thrown into sharper relief a range of exaggerated male identities:

Retributive masculinities aim to "reclaim" (from their "emasculated peers") traditional forms of masculinity and a familiar example here might be the:

New Lad – someone whose (young) life centres around "birds, booze and football". In this instance the emphasis is on a late-20th century" reinvention" and reinterpretation of a more traditional form of masculine identity, whereas:

Hyper masculinity represents a version of *masculinity* that **Wolf-Light** (1994) characterises as "authoritarian

Subordinate

Marginalised

complicit

Types of masculinity...

Hegemonic

New Man

subversive

and autocratic, impersonal, contemptuous and violent. In short, the very image of patriarchy". **Robinson** (2006) characterises this, largely American, phenomenon as having "…a substantial following amongst white, middle-class and middle-aged men primarily because of its ability to provide a degree of certainty about what it means to be a man…a belief in an essential and unchanging 'deep masculinity'".

Feminine Identities: Explanations

Mirroring the experience of their male counterparts, there various ways for women to express their gendered identity in contemporary UK society; these range from traditional *private sphere* feminine identities – wife, mother and the like – to the less-traditional *public sphere* identities found in the workplace (career woman, for example). Reflecting these ideas, we can identity three main groupings by way of illustrating a selection of contemporary feminine identities.

Contingent

At the "traditional end" of the female identity spectrum we find **contingent femininities** based around what **Froyum** (2005) characterises as "acquiescence to male privilege"; in other words, these involve identities framed and shaped around male beliefs, behaviours and demands. **Chambers et al** (2003) argue that such femininities are contingent because they require "constant attention, renewal, concern, self surveillance…risk-prevention…and moral policing… pleasure is linked to "pampering" the body rather than testing it".

At one end of this particular scale we find:

Normalised identities in which women play a secondary role, one where they are encouraged to inhabit *peripheral spaces* on the edge of male identities - as mothers, girlfriends, partners (both romantic and sexual) and the like. Female identities, therefore, take-on a supporting role for their "male leads" – one that continually struggles, as **Chambers et al** argue, with the problem of "producing a femininity that will secure male approval". At the other end we find a range of **sexualised identities**, largely fashioned through male eyes and fantasies, such as prostitute, slag, slut, and so forth.
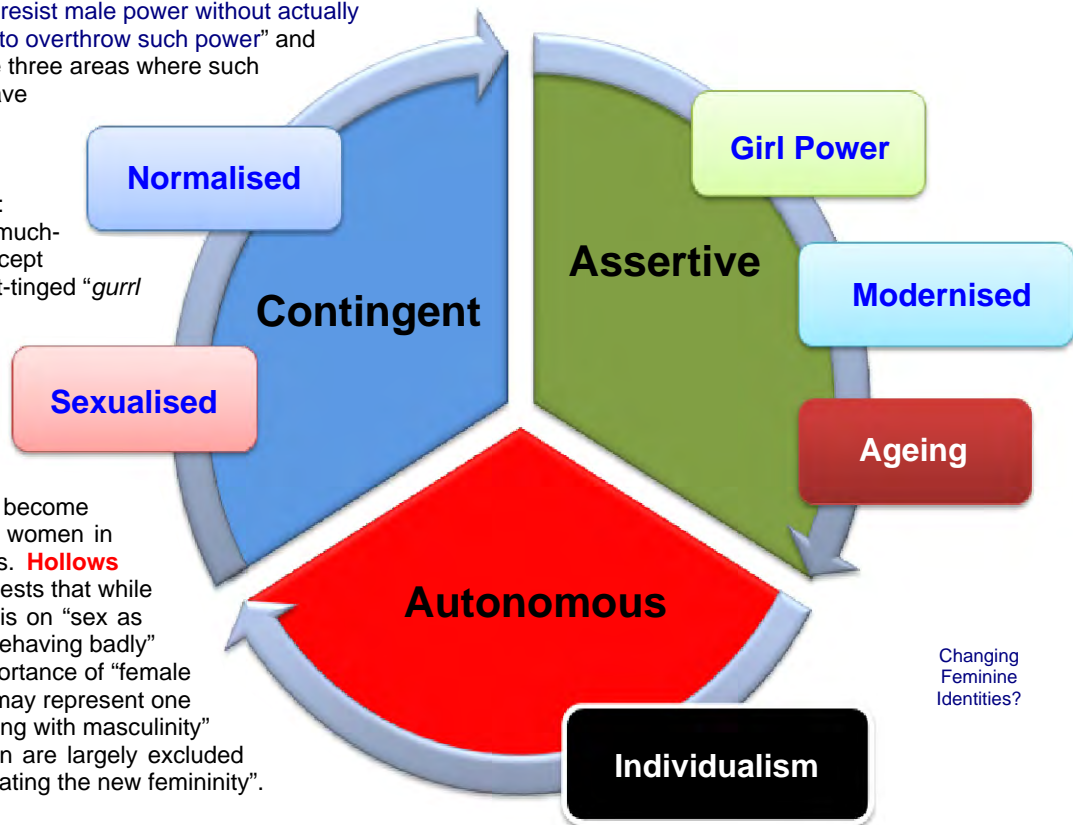
Assertive

Identities in this category reflect the changing position of women in society, partly as a result of feminist political and cultural ideas and partly as a reflection of changing economic circumstances. Assertive identities involve the idea of women "breaking free" from traditional ideas about femininity while, at the same time, not completely setting themselves apart from their male counterparts. **Froyum** (2005) suggests assertive femininities are

adopted to "resist male power without actually threatening to overthrow such power" and we can note three areas where such identities have been made manifest:

Girl Power: Although a much-derided concept (the feminist-tinged "*gurrl power*" seems to have more currency in the 21st century), this identity has become available to women in recent times. **Hollows** (2000) suggests that while the emphasis on "sex as fun", "girls behaving badly" and the importance of "female friendship" may represent one way of "coping with masculinity" older women are largely excluded from "articulating the new femininity".

Modernised femininities relate to a slightly older age (and *class*) group, as they seek to locate new-found female economic, political and cultural "rights" within a relatively traditional context of family responsibilities (the *assertive* aspect here being a desire for personal freedom and expression within the context of traditional gender relationships). For **McRobbie** (1996), modernised femininities involve attributes like the pursuit of a career, "individualism, liberty, and the entitlement to sexual self-expression".

Ageing femininities: Older female identities in our society have generally been *stigmatised* as objects of pity, charity, social work and the medical profession. Elderly women as fashionable, active and, indeed, *sexual* beings is a more-recent possibility and reflects, in some ways, both the general ageing of the UK population structure and higher levels of disposable income in this age group.

Autonomous

This final grouping, **Froyum** (2005) suggests, is one characterised by female attempts to "establish power by negotiating within their heterosexual relationships".

Contingent

Normalised

Sexualised

Assertive

Girl Power

Modernised

Ageing

Autonomous

Individualism

Changing Feminine Identities?

Autonomous femininities don't involve women living "separate from and without regard to men"; rather they involve establishing gendered relationships in competition with men, on female terms.

A combination of economic, political and cultural developments (service industries, legal freedoms and educational achievements, for example) have given women greater freedom of choice over how to both live their lives and express their femininity.

Thus **Evans** (2006) points to the idea of **female individualism** as part of a "new gender regime that frees them from traditional constraints" (such as pregnancy, child care and so forth); *autonomous women* are likely to be highly-educated, successful, professional women focused on their work and career (areas traditionally seen as male preserves). In terms of their relationships **Evans** suggests they tend to form non-committal heterosexual attachments that may involve marriage, but is unlikely to involve children.

Age Identities: Observations

Like gender, age is an interesting category because it illustrates the sociological relationship between an objective characteristic (biological ageing) and the meanings different cultures attach to this process. Different age groups, for example, reflect different *cultural assumptions* about how it is appropriate for people of a particular age to behave and these assumptions reflect back onto individual identities in two main ways:

Firstly, through a process of *identification* with people of a similar biological age (involving group identities such as "child, youth, adult and elderly"). This creates a sense of belonging (*social solidarity*) to a specific grouping with its own particular values, norms and forms of behaviour.

Secondly, through pressure to *conform* to an *ascribed* age grouping. Children, for example, are denied some of the opportunities open to adults in our culture while the elderly are similarly denied opportunities to behave in "age inappropriate" ways (involving sporting activities, sexuality and so forth). We can use the concept of:

I ask you, is this any way for a grown man to spend his Sunday afternoons?

Life-course – the idea we can identify four different phases in our biological development associated with different cultural meanings and identities – to illustrate age-related identities.

Childhood

For **Woodson** (2000), childhood "... is the manner in which we understand and articulate the physical reality of biological immaturity" and, as such, is arguably the first social identity consciously experienced by "immature humans"; it is during this period we are first exposed to *primary socialising* influences from adults (mainly parents) and, increasingly, *secondary sources* such as the media. In our society "childhood" is associated with a variety of meanings (something that supports **Jenks'** (1996) argument that "childhood is not a natural but a social construct"), from the idea of "innocence" to children being in need of adult care, supervision and protection.

Childhood also involves socially constructed ideas about *permissions* (children are "allowed" to exhibit behaviours – such as play - discouraged in adults) and *denials* (children are not allowed to do a range of things – such as marry – open to adults).

> **Module Link**   **Families and Households**
>
> For a more detailed discussion of childhood see "**The Nature of Childhood**" Section.

Youth

Like childhood, **youth** reflects a range of identities – such as pre-teens ("teenies"), teens and young adults – that have come into recent existence to reflect social changes in areas like education, work, and consumption patterns. **Hine** (2000), for example, argues "teenagers" didn't make much of an appearance in Britain until the mid-to-late 1950's" and their development reflects things like the extension of education into the teenage years and the development of consumer goods (music and fashion in particular) aimed at a specific post-child, pre-adult market. **Baron et al** (1999) note that (Functionalist) writers such as **Parsons** (1964) and **Eisenstadt** (1956) have argued *youth cultures* and *subcultures* (spectacular versions of which include Skinheads, Punks and Goths) function to provide a "*period of transition*" between childhood (the narrow family) and adulthood (the wider workplace). In other words, societies create concepts of "youth" as a way of allowing young people to move gradually away from childhood identities and into adult identities.

> **Module Link**   **Crime and Deviance**
>
> A variety of **subcultural theories** (especially those related to the concept of youth) are linked to explanations of crime - mainly because this general age group is statistically most-likely to be involved in crime. The link between age and crime is explored in the Section "**Different Explanations of Crime and Deviance**".

Adulthood

Adult identities are generally constructed around a range of rights and responsibilities that mark them apart from child and youth identities. Adults are allowed to do certain things (marry, work full-time, drink and smoke etc.) while also taking on roles (family and work, for example) that involve care and responsibility for others. In this respect adult identities avoid many of the:

Age discrimination ideas and practices aimed at both children and the elderly (the concept of **ageism** whereby "the old" suffer discrimination based solely on the fact of their age). For **Magolda** (1999), adulthood represents a general identity defined in terms of how individuals start to construct fully-formed personal identities separate from the controlling identities of their youth and childhood. Adulthood, in other words, represents a shift in individual identity focus – away from the various forces that shape children and young adults and towards a sense themselves of the society of "what to make of within the context around them".

Old Age

Longer life expectancy has resulted in changing consumption and leisure patterns among the elderly.

In contemporary societies "old age" can be considered as being both separated from general notions of adulthood (although the old do, of course, retain certain adult identities) and an identity in its own right – one that is becoming increasingly significant in the UK, for example, with the twin trends of an **ageing society** – one in which the number of elderly far outnumber the young – and longer life expectancy, itself a product of improved medical treatment, care and a greater understanding of the importance of diet, exercise and so forth (an "**Affluence Dividend**" - as societies become generally richer life expectancy increases). Conventional notions of old age as a:

Diminished identity – one resulting from the loss of status that occurs when retirement is enforced, family members either die or have significantly less personal contact and so forth – still retain some currency (even though the elderly may gain increased family status as *patriarchs* or *matriarchs* within some family structures). **Mutran and Burke** (1979), for example, note that "old persons have identities which, while different from middle-aged persons, are similar to young adults: they see themselves as less useful and less powerful than middle-age individuals". In addition, elderly identities can be:

Stigmatised in terms of seeing old age as an inevitable process of decline, senility, helplessness, withdrawal from society and loneliness. The elderly, in other words, are reconceptualised as a *deviant minority group*. **Gianoulis** (2005) argues that the **medicalisation** of old age contributes to this process: "Medicine defines and manages individuals deemed undesirable by the broader culture…and instead of viewing the disorientations of older people as being the result of personal and social change, they are viewed as symptoms of 'senility'". Conversely, we could note the contemporary:

Reinvention of elderly identities based around longer life expectancy and more affluent lifestyles. This involves the *fragmentation* of elderly identities (distinguishing between the old and the very old, for example), changing patterns of consumption and leisure (especially among the middle classes) and different interpretations of the meaning of "being old", whereby the elderly refuse to conform to conventional stereotypes and social identities. **Barrett et al** (2003), for example, argue different societies produce different subjective experiences of aging. Americans and Germans, for example, "tend to feel younger than their actual age…but the bias toward youthful identities is stronger at older ages, particularly among Americans".

Age Identities: Explanations

The social construction of age can be evidenced by the fact that there is no clear *historical* or *cross-cultural* agreement about the age at which the individual loses one identity and takes on another (when, for example, does adulthood begin?).

The fuzziness of boundary marking notwithstanding, **Settersten** (2006) suggests age identities are significant in contemporary societies for three reasons:

1. Salience: Age identities have a formal, organisational, importance (*salience*) for societies as a way of structuring "rights, responsibilities, and entitlements" (between, for example, adults and children). Informally, individual age identities "shape everyday social interactions" (such as those between a parent and child) and provide a basic structure to these social exchanges.

2. Anchorage: The passage of *biological time* is a way of fixing the passage of *social time* in that we give certain age-related events (an 18th or 21st birthday, retirement from work and so forth) a social significance as:

3. Markers – something that denotes the transition from one phase in the life course to another (such as from child to adult), a process sometimes termed a **rite of passage**. These rites take different forms in different cultures – for Aborigines this transition is marked by "Walkabout" – at 13 the child spends six months in the Australian Bush and on their return they are accepted into adulthood.

For Jews, on the other hand, the transition from childhood to adulthood can be marked by the *Bar mitvah* ceremony for boys (at age 13) and the *Bat mitzvah* ceremony for girls (at age 12).

A traditional form of Bar mitzvah ceremony.

There are a range of rites we could note in the contemporary UK – from things like christenings through marriage ceremonies to funerals (with birthdays also being part and parcel of the ritual of age).

Significantly, **Settersten** suggests biological age itself is relatively unimportant here: "What matters is what the age indexes - the important experiences that happen at those times".

We can note two further aspects of age identities related to the above:

Mapping: Age identities come bundled with normative expectations (the types of behaviour expected from different age groups) that we use as a "life map". **Polkinghorne** (1991), for example, suggests "Individuals construct private and personal stories linking diverse events of their lives into unified and understandable wholes…They are the basis of personal identity and they provide answers to the question 'Who am I?". In other words we come to understand something about our self by linking a range of age-related experiences to create "the story of our life".

Strategies: **Riach** (2007) suggests that by understanding how age identities are organised people can, if they choose, use this knowledge to both upset normative expectations (of age-appropriate behaviour, for example) and "pre-empt possible forms of marginalization". She suggests, for example, that in situations where **ageism** is (literally) at work people may take conscious steps to avoid "embodying the older worker".

Tried and Tested

(a) Identify **two** ways that old age is a stigmatised identity (4 marks).

(b) Suggest **two** ways that the "affluence dividend" has resulted in changing leisure and consumption patterns (4 marks).

(c) Suggest **three** reasons for changing male and / or female identities (6 marks).

(d) Examine sociological explanations for changing gender identities (24 marks).

(e) Assess the view that gender identities are closely related to both class and age identities (24 marks).

National Identities: Observations

Nationality involves thinking about the various ways people come to identify themselves as belonging to a wider social group (the Welsh, the Somalian and so forth) – a process that involves a combination of two things, one *physical* the other *sociological*:

1. Territoriality: Although "a nation" involves identifying a certain *physical space* (such as the British Isles), this alone isn't sufficient to create a "national identity" since people occupying a particular territory have to feel they have things in common not shared by other nationalities - a sense of uniqueness that comes from:

2. Common culture: National identities relate to things like the attitudes, attributes and ideas that are part-and-parcel of belonging to what **Anderson** (1983) calls an "imagined community" – the initial basis of which is a shared:

Language, both in the *literal* sense (speaking English for example) and the *metaphorical* sense (understanding the "language" through which national identities are culturally constructed and transmitted).

Anderson argues, for example, that the media play an important role in "representing the nation" as a community of "like-minded individuals" who have things in common although, as the **Commission for Racial Equality** (2005) suggest, the construction and maintenance of national identities involve a range of social processes:

Ceremonies, **Symbols** and **Rituals** reinforce a sense of national identity through *ceremonies* such as royal weddings, *symbols* such as anthems, flags and *rituals* involving things like support for national sports teams or voting for governments.

Values and attitudes: When **Sotheacheath** (1997) notes that "National identity is the transmission of each generation's legacy to the next" one aspect of this is the belief there are certain values (such as "upholding human rights and freedoms, or respect for the rule of law") and *attitudes* (a sense of fair play, tolerance and so forth) that characterise "a nation". In addition, national identities involve:

Traditions, habits and **customs** – such as celebrating Christmas or other religious festivals, sending Birthday cards, "coming of age" ceremonies and the like. These are frequently related to:

Consumption patterns: A preference for a particular type of food (such as "fish and chips", pizza, curry or hamburgers) may be incorporated into a national identity as might certain sporting practices (cricket and football) and:

Achievements: Part of the "national legacy" involves transmitting a sense of history based around:

• **Politics** ("parliamentary democracy", for example, or the 2nd world war).

• **Technology and science** (such as the industrial revolution or the World Wide Web).

• **Sport** (the invention of cricket, winning the football World Cup).

• **Culture** (popular music, fashion, literature...).

National Identities: Explanations

If national identities are constructed around the kind of *socialising mechanisms* we've just noted it follows that they represent what **Durkheim** (1897) called:

Integrating mechanisms: Things like participation in national ceremonies, observance of national rituals and socialisation into national cultures all contribute to the creation and recreation of national identities – the overriding purpose of which is:

Social solidarity – the general belief that people share a bond uniting them as "a people" and, in consequence, provides a sense of social cohesion and purpose. *Solidarity* can involve ideas of *loyalty* (to a country, for example) as well as finding its expression in:

Nationalism – a general belief in the *superiority* of one's nation as against the perceived *inferiority* of other nations – and this makes national identity something of a double-edged sword; on the one hand it can invoke feelings of community and cohesion, while on the other it can provoke feelings of difference and antagonism towards "Others" - whether these be other nations or groups within a nation (such as *ethnic minorities*). **Terzis** (2001) suggests the media plays a significant role here in terms of how it may "produce and reinforce the relational oppositions of 'Us' and the 'Others'". In other words, how the media helps to construct and transmit notions of national identity on the basis of real or imagined differences between people and nations.

Integrating mechanisms do, of course, require a vehicle for their delivery and in contemporary societies this role is performed by **cultural institutions** such as the *education* system (involving subjects like history, geography and citizenship) and the *media*.

Terzis (2001) for example, suggests the media play a significant role as:

• "**Tellers** of national myths (in times of crisis, rapid change or external threat).

• **Engravers** of national symbols on the nation's memory and

• **Presenters** of national rituals (such as elections and celebrations)".

The concept of "nationalism" raises some significant questions for identities in the contemporary world in the context of changing:

Defining concepts like "Britishness" or "Englishness" isn't as easy as you may think - try it and see...

Global economic, political and cultural processes. We experience (and incorporate into our personal value systems) a huge range of "global cultural" influences – from the media we consume, through the food we eat to the fashions and styles we wear. The problem, here, is that the meaning of nationality is no-longer clear, straightforward and relatively fixed; rather, "national identities" are increasingly fuzzy, imprecise and fluid.

For example, "Englishness", **Dolan** (2006) suggests, is "Seemingly a readily recognisable 'fact of life' embedded in understandings of British culture… Yet, once held up for close scrutiny… eludes definition… rather than having a fixed and knowable formulation of 'Englishness' that can be readily described and categorised, we are left with fluid conceptions that shift in relation to historical and political circumstances".

Along similar lines, **Dahl** (2001) argues that the idea of a "national culture"…shared across the individuals that live in a 'national state or territory' has diminished in importance as "nations" experience the "break up of society into…various ethnic, religious and racial groups". The implication here is that both the content and meaning of national identity has changed under what **Rex** (1996) characterises as two main challenges posed by **globalisation**:

1. Political unions (such as the European Community); such *supra-national* associations (political and economic groupings that involve many nations) have the potential to create a new layer of identity that supersedes notions of national identity.

2. Immigration "by minority groups with their own forms of culture and social organization". If national identities are rooted in a separation between The Self and The Other it becomes more difficult now than in the past to maintain the clear cultural separation between different "nationalities" essential to the concept of identity. This, it can be argued, results in three distinct outcomes:

Hybrid identities based on a combination of different "national" (and ethnic) influences, such as the aforementioned *Brasian identities* – a combination of British and Asian cultural influences.

Soft nationalism - a vague and fairly general sense of national identity that sits "in the background"; while people may, when questioned, identify themselves with a specific nation this has little or no specific meaning to them in their day-to-day life, although it may come to the fore at times of national crisis or celebration (such as when England beat Australia at cricket in 2005).

Hard nationalism that involves a retreat into beliefs about the essential basis of "national culture" (the fundamental attributes that make "the English" different – and superior – to other nations) and finds its expression in an aggressive and sometimes violent opposition to "foreigners".

> **Ethnic Identities: Observations**

Ethnicity refers to **cultural differences** between social groups in areas like religion, family structures, beliefs, values and norms and ethnicity and identity join, **Winston** (2005) suggests, when people "see themselves as being distinctive in some way from others" because of a shared cultural background and history, expressed in terms of:

Markers: **Song** (2003) argues that an "ethnic group" is a group within a larger society that has a "common ancestry" and "memories of a shared past"; the group, in this respect, has a sense of shared identity based around: a variety of "symbolic elements…such as family and kinship, religion, language, territory, nationality or physical appearance".
When thinking about ethnic groups, we need to avoid two significant misconceptions:

Firstly, although the concepts of "**race**" and "ethnicity" are often confused, the former conventionally refers to the belief we can distinguish between people on the basis of things like physical characteristics (such as skin colour).

Although race is an important idea (mainly because people refer to "racial groups" as if they were real and substantial) it is a crude biological concept (developed in the 18th and 19th centuries) that, **Ossorio** (2003) argues, is no-longer sustainable: "We have a notion of race as being simple divisions of people…that are deep, essential, somehow biological or even genetic, and that are unchanging, that these are clear-cut,

Ethnicity refers to the idea of cultural **differences** *between* social groups and cultural **similarities** *within* such groups.

distinct categories of people. And that is not the case. We can't find any genetic markers that are in everybody of a particular race, and in nobody of some other race…the simple biological notion of race is wrong".

Furthermore there are, as **Winston** (2005) points-out, many (ethnic) groups in our society "defined mainly in terms of religion (i.e. Jewish people or Muslim people) or nationality (i.e. Scottish or Irish people)".

Secondly, we need to avoid thinking about ethnicity in terms of "minority groups" or practices (such as "ethnic" art or food). As the **Center** (*sic*) **for Social Welfare Research** (1999) argues, "For all of us, identity is in some sense "ethnic" in that we have diverse origins…related to how we are perceived and treated by others… we are all to some degree members of ethnic groups…The issue… is not who is ethnic and who is not. It is the role ethnicity plays in personal identity". Thus, although we can distinguish between majority and minority ethnic groups we all have an "ethnic identity". As **Winston** suggests "because White people are the majority in Britain their ethnic identity is often simply taken for granted and regarded as 'the norm' and thus is rarely questioned" – an idea confirmed by **Savage et al** (2005) whose research revealed "White respondents were remarkably reluctant to identify themselves in any kind of ethnic terms".

> **Examples**

We can note some examples of ethnic groups in the contemporary UK in terms of:

Ethnic majority: **Self and Zealey** (2007) note that "Historically the population of Great Britain has predominantly consisted of people from a White British ethnic background" - the 2001 Census, for example, showed 88% of the population (around 50 million people) were classified as "White British".

This figure could, of course, be broken down into its constituent parts (English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish) although the question then arises as to whether ethnic groups such as the Irish are minorities

or part of the "British majority" – an important idea when thinking about cultural backgrounds and traditions since "British" is a notoriously difficult ethnicity to define.

Ethnic minorities: **Self and Zealey** (2007) further note that "The pattern of migration since the 1950s has produced a number of distinct ethnic minority groups" – the main categories in descending order of size being identified in the following table :

UK Ethnic Minorities
Source: **Self and Zealey** (2007)

Minority Group	Percentage
Other White	2.5
Indians	1.8
Pakistanis	1.3
Mixed ethnic backgrounds	1.2
Black Caribbean	1.0
Black Africans	0.8
Bangladeshis	0.5

This pattern of ethnic diversity is further complicated by "other ethnicities" (such as Chinese) and people (such as Europeans – the French in particular) who live and work in the UK but are resident elsewhere. **Favell** (2006), for example, estimates around 200,000 French live and work in London and the South East ("London is now the fourth largest French city after Paris, Lyon and Marseilles").

Ethnic Identities: Explanations

The discussion of ethic group markers, types and boundaries (what **Modood et al** (1997) calls the "confusion" over ethnic identification) highlights a key sociological problem; while it is possible to identify a wide range of ethnic groups and identities it is extremely difficult, in many instances, to actually pin-down the "cultural differences" that mark one ethnic group apart from another; what, for example, are the specific cultural behaviours, beliefs and practices that mark "English ethnicity" apart from "Scottish ethnicity" or "Afro-Caribbean ethnicity"?

We can limit the "problem of specific markers" by approaching ethnicity from a

As a part of what we generally consider to be traditional dress, the kilt might be seen as a significant part of Scottish cultural identity stretching back to into the myths (sic) of time.

It was, however, invented in the 18th century (circa 1725) by Thomas **Rawlinson** (an *Englishman*).
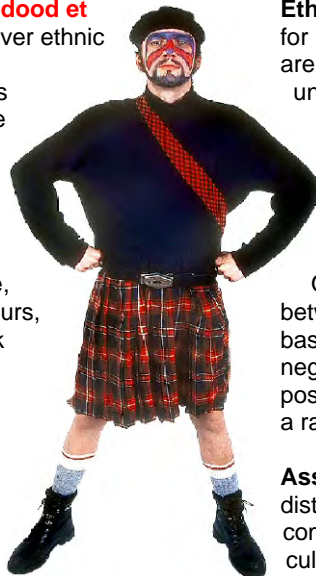
slightly different angle; rather than "from the outside looking in" (as observers trying to identify the various cultural elements that mark one ethnic group apart from another) we could consider it from the "inside, looking out".

Thus, **Song** (2003) suggests ethnic identity doesn't necessarily relate to "any actual evidence of cultural distinctiveness as a group"; rather, what is important is whether people are "conscious of belonging to the group" or as **Self and Zealey** (2007) suggest: "Membership of an ethnic group is something that is subjectively meaningful to the person concerned". This solution is not, however, without a couple of *methodological* problems:

Firstly, **Self and Zealey** (2007) point-out that asking people to self-classify in terms of ethnicity "means the information collected is not based on objective, quantifiable information like age or sex".

Secondly, it leads to confusion between *objective* ethnicity and *subjective* ethnicity.

Module Link　　　　**Theory and Methods**

These observations can be related to questions concerning the **reliability** and **validity** of different forms of data.

For example, **Modood et al** (1997) point-out that in the contemporary UK "Many people identify more readily with their ethnic group than with being British" – although substantial numbers do not (for example, some Asians – especially 2nd and 3rd generation individuals - see their ethnicity in terms of being British rather than "Indian" or "Pakistani" and some groups see their ethnicity in hybrid terms, as a combination of their parents ethnic background and their British ethnicity).

We can develop the above ideas by thinking about:

Ethnic boundaries and the consequences they have for identity. On one level, for example, if ethnic groups are "culturally different" we need to establish and understand the nature of the *boundaries* between them – where, for example does a majority / minority ethnic group begin and end? (that is, what are the specific characteristics of one ethnic group that clearly differentiate them from another, possibly similar, group?).

On another level we can understand the relationship between different majority / minority ethnicities on the basis that, if ethnicities are socially constructed and negotiated (since they are inherently *subjective*), it's possible for boundaries to be established or removed in a range of ways:

Assimilation, for example, involves the idea that the distinctive cultural identity of one ethnic group is completely absorbed into that of another – without the cultural beliefs and practices of the latter being significantly changed. In other words, *assimilation* involves the complete removal of ethnic boundaries through the effective "cultural destruction" of an ethnic identity.

Integration on the other hand involves the blurring of ethnic boundaries in the sense that different ethnicities *merge*, such that a new (*hybrid*) identity is created. Although total integration is rarely, if ever, complete, it is possible to see evidence in UK society of **cultural diffusion** – a process whereby cultural exchanges take place between ethnic groups in different areas like food - the spread of Asian cuisine, for example – fashion, language and so forth. As **Phillips** (2005) puts it "Integration is a two-way street, in which the settled communities accept that new people will bring change with them", while "newcomers realise that they too will have to change".

Segregation involves a clear fixing of ethnic group boundaries, such that little or no cultural exchange takes place between groups. We can briefly note two levels of segregation:

Firstly, systems such as **Apartheid** ("*separation*") in South Africa (between 1948 and 1994) involved the complete physical, economic, political and cultural separation of different groups (in this instance those designated "White", "Black" and "Coloured"). The system was governed by legal rules and punishments that worked predominantly in favour of the White ruling *minority*.
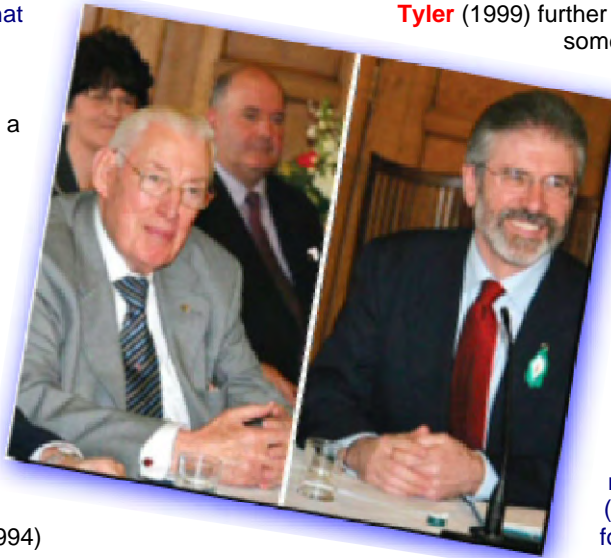
Northern Ireland - an example of ethnic segregation based on religious differences between Protestants and Catholics?

Apartheid in South Africa involved the complete separation of "racial groups"

Secondly, **Phillips** (2006) has argued that in some areas of the UK there is effective ethnic segregation in schools ("Faith schools", for example, whose intake is restricted to a particular religion, such as Christian or Muslim) and residential districts that are "on their way to becoming fully-fledged ghettoes".

He also argues that a form of "soft segregation" exists whereby "outside work, people confine their social and cultural lives to people of their own background, and seldom make friendships across ethnic boundaries".

Tyler (1999) further suggests that ethnic segregation sometimes occurs in urban fringe areas (such as in and around Leicester where she based her research) with the maintenance of "white enclaves" (areas that were exclusively white) in the context of black and Asian settlement.

She argues "White dominance is maintained through the production of stereotypes" that polarise differences between "the White Self and the Asian Other" in terms of "Us" ("English, White, rural, normal food…") and "Them" ("Asian, Black, urban, smelly food…").

Disabled Identities: Observations

The concept of disability involves a unique combination of two ideas:

1. Ascription - in the sense it is an identity given to those who fail to measure-up to socially constructed definitions of *normality*. One *is* – or *becomes* – "disabled" because of what you are *not* (physically and / or mentally "able").

2. Damage -- in the sense that "the disabled" inhabit a social space reserved for those who fail to match cultural ideas about what is *normal* and what is *abnormal* – they are, in other words, *stigmatised*.

Disability, in this respect, is generally represented (in the media as much as in everyday conversation and practice) as a:

Problematic identity; that is, one that is difficult to place and manage – both for the disabled individual (who, it is generally assumed, stands outside "normal society" in terms of their ability to participate fully in that society) and the able-bodied knowing how to deal with people who are "not normal". **Davis** (1997) brings these ideas together when he argues that the "problem of disability" is "the way that normalcy is constructed to create the 'problem' of the disabled person" – an idea reflected in **Morris's** (1991) argument that disability is frequently used (especially in the media) *stereotypically* "as a metaphor for evil, or just to induce a sense of unease… a character with a humped back, with a missing leg, with facial scars, will evoke certain feelings in the reader or audience".

> **Module Link** **Mass Media**
>
> These ideas link into the way "disability" is represented in the mass media.

Disability is a **contested concept** in the sense that it's actually very difficult to define exactly what we mean by "disabled". **Roper** (2003), for example, distinguishes between *impairment* - reflecting a real physical or mental state involving limitations in some situations – and *disability* which she sees as a cultural construct implying notions of "damage" and inability. Contemporary sensitivity to definitions and *labelling* is important because it highlights how social identities surrounding disability have been dominated by disability as:

Handicap: This reflects – in brutal and disparaging terms – a form of *dependent identity* in that "handicapped" implies an "inability to cope unaided", a perception that throws responsibility for stigma on the *victim* of the labelling process.

Gianoulis (2006), for example, argues that "handicapped identities" serve to obscure the reality of the situation in that the disabled individual's "chief handicaps are the barriers an unresponsive society creates…both physical obstacles to accessibility and attitudes of prejudice, condescension and ignorance".

Newell (2007) develops this general idea by suggesting that "the problem" here is not so much the fact of "difference" but that such difference is rooted in and supported by modern science and medicine; through these disciplines we have created "physical and psychological concepts of normal against which are contrasted the abnormal".

Disabled Identities: Explanations

Although disability takes different forms, both between general categories like *physical* and *mental* disability and within such categories (blindness and paraplegia for example) **Barnes** (1992) outlines a range of:

Imposed identities within the general "disability" category that reflect public perceptions of disabled identities. Examples here include:

• **Objects of ridicule** – people who are seen as pitiable and pathetic, sometimes sinister and evil but invariably objects of curiosity. This general type of identity focuses on a mixture of helplessness and compassion in that while the disabled may not be fully responsible for their condition they do little or nothing to alleviate it.

• **Super cripples** on the other hand represent a group that, as **Roper** (2003) puts it, has struggled to overcome their "handicap" and become "more 'normal' in a heroic way". The function of this group, she suggests, is to show that if some individuals can overcome their disability then so can others – once again illustrating the idea that disability is not so much a problem for the society that produces it, but rather a problem of the individual.

• **Incapables**: This category is both an extension of the first and confirmation of the second in that disabled identities are couched in both notions of dependency / incapacity and also in terms of the disabled as "burdens" on society and individual carers.

World-renowned physicist Professor Steven Hawking.

Roper (2003) suggests that contemporary notions of the relationship between disability and identity reflect two main models:

1. The individual model (the "dominant notion of disability") sees disability as "inherent in the individual, whose responsibility it is to 'overcome' her or his 'tragic' disability". This approach has three functions. Firstly it places "responsibility" for disability on the individual. Secondly it defines certain "boundaries of normality" by labelling some people as "abnormal" and, thirdly, it reinforces the latter because it "aims for the normalisation of disabled people, often through the medicalisation of their condition".

2. The social model reverses this picture by suggesting that "disability" is a problem for society, rather than the individual. That is, in any society where large numbers of people have physical and mental impairments the onus is on that society to adjust to this situation (the reverse of the individual model). For example, if the design of the built environment makes access for people with mobility problems an issue the solution is not to exclude them; rather it is to change the environment to enable their inclusion.

Sexual Identities: Observations

Although *gender* and *sexual* identities are closely related (through concepts, displays and practices of masculinity and femininity), sexual identities relate specifically to how individuals define themselves in terms of sexual and romantic (non-sexual) attraction. In this respect we can note *four* general types of sexuality in the contemporary UK:

1. Heterosexuality (attraction to someone of the opposite biological sex) is sometimes characterised as *conventional* or *hegemonic* sexuality on the basis that in both everyday practice and through institutions such as the legal system, schools and the media it is generally represented as the *dominant* form of sexuality – an idea reinforced by the concept of:

Homophobia (a fear of homosexuality): Until 1967, for example, homosexuality was illegal in the UK and from 1988 to 2003 it was illegal (although no-one was ever prosecuted) for teachers to "promote the teaching of homosexuality". While **McLean** (2002) notes that some of the more blatant examples of media homophobia (*The Sun*, for example, once described Aids as a "gay blood plague" and referred to gay men as "poofters") are no-longer acceptable, undercurrents still remain - although the language tends to be more guarded.

A satirical response to Homophobia

2. **Homosexuality** (attraction to someone of the same biological sex) is usually categorised in two main ways: *gay* (male-to-male) and *lesbian* (female-to-female). Homosexuality is sometimes termed a:

Marginalised sexuality to reflect the idea that, historically, it has been represented as a form of

minority practice existing "at the edge" of conventional sexuality. In this respect homosexuality has been a:

Stigmatised identity – one where concepts of "normal" (hetero)sexuality are contrasted unfavourably with "abnormal" (homo)sexuality. The persecution of gay and lesbian sexualities is reflected by the idea of being "in the closet"; one's sexuality is hidden from wider view and is something practiced "in secret" for fear of exposure. *Closeting* – and the decision about whether to "leave the closet" - is not, **Dreschler** (2004) argues, simply a matter of legality: "In the developmental histories of gay men and women, periods of difficulty in acknowledging their homosexuality, either to themselves or to others, are often reported", mainly because of the *stigma* attached to such identities. "Children who grow up to be gay rarely receive family support in dealing with anti-homosexual prejudices… beginning in childhood - and distinguishing them from ethnic minorities - gay people are often subjected to the anti-homosexual attitudes of their own families and communities".

3. Bisexuality (attraction to both the same and opposite biological sex) involves debates about the actual status of this form of identity – whether, for example, it represents a distinctive sexual identity in its own right. **Kitzinger and Wilkinson** (1995) noted a greater fluidity of sexual identity amongst women who, while labelling themselves as homosexual "maintain occasional sexual encounters with men even after 'coming out' as gay". The point here, perhaps, is not to question the nature of sexuality but rather to attempt to pin-down "bisexual identities" – the "problem" being, as **Bleiberg et al** (2005) suggest, that bisexuality "encompasses elements of both heterosexual and homosexual identities" that make simple categorisation difficult. In their categorisation, "bisexual identity development" follows a relatively complex socialisation process involving several distinctive stages (or layers):

"Layer Cake Model of Bisexual Identity Development": Bleiberg et al (2005)

Layer 1
Socialization into a heterosexual world;
Development of heterosexual identity

Layer 2
Experience homosexual feelings,
thoughts and / or behaviours

Layer 3
Accepting of homosexual attraction
while maintaining heterosexual identity

Layer 4
Integration and assimilation of
heterosexual and homosexual identities

Layer 5
Identify as bisexual

4. Transgender, as defined by **Whittle et al** (2007), "is an umbrella term used to include people whose lifestyles appear to conflict with the gender norms of society" and conventionally includes three broad types:

• **Transvestite** – someone who adopts the conventional clothing of the opposite sex.

• **Transgender** – someone who adopts the lifestyle of the opposite sex (to live "cross-gendered") while not undergoing surgery to change their biological sex.

• **Transsexual** – someone who, through surgery, changes their biological sex (from male to female, for example) to live as a member of their chosen sex.

Types of sexuality

Heterosexual

Bisexual

Transgender

Homosexual

Sexual Identities: Explanations

Although debates over the relationship between heterosexuality and homosexuality are nothing new, a recent development has served to frame the overall debate between sexuality and identity and opened up the debate about whether sexuality is a "lifestyle choice" or something determined by our genes (*Transexualism*, for example, raises interesting questions here about sex, gender and sexual identities since it encompasses the idea that an individual born as one biological sex believes themselves to be of the other sex – is this a "lifestyle choice" or does it relate to some deeper form of genetic programming?).

Genetics

Research by **Hamer et al** (1993) "suggested the possibility" that genetic factors influenced the likelihood of *male* (but not female) offspring being "born homosexual" and while they denied their research demonstrated that "homosexuality was rooted solely in biology", subsequent *media amplification* focused on the idea of a "gay gene"; **Conrad and Markens** (2001), for example, note how the UK media sensationalised the research as 'the perils of the gay gene'.

Module Link   Crime and Deviance

The concepts of **deviancy amplification** and **moral panics** can be applied to socially constructed ideas about "normal" and "abnormal" sexualities.

Although **Bailey et al** (2000) argue there is no evidence that "recurrent patterns of homosexuality within families" could be attributed to specific genes, the idea of a "significant" genetic component to homosexuality has a couple of important implications for sexual identities:
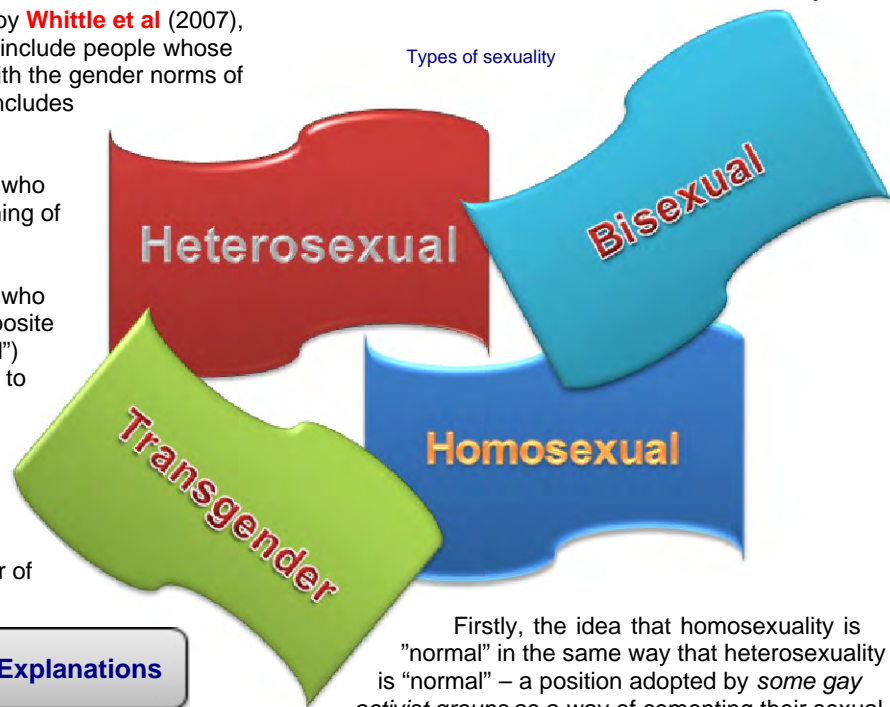
Firstly, the idea that homosexuality is "normal" in the same way that heterosexuality is "normal" – a position adopted by *some gay activist groups* as a way of cementing their sexual identity.

Secondly, the idea that homosexuality is a "genetic mutation" from the norm of heterosexuality – a position adopted by some *anti-homosexual activists* to cement their argument that homosexuality is a deviant identity that can be "cured".

Identity

Although such debates are significant, sexual identities in contemporary UK society are largely constructed around the idea that cultural factors (such as socialisation) play a dominant role in the creation and sustenance of distinctive sexual identities, in two areas:

1. Submerged identities, an idea that has two basic meanings. Firstly, heterosexual identities are generally *submerged* in the sense that "conventional sexuality" is the norm in our society; consequently it is less important to people as a source of identity because it has, until recently perhaps, been a relatively unchallenged identity.

To what extent are male and female identities still submerged in our society?

Secondly, homosexual identities have, until very recently perhaps, been submerged in the sense they were largely hidden away from public view.

One aspect of this particular argument is that it illustrates the idea (common to all forms of identity perhaps) that sexual identities only become significant to individuals and groups in situations of opposition, oppression and exploitation.

Katz (1995), for example, argues that "Heterosexuality is a modern invention" (the concept first appeared in America in 1893), whose function was to both define "normal" sexuality and identity and, by extension, "identify and name various deviations from the procreative norm".

Katz's argument is not that heterosexual behaviour didn't exist before the 19th century; rather it's that sexual identities are defined and given currency in terms of both their cultural opposition and the idea that one form of sexuality is socially constructed as superior to another.

2. Emerged identities: Homosexual identities, in an era of greater personal freedom and choice, *emerge* "from the shadows of illegality" as a means of both coping with and fighting sexual oppression. Homosexuality, for example, emerges as a form of *hypersexuality* – significant both in terms of its *practice* (love, affection etc.) and its *political* impact.

Overt demonstrations of sexuality (such as "coming out of the closet") represent a political statement that asserts the individual's right to assume whatever form of sexuality they choose. In some respects, therefore, these ideas reflect the notion of:

Negotiated identities – the idea that sexuality in both *general* (the particular form of sexuality one chooses and the sexual identity one adopts) and *specific* terms (how one chooses to play heterosexual or homosexual

For sociologists sexual identities are not "in the genes"...

roles - in terms of exaggerated masculinities and femininities for example) is not something fixed and unchanging but rather flexible and fluid. As **Kinnish et al** (2005) put it "Sexual orientation is inherently flexible, evolving continuously over the lifespan… out of an individual's sexual and emotional experiences, social interactions, and the influence of the cultural context".

Tried and Tested

(a) Identify two ways in which national identity impacts on our behaviour (4 marks).

(b) Suggest **two** ways disability may be a contested concept (4 marks).

(c) Identify and explain three ways national identities may differ from ethnic identities (6 marks).

(d) Examine the argument that there is such a thing as "normal sexuality" (24 marks).

(e) Assess the view that ethnicity is the most significant form of identity in contemporary European society (24 marks).

Are contemporary forms of sexual identity more likely to be negotiated than in the past?

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5. Leisure, consumption and identity.

Consumption and Leisure: Observations

Taking an initial lead from **Boden et al** (2005), consumption involves ideas about "…how we shop, where our purchasing 'needs' come from, how we treat the products we buy and how consuming shapes our lives" – a general characterisation we can relate to concepts of *culture* and *identity* in two main ways:

1. Culture

The distinction between *material* and *non-material* culture can be applied here in the sense that what we consume has both a *material* and *symbolic* element:

Material, in the sense that consumption involves buying "things" – a car, a washing machine and so forth that have some sort of practical use and value.

Non-material (symbolic) in two senses. Firstly, the material things we buy say something about us (both intended and unintended) in that they can be used as *status symbols*; that is, they *symbolise* something about how we both see ourselves and how others see us.

Secondly, however, consumption doesn't simply involve material culture and social status; a non-material aspect here is that when we construct personal identities we select from and "buy into" a range of cultural ideas about identity – such as beliefs about how to be male and young. Consumption, therefore, always takes place in a cultural context that involves the interplay between material and symbolic "products".

2. Identity

Leading from the above, we can think about how *consumption patterns* shape both lifestyles and social / personal identities. We can, for example, note how the creation of particular lifestyles involves ideas about *social solidarity*, friendship and the creation of what **Triandis** (1995) calls *ingroups* (people "like us" and about "whose welfare a person is concerned") and *outgroups* (people "not like us" and who are "in competition with the ingroup or are in some way endangering its existence"). In general, therefore, our concern here is with examining consumption in terms of how both the physical and symbolic things we consume relate to, support and project our sense of identity – something we can begin to examine in terms of:

Shop 'til you drop...

Consumer Culture

One way to express this idea is through the phrase "*I shop, therefore I am*" since this allows us to capture the relationship between consumption, culture and identity in a relatively simple, straightforward, way: Consumption (in the form of shopping) is a culturally-significant form of behaviour that has the added bonus of defining "who we are". The significance of "consumer *culture*" is, in this respect, two-fold:

Firstly, it suggests a change in the nature of consumption, away from shopping as a "chore" (something that, while necessary, is simply a routine and mundane part of the daily grind) and towards the idea of shopping as something we do for pleasure - a leisure and lifestyle choice.

Secondly, it expresses the idea that, in contemporary Western societies, we literally "shop for identities" in the sense that as "identity consumers" we are faced with an expanding range of choices about "who to be" and how to express our sense of self and identity.

Phillips (2003) summarises these ideas when she argues: "Consumption is changing…It is now just as important to buy things for what they mean as what they do. Consciously or unconsciously, consumers make decisions about their purchases based upon their identity or the identity they wish to project or communicate to others".

We can develop these ideas further by both identifying what **Sanghera** (2006) calls some *key features* of consumer culture and relating them to concepts of identity:

Culture of consumption: This involves the idea that consumption is the most important organising principle of contemporary societies; everything, from work, through education to family life is related to the desire to consume.

> **Module Link**　　　　　　　　**Mass Media**
>
> The media play a significant role in any **culture of consumption** - both in terms of creating *consumption desires* (through advertising, for example) and maintaining c*onsumption practices* through things like their portrayal of desirable lifestyles, fashions and the like.

Market society: The values of "the market" (everything is a commodity, has a price and can be bought or sold) become the dominant values in contemporary societies. Identities too, become commodities that can be worn, altered and discarded in favour of something new and different.

Universal and impersonal: Where culture is defined in terms of consumption it follows that there are few, if any, rules to follow. In our ability to consume "We are all formally free and equal, unconstrained in our choices by legally fixed status or cultural prohibitions". In this respect, the "old cultural prohibitions" relating to identity (how to be a man or a woman, for example) no-longer hold and these identities become whatever we can or want to make of them.

Choice: Consumer culture involves the exercising of choice, not just over what to buy but also over "who to be". In this respect, identity construction represents a "private choice" over which others have no control or input – "society", in the shape of social identities, can no-longer tell you "your place" in the great identity scheme of things and expect to be obeyed. The consumer (or individual) is sovereign.

Never-ending needs: A consumer society continually involves change because consumption feeds itself (pun intended); if people are to continue consuming they must continually recreate needs (both physical products and different identities - the things that make individuals feel different, unique and special).

Negotiation: The emphasis on the individual and the satisfaction of their needs "sweeps away any possibility" of identities being imposed on people – a

situation where "Identity must be constructed by individuals because it is no longer given or ascribed". In this respect the "regulation of identities" by tradition (the way things have always been done) is replaced by "the negotiation of status and identity".
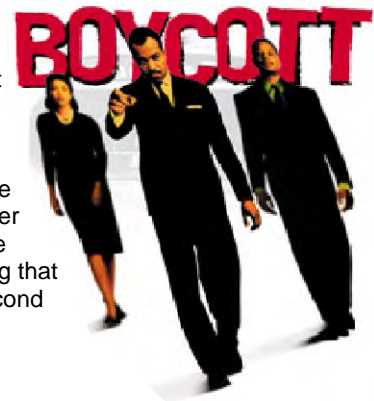
> **New Identities**

The above suggests identities in contemporary society are changing; in previous sections we've examined some of these changes in relation to what we might term "traditional identities" (such as class and gender) as well as the changing nature of "newer identities" such as sexuality. In the next part we can outline two examples of "new forms of identity" that have arguably arisen as a consequence of consumer society.

1. Green identities have developed in recent years around the environmental movement and while they involve a range of levels (from full-on "eco-warrior" identities related to globalisation, environmental destruction and the like at the "harder (activist) end" to a more general awareness of and concern about things like organic produce, animal welfare and so forth at the "softer end") they reflect an increasing concern about the relationship between consumption and the physical and social environments. In this respect we can talk about "ethnical consumption" – an example of what **Brusdal and Lavik** (2005) characterise as the:

Political consumer - someone who "tends to buy environmentally friendly products when possible, who will not buy products for political reasons and will boycott certain labels". **Wray** (2007), for example notes that "Tesco faced an unprecedented revolt over the meagre wages it pays workers in the developing world to supply its supermarkets with everything from cheap clothing to fruit" and a range of other global companies have been subjected to consumer boycotts for the way they allegedly use child labour in the construction of products like trainers and footballs.

Micheletti (2003) has argued this type of consumer behaviour represents a new and different form of political behaviour because it involves "individualised collective action"; a large number of individuals who, though they have little or no physical connection, have a collective sense of (green) identity that enables them to "act together" to achieve a political aim. This type of behaviour is made possible by the existence of computer technology (and the Internet) – something that leads neatly to a second example, namely:

2. Cyber identities: The development of the Internet, involving things like the World Wide Web, email, blogging and peer-to-peer (file-sharing) communication (such as Napster, in the past, and BitTorrent) has opened-up possibilities for identity formation, development and change on an unprecedented scale. In particular we can note the adoption of *virtual identities* as illustrative of this idea in a range of ways:

Anonymity: The ability to connect and converse "anonymously" with a huge potential network of people across the globe provides interesting opportunities for identity experimentation in terms of the freedom to construct and deconstruct different (frequently multiple) identities. For theorists such as **Haraway** (1991), identity experimentation can be made manifest in such "extreme forms" as:

World of Warcraft - the most popular role-playing game in the (known) universe?

The Cyborg – a fusion between, in this instance, computer technology and human beings. A cyborg, as she puts it, is: "'…a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction". In other words, in cyber space people don't simply interact "as human beings" but rather as cybernetic beings whose identity is, at best, blurred; we can, in short, present ourselves in this virtual world in any way that takes our fancy and for any number of reasons – an idea that makes "real world" identities based around age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability or whatever largely redundant concepts. As **Carlson** (2001) argues, the Internet is a *hyperreal* world – it has no physical existence, as such, but is "more real" than the physical world we inhabit.

Less radically, perhaps, anonymity allows individuals to *play* with different identities in different situations, such as through online message boards or chatrooms. In this situation people maintain a certain separation between their "real world

The Terminator - Half man, Half machine (although in Arnie's case it's not altogether clear which half is which...).

identities" and those they develop in the virtual world – an idea related to:

Immersion: An example here might be the development of role-playing games (the most popular of which is currently (2007) "World of Warcraft" with around 4 – 5 million users) where the individual enters, in this instance, a fantasy virtual world, adopts a certain class and type of player identity and interacts in that world on the basis of this identity. Recent developments here might include something like "Second Life" which currently claims around 7 million users and advertises itself as an "Online digital world imagined, created and owned by its residents". Something like Second Life parallels the real world in that it represents a *cyber space* where people can live, work, marry and so forth using whatever identity they wish to develop.

Networking: A recent cyber space development is the rise of "social networking" (through sites such as MySpace and Facebook) that provide the tools people can use to create an online presence and, by so doing, network with like-minded individuals. In terms of identity, social networking is a space where the real and virtual worlds intersect; people use them to present their real world, conventional, identities to as wide an audience as possible (largely consisting of people they will never meet outside of cyber space). Although this gives opportunities for *identity play*, the basic idea is to use social networking as a way of presenting your "real self" to others – although it could be argued that, as with interaction in the real world, people may attempt to *impression manage* (**Goffman**, 1959) by presenting an *ideal self* for public consumption.

Transformations

Although the virtual world is an obvious place for different forms of identity *transformation* (at least while you're online), **Phillips** (2003) notes a number of ways personal identities are transformed through consumption in the real world. These include:

Surgical transformations where the body is altered for cosmetic (buying a new nose, for example) or medical reasons (such as to repair damaged limbs). Changing the appearance of one's body can have symbolic significance for identity in that changes to our body-image impact on our self-concept – making us more comfortable in the identities we've already developed or allowing us to create a new identity, such as changing gender through surgery.

Landmark events such as childbirth or divorce encourage identity changes through changes in consumption practices. This might include, for example, discarding the clothing we associated with a past identity (when we were married, for example) and buying a new wardrobe to reflect our changing sense of identity.

Transition periods such as moving from childhood to youth where consumption patterns and preferences change to reflect our new-found sense of identity.
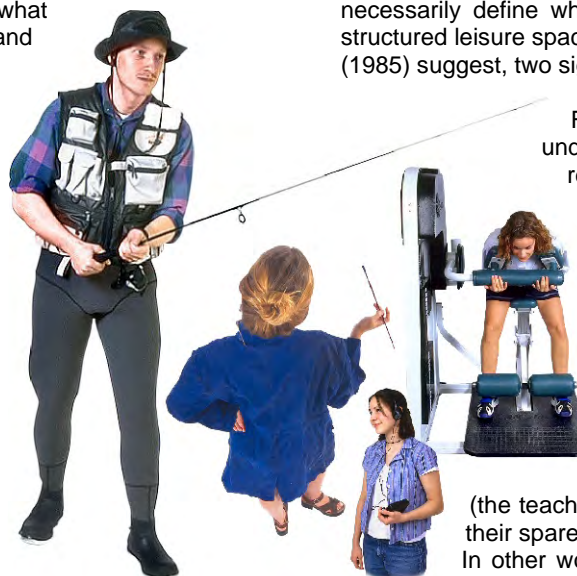
Leisure

Definitions of leisure are many and varied, reflecting perhaps the difficulty of pinning-down exactly what the concept involves. However, for our purposes we can, following **Cushman and Laidler** (1990), define leisure in terms of two ideas:

> • **Freedom to act**, in the sense of being able to spend "leisure time" as we choose.
>
> • **Freedom from** "conditions imposed by necessity" – leisure involves the things we do because we *want* to do them, not because we *have* to do them.

These ideas reflect the argument that leisure is the individual's "own time", where they have the freedom, through the consumption of leisure activities (and products), to create their own sense of personal identity. In this respect, if leisure has numerous possible dimensions – from a stroll in the park, through watching TV or playing games and sports to hobbies and pastimes – one unifying feature it possesses is related to the idea of:

Leisure values that reflect our perception of the distinction between work, on the one hand, and leisure on the other. Such values, therefore, represent fundamental beliefs about what leisure is, what it involves and how it should be spent – general values that give rise to a range of more-specific values about leisure.

For **Downes'** (1966), the sense of estrangement (Durkheim, 1893) from work experienced by working class youths led them to develop *leisure values* that involved fun, excitement, danger and pleasure, while **Godbey et al** (1993) suggest middle class leisure values involve concepts like "freedom, creativity, learning, socialisation and self development" – ideas that suggest we can illustrate the relationship

Both tattoos and body-piercing represent (non-surgical) ways of transforming the body - something that can result in identity changes or identity confirmations.

between leisure, consumption and identity through the concept of:

Leisure spaces: Whatever the specific nature of leisure values, they reflect the general idea that personal identities can be created and worked-through in arenas (*spaces*) of the individual's own choosing. However, while leisure choice is clearly an important consideration - some people spend their leisure time *passively* (watching television for example) while others go for a more *active* involvement (such as playing sport or working out at the gym) - the thing that unites these different types is that leisure in our society is generally a *structured activity*; it takes place in sites and spaces that are designed, in some way, for leisure – whether this be the home (with its surround sound cinema), the pub, club, cinema, sports arena, beach or Mediterranean cruise.

The way we use structured leisure spaces and the things we consume (in the widest possible sense) while we occupy them contributes to both our "sense of self" and, by extension, our sense of personal identity – and while for the majority of us leisure in itself doesn't necessarily define who we are, as the concept of structured leisure spaces has, as **Clarke and Critcher** (1985) suggest, two significant consequences.

Firstly, leisure needs to be understood in terms of the relationship between historical and cultural patterns of work and leisure.

Parker (1976), for example, argues work and leisure identities are intertwined in three main ways:

1. **Extension** patterns reflect the idea that leisure activities are closely related to work (the teacher, for example, who spends their spare time reading and researching). In other words leisure activities are an extension of an individual's working life.

"Leisure" in our society involves a diversity of different behaviours - from sports like fishing and football, through activities like painting and exercise, to listening to music or, indeed, doing nothing at all...

2, **Opposition** patterns, on the other hand, reflect the idea that leisure activities are unrelated to work; individual leisure choices, in this respect, bear no relationship to the work people do.

3. **Neutrality** patterns reflect the idea that leisure activities are largely unrelated to paid work and are more-likely to be focused around the family group.

Extension

Opposition

Work and leisure identities (**Parker,** 1976).

Neutrality

Parker's observations are related to - and to some degree mirrored by - the concept of **job satisfaction** (in basic terms, how people feel about the type of work they do and how these feelings relate to their choices of leisure activity). For example:

Intrinsic job satisfaction involves the idea that the individual gains a high level of personal satisfaction and fulfillment from their work and these feelings are carried-over into their leisure pursuits. Work, in this respect, becomes "an end in itself" and leisure activities are chosen as an *extension* of work. In the example noted above, a teacher with a high level of intrinsic job satisfaction would be inclined to chose leisure activities (such as reading, visiting museums and so forth) that extend their understanding of their work.

Extrinsic job satisfaction is the opposite of the above; it reflects the idea that the individual gains little or no personal satisfaction from work and hence work is viewed as a "means to an end" - as a way of earning money that can be used to fund leisure activities that are, in consequence, likely to be chosen "in opposition" to work; they provide the things (fun, excitement, personal fulfillment, social status and so forth) that the individual fails to find through their work.

One way to release those pent-up workplace frustrations... (don't try this at home, kids)

Secondly, in contemporary societies leisure has become *commodified* - something to be bought and sold in the same way people by and sell other types of consumer product.
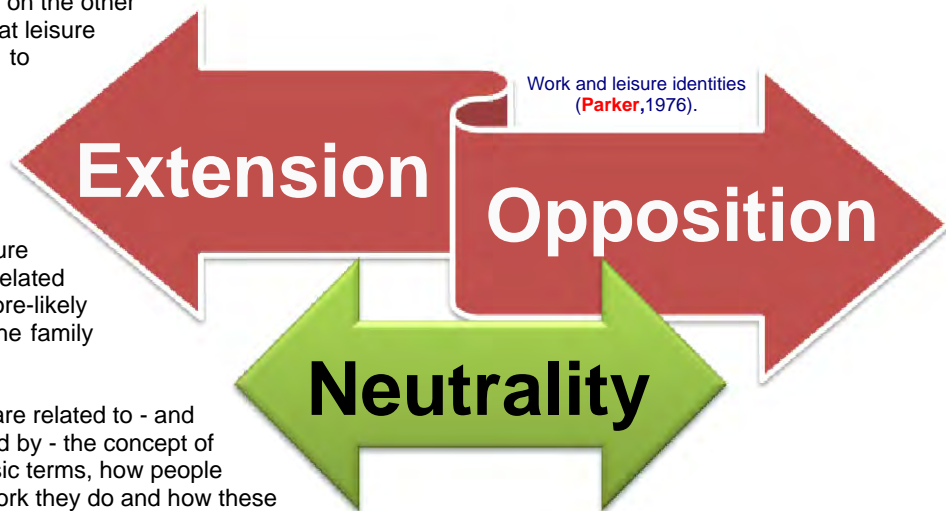
Tried and Tested

(a) Identify **two** ways in which leisure differs from work (4 marks).

(b) Suggest and explain **two** ways material culture differs from non-material culture, other than those cited in the text (4 marks).

(c) Suggest two ways consumption based identities are "negotiated" (4 marks).

(d) Examine the relationship between work and non-work identities (24 marks).

(e) Assess the argument that identities in contemporary society are changing (24 marks).

Consumption and Leisure: Explanations

Structured leisure spaces relate, as we've suggested, to both the *private* and the *public spheres* and they are united, **Clarke and Critcher** argue, by *commodification* – an idea that has interesting consequences for the way leisure, consumption and identity are related through lifestyles in contemporary societies. In previous sections we've touched on the concept of *consumption* when we've looked at the relationship between *social identities* (the beliefs and behaviours a culture generally associates with a particular type of identity) and personal identities (the various ways people interpret and shape social identities to their own particular ends). Both, in their different ways, involve consumption, in the sense of "buying into" particular types and forms of lifestyle and identity and the distinction we've made allows us to think about consumption in two basic ways:

Off-The-Peg

Firstly, it can be considered in terms of taking-on (*consuming*) identities, such as male or female, that already exist; here, the role of "the consumer" (or individual) involves being socialised into the behaviours a culture associates with a particular identity (such as

learning age appropriate behaviour, gender norms or "your place" in the class structure). In other words, the concept of consumption is viewed as a secondary or subsidiary one to that of *production* (societies and cultures produce certain types of identity which are then consumed, relatively passively, by individuals).

Made-To-Measure

An alternative interpretation of consumption is one that involves thinking about the meaning of identities to individual consumers – how they take general forms of identity (such as gender) and shape their content in a particular way; to create, for example, different forms of masculinity and femininity, different forms of sexuality and so forth. The consumer role here is an *active* one; rather than simply consume "ready-made" identities the individual interprets and creates new and different forms of identity.

These two positions reflect a major theoretical split between two broad groups of sociologists, the first of which places the role of *social structures* at the centre of the relationship between leisure, consumption and identity and the second of which attempts to understand this relationship in terms of *social action*. While both view ideas like the commodification of leisure and the increasing significance of lifestyle practices and consumption patterns as important, they interpret these ideas in very different ways.

Structure and Lifestyle

This general perspective broadly argues that leisure choices and lifestyle patterns are determined, in the main, by *economic factors* (the type of work people perform, both paid and unpaid, their levels of income and wealth, the amount of leisure time they have available and so forth). At the start of the 20th century, for example, **Veblen** (1899) identified a:

Leisure Class – a group who, on the basis of their wealth and economic ownership, were "exempt from industrial labour". As **Jensen et al** (2000) suggest "Describing the consumer of a hundred years ago is the same as describing the upper class at that time. Consumption among ordinary people was for survival only and very little else. Luxury existed only for the few". **Veblen** argued this class was characterised by:
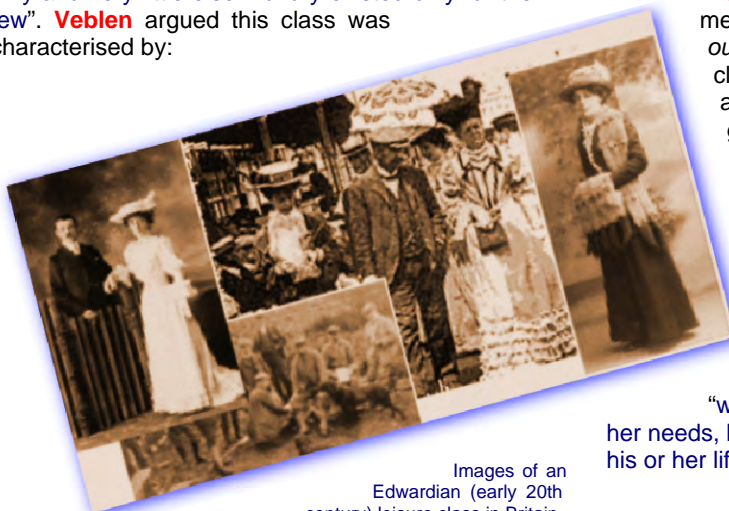
Images of an Edwardian (early 20th century) leisure class in Britain

Conspicuous consumption – what **Jensen et al** describe as "consumption that served the principal purpose of impressing on others who and what they were". Identity was, therefore, expressed through the display (or non-display if you were poor) of wealth that emphasised "one's position in life". Consumption (conspicuous or otherwise) links into identity in that it represents a "background presentation" of the self; the consumption of products (both goods and services) comes with a "substance of stories and experiences attached to them" – what we buy, how we dress, where we spend our leisure time and so forth all tell others something about who and what we are. Thus, the lifestyle of a leisure class expressed both their position in the world and their sense of *collective* (how they differed from "the masses") and *personal identity* (how they were individually different from members of their class).

Members of the modern leisure class captured in their natural habitat (a celebrity party, where else?).

Although it's arguably still possible, in the 21st

century, to identify a "leisure class" (one whose modern equivalent might encompass the lifestyle and behaviour of "celebrities" such as **Paris Hilton**, as well as its more-conventional members) a significant change has occurred *outside* this class with the development of classes with varying levels of time and money available to spend on leisure. From this general position, however, this development simply "expands the consumption pool" in two senses:

Firstly, there is greater demand for consumer products, on the basis there are more people in a position to consume such products and, secondly, "the consumer" is still seen, as **Brusdal and Lavik** (2005) suggest, as someone "who is not only occupied with covering his or her needs, but with creating meaning and purpose in his or her life using consumer gods as a means".

As **Wearing and Wearing** (2000) put it: "Conspicuous consumption… increasingly influences people's choices of leisure commodities, not for their use value but for their signification in terms of identity and status". In other words, even where consumption is extended down the class structure it is still used as a form of "background presentation" to people's sense of identity.

Thus, when **Aldridge** (2003) poses the question: "What is consumption about? Is it primarily concerned with the instrumental purchase of goods and services for practical purposes – the car as a means of transport? Or is it a symbolic realm in which people exchange messages about class, status and identity – the car as status or sex symbol?" the answer, from a structural position is that it is both; people are, firstly, compelled for good economic and political reasons to consume (in Capitalist societies profits need to be made, standards of living maintained and so forth) and secondly they are propelled into seeing consumption as a statement of identity – an idea that brings into focus the crucial role of the *mass media* in both creating and focusing people's perceptions of the relationship between consumption, leisure and identity.

Although we're free to choose the products we consume, advertising is designed to ensure we buy "the right products" - is the same true for personal identities?

Barker (2002), for example, personifies this general position when he argues: "As consumers, we seem to be creatures of free choice, able to express ourselves as we want - if only through what we buy…By choosing, we can make a partial statement about our individual "identity". We're encouraged to do this by the billions of pounds spent on advertising".

We can summarise this general position by noting that people are socialised into a set of pre-existing identity categories (such as gender, age and class) constructed around the prevailing system of economic, political and cultural values. Although the precise content and meaning of these identities may shift and change over time, the basic principle holds true in that patterns of consumption and leisure are used, in various ways, to bolster people's general perception of both their own and other's identities. In this respect, as **Rampton** (2002) suggests, the significance of social and personal identities is related to "their function in the social system"; something like age identities, for example, are constructed in ways that reflect the requirements of the social system as, for example, we've seen when we looked at ideas like *rites of passage*.

Postmodern sociologists argue that identity in contemporary societies is like a "Pick'n'Mix" arcade - people construct their own sense of identity by combining a wide range of identity options to create something personal and unique...

Action and Lifestyle

An alternative way of understanding identity construction is to "reverse the sociological gaze" – away from the influence of social structures and onto the influences of social actions. **Rampton**, for example, suggests this general position is based around the idea individuals "play a central role in shaping the habitats in which they live". In situations where societies are relatively closed to new economic, political and cultural influences, ideas and relationships, identity construction follows the kind the traditional paths we've previously outlined; however, in situations where economic, political and cultural changes constantly occur, two things happen:

Firstly, it becomes more difficult for individuals to sustain a sense of identity in the face of changes to the *anchors* on which such identities rest. For example, gender identities in our society in the past were relatively fixed (*anchored*) and stable because there was nothing to change the way they were constructed – there were few, if any, alternative ways to construct gender. People were either unaware of possible gender alternatives or were unable to enact such alternatives because of strong social pressures to conform to prevailing gender norms.

Gender relationships (and their attendant inequalities) were, in this respect, "taken for granted" (accepted as normal, natural and right). When different economic, political and cultural ideas about gender are introduced into a society things start to change as people pick-up, develop and incorporate such influences into their personal sense of gender identity (and this, in turn,

translates into changes in social identities relating to gender). Secondly, this leads to the idea of:

Decentred identities: The old "centres of identity" (traditional rules governing things like how to perform gender "correctly", for example) can no-longer be sustained once the *anchors* of such identities are loosened (or untied completely) and identity *markers* (such as the way we dress or are expected to behave) become fluid and changeable. This leads to a range of "*identity contradictions*" where conventional beliefs about identity are twisted and turned until they are (arguably) unrecognisable. In recent times, for example, women have appropriated clothing and behaviour formerly associated with male identities; the elderly have adopted styles and fashions formerly associated with the young; "the masses" wear clothing that was once the exclusive preserve of the upper classes (such as copies of designer wear or, in some instances, affordable versions of designer collections themselves). **Peterson and Kern** (1996) use the term:

Omnivorousness (which they define as "an openness to appreciating everything") to describe this condition in contemporary societies.

The implication here, therefore, is that in a *decentred* society people are increasingly open to and accepting of different forms of experience, something that encompasses both "the new", in the literal sense of something not previously seen or done before and "the newly different" in the sense of changing how we relate to existing experiences – a good example here might be the experience of *shopping*.

With the above in mind, **Rampton** (2002) suggests that identity construction in contemporary (*postmodern*) societies is "something that involves assembling, or piecing together a sense of identity from a plethora of changing options". Identity, therefore, is something people personally create using a range of culturally available "tools".

We can illustrate this idea by thinking about the difference between a conventional, non-interactive, web site (like **Sociology Central**: www.*sociology.org.uk*) and an interactive site (such as a social networking site like **MySpace**: www.*myspace.com*). When you visit a non-interactive site you're presented with a range of content that has been pre-selected for you by whoever produces the site. You choose to use such content in whatever way you like – but you cannot change or adapt it. However many different people view the site, they will always be presented with the same content. On a social networking site, however, the producer makes available to you a range of tools (the ability to post your photographs, play music of your choice, invite people to become "your friends" and interact with them through notice boards and the like). In this respect the consumer becomes the *producer of content* – and since this content is unique to them, no two versions of the site are ever the same.

In terms of identities, therefore, the argument here is that in contemporary societies people are able to both select from a wide range of "identity tools" and use these tools to fashion whatever identities they choose. Each individual creates identities through their consumption choices and practices – and we can bring the experience of shopping into the equation when we think about the difference between say, a corner shop in a small village and a vast shopping Mall situated on the edge of a town.

When we visit the corner shop we're presented with a narrow range of goods from which to choose (as was the case with identities in the past); when we visit *The Mall* (what **Ritzer** (2001) calls "Cathedrals of consumption") we are presented with an *experience* that personifies the relationship between consumption, leisure and identity in contemporary societies. We're presented with (the appearance of) unlimited choice and freedom to browse huge spaces filled with consumer goods. "Shopping", in this respect, is transformed from a *chore* into something akin to a *leisure experience* – we make plans to visit the Mall (perhaps as part of a family outing), stroll around taking in the sights and sounds, combine eating and drinking with shopping and perhaps even take in a film before returning home.
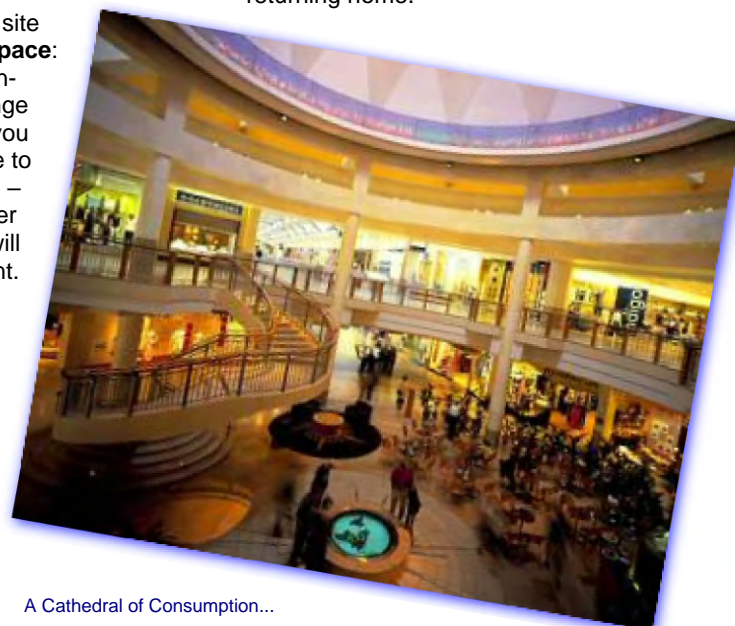
A Cathedral of Consumption...

The idea of "shopping for identities" (using the Mall as an analogy) reflects the idea that consumption, leisure and identity meet in a number of areas – something we can illustrate using the following examples:
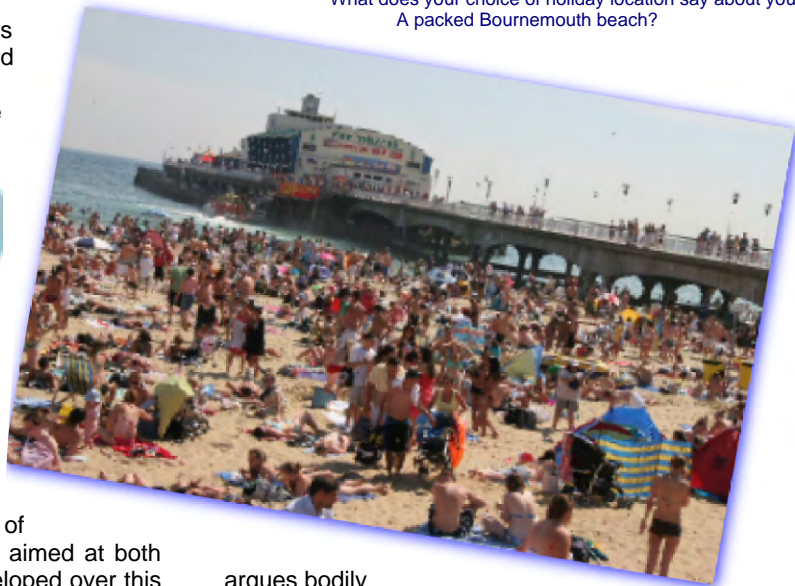
Lifestyles

Jackson et al (1997) note the development of a "new generation of men's lifestyle magazines" (titles such as Loaded, FHM, GQ and Arena) that have emerged since the mid-1980s and while their research focused specifically on the development of different forms of masculinity we can note that a range of lifestyle and self-help publications – aimed at both males and females – have also developed over this period. The appearance of such publications suggests that in postmodern society the media becomes an important source of identity construction and stability in the context of potential "crises of identity" – the idea that we look, for example, to "experts" for help and advice about how to construct identities. The popularity of television "makeover" shows is also indicative of interest and concern about identities related to areas like *bodies* and *places*:

Bodies: Personal presentation and display has always been an important part of identity marking (in terms of things like clothing, perfume, make-up and toiletries) but recent developments focus on a variety of "pleasures located in the body" – not just in terms of physique (fitness regimes as a form of both leisure and identity for example) but also in terms of adornments such as tattoos and piercing. These, in the past, have been negatively associated with the lower classes but **Curry** (1993) argues tattooing now cuts across categories like age, gender and class as people come to see their skin as "a surface on to which I can... project that which is much more deeply me' – an idea **Sweetman** (1999) reflects when he argues bodily adornment is increasingly a form of self-expression and identity construction.

Places are an interesting category to consider, in terms of both permanent places in which to live (*home*) and temporary living spaces (*holidays*). In the case of the former, patterns of both consumption and leisure are related to how we choose to decorate living spaces (including "personal areas" within these homes) and this both reflects and projects a sense of "who we are". In the UK, for example, DIY is a multi-billion pound industry with around 10 million people each year carrying-out various types of "Do-It-Yourself" project around the home. In the case of the latter:

Tourism is an area where consumption and leisure meet identity. Where overseas travel (and the concept of "a holiday") were once the exclusive preserve of the wealthy, the advent of cheap air travel, growing affluence and wider knowledge of the world has opened-up a wide vista of tourist access around the globe. Tourism is, by definition, a consumption process considered both in *abstract* terms (the consumption of leisure) and *concrete* terms (the things we buy). It is also bound-up in questions of identity. Holidays say something about us, to both ourselves and others, in terms of the places we choose to go (Bournemouth beach, the Arctic Circle, Outer Space?) and the things we do once we're there (from lying on the sand for a week, through pony trekking across the Himalayas to climbing Mount Everest and all things beyond).

In addition, by playing the role of the tourist we reinforce or change the identity of the places we visit. The development of the "seaside holiday" dramatically changed the nature of UK coastal resorts while in Spain cheap package holidays to places like Majorca led

to their reinvention as a "British spaces" – a place where the tourist could speak English, consume familiar food and drink and mix with people of their own nationality (and class). More recently, as **Diken and Laustsen** (2004) note, places like Ibiza have been "transformed from a "paradise island" of alternative holiday in the 1960's, first into a bastion of package tourism and then into a clubbers' Mecca of unchallenged hedonism", while Faliraki "has become just another "Gomorrah of the Med", where wild life comes out to play in a hedonistic cocktail of sun, sea, music, cheap alcohol and drugs, sex, and expectation of excess".

Sheller and Urry (2004) analyse the relationship between tourism, consumption and identity in terms of:

Playful performances – the idea that the tourist, in a variety of different ways ("walking, shopping, sunbathing, photographing, eating and clubbing"), "performs identity" through their leisure experiences in a variety of guises and places – a selection of which include performing:

• **Paradise** - exotic beaches and islands as "particular sites of play".

• **Global Heritage** – the experience of "museums, World Heritage Sites, and 'historic' places".

• **Remade Playful Places** – whereby global cities (such as London, Hong Kong and Barcelona) have "refashioned their built environments…to perform as 'attractions' on a highly competitive global stage of 'world-class' destinations".

• **New Playful Places** which involve the exploration of "unexpected sites" (such as the slums and tenements of inner city urban landscapes across the world) – "places of danger and enthralment, monotony, and awesomeness...the new places of play for a kind of 'postmodern middle class' both fascinated and repelled by their indescribable, indistinct, yet atmospheric post-apocalyptic urbanism".

Paradise

Global Heritage

Playful Performances

Remote Playful Places

New Playful Places
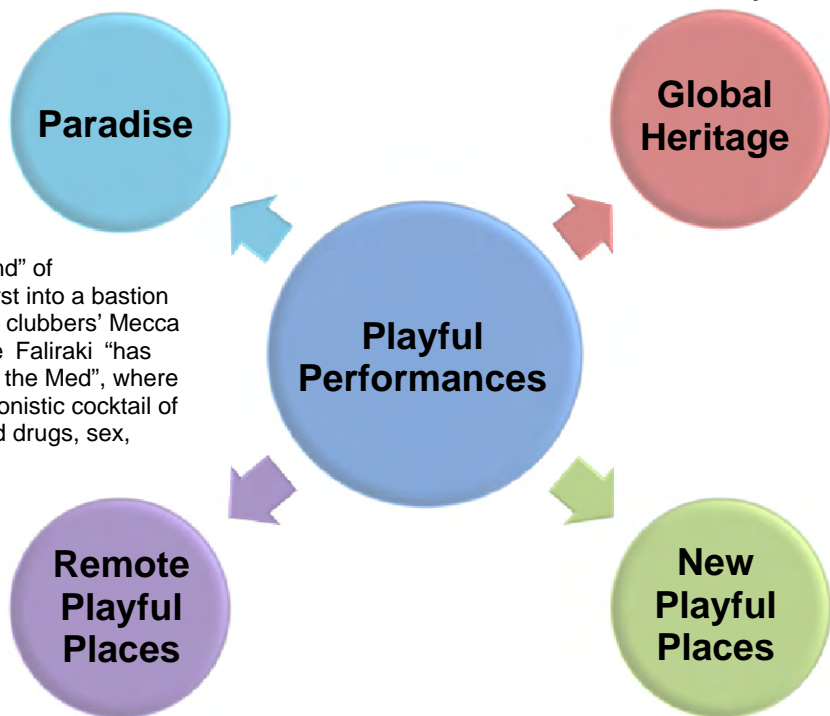
People and places combine, **Urry et al** (2004) suggest, through the way people see and use places to construct "leisure performances and identities" that are different from other types of performance and identity (such as family, work or education) because they focus on "play" (having a "good time" free from the normal constraints of life). "Tourist identities" both reflect conventional identities (our choice of leisure destination and type reflect our cultural tastes) and also shape them, in that our experience of tourism reflects back onto our sense of identity.

Slumming it in Kenya - a New Playful Place for rich Westerners?

To conclude, we can explore these ideas in a little more detail by focusing on a distinction **Urry** (2001) makes between two types of "tourist gaze":

The collective gaze involves deriving leisure pleasure through its shared consumption; in other words, leisure identities are constructed around being and interacting with others as part of the tourist role. Examples here might range from the package holiday in Benedorm to the Theme Parks of Florida.

The romantic gaze, on the other hand, is more individualistic and focused on "solitary" personal pleasures. Examples here range from things like Adventure holidays (which may involve elements of both controlled and uncontrolled risk and danger) to more sedate (and risk free) pastimes like visiting museums and "places of historical interest".

An interesting aspect of the *romantic gaze* in contemporary societies is the idea that it reflects the development of postmodern identities because it involves the search for pleasure through:

Authentic experiences – the idea that what one experiences is somehow "real" and unique (and distinct from the *inauthentic experience* of the *collective gaze* that involves pre-packaged forms of leisure and consumption). The search for *authenticity* is a significant aspect of the *decentring* of identities in that it represents a search for "real experiences" around which identities can be constructed.

Interestingly perhaps, there is a class element to both romanticism and authenticity (one related to both the past – when, as we've suggested, travel was by-and-large restricted to a small minority of the leisure class – and the present as the middle classes (both young and old), in particular, seek-out new ways of distinguishing their sense of personal identity from other social classes, mainly through their ability to pay for the privilege of "authentic experiences").

In this respect the consumption of *authentic leisure experiences* is not simply an expression of new identities; rather, it represents an integral part of how these identities are constructed (authentic leisure consumption helps the individual, in effect, to construct and maintain their sense of self).

The Collective gaze?

Or something just a little more Romantic?

Tried and Tested

(a) Identify **one** aspect of conspicuous consumption in our society (2 marks).

(b) Suggest **two** ways private leisure spaces differ from public leisure spaces (4 marks).

(c) Identify and explain **two** reasons for believing consumption patterns are not simply the result of "individual choices" (6 marks).

(d) Examine the relationship between consumption practices and lifestyles (24 marks).

(e) Assess the view that contemporary identities are based around consumption and lifestyle (24 marks).

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Unit 1:
Wealth, Poverty and Welfare

Contents

1. Different definitions and ways of measuring poverty, wealth and income.

Wealth, Poverty and Welfare: Introduction

The general theme of this Chapter is the relationship between social inequality defined and measured in terms of concepts like wealth, poverty and welfare. The main focus of the Chapter, therefore, is an examination and understanding of the way in which things like wealth, income and poverty are unequally distributed in our society.

As with most areas of the course we can begin to explore this theme by thinking about some initial definitions of significant concepts – in this instance those of income, wealth and poverty – since as **Levitas** (1999) perceptively argues: "…definition precedes decisions about measurement". In other words, before we can decide how we're going to measure something (like poverty for example) we have to decide how it can be defined for at least two reasons:

1. If we can't define something then it will not be possible to measure it (since we'd have no clear idea about what we're supposed to be measuring).

2. How we define something has a significant effect on how we measure it. Poverty, as we'll examine in a moment, can be defined in a range of different ways, each definition producing a different measurement of the nature and extent of poverty in our society.

Definitions, therefore, are important – not least because if we're going to suggest ways of measuring concepts like income, wealth and poverty it would be helpful to have some idea about what it is we're trying to measure.

Income: Observations

Income, on the face of things, is not particularly hard to define; it refers to the monies received by an individual over a specified time period (usually, but not necessarily, a year). In this respect, it's a simple *economic indicator* of value that, consequently, can be objectively quantified (or measured). It can also be one of two types:

1. Earned (or **active**) income is money received for doing something (like paid employment).

2. Unearned (or **passive**) income, on the other hand, comes from things like investments (such as dividends from stocks and shares), rents and so forth.

As **Townsend** (2004) notes, it's important not to confuse *earnings* (money from paid work) with *income*; the two ideas, although related, are not the same - income, for example, may include "savings and investments, benefits and occupational pensions, in addition to wages". Three related ideas we can note here are:

The recent "buy-to-let" boom
is a good example of "unearned income".
Someone buys a house using a mortgage and they then rent the house to someone else (which, in theory, pays-off the mortgage and leaves a tidy little profit into the bargain - nice "work" if you can afford it...).

Gross income involves the total amount of an individual's income - earned and unearned - before any direct taxation (such as income tax).

Net (or *disposable*) income is the amount left after various forms of direct taxation have been deducted.

Discretionary income refers to the amount of money someone has available to spend once essential items (food, clothing, transport to work and shelter for example) have been deducted.

Although the basic definition of income is fairly straightforward, a couple of complicating factors enter the equation (you just knew they would, didn't you?) when we think about the possibility of using it as an indicator (or measure) of something like social inequality or poverty:

Different types of family have different types of need...

Individual or **Household**: Although incomes are earned individually, within family groups or households they're likely to be pooled (or *aggregated*), a situation further complicated by the number of incomes being pooled (a single adult contributing to the economic upkeep of the family or a number of adults contributing their income, for example). When income is defined at the level of a family or household, the term:

Equivalised income is frequently used, especially if we want to compare families and households on the basis of their needs; a single adult household, for example, needs a lower income than a two adult with children household to maintain a similar standard of living. Most official statistics in this area use an "equivalence scale", such as that devised by **McClements** (1977), to compare incomes between different households.

> **Module Link** **Families and Households**
>
> The idea of different types of family or household group is significant in terms of the concept of **family diversity**.

Self and Zealey (2007) note that within family and household groups those most likely to experience "persistent low incomes" (defined as "3 out of 4 years below 60 per cent of average income") are, in descending order of frequency:

> • Single with children
> • Single pensioner
> • Pensioner couple
> • Couple with children
> • Single without children
> • Couple without children

In this respect we can note that one of the key variables affecting families with low incomes is likely to be the *absence* of full-time employment (because of retirement, in the case of pensioners, or childcare responsibilities in the case of single-parents).

National, **International** or **Global**: When making comparisons between different countries, *national* income figures are a useful starting-point. *Global* comparisons, for example, can be used to locate a country's total income within a *world* context, whereas *international* comparisons can be used to compare the total income of a country like Britain with its equivalent economic competitors (such as France or Germany). However, a simple comparative focus on national income levels - while undoubtedly interesting and useful - may mean we overlook wide disparities of income *within* a society.

> **Income: Explanations**

Although defining income, as we've seen, is not too difficult, such a definition - although necessary - is not particularly useful or meaningful. What *would* be useful and meaningful is the ability to think about income in terms of its:

Relative distribution in our society. That is, how different levels of income are distributed within and between different social groups. If we can discover this it will go some way towards helping us understand concepts such as poverty and, of course, why some individuals and groups are more unequal than others.

To make income meaningful, therefore, we need to measure it - and this, as we're about to discover, is not as simple and straightforward as you might expect, for a couple of reasons:

1. Masking

Some groups in society have the ability to hide their real income from the prying eyes of tax officers (and sociologists of course - although they're probably slightly more concerned about the activities of the former).

The *wealthy*, for example, may employ accountants to find (legal) ways of minimising their income for tax purposes. **Sikka** (2003), for example, estimates UK tax avoidance schemes (legal ways of avoiding taxation) cost the government £25 billion each year. On the other hand, some groups may minimise their declared income by working in the:

2. Hidden Economy

Income here is either from illegal sources (such as theft or drug-dealing) or paid "cash-in-hand" (that is, paid directly to someone - such as an employee or contractor - without the money being declared for tax purposes).

Measuring something like the "hidden economy" does, therefore, present its own special problems One such problem, as **Harrison** (2008) notes, being that "There are no official statistics on the size of the black economy or "hidden economy", as Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs prefers to call it. (A Liberal Democrat MP once objected to the term "black economy", claiming it was "racist".) But economists have estimated that it accounts for 10 per cent of GDP, or more than £130 billion - and growing". If, therefore, the hidden economy consists of a wide range of different behaviours (from the proceeds of international drug-trafficking through small-scale tax evasion to something like "moonlighting" – having a second job on which income tax and national insurance are not paid) how is it possible to accurately measure it?

> **Module Link**   **Research Methods**
>
> The difficulties involved with defining and measuring something like the "hidden economy" can be related to concepts of data **reliability** and **validity**.

One method, suggested by **Pissarides and Weber** (1989) is to compare the **spending patterns** of people with different levels of declared income. They found, for example, that "most self-employed people who declared average earnings of £35,000 had similar spending patterns to employees who earned £50,000" (for the latter taxes are deducted by the employer and so there is no scope for tax evasion by the employee). This suggests, of course, that the self-employed are not declaring substantial amounts of income to the tax authorities (**Pissarides and Weber** suggest that "on average true self-employment income is 1.5 times as much as reported self- employment income").

On this basis **Bhattacharyya** (1999) argues the existence of "unrecorded economic activities" casts doubt on national income estimates and, by so doing,

American property developer Leona **Helmsley** once famously said "Only little people pay taxes" This was, of course, before she was imprisoned for 4 years (in addition to a $7 million fine) for failing to declare her true earnings to the US tax authorities. When she died in 2007 she left $12 million to her dog - and nothing to her grandchildren...

has implications for social and welfare policies (which we'll discuss in more detail later).

Leaving these complicating factors aside, measuring "net disposable household income" involves, according to **Lunn** (2003), counting, where applicable, all of the following:

> • Net employment earnings.
> • Profit or loss from self-employment.
> • Social Security benefits and tax credits.
> • Occupational and private pensions.
> • Investments and savings.
> • Maintenance payments (if received directly).
> • Educational grants and scholarships (including loans).
> • Payments in kind (such as luncheon vouchers or free school meals).

Although defining and measuring income can, as we've suggested, be difficult, once we've done these things it becomes fascinating (okay, we're exaggerating a little - it's not that fascinating, but it can be interesting) to think about how income is *distributed unequally* in our society across a range of social categories, beginning with:

Social Class

Although there's no great surprise in the observation class differences in income exist (in general, the higher your social class, the higher your overall income), a couple of points can be noted:

Proportion: According to the **Shephard** (2004), income in our society is *disproportionately* skewed towards the higher social classes, as the following table illustrates:

UK Income Share: 2002 - 2003
Source: **Shephard** (2004)

Population	Percentage share of total UK Income
Richest 1%	8
Richest 10%	28
Poorest 10%	3

Increasing income inequality: Over the past 40 years, higher income groups have increasingly taken a higher share of national income. The rise in income inequality is not, however, an even upward movement. As **Hills** (1998), for example, notes:

1961 - 1979	Income rises were fastest for the lowest groups.
1979 - 1992	Income for the poorest 30% was largely static: incomes in general rose by 36%.
1992 - 1995	Income of poorest rose slightly faster than for other groups.

The **Institute of Fiscal Studies** (2000) suggests that, although "the widely charted rise in income inequality in the 1980s was checked during the recession of the early 1990's…inequality has since begun increasing again". The **Office for National Statistics** (2004) notes that by 2003 "income distribution was broadly stable" with 20% rises in disposable income (money available to spend after income taxes have been deducted) for both the top and bottom 10% of the income ladder. Somewhat perversely, of course, a similar percentage rise for those on high and low incomes means that income inequality between these two groups increases (for the deceptively simple reason that 20% of a lot of money is better than 20% of a little money…).

As the **Institute for Fiscal Studies** (2007) suggest "Income inequality in 2005/06 increased compared to the previous year. This increase is due to greater inequality of earnings and self-employment income, rather than the tax and benefit system…Income inequality still remains high by historical standards - the large increase which took place in the second half of the 1980s has not been reversed".

Shephard (2004) characterises the current situation, therefore, as one of "Increasing inequality, yet increasing redistribution" - which suggests that although over the past few years there has been some redistribution of income among social classes, it has largely been from the higher classes to the middle classes (that is, income redistribution, where it has occurred, has been from the highest income earners to the group just below – not to the lowest income earners). To put this into some sort of context, analysis of income trends – using "The most commonly applied threshold of a household income that is 60% or less of the average household income" - over the past 25 years by **The Poverty Site** (2008) reveals:

• The number of people on low incomes is still lower than it was during the early 1990s but much greater than in the early 1980s.

• In 2005/06, almost 13 million people in the UK were living in households below this low income threshold. This is around a fifth (22%) of the population.

• The proportion of people living in relative low income in the UK is twice that of the Netherlands, and one-and-half times that of both France and Germany.

Mathieu (2007), on the other hand, notes that although "The income gap between rich and poor goes on getting bigger, we seem remarkably unconcerned". As she argues "Income inequality is at a historic high in Britain, but…the public is becoming pessimistic about the possibility of changing this…a report last month on British attitudes to inequality…found that although a large and enduring majority of people think the income gap between rich and poor is too large, there is little understanding about the extent of inequality in Britain and a poor grasp of how wide the gap has become in recent years".

Income Inequalities

Thinking about these ideas, we can identify a number of reasons for income inequality in the recent past:

Structural economic changes over the past 25 years

The decline of manufacturing industry (such as coal mining)

Technological changes: The development and application of *computer technology* over the past 25 years has had a number of consequences for income inequality in our society, related to the changing nature of employment. In the 1980's, for example, the decline in *manufacturing* (such as car production) and *extraction* industries (such as coal mining) led to an increase in (mainly working class) *unemployment*.

The rise in *service* industries (such as banking and finance services, data processing and so forth), has, on the other hand, had a couple of consequences we can note here. Firstly, the growth of relatively low-paid work in areas such as call centres and, secondly, an increase in the income of some parts of the middle class as employers pay an income premium for   skills, knowledge and qualifications.

Trade Unions: The decline in the number of people joining unions has lessened their ability to raise wage levels for the poorest sections of our society.

Unemployment: Although at around 1.5 million people this is far lower than in the early 1980's (where an estimated 3 - 4 million people were unemployed), substantial numbers of individuals and, more importantly, households,

And high-pay, high-skill, high status global financial services...

who rely for their income on State benefits are among the poorest in our society.

Benefit changes: Payments were once linked to rises in income, but are now linked to price rises. In a low price-inflation economy (where prices rise slowly, if at all), the value of welfare benefits has declined in relation to work-related incomes.

Tax changes: The highest rate of income tax is now 40% (for those earning over £40,000), which contrasts with rates reaching 80% - 90% in the recent past. Those on higher incomes, therefore, now get to keep more of that income.

In addition, there are a couple of useful concepts we can apply in this context (and, as we will see, in relation to areas such as gender, age and ethnicity):
Vertical segregation refers to the way the workplace is *hierarchically structured* ("top to bottom"); within occupations, for example, there is normally a grading structure whereby those at the top earn significantly more than those at the bottom (a Head teacher for example, earns more than a classroom teacher).

Horizontal segregation refers to the idea different occupations have significantly different rates of pay. Middle class occupations (such as a doctor or lawyer) are segregated from   working class occupations (such as bricklayer or road sweeper) on the basis of skills, knowledge and qualifications.

The rise of service industries

Such as low-pay, low-skill, low-status call centres

Age

Income differences, for a variety of reasons, are linked to age in two main ways:

Individually: In general, the incomes of the *young* are lower than those of other age groups (with the possible exception of those aged 65+). One explanation here is that of *career seniority* linked to levels of skills, knowledge and qualifications. *Vertical workplace segregation*, for example, may be a factor in aged-related income inequalities in some occupations (such as Further Education lecturing, where individuals move up the pay scale for each year of experience they gain).

Life cycle: **Rownlinson et al** (1999) argue significant income inequalities are related to life cycle differences. Thus, "young, childless, couples" for example, generally have higher (household) incomes than young single people or young couples with children. For couples with children,

Rownlinson et al noted three significant factors in relation to income:

> • **Single parents** had significantly lower incomes than dual parent households.
>
> • **Age of children**: Lower income families were more likely to have children of pre-school age.
>
> • **Age of mother**: Where women delayed childbearing (until their early 30's, for example), this had less impact on family income levels. This is probably due to middle class women, in particular, delaying childbearing until they have established a career to which they can return after child birth.

Rigg and Sefton (2004) also point to the way life cycle factors affect income when they note: "Mothers typically reduce their employment activity when they have children and retirement is usually, though not always, associated with a reduction in employment activity".

One interesting feature of the elderly and retirement is the observation that, although this group tend to have significantly lower incomes (especially single elderly people) they're often one of the *wealthiest* social groups (mainly because of outright house ownership and the value of private pensions).

Gender

Average female incomes have, historically, been lower than average male incomes. The **Office for National Statistics** (2004) noted, for example, the "gender gap in average hourly pay of *full-time employees*" was 18% (women earn 82% of average male earnings) - a decline, it should be noted, from 26% in 1986. By 2006, however, **Self and Zealey** (2007) note that the gap had reduced further to around 13%. Although this figure hides significant differences in income across different social classes and occupations, we can note a number of reasons for the continuing difference:

Discrimination: Although an old favourite, we shouldn't discount the continued significance of overt (and covert) forms of sex discrimination within the workplace as an explanation for gendered income inequality.

Vertical segregation: Within many occupations, the top (highest-paid) positions are still predominantly filled by men. The concept of a *glass ceiling* is sometimes used to suggest the idea that, although women may not suffer overt forms of sex discrimination, they are still, by-and-large, unable to reach the top positions in companies in any great number.

Horizontal segregation refers to the idea many occupations are *sex segregated*, in the sense of being predominantly performed by either males or females. Female-dominated occupations, for example, include areas such as teaching, nursing, shop and secretarial

work and, in general, these types of work are lower paid than male-dominated occupations.

Dual Labour markets: Sociologists often distinguish between:

> • **Primary** labour markets, involving, for example, large, technologically advanced, companies with high levels of profitability, job security, promotion, career prospects and wages and
>
> • **Secondary** labour markets where the reverse is true - working conditions, job security and wage levels, for example, are normally considerably worse than in the primary market.

The fact women tend to work in the secondary labour market, therefore, goes some way to explaining lower levels of female income. **Sommerlad and Sanderson** (1997) , for example, note: "The primary market is conceptualised as male and characterised by male ways of working and career norms".

Do women have to be accepted as "honorary men" within the workplace to achieve income equality?

Even where women are present in a primary market (as in the case of solicitors studied by **Sommerlad and Sanderson**), they occupy a *secondary position*, based on the idea of vertical *workplace* segregation. In other words, women in such professions generally have lower incomes than their male counterparts.

Furthermore, **Sommerlad and Sanderson** argue the position of women within an organisation may be both fragmented and complicated, thus: "The secondary market is characterised by its own hierarchy: full-time women who have not taken a career break and who are childless, but who have not been accepted as 'honorary men', full-time women who have not taken a break, but who have dependent children, returners with children who are full-time and, at the bottom, returners with children, who work part-time".

Ethnicity

In relation to non-white ethnic groups we find a diversity of income levels related to specific cultural (such as family composition, size and type) and economic factors (such as type and level of employment). In an overall sense, factors such as those identified for other social groups also apply to ethnic minorities. For example:

Racial discrimination is a factor in the relatively lower levels of income experienced by minority groups compared to their majority (white) counterparts.

Vertical segregation involves the fact ethnic minority group members (with notable exceptions - especially among those who have successfully established their own businesses) tend to be employed at lower organisational levels.

Horizontal segregation operates by locating minority group workers in lower-paid occupations (such as nursing, for example).

Dual Labour markets: Ethnic minority groups are disproportionately found in *secondary markets*, where they experience lower job security and wages.

Against this general background of lower ethnic group incomes, **Berthoud** (1998) notes a wide diversity of income levels between different non-white groups. He identifies Pakistanis and Bangladeshis as being amongst the very poorest in our society for a number of reasons:

- **Family size** tends to be larger than average.
- **Unemployment** is high among males.
- **Economic activity** is low amongst females.
- **Lower levels** of pay.

Indian and Chinese groups have higher levels of employment and, in general, their rates of pay - if not always household income levels - match white workers. Afro-Caribbean minority groups generally have higher levels of (male) unemployment, coupled with higher than average rates of single-parenthood. **Berthoud** notes that, although wage levels for men tend to be *below* those of their white counterparts, the same is *not* true for female pay rates. **Platt and Noble's** (1999) study of ethnic diversity in Birmingham **confirms Berthoud's** general argument; they found "Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean, and Pakistani ethnic groups are over-represented in the low-income population".

Risk

Finally we can note that in terms of the *risk* of experiencing income levels significantly below the national average, **Self and Zealey** (2007) point to the following factors as being most significant:

1. Economic status of adults in the family: Those at greatest risk in our society involve families with no adult member working.

2. Ethnic group of head of household: Asian and Black African ethnicities, for example, are most likely to experience low incomes.

3. Family type: Single parent families are the third largest group in the low income structure.

4. Disability: Families with disabled children or adults are at significant risk (very slightly greater than for single parents) of experiencing low incomes.

FUELing ethnic inequality?

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain the difference between earnings and income (4 marks).

(b) Suggest **two** reasons why it might be difficult to measure the extent of the "hidden economy" (4 marks).

(c) Explain how workplace segregation may explain income differences based on **one** of the following: class, age, gender or ethnicity (4 marks).

(d) Examine some possible reasons for income inequality in the UK over the past 25 years (24 marks).

(e) Assess explanations for income inequalities based around concepts of class, age, gender and ethnicity (24 marks).

Wealth: Observations

Defining *income* is, you'll no-doubt be happy to know, relatively straightforward compared to defining *wealth*. Although **Matheson and Summerfield** (2001) make a relatively simple distinction:

• **Income** represents a flow of resources over a period, received either in cash or in kind.

• **Wealth** describes the ownership of assets valued at a particular point in time.

the main (sociological) problem we have in relation to defining wealth is deciding the *relative importance* of different types of:

Asset, defined as the ownership of *things* (such as cars, houses and computers) that have an economic value - they can be sold for money, in other words. However, within this basic category there are two sub-divisions we can note:

1. Use: If we think about economic assets in terms of *property*, this category involves the things we own for *personal use*; the home in which we live, the car we drive, the sociology books we read. The significance of ownership here is that, because it involves personal need or use, if we sell something we need, we may have to buy something similar to replace it. This dimension of wealth is clearly important when we're comparing cross-cultural wealth (and poverty), but less useful when we're comparing levels of wealth within a society. Part of the reason for this is a debate about whether or not the things we own for their *use value* (I need a house in which to live, a car to get me to work and sociology books to teach from) can be counted as wealth in the same way as things kept for their:

2, Value: Property in this category refers to the things we own as *investments* - the things we accumulate for their worth and the value they will realise once sold. Stocks and shares are obvious examples here, but ownership of a second home also counts as wealth in this category. This is often called *marketable wealth*. However, just to complicate matters, a further dimension here is:

Non-marketable wealth - this has neither a particular use, nor can it be sold. A *personal pension* is a classic example of this type of wealth.

In terms of the above, therefore, we can distinguish between two types of wealth:

1. Productive property is a form of wealth that can create income (by selling something like a second home, ownership of a business, investments in things like shares and so forth).

2. Consumption property, on the other hand, involves things owned for their use (such as a TV set). They don't create income, but they could be sold. However, they would have to be replaced if you wanted to maintain a certain standard of living.

Debates about how to define wealth are important since, as **Jenkins** (1990) argues, if we can't easily decide how wealth should be defined and measured, this creates problems for our understanding of its distribution in society (understanding, in effect, who owns what and the social consequences of different levels of wealth ownership).

Such debates are important, however, because they shape our understanding of ideas like social inequality and poverty; if we include in our definition of wealth everything people own, the picture we get is one in which disparities of wealth (the difference between the wealthiest and poorest in our society) may not be as great as if we exclude from our definition those things owned for their use, rather than their actual value.

"Jimi's Burger Bar and Grill"
- productive property by day and consumption property at the weekend BarBQ...

Wealth: Explanations

When we think about how wealth is distributed between social groups in our society we need to keep three things in mind:

1. Definitions: As we've just seen, how you define wealth has implications for how we understand its distribution in our society (if we exclude, for example, home ownership from our definition the picture we get will be of a more unequal society in terms of wealth than if we include it).

2. Measurement: In this instance we're less concerned with what counts as wealth and more with how to reliably and validly count people's actual wealth. This is not always easy, for similar reasons to the measurement of income:

Masking: The wealthy, for personal and tax reasons, can restrict our ability to estimate their wealth accurately. This may involve moving wealth "off-shore" (to countries with relatively lax tax and disclosure laws) or *gifting* money and property to relatives to avoid inheritance taxes - and since much of our knowledge about the wealth of the very rich is only revealed when they die (from their wills), we need to be aware this type of source may understate the extent of individual wealth.

Hidden economy: This may involve both wealth accumulated by criminal means or, as in the above, exploiting various legal loopholes to hide actual levels of real wealth from tax authorities.

3. Process: Rownlinson et al (1999) identified four major factors in the ability to accumulate wealth (not including, of course, the ability to inherit it from your parents):

High income: The highest income groups are more likely to use part of their income for investment (savings, stocks and shares, etc.). **Townsend** (2004), for example, noted "…almost 70% of investment income is received by those with incomes above £20,000 a year".

Lifestyle - which included attitudes towards saving (and, most importantly, the ability to save).

Knowledge relating to investment schemes and opportunities was a significant factor in wealth accumulation.

Availability of suitable savings and investment schemes.

Keeping these ideas in mind, we can make some general statements about the distribution of wealth in our society:

Social Class

There is a strong relationship between social class and wealth. In terms of its general distribution, for example,

the **Office for National Statistics** (2003) provides the following breakdown:

Total Marketable Wealth:	1976	1999	2001
Top 1%	21%	23%	23%
Top 10%	50%	55%	56%
Top 25%	71%	74%	75%
Bottom 50%	8%	6%	6%

Self and Zealey (2007), on the other hand, note the following levels of wealth distribution:

Total Marketable Wealth:	1991	1996	2001	2002	2003
Most wealthy 1%	17%	20%	23%	24%	21%
Most wealthy 25%	71%	74%	75%	75%	72%
Most wealthy 50%	92%	93%	94%	94%	93%
Least wealthy 50%	8%	7%	6%	6%	7%

When we look at **total marketable wealth** (which includes the value of houses), therefore, the picture we get is one of:

• **Inequality**: The wealthiest **half** of the population, for example, currently holds 93% of the nation's total wealth.

Both tables reveal a quite phenomenal picture of wealth inequality in the contemporary UK - with the "most wealthy 1%" of the population (roughly 60,000 individuals) owning three times as much wealth as the "least wealthy 50%" - roughly **30 million** people.

• **Increasing inequality**: Over the past 25 years, the wealthy have taken a greater share of the nation's wealth.

Module Link Stratification and Differentiation

Inequalities relating to areas like **wealth** and **income** are significant aspects of and contributors towards general social inequalities in the contemporary UK.

Large differences in the ownership of wealth are significant factors in both social inequalities (how people are included and excluded from the "normal expectations of life" in our society) and social stratification – the wealthy, for example, are increasingly able – and willing - to set themselves physically apart from the rest of society.

If we *exclude* the value of dwellings (because a house, for the vast majority of the population has only **use value** - although it can be sold for profit, the seller needs to buy another house because they need somewhere to live...) the picture is, as might be expected, one of even *greater inequality*.

According to the **Office for National Statistics** (2004), one-third of all wealth is owned - as the following table illustrates - by just 1% of the population:

Marketable wealth (less value of dwellings)	1976	1999	2001
Top 1%	29%	34%	33%
Top 10%	57%	72%	72%
Top 25%	73%	86%	86%
Bottom 50%	12%	2%	3%

This situation has led **Townsend** (2004) to argue for the significance of:

Wealth exclusion: The number of people with the least wealth (those with no savings or investments) increased in the 20th century. 10% of the UK population had no discernable material wealth at the end of the century (a figure that rises to 20% in the 20 - 34 age group).

A significant factor in the relationship between social class and wealth is:

Inheritance: Not only can wealthy individuals' marketable wealth be passed, on death, to their offspring, the value of any non-marketable wealth may also be realised at this point. One consequence of this system is:

Elite self-recruitment: The wealthy - by their ability to pass their wealth down the family line to their offspring - perpetuate wealth inequalities, effectively ensuring the recruitment of their sons - and, increasingly, daughters - to the ranks of the wealthy.

> **Module Link** **Stratification and Differentiation**
>
> Elite self-recruitment also has significant consequences for **social mobility** because it mans there will be fewer positions "at the top of society" that can be filled by the middle classes - and this has a knock-on effect for the mobility chances of those lower down the class structure.

The existence of "death duty" taxation also helps explain what little wealth redistribution there has been over the past 50 years in the UK; the very wealthy seek to minimise their tax liabilities by passing wealth down the family line *before* they die. Although, historically, inheritance has been through the male line (*patrilineal descent*), the increasing likelihood of all children being included may slightly dilute the overall wealth of the

very wealthiest in the population by spreading wealth across a number of different children.

Age If we think about age-related wealth in terms of an individual's *life cycle*, over their lifetime people are more likely to build-up marketable wealth, which suggests wealth inequality is built into our economic system. **Rownlinson et al** (1999) noted how wealth increased with age, peaking in the 60 - 69 age group. The least wealthy life cycle groups were "young single people (under the age of 35) and lone parents".

Gender Although, as we've noted, in the past wealth was generally passed down the male line, this practice is not as prevalent as it once was. However, in terms of *wealth creation*, men are much more likely to feature among the *self-made wealthy* than women (something related to economic practices and opportunities - we could think about how vertical and horizontal workplace segregation apply here).

Ethnicity Among non-white ethnic groups, those of Asian origin (especially Pakistani origins) are most likely to feature in the *least wealthy* 10% of the UK population. Those of Chinese origin, on the other hand, are most likely - among all ethnic minority groups - to appear in the *wealthiest* 10% of the population.

Region **Green** (1994) noted changes in the traditional distribution of wealth in the UK during the 1980's - areas formerly dependent on large-scale extraction industries (such as coal-mining) and manufacturing saw a general decline in their share of the nation's wealth; the South-East and London (where the commercial focus is on *service industries*) saw their proportionate share of wealth increase. This process has continued into the 21st century.

> **Tried and Tested**
>
> (a) Explain the difference between income and wealth (4 marks).
>
> (b) Suggest **two** reasons why it might be difficult to measure wealth (4 marks).
>
> (c) Suggest two reasons why wealth may be a better indicator of inequality than income (4 marks).
>
> (d) Examine some possible reasons for wealth inequality in the UK over the past 25 years (24 marks).
>
> (e) Assess explanations for wealth inequalities based around concepts of class, age, gender and ethnicity (24 marks).

Poverty: Observations

Although you won't thank us for this, it's probably fair to warn you that our ability to define poverty presents us with some subtly different problems compared to our ability to define concepts such as wealth and income. The good news is there are two basic types of definition we can use (we'll leave the bad news about them until you've understood what's involved):

1. Absolute

This definition of poverty is based on the idea we can identify the *minimum conditions* for the maintenance of human life. **Rowntree** (of the **Foundation** and Fruit Gums fame) for example, was one of the first (1901) to identify a *minimum subsistence level*, below which people were to be considered poor. He also distinguished between what he called:

Primary poverty - a situation in which individuals or families lacked the means to provide the basic necessities of life (food, clothing and shelter, for example) and

Secondary poverty - a situation in which, although people have sufficient means to sustain life, they fail to do so adequately because they spend at least part of their income on things that aren't essential (a classic example here might be spending on things like alcohol and tobacco).

In this respect, we can think of this type of definition as being based on human *biological* needs. A more modern version of absolute poverty, however, might be evidenced by **Gordon and Townsend et al's** study (2003), which defined poverty on the basis of *seven basic needs*:

Basic Needs: "Child Poverty in the Developing World", 2003

1. **Clean water**
2. **Sanitation**
3. **Shelter**
4. **Education**
5. **Information**
6. **Food**
7. **Health**

"If the household or individual does not have access to a particular basic need, they are defined as 'deprived'. Those who are deprived of two or more of the seven basic need indicators are defined as being in absolute poverty'".

Townsend Centre for International Poverty Research

However we specifically define absolute forms of poverty, this type of general definition rests on the ability to draw a:

Poverty line by which to identify basic human requirements (in the manner of **Gordon and Townsend et al's** study). In basic terms, if you do not have these things, you are poor.

As we will see in a moment, there are advantages and disadvantages to defining and measuring poverty in absolute terms. However, we need to note a significant *problem* (one that led to the idea of defining poverty in *relative* terms - something that's discussed further below) with absolute definitions, namely the concept of:

Minimum Needs: Although human life has certain minimum needs (a given amount of food and water each day, for example), this type of "absolute definition" is not particularly useful when it's applied to societies (such as Britain in the 21st century) where very few - if any - people are unable to meet these "minimum needs".

Gordon and **Townsend et al**, for example, found 35% of children in the Middle East & North Africa were in absolute poverty - applying the same measures in their study to children in Britain would probably conclude no - or very little - poverty existed in our society. Although in absolute terms this may be true, it's not a very useful way to think about poverty, mainly because there are considerable differences in general living standards in our society - some people, in basic terms, have more of the "good things in life" than others - and we need to understand the significance of this type of difference. For this reason, an alternative way of measuring poverty focuses on:

2. Relative

If, at least in its original formulation, the concept of absolute poverty focused on the idea of *biological* needs, the concept of relative poverty - originally articulated through the work of **Townsend** (1954) and **Townsend and Abel-Smith** (1965) - added the idea of:

Cultural needs to the definition. In other words, **Townsend** (amongst others) argued poverty in *affluent* (wealthy) societies wasn't simply a matter of biology - someone should be considered poor if they lacked the resources to *participate fully* in the social and cultural life of the society in which they lived.

This type of definition introduced the idea poverty was related in some way to the "normal and acceptable" standard of living in any society (whatever this may be). **Mack and Lansley** (1984) express this idea quite neatly when they note: "Poverty can be seen in terms of an enforced lack of socially perceived necessities". The key idea here is "socially perceived"; what one society at one particular time sees as being "unnecessary" may, in another society or at another time, be seen as essential. By considering poverty in terms of cultural needs, therefore, we can accommodate ideas of:

Cross-cultural differences: Different societies, for example, have different living standards - life in East Africa, for example, is not the same as life in East Anglia.

Historical differences: In our society, life is very different for the majority of the population today to what it was 200 years ago. What may have been considered an acceptable living standard at the start of the 19th century would probably not be considered acceptable today.

Demographic differences takes the idea of *cultural relativity* further by noting that, even within the *same* society, there are differences between social groups (such as young people and the elderly). A "normal and acceptable" living standard for a teenager may not necessarily be viewed in the same way by an old age pensioner.

Poverty: Explanations

In later Sections of this Chapter we're going to look at the concept of poverty in more detail, so we're not going to think about things like the extent of poverty in our society just yet. Instead, we can look a little more closely at how poverty is defined and measured and the respective advantages and disadvantages of such definitions and measurements.

We can begin by noting poverty (unlike concepts such as income and wealth) is not something we can directly measure, since it's not immediately quantifiable. To *operationalise* (define and measure) the concept we need to identify certain *indicators* of poverty (in the way you've just done in the previous activity, for example).

In this respect, all definitions of poverty (either absolute or relative) are essentially based on the same idea, namely we can - somewhere and somehow - draw a *poverty line*, below which people are to be considered poor and above which they are to be considered not poor. The argument, therefore, is not particularly over whether absolute or relative definitions are superior or inferior (since both types, ultimately contain an absolute definition somewhere along the line). Rather, the argument over definitions falls in two main categories:

1. Indicators: The main question here is whether we use *biological* or *cultural* indicators (or perhaps both) as the basis for any definition: *Absolute definitions* are more likely to use the former (because they provide a basic yardstick against which to measure human needs in general), whereas *relative* definitions are more likely to use the latter (because they provide a flexible set of indicators that can be applied to specific societies at different times).

2. Measurement: Related to the above, we have to decide what features of social life are to be used as indicators of poverty. Relative definitions, for example, use a range of different indicators depending on the

Module Link   **Research Methods**

The debate between absolute and relative definitions is a useful illustration of the fact that in the social world how we define something is going to affect how we measure it and - most importantly perhaps - how we understand it's possible effects or consequences.

The diagram shows "Absolute Poverty 7 Basic Needs" surrounded by: Clean Water, Sanitation, Shelter, Education, Information, Food, Health.

preferences of their creators - an idea we can briefly outline in the following way:

Relative Definitions

Measuring relative forms of poverty involves varying levels of complexity and depends, to some extent, on what the researcher is trying to achieve and the resources they have available. We can get a flavour for the various ways of defining and measuring poverty by identifying a variety of different models using a basic classification suggested by **Ruggeri et al** (2003):

Monetary Models — These involve using income (either directly or in terms of the ability to buy certain goods and services defined as "necessities") as the basic definition and measure of poverty. For example:

Households Below Average Income: In the UK, this measure sets a relative household *poverty line* at 60% of *median net income* (the "median" is found by arranging income values in order and then identifying the one in the middle - if the median income was £100 per week, for example, the poverty line would be drawn at £60 per week).

In the European Community, however, a figure of 50% of median net income is used as a poverty line - which demonstrates how problems of definition may occur even when we use a relatively simple monetary indicator of poverty.

The World Bank uses the formula of "1$ a day" (approximately 60p) as the economic measure of world poverty - if your income is above this level you are not classified as poor.

Budget Standards: Startup (2002) advocates a measure of poverty based on the idea of the cost of a "basket of goods and services". This involves identifying basic biological and social necessities, estimating their cost and setting a poverty line at this level. A variation on this idea involves:

Basic Necessities Surveys: **Davies** (1998) argues poverty can be defined as "the lack of basic necessities". However, what these necessities may be is *not pre-defined* by the researcher; rather, they are identified *during* the research process. The researcher may, for example, start with a list of items (such as a television) and events (the right to an education, for example) and these are accepted, rejected or modified by respondents as they see fit. These approaches are similar to the *participatory models* approach (see below) but are usually classified as *consensual approaches* to defining poverty because they're based on a *popular consensus* about what constitutes "basic necessities".

Capability Models

These approaches focus on what **Sen** (1999) has termed "indicators of the freedom to live a valued life". In other words, they focus on understanding poverty as a set of *lived experiences* (things people can or cannot do) rather than a simple monetary approach. What these capabilities may be differs both historically and cross-culturally and involves identifying a range of indicators of *deprivation* (the ways some people are deprived of the things a society takes-for-granted as being part of a normal and acceptable standard of living). We can, for example, note a couple of **capability-based** concepts:

Relative Deprivation: Writers such as **Townsend** (1979) and **Mack and Lansley** (1985) used a range of different indicators of deprivation to measure people's quality of life. **Townsend**, for example, included things like household amenities (a refrigerator and fixed bath, for example), how often people went out to visit friends or for a meal, as well as the type of food people bought and ate. **Townsend's** "Material Deprivation Score" analyses (1991 and 2001) for the **National Public Health Service for Wales** are more recent examples of this approach, using a simplified index of deprivation based on four Census-based variables, namely the percentages of households:

> • With no car
>
> • Not owner occupied
>
> • Unemployed
>
> • Overcrowded

Indices of Deprivation: Although measuring a range of deprivation indicators in a similar way to the ones noted above, involve broader estimates of people's overall quality of life. The **McLennan** (2004), for example, used indicators such as levels of *income*, *employment* and *experienced crime* (among other factors) to create an *index of material deprivation*.

The main difference between the two (similar) approaches is their focus: *relative deprivation* approaches tend to focus on individuals and households, whereas *Indices of Deprivation* approaches broaden the scope to include wider community factors (such as levels of crime in an area).

Social Exclusion

These approaches represent a more recent way of thinking about how poverty and deprivation affect people and the society in which they live. They focus, as you might expect, on trying to measure the various ways people are excluded from participation in the activities and experiences we take for granted as part of our general lifestyle.

A range of indicators can be used to measure social exclusion. For example, "Opportunity for All: Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion" (**Department of Works and Pensions, 2003)** identified a variety of ideas (levels of rural poverty, unemployment, urban deprivation, child poverty, health care and so forth) that, taken together, represent some of the ways people are socially excluded.
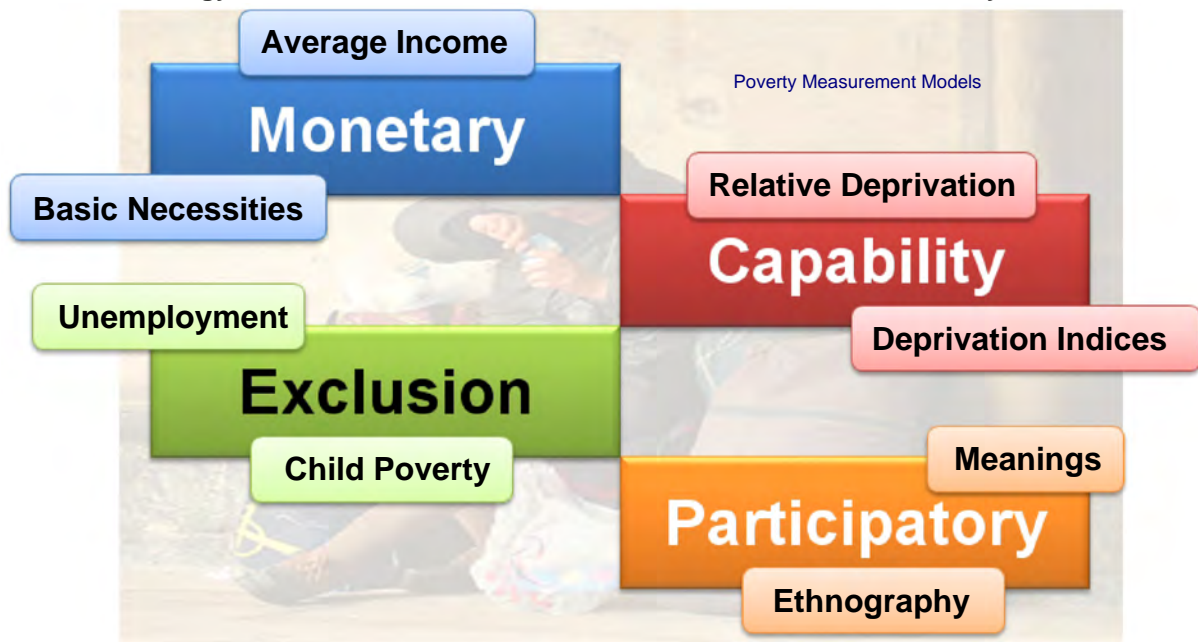
Palmer et al (2003), on the other hand, used indicators related specifically to different age groups (children, youth, adults and the elderly) as a way of measuring exclusion. Within each group they looked at different factors (such as birth weight and exclusion from school for children, winter death rates, levels of anxiety and access to services for the elderly) to arrive at a comprehensive "index of exclusion".

Participatory Models

These are similar to *consensual approaches* in that they're based on the idea of asking people to define what they mean by poverty. However, as **Bennett and Roberts** (2004) argue, a major difference here is that the *meaning* of poverty is constructed through "discussions with people with past or present experience of poverty". This approach, they argue, takes control over definitions away from governments and researchers and returns it to the people with direct, first-hand, experience of the matter. A similar:

Ethnographic approach (allowing the poor to "speak for themselves") was advocated by **Beresford et al** (1999) as a means of *understanding*, as opposed to simply *representing*, poverty. The main objective of such approaches, therefore, is to discover ways of eliminating poverty and social exclusion based on how the people involved actually experience such things.

Although these types of approach can be criticised (it's not just the poor, for example, who have an interest in both defining and eliminating poverty), **Chambers** (1995), defends *participatory approaches* by asking: "Whose reality counts? The reality of the few in centres of power? Or the reality of the many poor at the periphery?". He justifies such approaches by arguing they have the potential to bring "poor people's problems and priorities" to the attention of national policy makers.

Poverty Measurement Models

Average Income

Monetary

Basic Necessities

Relative Deprivation

Capability

Unemployment

Deprivation Indices

Exclusion

Child Poverty

Meanings

Participatory

Ethnography

To complete this section we can look briefly at a number of *advantages* and *disadvantages* to absolute and relative definitions of poverty.

Absolute Definitions

If, for the sake of argument, we consider absolute forms of poverty in terms of indicators related to human biological needs we can note a number of **advantages** to this form of measurement:

Standardisation: The basic definition of poverty never changes, since human beings, wherever they live in the world, all have the same basic needs in terms of the things required to sustain life. Thus, when we measure poverty we're always applying the same set of rules. This makes measurement:

Objective: Once we've decided what constitutes minimum or essential human needs, our definition - and hence measurement - doesn't change. **Falkingham** (2000), for example, notes absolute definitions are based on objective norms; we are always, in other words, applying the same definition of poverty wherever and whenever we try to measure it. This, of course, makes the concept:

Transferable: Once we've identified norms that define poverty, they can be consistently applied across all societies, which allows us to compare levels of poverty on a global scale, regardless of different levels of social and technological development within different societies.

Social Change: Because biological needs don't change over time, absolute measures allow us to track *historical changes* to the levels of poverty in the same society.

Poverty: This type of definition does exactly what it says on the tin - it measures poverty. It doesn't try to

measure concepts like *deprivation*, *relative deprivation* or *social inclusion* and *exclusion*. It has the advantage, therefore, of being simple, clear, consistent and easily understandable as a way of measuring poverty.

Having said this, *absolute approaches* do have several **disadvantages**, which we can note in the following terms:

Basic Needs: Historical and cross-cultural differences in terms of living standards make it difficult to apply a standard "biological needs" test of poverty in any meaningful way. Using a "minimum subsistence level" test in modern Britain, for example, would, as we've previously suggested, result in very little (if any) poverty being found.

Social change: Related to the above idea, it's clear that in our society, ideas about what is and what isn't

Measures exactly what it says on the tin...

an "acceptable standard of living" have changed - even over the course of the past 50 years. As a society changes, therefore, concepts of poverty also need to develop to reflect these changes. Thus, we need to think about:

Poverty itself, in the sense of what it *means* to us as a society. Some critics of relative measures argue, as we will see, relative definitions measure things like social inequality, deprivation and exclusion rather than poverty. In historical terms, however, it's clear that as living standards rise people's *expectations* about acceptable lifestyles change - and concepts of poverty (however defined) also need to change to reflect the fact we now live in a very different type of society to the one that existed 50 or 100 years ago. If societies and individuals change, should we keep to definitions of poverty that belong to a world that has disappeared?

Objectivity: There are two points we can usefully make here. Firstly, any attempt to draw a poverty line - even one as basic as "minimum nutritional needs" - cannot be truly objective. This follows because the concept of poverty itself is a *subjective* condition; if you think about it, my definition of "minimum needs" may be different to your definition - and we have no objective way of choosing between them.

Related to this idea is the fact there is no such thing as a minimum level of *human* need. A child, for example, will have different minimum needs to an adult and an adult male manual worker will have different minimum needs to an adult male office worker. As these examples, demonstrate, even apparently objective definitions of poverty may have a cultural (subjective) basis.

Secondly, simply because we may prefer *quantifiable* - as opposed to *qualitative* - ways of defining and measuring poverty, doesn't make the former any better - or indeed worse - than the latter. Ultimately, concepts of poverty reflect whatever a society and its members believe is an acceptable standard of living - which leads to the idea of:

Relative differentiation: Although, on the face of things, identifying needs doesn't appear to be a problem, a couple of questions arise. Firstly, as **Falkingham** (2000) notes, what exactly are people's "needs" (are they merely biological or do they extend into cultural areas such as education)?; secondly, on what level do we measure need? For example, do we measure it in terms of individuals, families or
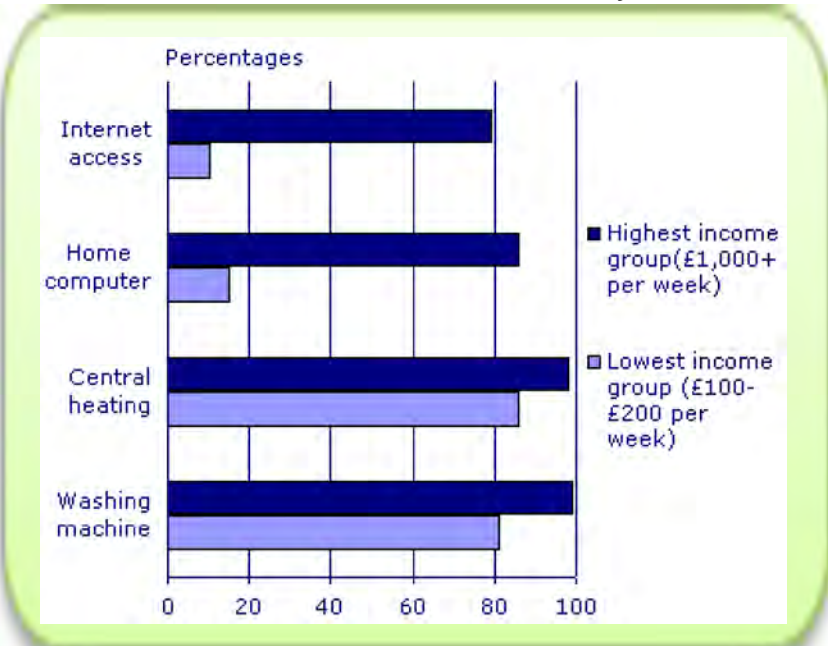
Percentages

households, or do we extend this to include communities? Alternatively, as we've just suggested, an elderly adult has different needs to a child or a pregnant woman. In this respect, it's not simply a matter of defining a set of "human needs" and applying them uncritically to a population that is *relatively differentiated* (that is, a population with *different* biological and cultural needs).

Relative Definitions

These definitions of poverty, on the other hand, have a number of **advantages**, leading from - and reflecting to some extent - the criticisms we've made of absolute definitions:

Realism: Relative definitions - even the simplest ones that focus on income or budgetary requirements - more realistically reflect the nature of modern lifestyles; life in our society is, arguably, more than just the pursuit of a minimum standard of living. This follows because of:

Social differentiation: As we've suggested, although we're all human this doesn't make us the same; on the contrary, people are different in a number of (socially constructed) ways. If such differences - even if we minimally consider them in terms of class, age, gender, ethnicity and region - are real, it follows any definition of poverty must attempt to reflect and capture the richness of people's social behaviour - an idea that leads us to:

Measuring "needs" - do the elderly have different needs to the young?
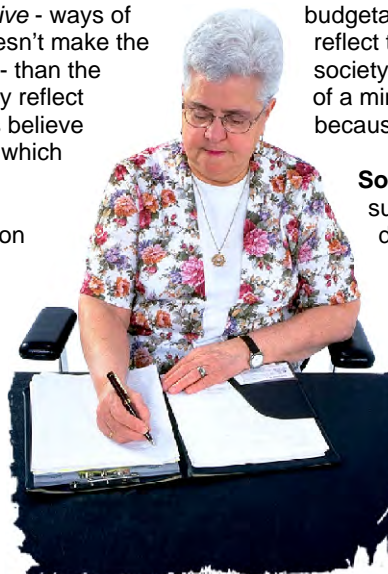
Complexity: If our society is a complex place, considered in terms of culture and lifestyle for example, any concept of poverty - expressed perhaps in terms of relative forms of deprivation and social exclusion - must, of necessity, be complex. Relative definitions, because they attempt to measure a variety of different dimensions of life and lifestyle, are more likely than absolute definitions to accurately represent people's behaviour, attitudes and expectations.

In addition, therefore, we need to be aware poverty is not simply about being *economically poor* - it must also be considered in terms of things like access to education and health, general *life chances*, risk of illness and so forth.

Although relative definitions have significant advantages, in terms of how they conceive, theorise and attempt to measure poverty, the range of different measures and perspectives involved make for some significant

disadvantages we can outline as follows:

Meaning: Maxwell (1999) notes how, over the years, the meaning of "poverty" has evolved - not just in terms of ideas like deprivation and exclusion, but also in terms of more specific ideas about what is actually being measured. He notes, for example, seven different basic meanings in current use:

> • Income or consumption poverty.
> • Human (under)development.
> • Ill-being.
> • (Lacking) capability and functioning.
> • Vulnerability.
> • Livelihood unsustainability.
> • Lack of basic needs.

Such diversity of meaning makes it difficult to know what, if anything, is being measured using different types of relative definition. In addition, the question arises about who decides the meaning of poverty? What happens, for example, when someone can be objectively defined as "poor" but they refuse to consider themselves poor? This raises the problem of:

Subjectivity: Although, to some extent, true of all ways of defining and measuring poverty, relative definitions and measurements raise a number of significant problems. For example:

• **Objective measurements** used as indicators of relative poverty (such as in income or budget approaches), raise the question of *who decides* where a poverty line is drawn is somewhat arbitrary (as we've seen in relation to the difference between UK and European Community income-based definitions).

• **Consensual definitions** have similar problems - people may lack knowledge and experience of poverty when they're asked to decide what features of social life represent "normal" and "acceptable" aspects of our general standard of living.

Is the poverty of the 1930's comparable to the poverty of the 21st century?

• **Ethnographic** (**Participatory**) **definitions** involve the basic problem that, in order to involve "the poor" in the creation of definitions of poverty you have to categorise people as poor in the first place (which sort of limits the effectiveness of such studies).

Differentiation: In the same way that a differentiated population creates problems for absolute definitions, the same is also true for relative definitions unless they are sufficiently clearly defined to reflect possible differences in population expectations and standards. This means that:

Indicators of poverty cannot be easily *standardised*. *Cross-culturally* and *historically* there will be different living standards that need to be reflected in the indicators used.

Poverty: A major criticism of relative definitions is that they lose sight of poverty, as such, and instead become measures of *social inequality*. In an affluent society people can enjoy a relatively comfortable standard of living - yet still be classed as "relatively poor". The problem, in this respect, is that poverty becomes a function of *definition* rather than *fact*; that is, in every society where social inequality exists - no matter what the general standard of living in that society - relative poverty will always, by definition, exist.

> **Tried and Tested**
>
> (a) Explain the difference between absolute and relative poverty(2 marks).
>
> (b) Suggest **two** reasons why it might be difficult to measure poverty (4 marks).
>
> (c) Identify and explain two problems with the use of *either* absolute *or* relative definitions of poverty (6 marks).
>
> (d) Examine some possible advantages and disadvantages of relative definitions and measurements of poverty (24 marks).
>
> (e) Assess the advantages and disadvantages of absolute measurements of poverty (24 marks).

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2. The distribution of poverty, wealth and income between different social groups.

Explaining Inequality: Introduction

This section focuses on the concept of social inequality - considered in terms of the ideas introduced in the first section of this chapter - and it involves outlining and examining a range of different explanations for the distribution of poverty, wealth and income between different social groups. In this respect we can consider a number of different perspectives on equality, firstly by outlining their key theoretical points and, subsequently, by applying these ideas to a specific explanation of inequality.

> **Module Link**   **Introduction**
>
> The majority of the perspectives discussed in this Section are outlined in greater detail in the **Introductory** Chapter.

Functionalism: Observations

Thinking about social inequality from a Functionalist viewpoint, we can identify a number of key ideas that inform this general perspective, the first of which, unsurprisingly, is that of:

Function: We know that if something exists in society it does so because it performs some important task or function. The question here, therefore, is what are the functions of inequality based around disparities in wealth and income – a question that, on the face of things, may appear a little nonsensical since we usually assume that something like poverty is both undesirable and in need of eradication. If something (such as poverty) has a purpose then from this particular perspective it is built into the very structure or fabric of the society in which it exists; it is, not to put too fine a point on things, essential for the existence of that society.

To understand why inequality is *functional*, therefore, we need to understand a little more about how Functionalist perspectives understand "society". In this respect, we can note modern societies are seen as:

Complex systems: That is, they involve a huge range of political, economic and social roles that have to be successfully filled and performed if society is to both function (or exist) and develop. For example, focusing on economic roles, you'll be aware of a vast number of roles (or "jobs" as some people call them) that need to be done; to take a few at random, we need doctors, police officers, traffic wardens, dentists, people to empty our dustbins, shelf-stackers, lifeguards and, last but by no means least, burger-flippers in McDonald's. In this respect, the working world is:

Differentiated in terms of roles requiring different levels of skill, training, expertise and knowledge. If this is the case, societies have to find ways of allowing people to demonstrate they have the skills necessary to perform certain jobs - if work roles were simply allocated randomly, or on the basis of "who you know" we'd have a situation in which anyone who fancied being a dentist could set themselves up as such. I don't know about you, but personally if someone's going to put a drill in my mouth I'd prefer it to be someone trained in dentistry, rather than "the bloke who used to be a garage mechanic". For Functionalists, the best way to *allocate* work roles is through the "proven merits" of each individual - hence it's important society is:

Meritocratic: That is, people are required to demonstrate their abilities (by working hard in school, for example - there's probably a moral there somewhere) in order to qualify themselves for certain roles. Although **Davis and Moore** (1945) have argued some roles are more "functionally-necessary" than others - therefore, we have to ensure the "best people" fill them by giving them *incentives* and *rewards* (such as higher pay) - this isn't necessarily the case. Even if we leave aside the idea *all* roles are functionally necessary in some way - if they weren't they wouldn't exist - on what basis can we say the woman who sweeps my street is less functionally important than a bank manager?

In a meritocracy people succeed or fail on the basis of their individual merits...

If society is *meritocratic* (and it's not necessarily true that it is - but bear with us for the moment), it must therefore be based on:

Competition, which develops in a society for the performance of particular roles; some are more desirable, fulfilling and, of course well-paid (which is a bit of a chicken-and-egg situation - do people compete for high-paid jobs *because* they are well-paid, or do they pay well because there's a lot of competition for them?) than others. Stacking shelves in Sainsbury's is something most people could do after about 5 minutes training; learning how to carry out a heart transplant probably takes a little longer. Economic inequality, therefore, develops "naturally" out of the:

Social division of labour: As work is differentiated in terms of, for example, skills, qualifications and income levels, societies develop *hierarchically* (in the sense some jobs come to be seen as better than others).

Thus, for traditional Functionalism, economic inequality is both functional and necessary for society - and to understand how inequalities of income, wealth and poverty are functional, we need to dig a little deeper.

> **Functionalism: Explanations**

Perhaps the classic modern Functionalist statement concerning the functions of social inequality is that of **Gans** (1971), when he argued inequalities of income, wealth and poverty had "13 main functions" which we can group, for our convenience, into four main categories:

1. Economic functions relate to ideas such as the poor being available to do "society's dirty work" - the various menial tasks (emptying bins, flipping burgers and so forth) someone has to be prepared to do. The presence of a group of low-waged poor people also

creates employment for middle-class professionals (such as social workers, for example).

2. Social functions cover areas such as *norm maintenance* - the poor "can be identified and punished as alleged or real deviants in order to uphold the legitimacy of conventional norms". The fact the poor are criminalised more than other social classes also, according to **Gans**, serves a *boundary-setting* function - it shows people where the limits of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour lie.

3. Cultural functions include things like "guaranteeing the status" of those who are not poor ("In every hierarchical society, someone has to be at the bottom") and as a guarantor of upward social mobility for those "just above them in the class hierarchy".

4. Political functions: The poor, being relatively powerless (and less likely to vote than other social groups) can be *scapegoated* in various ways (for their laziness, lack of sexual morality, criminality and so forth.) Their existence also guarantees the existence of political parties to "represent their interests", thereby providing a democratic counterweight to political parties representing the middle and upper classes.

While it's sometimes difficult to know when **Gans** is being serious and when he's taking the opportunity to poke fun at such arguments ("…the poor help to keep the aristocracy busy, thus justifying its continued existence", for example), his ideas do give us a general flavour of the way Functionalists address the (sociological) problem of social inequality.

However, they're also indicative of what **Bolender** (2004) terms *neofunctionalism*; that is, developments in Functionalist thinking in the latter part of the 20th century. **Gans**, for example, doesn't necessarily see
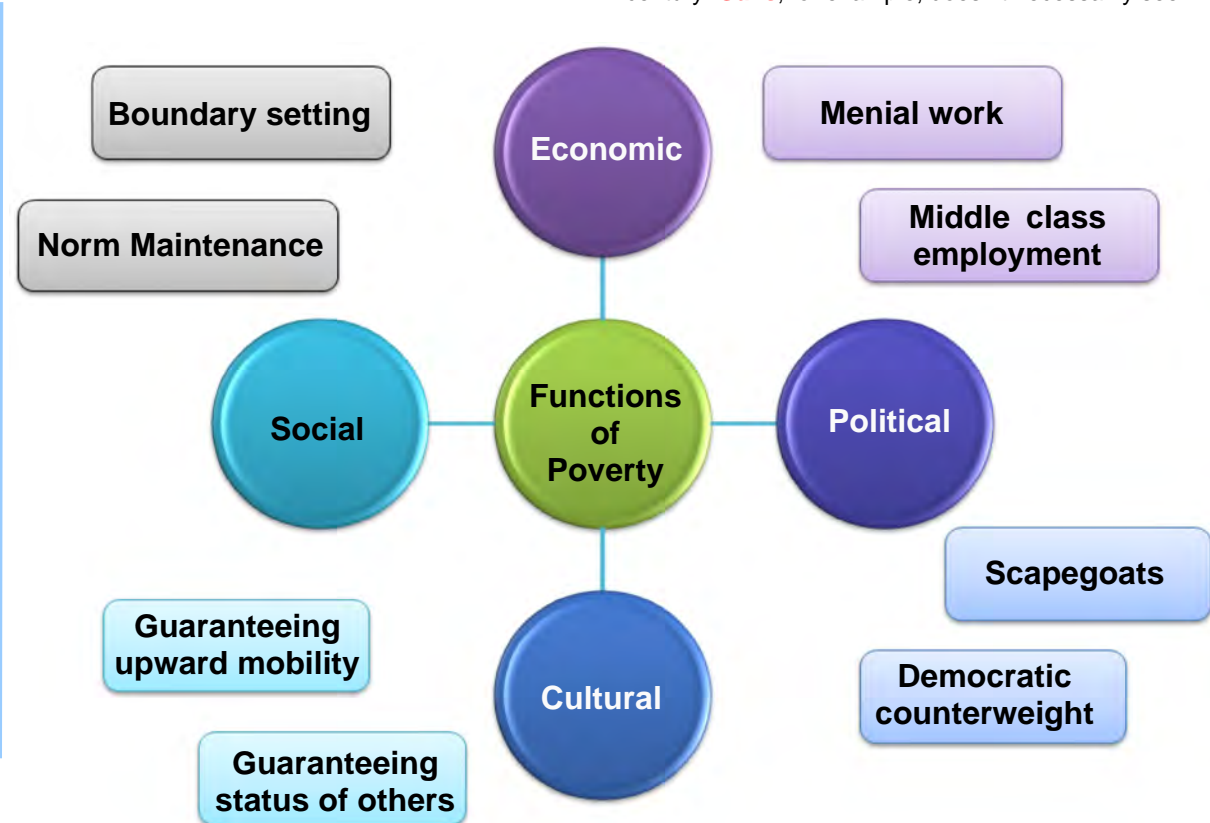
poverty as beneficial to "society as a whole" (although it may serve this purpose - poverty's political functions may encourage the democratic political process, for example); rather, he explains it in terms of how it is:

• **Functional** for some groups in society (notably the middle and upper classes) and

• **Dysfunctional** to other groups (the poor being the most obvious example here).

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain the meaning of the term "meritocracy" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest two ways in which the UK education system is meritocratic (4 marks).

(c) Suggest three reasons for seeing poverty as functional to society (6 marks).

(d) Assess the view that poverty is functional for society (24 marks).

New Right: Observations

In many ways the basic ideas underpinning New Right perspectives on social inequalities reflect those of the more basic forms of Functionalist argument, in that inequalities of wealth and income are generally seen as both beneficial to, and necessary for, the health of any given society. Given this theoretical lineage it's not too surprising that New Right perspectives are sometimes referred to as **Neo-functionalist** perspectives.

However, since New Right theorists have a number of distinctive strands relating to both the way they see the relationship between society and the individual and how they view inequality we've decided to go with the category of "New Right" (rather than Neo-functionalist) here - although as we've suggested the difference between them may more apparent than real. On this basis, we can start to understand New Right perspectives in terms of:

Individualism: This idea sits at the very heart of New Right thinking about the nature of both people and society; ideas about individual liberty and the freedom to pursue economic goals (such as becoming wealthy) are fundamental to this perspective. From these basic concepts springs a range of ideas about "human nature" and social organisation - the former being based on ideas about:

Rationality: People are viewed as rational beings who make *informed choices* about their behaviour. In this respect, individuals, not governments, are best placed to make these choices based on a:

Cost / benefit analysis: That is, before they do something, rational, calculating, individuals weigh up the possible *costs* of their behaviour against any likely *benefits*; if the benefits outweigh the costs they will do something, but if the reverse is true, they won't (think about this in relation to crime; if the likelihood of being caught is high (the cost) this may outweigh any possible benefits and so the individual remains law-abiding). For this aspect of "human nature" to operate effectively, social organisation has to be based, as with Functionalism, on:

Competition: This is a vital aspect of economic organisation because it creates innovation, progress and wealth. Without economic competition, it is argued, society would simply stagnate - and such competition is guaranteed by the existence of:

Free markets: Ideally, companies and individuals must be allowed to compete against each other, free from "outside interference" - an idea encompassing organisations like Trade Unions and the State (the government and Civil Service bureaucracies, for example). Any interference in the workings of the market distorts competition and makes them less efficient, which is why New Right perspectives tend to be *against*:

Welfare systems (such as the Welfare State in Britain). Any form of government-based welfare (such as unemployment or housing benefits) places limits on competition because it protects people from the consequences of their behaviour. For example, if I choose not to have children, why should I have to pay, through higher taxation, to educate other people's children? In other words, if you choose to have children you should, the New Right argue, take *responsibility* for ensuring they are educated.

We can apply this idea to economic behaviour generally. For example, faced with a decision about whether to accept a low-paid job or receive a similar (or greater) level of government welfare benefit, any *rational person* would choose the latter. The consequence of this may be companies competing in global markets simply relocate to countries (such as India) where wages are lower. Not only does this contribute to higher levels of unemployment, it effectively creates a group of people who become "unemployable". If

Martin's rational assessment of the chances of "Sleepy Boy" winning the 3.30 at Chepstow proved to be a costly mistake...

low-skill, low-paid work is exported to other countries, the existence of State-financed welfare systems simply means we create a group of people who have little or no incentive to work; it creates, in other words, a:

Dependency culture - a situation where an increasing number of individuals and their families literally *depend* on government welfare for their existence. This, in turn, creates what New Right theorists such as **Murray and Phillips** (2001) have termed an:

Underclass - people who exist "outside" the normal limits of society. They represent a group who effectively fail to participate in the day-to-day activity of the society in which they live. Such people, according to writers such as **Murray**, are dependent on State benefits, have little or no economic incentive to work, fail to take responsibility for their families or children and are over-represented in criminal activity.

This idea, in some respects, reflects Functionalist notions of *social solidarity* - the idea people need to feel connected to and responsible for others. The underclass, because it is *not integrated* into mainstream society through mechanisms such as work, is effectively *excluded* from the normal workings of mainstream society - except, of course, in terms of how their behaviour (high levels of illegitimacy, child and family neglect and criminality) impact on the quality of life in mainstream society.

New Right: Explanations

In terms of the above type of analysis, it's not difficult to understand how New Right perspectives generally view inequalities in income, wealth and poverty. We can outline these ideas in terms of four general categories:

Economic reasons: Because, as we've suggested, people are seen as rational beings, they need *incentives* to behave in particular ways; if, as a society, people want a certain standard of living (one that involves comfortable housing, personal transport, the latest technology and so forth) they have to be *motivated* to work - and this is achieved, for the New Right, through individual responsibility, competition and the potential rewards of economic success.

A high income, for example, is a reward for working hard at school to get the qualifications required to become a doctor or a lawyer; in a meritocratic society, everyone has the chance to

achieve these things - some choose to pursue such goals while others choose not to. The important point here, of course, is the incentive is present - people, in other words, have to be allowed to reap the rewards of their success (and, consequently, suffer the pains of their lack of ability, application or effort).

Social reasons: For the New Right, societies are *moral systems* in the sense they hang together on the basis of how people view their relationship to others. Inequality, for example, is considered "fair" if people are allowed the opportunity to be successful and, in so doing, keep the fruits of their efforts. Someone who, for example, "creates wealth" by employing others should, in this respect, be allowed to benefit from their hard work, dedication and sacrifice. Welfare systems provided by governments, on the other hand, are *morally wrong* because they encourage people to live off the work of others.

Inequality, therefore, has social benefits because it encourages people to work to support themselves and their dependents (the family system is a crucial component of New Right thinking - it represents the "social glue" that binds people together in productive work). Poverty, in this respect, is generally viewed in *absolute terms* (although, somewhat confusingly perhaps, it also has a *relative* dimension) in the sense that in modern, Western, societies (such as Europe and America) few - if any - people experience the absolute forms of poverty characteristic of some areas of Africa and South America. Poverty is, in this respect, relative for Western societies - it is simply part of the price that has to be paid for a dynamic, wealth-creating, system.

Cultural reasons for poverty (in particular), are bound up in the actions of governments (see below) in terms of the way their behaviour both enhances and restricts the expression of individual choices. In some ways the concept of choice (about whether to pursue educational

Loadsamoney: Just Look at my Wad!

qualifications, for example) is bound up in values, in the sense of people making rational decisions about how to behave (to marry and start a family, for example - or not as the case may be). The choices people make about their lives, therefore, affect their behaviour and help to explain the social distribution of income, wealth and poverty.

Bane and Ellwood (1994) identify three main ways the choices people make relate to poverty and, by extension, inequality:
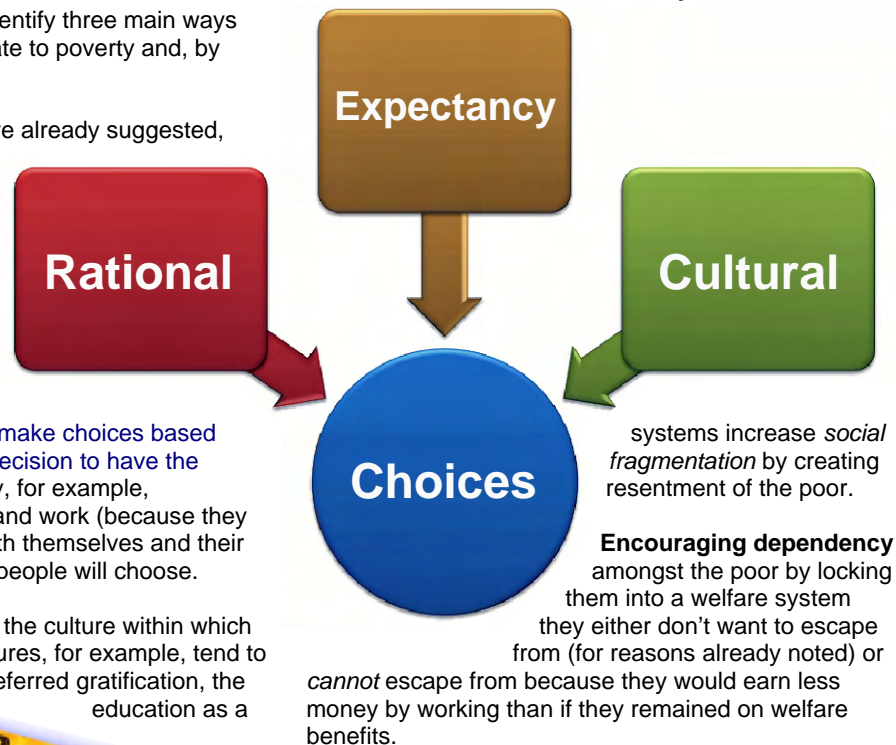
1. Rational choices, as we've already suggested, involve the idea people decide how to behave. They *"*survey the options available to them and make a rational choice of the option that will bring them the greatest satisfaction".

2. Expectancy choices involve the idea "that people make choices based on whether they expect the decision to have the desired outcome". If a society, for example, encourages people to study and work (because they see the future benefits for both themselves and their family) this is the route most people will choose.

3. Cultural choices relate to the culture within which people live. Middle class cultures, for example, tend to stress values such as deferred gratification, the importance of education as a means of social mobility and the like. Lower class cultures, according to the New Right, tend to develop a fatalistic acceptance of poverty - they develop into a dependency culture or a culture of poverty - a cultural situation which locks people into poverty as **Bane and Ellwood** put it: "If sanctions against a behaviour like unwed pregnancy are missing, it will occur".

Expectancy

Rational

Cultural

Choices

systems increase *social fragmentation* by creating resentment of the poor.

Encouraging dependency amongst the poor by locking them into a welfare system they either don't want to escape from (for reasons already noted) or *cannot* escape from because they would earn less money by working than if they remained on welfare benefits.

A crucial idea here, according to **Murray** (1984), is "the destruction of *status rewards*"; as he puts it, although "…not everyone can be rich, a person can enjoy 'status' by being a hard worker or a secure provider for his or her children". If government policies have the effect of removing status differences and rewards, therefore, social problems develop.

Does the existence of a Welfare State create a "culture of dependency" that contributes to the very problem (poverty) it is designed to eliminate?

Political reasons: For the New Right, the role of government is mainly one of creating the conditions under which people can successfully - and fairly - compete against each other for economic rewards. In this respect, government should *support* strong (*dual-parent*) families (and, by extension, *discourage* the development of single-parent families) and maintain the safety of citizens through law-and-order policies that allow people to go about their lives in relative comfort and safety. Governments should *not* involve themselves in welfare since this, it is argued, actually contributes to increased social and economic inequality in a number of ways - such as:

Discouraging individual enterprise and responsibility: Welfare, for example, has to be paid for by taxing those in work, leaving them with less of their own money and restricting their ability to provide for both themselves and their dependents. State welfare

Greetings from The Welfare State

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by a "cost / benefit analysis" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest **two** reasons why some occupations attract higher pay than others (4 marks).

(c) Suggest three ways in which welfare systems create a "culture of dependency" (6 marks).

(d) Examine the suggestion that the choices people make are the cause of social inequalities (24 marks).

(e) Assess New Right explanations of poverty (24 marks).

Social Democracy: Observations

These perspectives (think in terms of New Labour in Britain since 1997) share a number of ideas with both Functionalist and New Right explanations about the distribution of wealth, income and poverty (for example, the view some form of economic inequality is both necessary and desirable); where these perspectives diverge, however, is in relation to poverty, the social characteristics of the poor and - in a significant departure from New Right thinking - the role of the State in welfare provision.

In Britain, some social democratic approaches have attracted the label of a:

Third Way (see, for example, **Giddens** 1998, 2000); in other words, they seek to develop policies and explanations that sit between, on the one hand, the New Right belief social inequality is desirable and "Old Left" (or Marxist) belief it is undesirable.

success they merit". These views are, in turn, related to the idea of:

2. Competition based on people having different talents, aptitudes and abilities that, by-and-large, they are free to use in whatever way society deems legal. However, where social democratic perspectives take leave of New Right perspectives is over the idea of a:

3. **Mixed Market Economy:** That is, an economy characterised by both *private* and *public* (State owned) economic activity. Economic ownership, in this type of economy, is mainly in private hands (either individuals or, more-usually, shareholders), although in some circumstances the government may own an industry (such as the railways and coal mines in the UK from the middle to the latter part of the 20th century - a situation known as *Nationalisation*). Even where governments don't directly own industries, however, they play an important role in the:

4. Regulation of economic activity, through the legal and taxation systems, for example. Thus, the role of the

The Third (Social Democratic) **Way:** Neither Communist Nor Capitalist?

In this respect, social democratic perspectives tread the line between, on the one hand, seeing income and wealth inequalities as positive features of any society (for reasons we will explore in a moment) and, on the other, seeing too great a level of inequality as being damaging for both society (in terms of social exclusion, the waste of human resources and the like) and the individual, considered in terms of the problems and suffering caused by poverty. In general, therefore, we can identify the key components of this perspective in terms of five main ideas:

1. Meritocracy: Inequality, from this perspective, is desirable as long as it's based on merit. Those who work hard, use their abilities constructively and so forth should be allowed to accumulate private wealth and achieve higher incomes. Differences between individuals and groups in terms of income, therefore, stem from this idea of merit; people have different skills and levels of qualifications, for example, and differential rewards serve to motivate people to acquire the skills and knowledge needed by different economic sectors (the dedicated and talented are thus rewarded for their efforts by higher incomes). The ability to accumulate wealth also, of course, produces income differences, since the rich are allowed to live off the (unearned) income of their wealth.

Tony **Blair**, in a speech to the **Institute for Public Policy Research** (1999), expressed these ideas quite nicely when he argued there needed to be "Ladders of opportunity for those from all backgrounds, no more ceilings that prevent people from achieving the

State here might extend to things like equal opportunity laws (as happened Britain in the 1970's with the introduction of both the *Sex Discrimination Act* - making

it illegal to discriminate on the grounds of sex - and the *Equal Pay Act* - making it illegal to pay men and women different rates for doing the same job). Governments may also legislate for things like standards of workplace *safety*, a *minimum wage* and so forth. In addition, taxation policies may be designed to place limits on personal income and wealth and, in some instances, redistribute wealth via a:

5. Welfare State: This involves a number of ideas; in Britain, for example, the State has provided "free-on-demand" medical and educational provision, paid for by taxes on income (*production taxation*) and spending (*consumption taxation*). However, the main idea of interest in this context   is that of the State, according to **Veenhoven** (1992), "Guaranteeing their citizens a minimum level of living, by providing income supplements and/or services".

Social Democracy: Explanations

As we've suggested, these perspectives explain the distribution of income, wealth and poverty in terms of the relationship between (Capitalist) economic markets and the State. On the one hand, the logic of free markets dictates economic inequality is *necessary* while, on the other, the:

Role of the State is one that limits the worst excesses of Capitalism (in terms of the exploitation of workers, for example) and seeks to provide a *safety net* for those unable to compete effectively in the market place (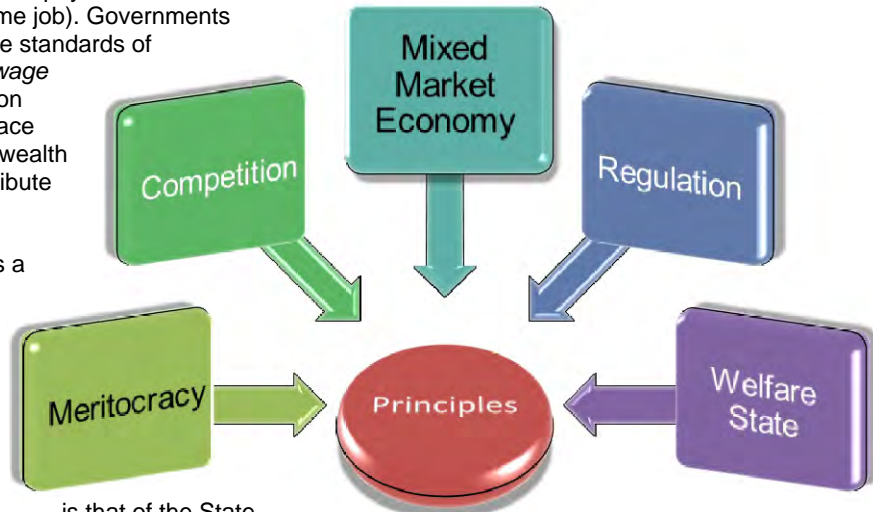the old, sick, disadvantaged and poor, for example). **Marquand** (1998) expresses this in the following terms: "A meritocratic society is one in which the state takes action to raise the level of the talents - particularly the talents of the disadvantaged - which the market proceeds to reward. First, the state levels the playing field. Only then does the game commence". In this respect, therefore, the State plays a number of *roles*::

An **enabling role**, in the sense of regulating economic markets (where it can), providing services (such as education) and generally promoting equality of opportunity through, for example, the legal system.

A **protection role**, whereby the socially vulnerable are given help (through such things as unemployment, housing and disability benefits) to provide a basic standard of care and sustenance.

A **redistribution role**, whereby the tax system, for example, is used to fund the previous two roles.

Lister (2000) characterises this aspect of the social democratic perspective as "Reforming welfare around the work ethic", As she argues, "It is work, or to be more precise paid work, which is the main focus of social security reforms designed to modify behaviour and to promote responsibility, as well as opportunity and inclusion". The emphasis, she argues, within social democratic perspectives has moved from the concept of *social equality* to that of *equality of opportunity*, which involves:

Responsibilities: The idea that the role of government is to encourage people to participate in the workplace wherever possible. Thus, various government schemes (aimed at getting, for example, lone parents into work by helping to provide childcare) are based on the idea the best way to help people escape from poverty is to turn them into working, productive, members of society.

Inclusion: This involves the belief paid work - and the ability to support oneself and one's family - is the best way to tackle social exclusion. **Giddens** (1998), for example, suggests a redefinition of "social equality" to mean *social inclusion* - the idea everyone should be encouraged, through State help if necessary, to play a part in the society in which they live.

Opportunity reflects the central problem faced by government in a mixed market economy, namely that of how to promote *social integration* (or *inclusion* in New Labour terms) within the parameters of a fundamentally unequal society. The solution, in social democratic terms, is for governments to provide opportunities through education, welfare training schemes and the like - for people to work.

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain the concept of a "Third Way" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest **two** ways that the State regulates economic activity (4 marks).

(c) Suggest three ways that the Welfare State "guarantees a minimum standard of living" (6 marks).

(d) Examine the social democratic view that wealth and income inequalities can be positive features of any society (24 marks).

(e) Assess the view that social inequalities are a consequence of social exclusion (24 marks).

Marxism: Observations

As a general perspective (focusing for the sake of convenience on the basic ideas shared by different types of Marxists), Marxism focuses on the idea of:

Conflict: While this idea covers all types of social conflict, the main focus is on *economic* conflict and the relationship between:

Social classes: At its most basic level, *class conflict* is based around the relationship between the:

> • **Bourgeoisie** (or **ruling class**) - those who own and control the *means of economic production* (land, factories, machinery and so forth) and the:
>
> • **Proletariat** (or **subject class**) - those who sell their *labour power* (their ability to work) to the highest bidder.

In this respect, *economic inequality* - in terms of vast differences in income and wealth, for example - leads to *social inequality* (differences in social status, lifestyles and so forth) and is based on the concept of:

Profit (or *surplus value*, as Marxists like to call it). In basic terms, *surplus value* is the difference between what an employer pays to produce commodities (goods and services that can be sold) - labour costs, general production costs, the price of raw materials and so forth - and the price for which they are able to sell these commodities. For example, for the publisher of this book the difference between what it costs to produce (the writing, editing, publishing and distribution costs, for example) and the price for which they sell it to you, is their profit - the "surplus value" added over and above the costs of production. The main reasons for the existence of profits are, according to Marxists:

Exploitation: The relationship between those who own the means of production and those who do not is, fundamentally, one in which the former exploit the latter. This is because, in a capitalist economy, ownership involves the *private* retention of profit. In simple terms, owners pay their workers

less than the cost of whatever it is they produce and, consequently, are able to keep (or *appropriate*) the difference between production cost and selling price for themselves. In this situation:

Inequality is an inevitable feature of life in capitalist societies. The distribution of both income and wealth, for example, will always be unequal - there will always be those who are rich and those who, relatively speaking, are poor. This follows because of the *economic structure* of this type of society - inequalities of wealth and income are, by definition, built into the fabric of capitalist society; they are, in short, the very bedrock (or *economic base*) on which this type of society is built.

Marxism: Explanations

Unlike Functionalist, New Right and Social Democratic perspectives that, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, see economic inequality as necessary and / or desirable, it should come as no great surprise to learn Marxists see it as neither. Where Social Democratic perspectives, for example, see the reform of capitalism as a major goal - through systems of progressive taxation (the wealthy paying increasingly higher rates of tax on their income and wealth, for example, to pay for social reforms) and the like, Marxists argue social and economic inequality can only be eliminated by the *revolutionary overthrow* of capitalism and the subsequent development of a *Communist* society.

However, until such a society comes into being, Marxists focus on the key question of how social inequality - based on the unequal distribution of income and wealth - is *maintained* in capitalist societies. They answer this question in a number of ways:

Bourgeoisie
(Ruling Class)

Proletariat
(Subject Class)
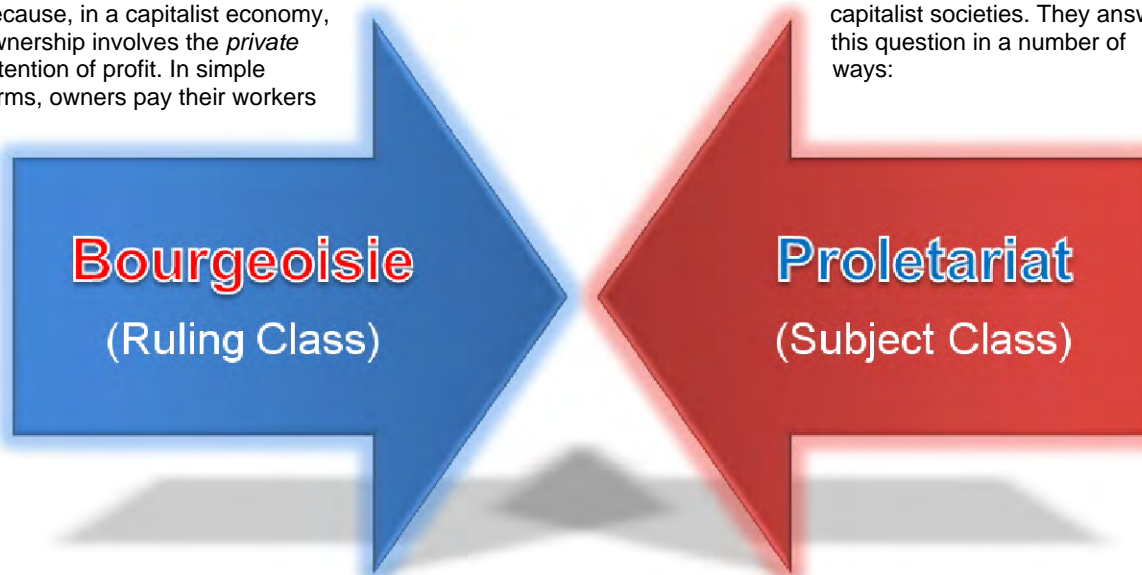
Ideology: As we've previously seen, writers such as **Althusser** (1971) highlight the concept of **Ideological State Apparatuses** (such as the education system) and their role in convincing people they live, for example, in the best possible type of society, that social inequality is inevitable and necessary and so forth. The role of *cultural institutions* such as *religion* and the *mass media* are also highlighted here in terms of their ideological (or *socialising*) role. Form this perspective, religions such as Christianity have, for example, historically stressed the importance of accepting the social order as "God given" and the media project a general world-view favourable to the interests of the ruling class.

> **Module Link**   **Education**
>
> The **education** system, along with **religious** institutions, also plays a major socialising role in our society.

Force: **Althusser** (1971) points to the idea of **Repressive State Apparatuses** (such as the police and armed forces) as a factor in maintaining order and, by extension, protecting the *status quo*. In basic terms, if a society is fundamentally unequal and the role of the police is to uphold the law, their behaviour simply serves to "maintain the existing unequal social order" (or, in other words, to keep things as they are).

Hegemony: Part of this idea suggests people come to accept (enthusiastically or grudgingly) the existing social order. They may, for example, see it as "right and proper" that inequality exists or they may, the other hand, want to change things but feel *powerless* to achieve such an aim.

In this situation, Marxists point to a number of distinctive ways capitalist societies promote social inequality by:

Economic means: An example here might be the concept of a:

Reserve army of labour: This involves the idea of people being brought into the work force at times of full production and labour shortages and then sacked or made redundant in periods of economic downturn. Traditionally, women have, according to Feminist writers such as **Bruegal** (1979), been treated in this way - partly because of the *housewife role* many women are still expected to play. In this respect, the argument here is women can, more easily than men, be forced out of the *public sphere* (workforce) and into the *private sphere* (the home) because of their traditional role as domestic labourers.

In addition, groups such as the *unemployed* also constitute a reserve pool of labour that can be dipped into by employers when they need additional labour. **Evans** (2002) has given this idea a somewhat novel twist by noting how, in Australia (as in many European countries) poorly paid and relatively low-status research students are employed on a part-time, casual, basis to carry out University-based research. Once they are no-longer required, they simply return to the pool of labour seeking further (short- term) work.

For Marxists, this idea of a labour reserve is important because it can be used to lower the wages of other employees. If a reserve army of labour exists in society - willing to be brought into and excluded from the workforce at various times - it lowers the job security of employees and makes them less likely to push for things like wage increases for fear of being replaced by people willing to work for less money.

Political means: The role of the State is an important one in maintaining social inequality through their provision of welfare services. Strange as it may seem, Marxists tend to view the role of welfare provision as being crucial in maintaining inequality because it protects "the poor" from the worst excesses of inequality. By providing a safety net, governments help to diffuse potential conflicts, lower rates of illegal activity and generally help to maintain the *status quo* from which the ruling class, quite literally, profit the most. Welfare, from this perspective, perpetuates inequality in a couple of ways:

• **Poverty** is marginalised in the sense few people, if any, are allowed to fall into the kind of abject poverty that might lead to a questioning of an economic system that allows some to enjoy vast personal income and wealth while others starve.

• **Policing**: Where governments provide for the poorest in society, one outcome of this is an increased *surveillance* of those who receive welfare benefits. Social workers, for example, become a form of "*soft policing*" because of their day-to-day involvement with their clients (checking on their current situation, offering advice on behaviour changes and so forth).

> **Tried and Tested**
>
> (a) Explain the concept of hegemony (2 marks).
>
> (b) Suggest **two** reasons for seeing social inequality as "inevitable" in Capitalist society (4 marks).
>
> (c) Suggest two reasons for the argument that ideological control is more effective than force (6 marks).
>
> (d) Examine Marxist arguments about the origin and nature of inequalities of wealth and income (24 marks).
>
> (e) Compare Marxist views on social inequality to *either* those of Functionalists *or* Social Democrats *or* the New Right (24 marks).

Feminism: Observations

As we noted in the Introductory Chapter there are a variety of different feminist perspectives. However, for the purposes of this section we will consider "feminism in general", in terms of the way feminists have considered and explained social inequalities.

Unsurprisingly, the traditional focus of feminist perspectives on economic inequality has been on the fact women, historically, have lower incomes (as the following table demonstrates), own less wealth and are more likely to experience poverty, than their male counterparts.

We can explore Feminist explanations for the relative levels of male - female inequality in terms of a range of ideas:

Social Segregation: Traditionally, men and women in our society have had differential access to - and participation in - different *social spheres*. For example, men have tended to be more heavily involved in the:

• **Public sphere** of the workplace, which gave access to a range of factors contributing to social inequality (income, social networks and wider relationships, for example). Women, on the other hand, were more likely to be involved in the:

• **Private sphere** centred on the home, domestic and family roles and responsibilities.

In such a situation, female dependency on men was fairly easy to demonstrate since it involved inequalities of power based on who earned and controlled family income and who didn't. As **Ramsay** (1994) notes, Feminists have traditionally argued the separation of the spheres "…affect [female] access to jobs and to participation in public life generally…inequalities at work reflect and reinforce [a] subordinate position in the private domestic sphere in that typical 'women's work' is an extension of their domestic roles, and the low pay and low status attached to this work mirrors the devaluing of their domestic tasks".

However, as **Ramsay** suggests, a distinct separation between the two spheres can't be easily maintained in the light of women's increasing participation in the workplace (and the suggestion men are far more involved in family life than in the past). **Labour Force Survey** figures (2006), for example, show that "In 1985 men filled 2.0 million more jobs than women. In June 2005 the numbers were similar, with each of the sexes performing about 13.3 million jobs

Although a clear "public - private" sphere distinction can't be easily maintained in relation to British society as a whole in the 21ˢᵗ century, we can make a passing reference here to:

Cultural and **subcultural differences** in male - female participation in the different spheres. Some ethnic, age and social class groups, for example, maintain a stronger sense of gender separation than others (an idea that reflects what feminists term "areas in which gender, class and ethnicity intersect").

Male / Female Income Differences

Women way behind on pay
BBC News: 21/02/00

"Women who choose career over family earn less during their working lives than male colleagues in the same job…many women were being paid less than men simply because of their sex.

This backs up figures from the Equal Opportunities Commission, which says that women get paid only 80% of the average hourly male earnings. The Equal Pay Act of 1970 was introduced to prevent exactly this inequality".

UK working mothers earn less:
BBC News: 06/03/02

Career women's lifetime wage **losses**, compared to men:

• No qualifications: **£197,000**
• GCSE qualifications: **£241,000**
• Graduate qualifications: **£143,000**

Lifetime wage gap between mother and father of two

• Low skills: **£482,000**
• GCSE skills: **£381,000**
• Graduate skills: **£162,000**

Universities 'break equal pay laws': **BBC News**: 04/04/00

The pay *difference* between men and women of the same grade:

• Anatomy / physiology professors: **£8,000**
• Veterinary science professors: £7,000
• Agriculture / forestry lecturers: £4,950
• Nursing lecturers: £1,558

Working mothers' pay compared to men.
Centre for Analysis for Social Exclusion (1999)

• Women with 1 child paid 8% less
• Women with three or more children paid up to 31% less.

However, even though it may no-longer be the case there is a clear and rigid gender separation between the two spheres, we need to be aware the "public - private" distinction may not have disappeared, as such, but merely changed in form. Feminists, for example, point to the way it seems to operate in terms of:

Economic segregation: In it s most general form, gender segregation operates, according to this perspective, in terms of a *dual labour market*:

• **Primary labour markets** involve, according to **Marshall** (1999), jobs that provide "security, career development, firm-specific training and an extensive benefits package". They are also more likely to involve full-time, well-paid, work.

• **Secondary labour markets** on the other hand - as **Marshall** notes -"…provide little in the way of training, job security or internal promotion prospects". They're also more likely to consist of low-paid, low-skill, part-time work whose "…most obvious and important characteristic…in the UK is that it is undertaken by women".

Walters (2002) further suggests secondary labour markets are characterised by a "plentiful supply of women seeking part-time work…and, until recently, poor legal and social protection as employees".

This basic distinction goes some way to explaining gendered income inequality since women are more likely than men to be involved in part-time work *(*as the following table demonstrates):

Employment Activity by Sex (millions)
Source: **Office For National Statistics** (2004)

Employee Status	Male	Female
Full-Time	11.5	6.7
Part-Time	1.2	5.1

More recent figures from the **Labour Force Survey** (2006) confirm this particular trend; male and female workforce participation rates, although similar in number, show one very significant difference, namely that "almost half of the women's jobs were part time compared with around one in six of the men's".

Although **Edwards** and **Robinson** (2003) characterise part-time work as a "…marginalised form of cheap labour and precarious employment largely found in low skill jobs that can be organised efficiently on a part-time basis", writers such as **Atkinson** (1987) and **Hunter et al** (1993) have argued income inequality can't be exactly explained by different forms of labour market participation.

As **Marshall**, for example, notes: "It would seem females whose labour market participation is constrained by domestic responsibilities often end up working part-time for employers who offer less

attractive terms for all their employees, rather than occupying peripheral jobs with firms who offer much better terms and conditions of employment to core workers". This idea, therefore, leads to a consideration of:

Workplace segregation as an explanation for economic inequality. As **Dolado et al** (2003) point out, this idea works in two ways:

• **Vertical segregation** involves the idea particular occupations (and workplaces) are *vertically stratified* by gender; they involve clear gender divisions between those at the top and those beneath them. **Hakim** (1981) expresses this idea in terms of: "Vertical occupational segregation exists when men and women both work in the same job categories, but men commonly do the more skilled, responsible or better paid work". In general - even in occupations where there is a gender mix - men occupy the higher positions (and receive higher levels of income) than women. **Wise** (2004), for example, points out "Men [are] over-represented in higher nursing grades and spend less time getting there". One consequence of this, as the **Equal Opportunities Commission** (2004) notes is that "Vertical segregation limits career development that would enable women to earn more".

• **Horizontal segregation** involves the idea men and women do different types of work. The **Equal Opportunities Commission** (2004), for example, notes: "75% of working women are still found in just five occupational groups":

- • Associate professional and technical (e.g. nursing).

- • Admin and secretarial work

- • Personal services (such as caring for children or the elderly).

- • Sales and customer service.

- • Non-skilled manual work.

The Commission argues: "Jobs which are classified as women's work command lower wages than men's work even when they require similar qualification levels, leading to inequalities in pay and income".

Although we've focused on explanations for income equalities related to gender, we can note how both *wealth inequalities* and *poverty* are also related to gender (we will examine the latter in more depth on the next section).

Wealth inequality, for example has both current and historical dimensions:

Current dimension: In terms of the areas at which we've looked, women have fewer opportunities than men to accumulate wealth through working. It may, therefore, seem somewhat surprising to note that, according to **Datamonitor** (2004), there are more wealthy women in the UK than men ("Nearly 393,000 women holding more than £200,000 in cash, shares and bonds, compared with 355,000 men"). This situation is explained partly by the relatively low definition of wealth and partly in terms of **Rownlinson**

et al's (1999) observation that the highest levels of wealth are found amongst the elderly; since women live longer in our society than men they are more likely to inherit their partner's wealth. The **Sunday Times Rich List** (2004) paints a somewhat different picture of wealth amongst the very rich in our society. Of the richest 1100 people in Britain, 93% (1,022) were men.

Historical dimension: Traditional forms of wealth distribution amongst families, for example, have followed the idea of *patrilineal descent* (inheritance down the male line). Until the 19th century, for example, women were effectively barred from wealth ownership and, as you might expect, change in this respect has been slow. Men, in general, have had far greater opportunities than women, historically, to accumulate wealth through inheritance.

Feminism: Explanations

In terms of the ideas at which we've just looked, for "2nd wave" Feminist perspectives at least (see Chapter 1 for a discussion of this idea and its relationship to post-feminist or "3rd wave" perspectives) they are all, in their various different ways, underpinned by the concept of:

Patriarchy: In basic terms, this involves the idea of *male domination* - something that, for Feminists, is at the root of gender inequalities across all areas of society. Various forms of male domination (in the private as well as the public spheres) are supported, according to this perspective by:

Patriarchal ideologies that seek to explain and justify men's continued domination and exploitation of women. In this respect, income inequalities, for example, are justified in various ways:

Male family wage: That is, the idea men need to be paid more because, as *primary providers* their income is spread through the family group - an idea that ignores both the primary family role played by many women and the fact income levels between men don't reflect differences in family status; a single man doing the same job as a man with a family to support is paid the same wage.

Biological programming: Some (non-sociological) perspectives (such as *Sociobiology* - or *Evolutionary Psychology* as it now prefers to be known) argue males and females have different biology-based abilities and capabilities.

• **Men**, for example, are biologically programmed for aggression which makes them more suited to hunting and, its modern-day equivalent, the workplace.

• **Women**, on the other hand, are programmed for nurture, which makes them better suited to the home-making role. Sociological versions of this idea appear in the idea of a female:

Affective role - the idea, common among traditional Functionalist writers such as **Goode** (1964), women have a nurturing role to play as a counterpoint to male breadwinning roles.

As the following suggests, however we view the notion of *patriarchy* and *patriarchal ideologies*, in any society where economic inequality is encouraged, competition between men and women for control of resources (such as income and wealth) is likely to have a patriarchal element, given men have, historically, been better placed - both culturally and economically - to discriminate against women on the basis of sex.

UK is 'still a man's world'
Source: **Office for National Statistics**
(2001)

"Men are still getting a better deal at work and at home despite years of campaigning to promote sexual equality. Men do much less cooking and housework than women and are still rewarded better in their careers. The gender pay gap is still evident and men hold more high-powered jobs than women, even though more women are working.

Family life is changing, with men no longer always being seen as the primary providers, but men are still not pulling their weight in the home: 'Traditional roles in the home may still exist with women undertaking the bulk of domestic chores'.

Work life: Men also have higher wages despite equal pay legislation, and 'outnumber women in management and in many professional occupations'...despite evidence women are now 'outperform men at many levels of education'.

The average gross wage for men is £247 a week, compared with £119 for women. Average gross earnings for women peak in their mid-20s at about £180 a week. Men, on the other hand, steadily rise in earning potential to an average £350 a week for the ages 35-50".

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain the concept of "patriarchal ideology" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest **two** ways women are exploited in the workplace (4 marks).

(c) Suggest **three** ways that patriarchy affects the distribution of wealth and income in our society (6 marks).

(d) Examine how the concept of workplace segregation contributes to inequalities of wealth and income between men and women (24 marks).

(e) Assess Feminist views on gender inequality (24 marks).

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3. The existence and persistence of poverty in contemporary society.

Existence and Persistence: Introduction

As we've seen in the previous Sections, there is a methodological debate (and not just within Sociology) over how the concept of poverty should be defined. This debate – broadly couched in terms of absolute or relative definitions – is a significant one since the type of definition – and measurement – used to understand poverty determines to some extent of poverty to be found in any society.

Absolute definitions, for example, tend to produce less evidence of poverty while relative definitions produce the reverse.
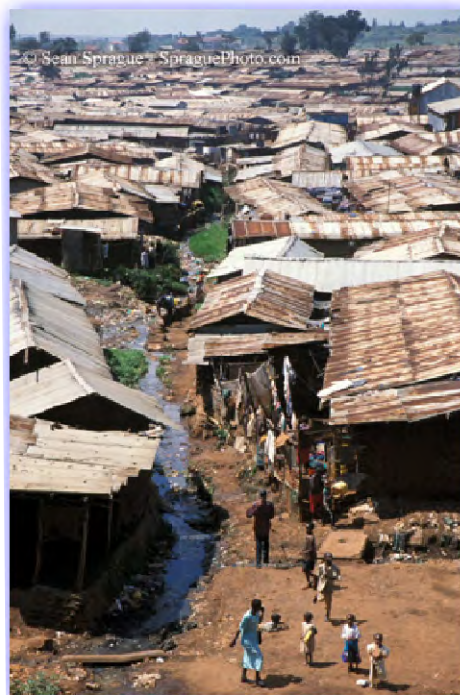
In addition, the way in which you chose to define and measure poverty has a significant impact on how you are likely to see the existence and persistence of poverty in contemporary society. Adopting an **absolute position**, for example, suggests that improved standards of living will, at some point in the future, result in the eradication of poverty - or at least that abject level of human degradation ("minimum human biological needs") that forms the baseline of some absolutist definitions.

Few, if any, people in our society live in this kind of abject poverty - but does this mean poverty, as such, doesn't exist in the UK?

Adopting a **relativist position**, on the other hand, effectively means two things. Firstly, that some form of poverty has always existed (and will always exist) and secondly that its persistence can be explained by reference to levels of social inequality (which, in itself as we've seen, is a criticism frequently aimed at relativists – they don't define and measure "poverty", as such, but rather levels of social inequality). This follows because by defining the concept relatively (the difference between what, say, one group in society has and another group doesn't have) effectively means that "poverty" can never be eradicated. In contemporary Capitalist societies such as the UK there will always be some form of social inequality – and hence relative poverty – since this situation is built into the very economic structure of our society.

While it's important to keep the above debate in mind when examining ideas and argument about the existence and persistence of poverty, in this Section we can develop these observations to look at a range of sociological arguments which, for our convenience, we can discuss in terms of two broad perspectives.

The first focuses on what we can term:

1. **Individualistic** (or **cultural**) explanations of poverty: These positions generally explain the existence and persistence of poverty in terms of the perceived qualities of individuals; that, in fairly basic terms for the moment, the "causes of poverty" are located in the behaviours and actions of individuals (and the groups to which they belong – hence the idea that this general position often refers to membership of **cultural groups** ("Chav culture", "Underclass culture" and so forth) as a source of explanation for poverty). "Solutions to poverty" (something we discuss in more detail in **Section 4**) tend to be couched in terms of how individual / cultural behaviours can be changed in order to move such people out of poverty.

The second general perspective, on the other hand, can be termed:

2. **Structural** explanations of poverty since these, unlike their individualistic / cultural counterparts, focus on the idea that explanations for the existence and persistence of poverty are to be found in the economic and political structure of contemporary societies. This position, therefore, locates the causes of poverty in "structures of inequality" (class structures in Marxist terms, gender structures in Feminist terms and so forth). "Solutions to poverty", in other words, are only to be found by changing the social structure of the society that creates poverty – individuals alone (whether the poor themselves, charitable institutions such as religious organisations or philanthropic members of the upper class) are neither responsible for – nor able to resolve – the problem of poverty.

Individualistic / Cultural: Observations

Explanations for poverty grouped under this general heading focus on the qualities possessed (or not as the case may be) by individuals and the groups to which they belong. This being the case, if poverty is a "quality of the poor" it follows any explanation for its existence and persistence is based on some form of:

Absolute definition of poverty (either biological or, more usually, cultural - a minimum level of earnings, for example). This follows because, if the behaviour of the poor is a cause of their poverty, any solution to poverty (something we will discuss in more detail in the next section) will focus on how the poor need to change their behaviour - which means there must be some form of poverty line against which to measure who is - and who is not - in poverty.

Poverty Cultures

In terms of this general type of explanation, we can identify and discuss a range of different theories, beginning with the idea of a:

Culture of poverty, originally developed by the anthropologist Oscar **Lewis** (1959, 1961). In his study of Mexican and Puerto Rican societies, **Lewis** wanted to understand poverty in a *cultural context*; that is, he wanted to understand how the poor *adapted* to and *coped* with the fact of their poverty; in this respect, he argued poverty, like any other form of cultural activity, was:

Socially organised: Rather than seeing poverty as simply being caused by random events (such as illness or disease) or natural forces that struck different people at different times, **Lewis** argued the persistence of poverty across generations meant it needed to be understood in terms of a:

Socialisation process: In other words, adults who experience poverty as a set of objective conditions (such as the effects of long-term unemployment, low rates of pay for those in work, illness, disability and so forth) learn to cope with the fact of living in poverty and, in the process, pass this knowledge on to their children (in the same way those who live outside poverty pass their accumulated knowledge on to their children). The persistence of poverty, therefore, is explained by the way each generation socialises the next

generation with the knowledge and skills required to live in poverty.

As should be apparent, if a culture of poverty develops it does so because it performs certain *functions* for the poor (hence we can associate writers like **Lewis** with a broadly **Functionalist** perspective). These include:

• **Informal economies**: For example, the use of pawnbrokers as a way of budgeting on limited resources or informal borrowing and lending arrangements with friends and neighbours.

• **Present orientations**: The idea of "living for today" and worrying about what will happen tomorrow or the next day when (or even if) it arrives.

• **Informal living arrangements**: A lack of commitment to institutions such as marriage which would involve trying to provide for others as well as oneself.

On the other hand, a culture of poverty is, ultimately *dysfunctional* (damaging to both individuals and societies) because it represents a:

Self-defeating strategy: By adapting and coping, the poor do not address the problems that create poverty in the first place (things like lack of employment and low wages). The development of *informal economies*, for example, may lead to the introduction of moneylenders into the *economy of poverty*. Borrowing money in this way may resolve a *short-term problem* (paying the rent, for example) but it creates a much more serious *long-term problem* since the money not only has to be paid back, but paid-back with punitive rates of interest.

A further *dysfunctional* aspect of a culture of poverty is the "absence of childhood". **Lewis**, for example, noted children, at an early age, were expected to be *economically active* - to "earn their keep" and contribute, if they could, to a family income; the problem here, of course, was the absence of schooling - low rates of literacy were common amongst the poor **Lewis** studied - and since education is one of the main (long-term) routes out of poverty the poor were, effectively (and unknowingly) perpetuating their own poverty.

Informal Economies

Present Orientation

Informal Living

Self-Defeating Strategies

New Right

Cultural theories have been influential as a way of studying and explaining the existence and persistence of poverty and, as you might expect, they've been revised and updated over the years. The following, for example, takes one particular aspect of the culture of poverty thesis - the idea the adaptive behaviour of the poor contributes to their continued poverty - and develops it into a theory of:

The Underclass: This theory, associated with New Right perspectives in America - through political scientists like **Murray** (1999) - and Britain, through the work of politicians such as **Field** (1989, 1995), argues the very poor in America and - to a more limited extent - Britain, constitute a "class apart" from mainstream society. They are, according to this argument, a class who not only exist at the very bottom of the society but who are also *socially excluded* in terms of income, life chances and political aspirations.

O'Brien and Briar (1997) notes New Right theorists frequently make an important (ideological) distinction between two groups:

1. The **deserving poor** - those who, through little fault of their own, find themselves in poverty (and who, to some extent, try to lift themselves out of this situation - hence the idea they are deserving of help). This group, for example, might include the "working poor" who struggle to exist on low wages.

2. The **undeserving poor** - those who are (supposedly) happy to exist on the margins of society, living off State benefits, indulging in various forms of petty criminality and who, for whatever reason, make little or no effort to involve themselves in the day-to-day life of mainstream society.

Jencks (1989) argues that, on the basis of this type of distinction, New Right perspectives generally talk about the *undeserving poor* in terms of three types of *failure*:

• **Moral**: They routinely indulge in deviant / criminal behaviour.

• **Economic**: They are unable (or unwilling) to get paid work.

• **Educational**: They lack cultural and educational skills and qualifications.

Underclass theory - a Shameless (groan) updating of culture of poverty theories?

The underclass, therefore, are seen to contribute to their own *social exclusion* by their *rejection* of the values and norms of wider society. In other words, membership of the underclass is defined in terms of the *choices* made by its members; for example, the failure to pursue educational qualifications leads to economic marginalisation and the development of a morality based around criminality and a dependence on the rest of society to support their deviant lifestyles through State benefits. In terms of who the undeserving poor actually are, however:

Membership varies according to different writers. **Saunders** (1990), for example, identifies the underclass in terms of the poor, educationally unqualified and those irregularly or never employed.

Three types of **FAILURE...**
The New Right aren't great fans of the poor (especially the undeserving sort)

Moral

Economic

Educational
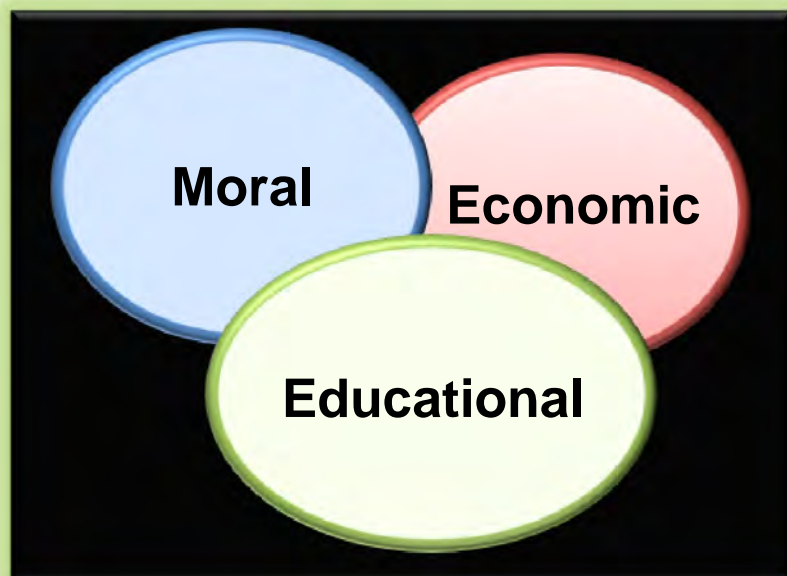
Lister (1996), on the other hand, argues the New Right generally characterise membership in terms of "those distinguished by their undesirable behaviour", examples of which include:

> • Illegal drug-taking.
> • Criminality and casual violence.
> • Illegitimacy.
> • Failure to find and hold down a job.
> • Truancy from school.

In addition, disproportionately represented amongst this class are:

> • Ethnic minorities (especially, but not exclusively, Afro-Caribbean).
> • People trapped in run-down council estates or decaying inner cities.
> • Young single people.
> • Single-parent families.

For the New Right (especially in America), the development of an underclass is, somewhat perversely, also a consequence of the behaviour of mainstream society, in two main ways:

Welfare systems providing various forms of economic support shield the poor from the consequences of their behavioural choices. By supporting poverty, welfare systems also support:

Deviant lifestyles and **moralities**: The poor are shielded from the effects of the *moral choices* that contribute to their poverty. For example, single parents who choose to have children they cannot support (because they can't work and look after children at the same time) are actively encouraged by a welfare system that effectively pays (through benefits funded through taxation) for their (deviant) moral choices.

Dependency

These ideas lead to a further theory of poverty, closely related to that of the underclass, namely a:

Dependency culture: The basic idea here is the existence of State welfare systems and payments both *supports* and *traps* the poor in poverty, depending on the particular view of the underclass adopted. In this respect, we can note three basic views about the relationship between a dependency culture and the underclass:

1. Generosity: Benefits are so high they provide the underclass with a comfortable existence for little or no effort.

2. Baseline: Although benefits may not provide a comfortable lifestyle, the fact the poor can live without (officially) working means they are free to involve themselves in the *hidden economy* (the world of cash-in-hand, no tax work as well as various forms of economic criminality).

3. Low wage work: Member of the underclass, almost by definition, lack the educational skills and qualifications to find highly-paid work. Their working options, therefore, are largely limited to low-skill, poorly-paid, work. Where welfare benefits are pitched at even a reasonably generous level, therefore, it's not in the economic interests of the underclass to take low-paid employment. It's interesting to note, in this particular context, the New Right "solution" to this problem is not to force employers to pay higher wages (since that would interfere with the workings of free markets) but rather to cut the level of State benefits.

In any of these situations, those who become dependent on the State for their existence become detached from wider society and are effectively excluded from participation in that society. **O'Brien and Briar** (1997) characterise this New Right view of dependency in the following terms: "Beneficiaries, it is argued, constitute a separate culture…with a different set of values and beliefs from the values and beliefs that exist in the society at large. 'Dependence' is a state enjoyed and relished. It is an argument…reflected, for example, in the…claim five year olds were entering school looking forward to life on social security benefit as their occupational aspiration".

Social Exclusion

In Britain, the idea of an underclass has tended, politically, to be expressed in a slightly different form. Although American New Right theorists (such as **Murray**) generally focus on the qualities of the poor as the cause of their poverty, British writers like **Field** have, in some senses, characterised the "underclass poor" as victims of:

Forces of Expulsion from society, which include:

> • Unemployment.
> • Widening class differences.
> • Exclusion from rapidly rising living standards.
> • Hardening of public attitudes to poverty.

In this respect, a *softer* version of underclass theory, largely associated with Social Democratic perspectives on poverty, has developed around the concept of:

Social exclusion: **Duffy** (1995) defines social exclusion as the "Inability to participate in the economic, political, social and cultural life of a society" (which, if you think about it, sounds very much like a definition of relative poverty). The notion of exclusion reflects, according to **Howarth et al** (1998) "Renewed concern about not just poverty, but the degree to which groups of people are being excluded from participation in work, lack full access to services and in other ways find themselves outside the mainstream of society".

From this perspective, therefore, while poverty may have many causes, some relating to wider *structural* influences (such as economic changes within labour markets - discussed in more detail below - that create widespread unemployment) and some relating to the *lifestyles and culture* of the poor, the "problem" for mainstream society is considered to be one of:

Social integration: In other words, the political problem of how to ensure the poor do not become culturally (as well as economically) detached from mainstream society. The government-funded **Social Exclusion Unit**, for example, has identified three general areas of potential social exclusion and suggested ways of "reintegrating the excluded" into mainstream society by introducing changes to different environments:

• **Physical**: This involves integrating people by improving local and national transport systems, housing and neighbourhood renewal, community regeneration and so forth.

• **Cultural** measures involve cutting crime and teenage pregnancy, reducing the fear of crime, improving access to educational training and skills and ensuring health services are accessible to those who need them most.

• **Economic**: This involves understanding the causes of unemployment (and its relationship to areas such as health and crime). Social integration initiatives have also focused on paid work as an inclusive force. Schemes to involve the unemployed in training and employment (so-called "welfare-to-work" schemes) have also proved a popular political solution to social exclusion.

In Britain, the **social democratic** concept of exclusion is subtly different from the **New Right** version of **underclass theory**; where the latter locates poverty in the behaviour and practices of the poor - **Horowitz** (1995), for example, sees poverty as being explained "…more by self-destructive behavior (sic) - crime, drug abuse, bearing children out of wedlock and a lack of commitment to education - than mere material want" - the former sees poverty in terms of a mix of *material* and *cultural* factors.

educational failure (cultural deprivation) which, in turn, leads to low-paid, low-skill work. When these people start families of their own, the cycle begins anew. An example of this type of theory might be expressed in the following report of research suggesting a link between poverty and school truancy.

"Link between Poverty and Truancy":
Source: **BBC News**: 07/07/02

"Children are more likely to skip school if they come from poor families. Research carried out by Ming **Zhang** found a close link between poverty and truancy among primary school children. The study, examined statistics from London boroughs between 1997 and 2000"

This theory, as we've represented it, *doesn't* involve the poor being "committed to poverty", nor are they (directly) to blame for their poverty (a process sometimes called "*blaming the victim*"). Rather, a range of social and economic factors, whose effect is *cumulative* (hence the idea of a *cycle* or *chain of events*), lead to the persistence of poverty down the generations.
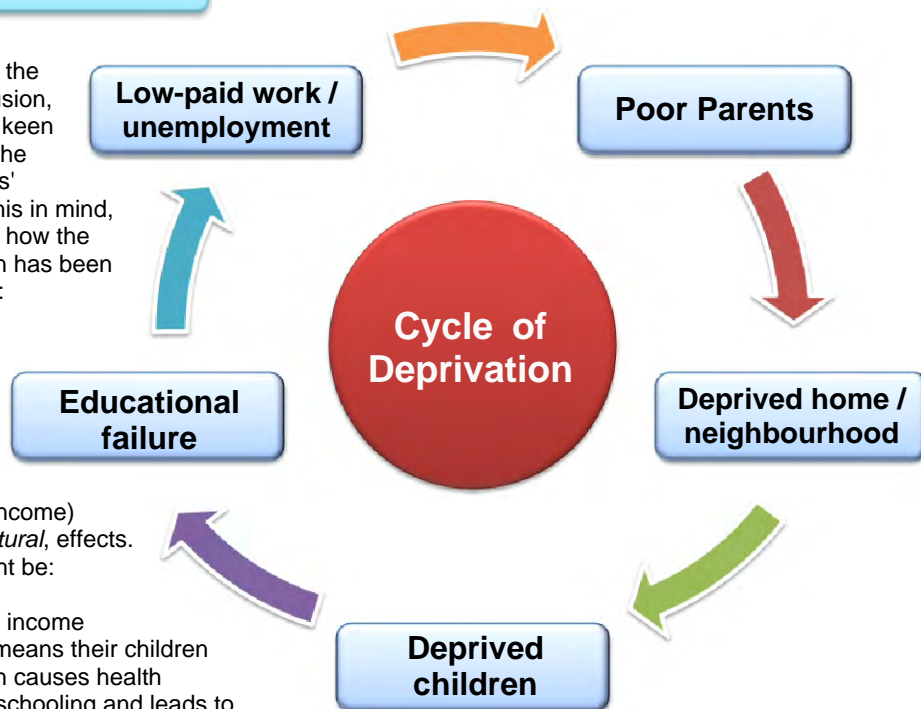

Tried and Tested

(a) Identify **two** characteristics of the "deserving poor" (4 marks).

(b) Suggest **two** differences between individualistic and structural explanations of poverty (4 marks).

(c) Suggest **two** ways in which a culture of poverty may be functional for its members (4 marks).

(d) Outline cultural explanations for the existence and persistence of poverty (24 marks).

Deprivation Cycles

As **Welshman** (2002) argues: "In drawing on the concept of social exclusion, New Labour has been keen to distance itself from the longer-term 'underclass' discourse". Keeping this in mind, therefore, we can note how the idea of social exclusion has been based on the idea of a:

Cycle of Deprivation: For this type of theory, deprivation is usually considered in terms of *material* factors (such as a low family income) having cumulative, *cultural*, effects. A simple example might be:

Parents living on a low income (material deprivation) means their children have a poor diet, which causes health problems and missed schooling and leads to

Cycle of Deprivation: Poor Parents → Deprived home / neighbourhood → Deprived children → Educational failure → Low-paid work / unemployment → Poor Parents

Individualistic / Cultural: Explanations

Although we will look more closely at cultural explanations in the next section (which discusses possible solutions to poverty), we can note a number of general ideas about the basic concept of:

Cultures of Poverty

When we think about this idea (as originally theorised and presented by **Lewis**) we need to ask three basic questions:

1. Do they exist?

Although the concept itself is a plausible one, it depends for its currency on the existence of a reasonably stable group of people, co-existing in poverty over time (and by time we're talking generations). The evidence we have suggests poverty - at least in Western societies such as Britain - doesn't necessarily have this basic characteristic.

Drever et al (2000), for example, note that, measured in terms of *income*, in the 6 years between 1991 and 1997, 50% of the bottom fifth of the UK population (the very poorest in our society) moved out of this category. This suggests, at the very least, a large **population churn**, something also suggested by **Jarvis and Jenkins** (1997a) when they note: "Although only a minority of the population have a low income in any given year, many more people experience low income at least once over a four-year period". Furthermore, "Fluctuations in income are experienced by people at all income levels. There is some evidence that mobility is greater in the very poorest and the very richest income groups".

On the other hand, **Jarvis and Jenkins** also note that, as ever, concepts of poverty largely depend on where a poverty line is drawn: "90% of those in the poorest tenth of the population remain in the bottom three-tenths a year later". The situation is further confused if we focus on a particular group of poor.

Howard and Garnham (2001), for example, argue poverty is likely to last longer for *children*, in the sense that where children are born into poverty (as opposed to becoming poor, for whatever reason, in later life) they find it very difficult to escape from that poverty - it is, they argue, something they carry with them into adult life. The **Department for Work and Pensions** (2002a), confirm this idea when they note how
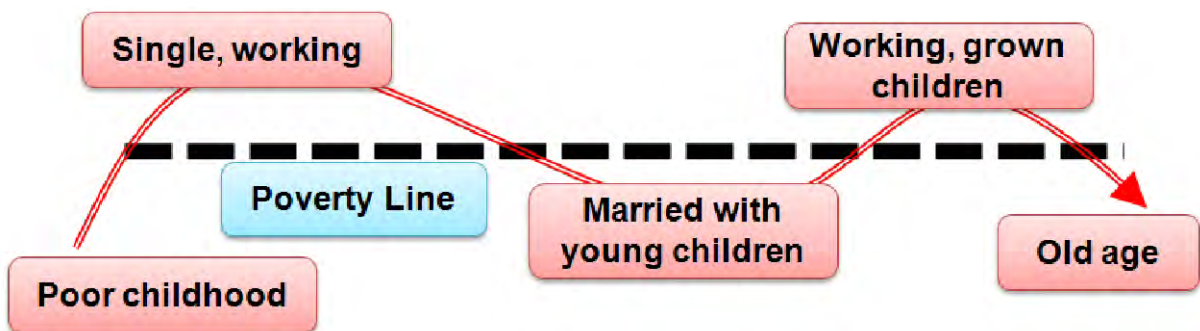
movement out of *extreme poverty* in the UK tends to be not very far.

What these types of study suggest, perhaps, is that people experience different *types of poverty* throughout their lifetime - from extreme forms to less extreme forms (whatever, in practice, each form might involve). In other words, just because we may be able to classify people as "poor" it doesn't simply follow they all have the same, shared, experience of poverty. If the evidence for the existence of a relatively stable group is, at best, inconclusive, a further question to ask is:

2. Are the poor homogeneous?

In other words, if we assume, for the sake of argument, a "hard core" poverty-stricken group does exist in our society, do they have the same basic social and cultural characteristics? When we look at "the poor" in our society, although it's possible to identify *broad groups* with similar characteristics, the evidence for homogeneity - and hence the development of cultures of poverty - is patchy. We can, for example, note:

• **Ethnic minority groups**, particularly Pakistani and Bangladeshi minorities, feature more heavily in poverty statistics, according to **Oxfam** (2003).

• **Regional variations** in our society exist in the extent, experience and distribution of poverty. **Department for Work and Pensions** (2002b) statistics, for example, show the North-East and South-West of England experience higher levels of poverty than the South-East of England.

• **Age variations**: Different age groups have different experiences of poverty - to be young and poor is different to being elderly and poor, for example.

• **Women** are more likely than men to be at risk of poverty (**Department of Social Security**, 2001) and reasons for this include the greater likelihood of their being single-parents and, because of longer life expectancy, widows. This observation, however, leads us to our final question, namely:

3. Is poverty communal?

A significant aspect of cultures of poverty is their communal character; such cultures develop in a situation where the values and norms of the poor are continually reinforced by people in similar social situations. However, it's interesting to note how, when those in poverty speak for

If people in our society can move out of and back into poverty at various points in their family life-cycle what does this tell us about "cultures of poverty"?

themselves, they repeatedly stress its *isolating effects* (as the following examples demonstrate).

Source: **UK Coalition Against Poverty** (2000)

"Poverty is isolating. You do not want anyone to know what you are feeling…you put on a brave face and do not let anyone into your private life".

In part it is about having no money. It is also about being isolated, unsupported, uneducated, unwanted".

Transmission Theories

In light of the above, **Moore** (2001a) argues "Controversial 'culture of poverty' theories suggest people become and remain poor due to their beliefs and behaviours…it may be more relevant to consider '*cultures of coping'* among the poor, and '*cultures of wealth'* among the rich and middle class as significant factors in keeping the poor in poverty". Rather than thinking in terms of a *culture* of poverty, **Moore** suggests we should view poverty in terms of:

Inter-Generational Transmission (**IGT**): This represents a sophisticated attempt to understand the persistence of poverty in terms of the interplay between a range of cultural and structural factors. In addition, it provides a bridge between the overtly-cultural theories we've just examined and the "structural poverty" theories we'll consider in more detail in a moment. **Moore** outlines the key elements of **IGT** as being the "Intergenerational transfer…and absence of transfer of different forms of capital: human, social-cultural, social-political, financial / material and environmental / natural". In other words:

Cultural transmission is a complex process involving a range of *capitals* we can group, for convenience, under two main headings:

1. Material capital involves things like parental ability to provide financially for children. **Gregg et al** (1999), for example, used a *longitudinal study* of children born in 1958 to show how "Social disadvantage during childhood is linked to an increased risk of low earnings, unemployment and other adversity by the age of 33".

2. Non-material capital, includes cultural traditions, values and experiences. **Shropshire and Middleton** (1999), for example, noted how non-material values were transmitted between generations. Children of single-parent families, for example, had "lower expectations about their future than their peers" - they were, for example, less likely to consider professional qualifications and occupations.

Moore (2001a) identifies a range of different types of capital which we can note (with illustrative examples) in the following terms:

1. Human capital: This may involve such things as:
• Labour contributions (from children / older people to working generation).
• Investment of time and capital in education / training,
• Knowledge / skills useful as part of coping and survival strategies.

2. Financial / material capital: Examples here include:
• Money and assets.
• Insurance
• Inheritance, bequests
• Levels of individual / family debt.

3. Natural / environmental capital: This relates to ideas like:
• Pollution and ill-health
• Lack of work in urban / rural areas
•Lack of affordable transport

4. Socio-cultural capital: This involves:
• Educational opportunities.
• Parental investment in child's education.
• Parents' experience of education
• Traditions and value systems.

5. Socio-political capital: This relates to things like:
• Ethnicity
• Gender
• Class
• Family background
• Religion
• Disability
• Access to key decision-makers.

Types of Capital

Financial / Material

Human

Socio-Cultural

Natural / Environmental

Socio-Political
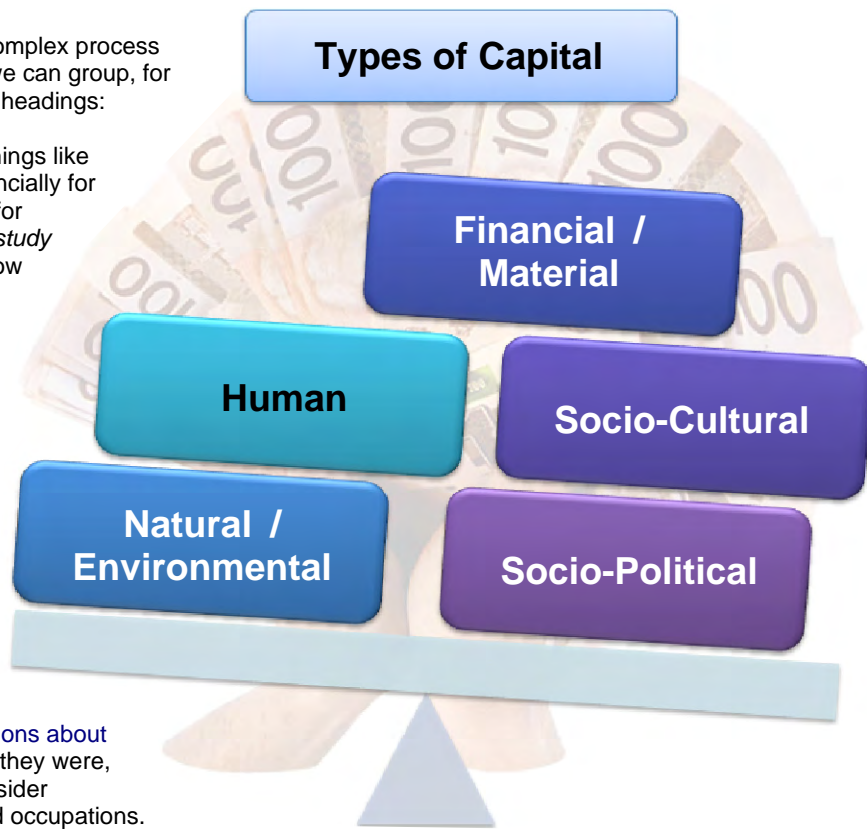
Before moving on to consider an alternative set of explanations for the existence and persistence of poverty we can note that, historically, individualistic / cultural explanations for the existence and persistence of poverty have proven popular with governments, media, researchers and the general populace alike, for reasons that are not particularly difficult to identify – these types of explanation variously:

• **Blame the victims** of poverty for their situation by reference to the supposed moral qualities (or indeed lack of same) of the poor. In this respect the causes of poverty are located in individual failings, whether these be laziness, moral laxity, stupidity or whatever.

• **Absolve** governments (and indeed the well-off) from either blame or responsibility. If poverty is the fault of reckless individuals then it follows neither governments nor those not in poverty can be held accountable for this situation. However, in some respects this also opens up the possibility for:

Humanitarianism, in that it is possible to move people out of poverty (those who want to be helped or who, through misfortune, find themselves in poverty) is a variety of ways. Some focus on the symptoms of poverty (providing food and shelter for the homeless, for example) while others strike at the "root of the problem" (as it is theorised by these approaches) by attempting to make cultural changes in the behaviour of the poor. In other words, the solution to poverty is a change in the attitudes and behaviours that "cause poverty" and it is here that governments and individuals can "make a difference" – either through the type of "Tough Love" policies pursued in America in recent times (removing welfare benefits from the unemployed, single parents and so forth) or the "Soft Love" policies generally pursued by British governments over the past 50 years involving the provisions embodied in something like the Welfare State.

To complete this part, the following article (written from a broadly New Right ideological position) contains a range of assertions about the nature of both poverty and the poor and raises some provocative questions about poverty (and its solution) in contemporary Britain:

Tried and Tested

(a) Identify **two** ways material capital differs from non-material capital (4 marks).

(b) Suggest **two** ways in which "the poor" are not an homogeneous grouping(4 marks).

(c) Explain the difference between a Culture of Poverty and Cycle of Deprivation(4 marks).

(d) Examine how "cultures of coping" and "cultures of wealth" might contribute to poverty (24 marks).

(e) Assess individualistic / cultural explanations for the existence and persistence of poverty (24 marks).

Structural Perspectives: Observations

In 1901 Seebohm and Joseph **Rowntree** published one of the most significant social studies of poverty in the 20th century – a study that was a ground-breaking piece of research in two ways:

Firstly, it attempted to **systematically** and **empirically** document the existence and experience of poverty in a British city (York) in a way that attempted to demonstrate that poverty was not simply a misfortune visited on the feckless and morally bankrupt – as the **Joseph Rowntree Foundation** (2004) put it "In his 1901 study...**Rowntree** argues that poverty is a direct result of low wages, contradicting a common view that poor people were responsible for their own situation. His study marks the beginning of a period in which research has a growing impact on the development of social policies. It is also highly influential in establishing a statistical and scientific approach to the measurement of poverty".

Secondly, it suggested that the existence and persistence of poverty could be explained in structural terms; that is, in terms of forces existing beyond the

Will the poor always be with us?
www.telegraph.co.uk: June 18, 2007

"The British appear to have resigned themselves to the fact that millions of their fellow citizens are mired in dependency. Even as unemployment falls, the numbers of those on benefits rise. But the United States ended its national welfare programme in 1996 and moved both funding and policy to state level. The numbers of Americans receiving welfare were reduced by 60 per cent - or three million people - and rather than tipping people into poverty, the new approach propelled them into work.

A similar transformation could be achieved in Britain by returning power to councils and communities...Frank Field, the former minister whose reports have laid bare the failings of New Labour's approach, urges that local benefit teams be given the freedom to use their expertise.

Would a new approach cut the numbers on welfare and help them back into jobs?
Or is poverty now so built into the system - and dependency into people's lives - that we are doomed to exist side by side with an underclass? Will the poor always be with us?"

reach and control of those in poverty whose operation was the root cause of such a condition. As the **Joseph Rowntree Foundation** (2004) note: "For Joseph Rowntree tackling poverty is not about simply giving money to solve the immediate problem, it is about dealing with the "underlying causes". In 1904, he writes "The Soup Kitchen in York never has difficulty in obtaining adequate financial aid, but an enquiry into the extent and causes of poverty would enlist little support".

Structural explanations for the existence and persistence of poverty, therefore, examine the way individual behavioural choices are limited (or extended) by structural factors in contemporary society. Whereas the kind of theories we've just considered (individual or cultural) share a couple of common themes (the behaviour of the poor is a social problem and the causes of poverty are found in the attitudes and lifestyles of the poor themselves), for this second set of theories the causes of poverty are located in areas such as the behaviour of governments and / or the wealthy and economic conditions and changes in society. In this respect, therefore, we can identify a range of **structural theories** of poverty, beginning with the idea of:

Labour Market Changes

Since the 2nd world war at least, our society - in common with many societies around the globe - has witnessed a relative **decline** in manufacturing industry, in terms of the number and type of products built and the number of people employed. One reason for this, as the following extract illustrates, is the relocation of some manufacturing industries from the UK to other countries (where production costs are much cheaper).

Dyson production moves to Malaysia
Source: **Gribben** (2003)

"Entrepreneur James Dyson was involved in a fresh row over exporting jobs yesterday after announcing he planned to switch production of washing machines to Malaysia with the loss of 65 jobs. The decision means the end of manufacturing for Dyson in Britain after last year's decision to move vacuum cleaner production to Malaysia, where production costs are 30% lower. The transfer resulted in the loss of 800 jobs".

Alongside this long-time decline, however, has been a rise in the numbers employed in *service industries* (such as banking and information technology at the well-paid end and call centres and sales at the low-paid end). We can note how such changes have impacted on poverty in a number of ways:

Unemployment: Although this concept, for a variety of reasons, is difficult to measure *reliably* (different governments, for example, use different indicators of unemployment), it's clear one consequence of changing labour markets over the past 25 years in Britain has been fluctuating levels of unemployment - something that's especially true among *manual workers* (one consequence of the loss of manufacturing jobs).

| Module Link | Research Methods |

Reliability and **validity** are two methodological concepts we can always apply to research methods - especially when secondary sources of data such as official statistics are being evaluated.

We need to note, however, unemployment and poverty - where they're related to the loss of such jobs - are:

Regional: In this respect, experience of poverty in the UK can be characterised as *fragmented*. Areas, such as the North of England and Scotland, with high levels of manufacturing (such as car assembly and ship-building) and extraction industries (such as coal-mining) have experienced higher levels of unemployment than areas with lower levels of manufacturing and higher levels of service industry, such as the South-East of England. **Bennett et al** (2000), for example, note how "Coalfield communities remain blighted by widespread unemployment, long-term sickness and poverty a decade after the collapse of the mining industry" and **Evans et al** (2002) have noted that although "Every neighbourhood in England has benefited from strong economic growth and falling unemployment since the mid-1990s", the rate of change has varied. This has led, they argue, to greater polarisation between the richest and poorest regions.

Income: Although levels of measured unemployment have fallen in recent years, a further consequence of labour market changes has been the replacement of relatively high-paid manufacturing work (especially semi and skilled manual jobs) with lower-paid, insecure, service sector work. As **Bennett et al** note "Companies have been able to hire people willing to work flexibly for low wages, often in non-unionised workplaces. The new jobs have often been part-time…Much of the work created has gone to women – creating tensions in communities where men have traditionally seen themselves as breadwinners".

Globalisation: A further structural development we can note is the insecurity of some service sector jobs (call centres being an obvious current example - as the following extract illustrates). The globalisation of telecommunications and computer technology, for example, has opened up opportunities for companies to employ cheaper labour, in countries such as India, to service customers in the UK.

Profits of loss
Source: **Denny**: *The Guardian*, 25/11/03

"South Africa and India are the new destinations of choice for British companies looking to cut costs. Call centres and IT processing, and even such high-skilled work as pharmaceutical research, are being "offshored". White-collar workers are discovering they are as vulnerable to competition from cheaper workers abroad as steelworkers and shipbuilders a generation ago. Unions fear the service sector is about to repeat the experience of manufacturing, which has lost 3.3m jobs since 1980".

Poverty and Capitalism

A second form of structural argument, related to the idea of labour market changes and the impact of economic globalisation, is the idea - largely associated with Marxist perspectives - that some form of poverty is:

Inevitable in Capitalist society. This follows because such societies are, by definition, unequal in terms of the distribution of wealth and income. In any economic system where competition is the norm, relative differences will always exist. The main question here, however, is how you define poverty. In absolute terms, for example, few people in our society could be considered poor; in relative terms, however, it's clear there are wide disparities between the richest and poorest sections of society.

More controversially perhaps, we could note the idea of poverty as a:

Necessary condition of capitalism - the idea that the existence of the poor (or relatively deprived if you prefer) is useful for a *ruling class* since they can be used as a *reserve army of labour* whose existence can be used to control wage levels and hence profitability. One aspect of this "necessary and inevitable" relationship between poverty and capitalism is the concept of:

Social Segregation: Structural theories of poverty have suggested the existence of *economically segregated* groups leads to *social segregation* and, in some instances, *physical segregation* - the existence, for example, of private *gated communities* that are a feature of some American cites and which are increasingly common in the UK. **Atkinson and Flint** (2004), for example, found "around 1000 such developments" which, they argue, relate to "patterns of interaction and separation which suggest an attempt to reduce fears of victimisation and promote privacy".

One downside of poverty (for a ruling class) is the fact the poor - as with other members of society - are *consumers*; if they can't afford to buy goods and services, profitability suffers. For many Marxists, therefore, the idea of a welfare system is significant, mainly because it provides some form of *safety net* for those at the bottom of society. This leads us to note a further aspect of structural approaches to poverty:

Structural Limits of Welfare

Although this idea has numerous dimensions, we can understand it by noting an example of the limitations of welfare systems in relation to poverty - namely, the idea of a:

Poverty Trap: In any *means-tested* welfare system (that is, one in which people receive different levels of benefits based on things like their income and savings), the problem of a poverty trap is always likely to exist. This is because, as someone's income rises (they move, for example, from unemployment into work or from part-time to full-time work) their welfare benefits are accordingly reduced.

For example, if for every extra £1 earned through employment, State benefits are similarly reduced, this creates a disincentive to work (if you're unemployed) or to take full-time work (if you're employed part-time). This is because, effectively, you're not being paid any extra money for the extra work you do. In an attempt to reduce this "disincentive to work", benefit reductions are increasingly staggered as earnings increase. However, according to **Department for Work and Pensions** figures (2004) over 2 million Britons are currently caught in a poverty trap.

One reason for this involves considering a slightly different example - a situation where an unemployed person with a family to support loses a range of benefit payments if they find employment. If the level of income they lose from the State isn't matched or exceeded by the income they can get from paid work, this individual (and their family) will, effectively, be worse-off than if they take paid employment.

Gated communities - where the wealthy live in glorious isolation from the poor (except for the servants and trades people who service the needs of the rich of course).

A final aspect of structural approaches to poverty we can note is the idea of the:

Feminisation of Poverty

According to the **Institute of Development Studies** (2001) "…there is little clarity about what the feminisation of poverty means". Notwithstanding this unpromising start, the concept generally relates to the idea the existence and persistence of poverty can be linked to female lives (as head of households) and experiences (of low-paid, part-time, work, for example). In this respect, the argument is that women experience:

• More poverty than men.
• Worse poverty than men.
• An increasing trend to greater poverty.

Ruspini (2000), for example, argues any structural analysis of poverty needs to take account of its:

Gendered nature: That is, the idea men and women - even of the same social class or ethnic grouping - experience poverty in different ways. For example, welfare and insurance systems reflect, according to **Glendinning and Millar** (1999) "…their different access to, and levels of, income replacement benefits".

Tried and Tested

(a) Identify two "social forces" associated with poverty (4 marks).

(b) Suggest **two** ways that governments may "contribute to poverty" (4 marks).

(c) Suggest **two** ways that governments may raise people out of poverty (4 marks).

(d) Examine the impact of structural factors on our understanding of the existence and persistence of poverty (24 marks).

(e) Assess the view that poverty is primarily a problem for women (24 marks).

Structural Perspectives: Explanations

Structural approaches, as we've indicated, focus on the way economic organisation and relationships create and sustain both wealth and poverty. In this respect, although such relationships have clear *cultural effects* (in terms of who is - and who isn't - likely to experience poverty), structural poverty theorists argue that to understand the existence and persistence of poverty it's necessary to understand its wider theoretical context; people fall into - or fail to get out of - poverty *not* because of their individual and social character deficiencies but because of way society is structured against them.

Poverty, from this perspective, forces people to behave in certain ways. Thus, although **Lewis** originally argued cultures adapt to social and economic conditions and, in the process, develop and perpetuate self-defeating strategies, structural theorists argue these strategies are not necessarily chosen from a wide range of possibilities; rather, they are "chosen" because they the only

Norman had considered every possible type of risk except for the risk of avoiding risks...

ones available to the poor. Rather than *blaming the victims* of poverty for their poverty, therefore, structural approaches seek to understand how and why there are victims in the first place. Given this observation, we can dig a little deeper into structural approaches by thinking, in the first instance, about poverty as:

Risk: This approach starts by taking note of the structural factors in any society relating to poverty. For example, we've already noted a selection of these in terms of things like: the nature of the economic system; regional differences relating to different types of labour market (and how changes in labour markets result in differences in employment and unemployment) and the impact of globalisation on national and international markets. In addition, we've noted how the risk of poverty may be associated with cultural factors such as gender and ethnicity.

Once these structural factors have been theorised, poverty can then be generally *mapped* in terms of our ability to identify different social groups who are at greater risk of poverty than others. This concept of *risk-mapping* moves us away from the simple cultural identification of "at risk" groups - characteristic of individual approaches to explaining poverty - for a couple of reasons:

1. Structural conditions: Different structural conditions create greater or lesser risks of poverty (which, as ever, will always depend on how poverty is defined).

2. Poverty conditions: We've noted a central problem with individualistic / cultural theories of poverty is the fact those considered to be "in poverty" at any given moment do not necessarily remain in poverty all their lives. On the contrary, the *cyclic nature of poverty* frequently means people (or whole groups) move into and out of poverty at different points in their *life cycle*. This suggests, therefore, that although the identity of "the poor" may change - in terms of specific individuals - the condition of poverty itself remains; it simply involves different people at different times.

We can understand this idea by thinking about **Berthoud's** (1998) observation that "Pakistani and Bangladeshi families in Britain are almost four times as likely to be living on low incomes as white households". **Berthoud** identifies four major "risk factors" for these groups:

- High male unemployment.
- Low levels of female economic activity.
- Low pay.
- Large family size.

The point to note, here, is *not* that poverty is explained in terms of the specific cultural characteristics of these minorities; rather, it's that *any* group sharing these characteristics is likely to risk falling into poverty.

Similarly, **Bardasi and Jenkins** (2002) found the "risks of old-age poverty for those retiring early are strongly linked to occupation". Managerial and professional workers, as you might expect, have a reduced risk of poverty - but so do manual workers. Clerical or sales occupations, craft and service workers (police officers

and waiters, for example) on the other hand "may be especially vulnerable if they stop work early".

Although the general concept of *risk* can contribute to our understanding of poverty, attempts have been made to refine this idea in order to relate it specifically to structural factors. We can look at an example of this in terms of:

Memberships Theory

Durlauf (2002), argues this type of theory can be used to examine how poverty is related to the way "various socioeconomic groupings affect individuals" and their behavioural choices, in terms of two different types of group:

• **Exogenous** group membership would include things like gender and ethnicity. In a sense, we can think of membership of these groups largely in terms of *ascribed* characteristics; for example, as we have seen with ideas like the feminisation of poverty or the relationship between ethnicity and poverty risk, individual life chances can be generally related to membership of such groups.

• **Endogenous** group membership, on the other hand, relates to the specific social and economic circumstances of the individual - **Durlauf**, for example, points to areas such as residential neighbourhoods, school and work relationships as being significant factors in the poverty / non-poverty equation.

In this respect, *memberships theory* examines the interplay *between* structural factors, in terms of how, for example:

• **Economic segregation**, through unemployment and low pay, for example, leads to:

• **Social segregation**, in terms of the idea the poor and non-poor lead different types of life, have different cultural lifestyles and so forth, which, in turn leads to:

• **Physical segregation**, in terms of rich and poor living in different areas, the development of private, gated, communities and the like.

We can summarise these ideas in the following terms:

Structural factors determine the general extent of poverty / deprivation in any given society. In the UK, for example, general living standards are different to some parts of Africa and South America. In turn, these factors influence the:

Behavioural choices of the rich and the non-poor, in terms of their general cultural characteristics (such as their lifestyles) which, in turn, place:

Cultural limitations on the *behavioural choices* of the poor, effectively trapping them in poverty through their own group memberships and *apparent* behavioural choices. For example, schools in poor neighbourhoods may have lower status and funding, which perpetuates lower educational achievement and contributes to a "cultural poverty trap" that sits alongside the kinds of possible economic poverty traps we've outlined above.

In short, therefore, this theory argues structural factors *determine* the development of membership groups that, in turn, *perpetuates* the risk of poverty.

Tried and Tested

(a) Identify and explain two types of risk related to poverty (4 marks).

(b) Suggest **two** ways that exogenous group membership may contribute to poverty (4 marks).

(c) Identify and explain **two** ways risk can be related to *either* ethnicity *or* gender (4 marks).

(d) Examine the structural factors in contemporary society that contribute to wealth and poverty (24 marks).

(e) Assess the argument that poverty is the result of individual choices (24 marks).

Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous...

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Responses to Poverty: Introduction

This Section looks at different responses to poverty, with particular reference to the role of social policy since the 2nd world war and we can combine the organisational structure of the previous two sections as a way of providing a general continuity to our exploration and understanding of poverty. This section, therefore, is generally organised around the two basic approaches to poverty outlined in the previous section (**individual and structural approaches**). Within each general category we can locate the various perspectives on poverty we encountered when examining explanations for the distribution of poverty (which, to refresh your memory, were: **New Right**, **Social Democratic**, **Marxist** and **Feminist** perspectives).

We can begin this section by looking firstly (for no particular reason) at possible **cultural responses** to poverty which, for our purposes, involve examining **New Right** and **Social democratic** perspectives in contemporary UK society.

New Right Responses: Observations

From this perspective, "solutions to the problem of poverty" are constructed around three general areas:

Economic liberalism: For the New Right, the crucial variable in any fight against poverty is the creation of wealth and, from this perspective, economic inequality is the means towards securing the best possible standard of living for the largest number of people. Although *inequality* may, at first sight, seem an unlikely means towards securing this general aim, we need to remember New Right perspectives generally subscribe to an absolute definition of poverty.

Thus, although there will always (necessarily) be inequality, how poverty is defined is crucial to its solution.

A simple way to illustrate this idea is to think in terms of the total amount of wealth in a society as being like a pie (an *economic pie*, if you will - bear with us, it does eventually make sense).

The Economic Pie

In the first illustration imagine the share of total wealth (including, for the sake of argument, income) owned by the poorest 50% of the population is represented by the missing slice. In this instance, let's further imagine the poor do not have a large enough share of total wealth to keep them out of absolute poverty.
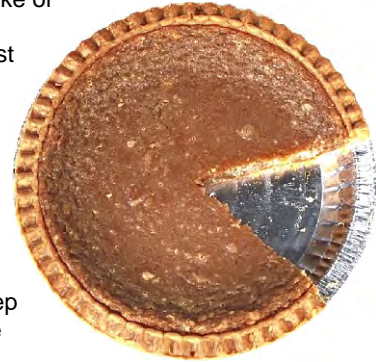
In the second illustration, the pie has increased in size and, although the *relative shares* are the same (assuming, once again, the missing slice is the share of wealth owned by the poorest 50% of the population), those at the bottom of society now have enough wealth to keep them out of absolute poverty.
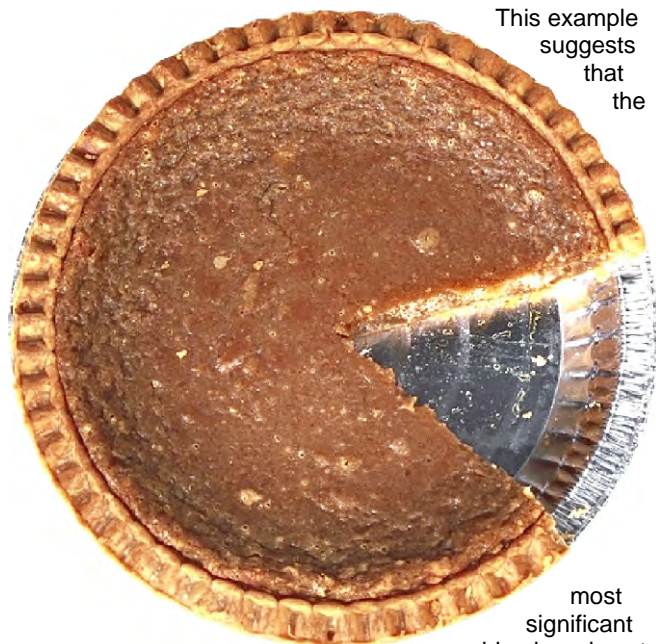
This example suggests that the

most significant idea here is not "who owns what amount" of the total wealth in any society, nor their relative share of total wealth. Rather, what is important, from this general perspective, is the idea that the greater the amount of wealth created and

owned by a society the wealthier will be its individual members. We can, in passing, note a number of ideas related to the general principle of economic liberalism:

Wealth creation: Given the key to solving poverty is to create wealth, individuals must be allowed free reign (within certain limits defined by fair competition) to make money. This, as you might expect, involves competition within the economic market-place.
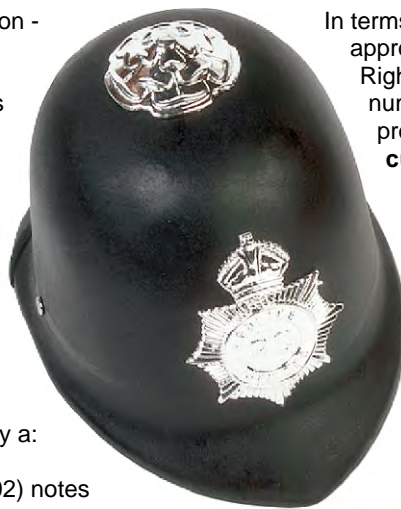
Legal safeguards: For wealth creation to occur successfully, certain preconditions need to be in place. These, for example, relate to things like how wealth may be legally acquired and kept (privately, since you ask). The role of government is seen to be that of enforcing rules of fair competition, safeguarding the rights of property-owners and the like. Any society that allows unproductive individuals (or criminals as they're sometimes known) to steal from wealth producers is effectively creating a huge disincentive to wealth creation - an idea that leads into:

Low taxation: The activities of criminals are not the only disincentive to wealth creation; the more a government takes from people in taxation, the greater is the disincentive to create wealth. For the New Right, no personal taxation would be the ideal, but some form of taxation is required to maintain the second general idea, namely a:

Minimal State: **Sowell** (2002) notes how the New Right sees the main role of government as ensuring the

Although New Right perspectives argue for a "Minimal Sate" one important role of government is to uphold the law to allow economic activity to flourish.

operation of free economic markets, in terms of setting and maintaining basic "rules of social order" (as we've noted, free markets are only seen to operate efficiently and successfully under conditions of personal security). The State, however, does *not* have a role to play in providing:

Welfare systems for the poor. This is because welfare is seen to; shield people from the consequences of their behaviour (an inability to compete in the market place because they've failed to gain the qualifications they need, for example); distort the workings of markets by providing a safety net for failure (the New Right, as I hope you've discovered, don't mince their words in this respect); create disincentives for those in work because a proportion of their income goes to support those who exist within a *dependency culture* (namely, the underclass).

Poverty and Social Policy

In terms of the above, New Right responses to poverty are based around two major policy areas:

Free-markets: Business should be privately owned and subject only to very light regulation by the State (minimum wage levels, for example, shouldn't be set by law). Private businesses represent the means to "expand the wealth of the nation", thereby ensuring everyone is kept out of absolute poverty.

Anti-Welfarism: The existence of welfare systems is seen as part of the "problem of poverty" and part of any solution must be to remove the poor from dependence on the State by eliminating all forms of State-sponsored welfare.

In terms of social policy, therefore, the **Market Liberal** approach outlined above - characteristic of New Right writers such as **Marsland** (1996) - involves a number of specific ideas for resolving the twin problems of an **underclass** and a **dependency culture**:

Universal welfare provision is *harmful* to society because it limits personal freedom of choice and responsibility. It should be abolished because it fails to help those who most need help (which reflects the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor we noted in a previous section).

Private insurance systems should be encouraged to allow individuals to choose their personal levels of insurance. This encourages personal and family responsibility.

Family groups (by which is generally meant dual-parent, heterosexual families) should be encouraged and aided by the State since it is this group, governed

For the New Right "private" is always best - whether it be private hospitals, private schools, private insurance or indeed private prisons (this looks very welcoming, actually).

by ideas of love, trust and affection, that forms the cornerstone of personal and social responsibility. In other words, where people require help they should look first to their family, not the State.

Charitable and Voluntary groups should be encouraged to support and supplement the basic welfare provision provided within the family.

Module Link　　　Families and Households

For the New Right certain types of family **structure** (single-parent...) and **relationship** (unmarried / cohabiting) are considered to be less desirable than others. The State should not encourage "socially divisive / destructive" relationships through the welfare system.

Alcock (2006) summarises the general New Right view in terms of the following ideas:

The role of government (the State) is not to become involved in the provision of welfare (since government intervention is considered to make social problems worse by interfering in the workings of "free economic markets"). Rather, welfare provision is a matter for individuals and families who make rational choices about their behaviour – to have children, when to have them, how many to have and the like.

Dependency cultures develop once rational individuals come to understand that "the State" will both provide and save them from the consequences of their choices; a woman, for example, who chooses to have a child outside marriage will receive State help and economic support – something, the New Right argue, that becomes an important element in such a decision.

Removing state support is seen, ultimately, as the means to remove poverty (by which they mean absolute poverty); in an affluent society like the contemporary UK there is sufficient work paid at a sufficient level to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to have a decent lifestyle.

New Right Responses: Explanations

When thinking about New Right explanations for - and responses to - poverty, they assume "the poor" are a *socially homogeneous*, relatively stable and easily identifiable group. Although the evidence for this is, at best, inconclusive, the general uncertainty around this idea is magnified when we consider:

Underclass Theories

There are a range of problems we can note with this general theory, the first of which is the is the major one of:

Definition: As **Jencks** (1989) notes, underclass theory "…focuses attention on the basement of the…social system (those who are 'under' the rest of us), without specifying what the inhabitants of this dark region have in common". He notes, for example, "a dozen different definitions" of the underclass, each one providing a different estimate of its composition, size and social significance. **Buckingham** (1996), for example, wants to define the underclass in terms of "…dependency on the state", a general category that includes those in receipt of State benefits and council house tenants. Writers such as **Murray** (1999) are more specific when they include single mothers, the long-term unemployed, various types of petty (and not-so-petty criminal) and so forth. A casual sweep through the British popular Press revels a long list of potential - if not necessarily actual - members of the underclass: Joy riders, ram raiders (remember them?), meth's drinkers, single mothers, the unemployed, the long-term unemployed, black youths, benefit claimants, "Chav's" and hunt saboteurs to name but a few.

The following article by **Phillips** (2007) probably ticks just about every box in the (populist) New Right position in a way that sums-up their general ideas and arguments about the relationship between "welfare" and "poverty".

Jobless couple with 12 children are given a £500,000 home
Source: **Newling and Bates** (2007)

It's the type of highly-desirable family home that is well beyond the reach of many middle-class professionals. A detached period house, with eight bedrooms, a garden, its own driveway and all set in a leafy residential area of well-to-do Newbury, Berkshire.

But Carl and Samantha Gillespie - together with their 12 children - have been able to move in without paying the slightest heed to Britain's sky-rocketing house prices. In fact the couple have been given the keys without lifting a finger in work. They receive the equivalent of £44,000 a year in benefits, a figure made up of £1,500 a month housing benefit; £1,200 a month child tax credit; £560 a month child benefits; £280 job seeker's allowance and £1,600 a year in council tax.

When asked why they don't work, the couple say that looking after their children is a full time job. And they claim they would earn less working than they do claiming the dole. Mr. Gillespie has revealed that he quit a job stacking shelves at Asda before he had even started, when he realised the £300 a week he would earn would result in a £400 benefits cut. Mr. Gillespie, 34, said: "We're not scroungers and if it was economical for me to work then I would do".

How welfarism is destroying Britain!
Source: **Phillips** (2007)

It is the welfare state which, more than anything else, has created the culture of incivility, irresponsibility, family breakdown and disorder… The direct link between welfarism and the 'me-society', between welfare rights and the erosion of the ties of duty that should bind us together, is unmistakable.

…[Charles] Murray…erupted onto the public scene back in the Nineties with his explosive theory that welfare…had caused widespread fecklessness, dishonesty and, above all, illegitimacy, creating through a **dependency culture** an **underclass** of people whose uncivilised behaviour was so extreme they had become detached altogether from normal society. A lot of people were put off not only by the uncompromising tone of his language, but by his radical proposals, which were widely interpreted as allowing the feckless poor to starve.

Many more Britons are hooked on the **dependency culture** as benefits were renamed tax credits and applied ever higher up the income scale. Yet since Labour came to power, it has spent a staggering £60 billion on 'welfare reform'. The vast **welfare bureaucracy** enables the Government to intrude ever more into people's lives, particularly in the areas of family life and child-rearing. And through providing financial incentives for lone parenthood while penalising couples, it has positively encouraged family disintegration, the single most important factor behind our culture of selfishness and disorder.

The crucial point was that welfarism detached behaviour from its consequences. It held that material need must be met, regardless of behaviour. It did this to avoid making the distinction between the **deserving** and **undeserving poor** that was associated with Victorian callousness towards the poverty stricken. But this in turn created a destructive Catch 22.

By meeting need regardless of how people behaved, it provided **incentives** for the kind of behaviour which only created even more dire need. Take family life. The Government says welfare must meet the needs of children whatever kind of household they live in. This is the principle behind child benefit, surely the most effective engine for the mass production of fatherlessness - and consequently child misery - that could ever have been devised. If a young girl has a baby without a father on board, the state says it must be 'non-judgmental' about her behaviour and focus instead entirely on provision for the child. So the young lone mother gets a range of welfare benefits and a council flat. But those benefits, which enable such girls to live what appears to them to be an independent life, provide an **incentive** to get pregnant - and to do so over and over again.

Lister (1996) suggests the problem of definition is largely resolved by those who advocate the existence of an underclass, through thinking in *moral*, rather than material, terms. The underclass, in this respect, includes any group who are considered, for whatever reason, "morally undesirable". As **Jencks** (1989) notes "The term underclass, with its echoes of the underworld, conjures up sin, or at least unorthodox behaviour. Low income may be a necessary condition for membership in such a class, but it is not sufficient".

This lack of definitional precision - let alone concrete evidence of its existence - has led to the suggestion the underclass is:

Mythical - both in the sense of the term being used to *stigmatise* the behaviour of the poor and in the sense it's used by writers such as **Moore** (2001b) when he observes: "The underclass is invisible because it doesn't exist…" (at least, not in the way writers such as **Murray** have used the term). **Spicker** (2002) also argues underclass theories are both too vague and, not to put too fine a point on it, *wrong*: "Poverty" he argues, "is a risk which affects everyone not just an excluded minority". Finally, therefore, in terms of:

Evidence for underclass theories, **Buck** (1992) argues the *economic evidence* for an underclass in Britain is actually very thin. In particular, he notes unemployment

varies with economic cycles, which means people may experience periods of semi-regular employment / unemployment, but *not* the permanent unemployment predicted by underclass theories. **Buck** characterises people who experience this type of employment pattern as: "Unstable members of the working class, not stable members of an underclass".

Similarly, **Heath** (1992) found little or no evidence of a permanently excluded group of people who could constitute an underclass. Among the supposed "underclass", he found such people were actually *more likely* to want work, less fussy about the types of jobs they took and no less active in the political process than other groups.

Module Link   **Research Methods**
Our ability to define an "underclass" **reliably** and **validly** is an important component of our ability to initially test whether such a class actually exists (outside the imaginings of writers such as **Murray** and **Phillips**).

Dependency

A major problem with underclass theory - apart from the *elasticity* of its definition (it includes, at various times, whichever social group is out-of-favour with the media) - is a failure to establish "socially excluded groups" are *detached* from the beliefs and values of mainstream society (whatever, in practice, these may actually be). The available evidence - drawn from both the behaviour of the poor and studies of the beliefs and values of those in poverty - suggests this is simply not the case. Although those in poverty are, to some extent,

The concept of "Chav" has recently been used in the mass media as a form of shorthand for "the underclass".

The year of the Chav
Source: **Daily Mail**: 22/10/04

Chav was a word coined to describe the spread of the ill-mannered underclass which loves shellsuits, bling-bling jewellery and designer wear, especially the ubiquitous Burberry baseball cap. Queens of Chav include glamour model Jordan while its king is rock star Liam Gallagher and its prince the footballer Wayne Rooney.

Chav is just one of the many new classist labels which have exploded this year. The word is almost certainly from the old Romany word for a child, chavi. But it was reborn last year to describe certain natives of Chatham in Kent. The concept has been popularised by several websites, one of which bills itself as a guide to "Britain's burgeoning peasant underclass".

economically detached (that is, they are poorer than other sections of society) there is little or no evidence for a persistent and wilful *cultural detachment* supposedly characteristic of an underclass. This observation, as you might expect, leads us to cast doubt on a further feature of underclass theory, namely the concept of a:

Dependency culture: This idea is based on the assertion that those living on welfare payments come to both depend on the State for their livelihood and, in the majority of cases, actually enjoy a decent lifestyle that effectively involves little or not work (both literally and metaphorically) to maintain.

A few points are worth noting here, relating to:

Evidence: **Dean and Taylor-Gooby** (1992) found no evidence of a dependency culture among welfare claimants. What they did find was a desire to work, frustrated by problems in finding it and the low levels of wages on offer. Rather than a dependency culture they found evidence of a *poverty trap*.

Heterogeneity: Surprising as it may seem, **Dean and Taylor-Gooby** also found claimants to be a very *mixed* group of people, living in very different situations and circumstances. Their *diversity* extended to the fact a proportion of the claimants they questioned had punitive attitudes towards claimants in general.

Widdecombe wages war on the 'liberal tyranny ruining Britain'
Source: **Sands** (2007)

During her recent ITV programme, Ann Widdecombe Versus The Benefit Culture, the country's most successful benefit scrounger, Mick Philpott - 18 children by five women, £38,000 a year in benefits - called Widdecombe a "bitch" and a "battleaxe" while he swaggered about his own virility. "Ignorance!" sniffs Widdecombe. On the other hand, the people she refuses to excuse for this dependency culture are the educated middle classes who have allowed the social conditions in which those like Mick Philpott thrive.

Meaning: The concept of a dependency culture is an example of the way ideas can mean different things in different contexts. For example, we could characterise *all* social life as involving some form of culture of dependency since any society requires its members to form *dependent relationships* (over such things as care for the sick, the old and the very young). We wouldn't, for example, think about characterising (and implicitly *stigmatising*) young children in terms of a culture of dependency surrounding their care and nurture.

Le Grand and Winter (1987) have also noted how *all* social classes, to greater or lesser extents, are involved in some form of dependency culture. A range of *tax credits* and *benefits* are enjoyed by the very *rich*, for example, and the "middle class welfare state" effectively provides cheap health care and education for those who, in reality, need it the least.

Independence: From a Feminist perspective, **McIntosh** (1998) has argued the benefit system is "**…**an exercise in control, in which workers and claimants are powerless and trapped. And yet surveys have shown most claimants would rather be in employment… In the myth of dependency culture, some forms of dependence - wage labour, family relationships, investments, rents and pensions - are seen as normal and legitimate, so much so that they are counted as independence. Receiving state welfare, however, is delegitimized by classing it as `welfare dependency'".

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain the term "minimal state" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest **two** ways that, according to the New Right, "welfare is harmful" to society (4 marks).

(c) Suggest **three** reasons for the existence of an underclass (6 marks).

(d) Examine the arguments for and against the existence of an underclass (24 marks).

(e) Assess the view that solutions to the problem of poverty should focus on the removal of a "dependency culture" (24 marks).

Social Democratic Responses: Observations

From this perspective, responses to the problem of poverty are constructed around two general areas:

Economic regulation: Although social democratic societies are essentially Capitalist in their economic outlook (in Britain, for example, people are encouraged to accumulate and keep wealth in private hands), the role of government is theorised rather differently to the way it's theorised by New Right perspectives. For example, in Britain since the 2nd world war we've experienced an economy that has mixed both privately-owned companies and industries with State-owned and controlled industries (such as coal-mining, telephones and telecommunications, transport and so forth). Having said this, during the 1980's, the **Thatcher** Conservative government introduced a policy of:

Privatisation that saw most State-owned companies and industries being sold to private shareholders (the supply of gas and telephone services, for example, were sold in this way). The State still has some direct ownership and control (the Post Office, for example), but by-and-large it's general economic role is now one of:

Regulation: That is, rather than playing a *direct* ownership role, governments "set the rules" for economic behaviour, in a variety of ways; through the taxation of individuals and companies, the setting of things such as a minimum wage, the creation and policing of Health and Safety regulations and so forth.

The Welfare State

Although we will examine the concept of a welfare state (and the role of *voluntary* and *informal groups*) in more detail in the final section of this chapter, social democratic perspectives, unlike their New Right counterparts, generally see an important role for government in the provision of welfare services for their citizens, for a number of reasons and in a number of ways:

1. Economic: Social democratic thinking in this respect extends into two main areas.

Firstly, some groups in society (such as the elderly, the sick and the differently-abled) are unable to compete for jobs and, consequently, find themselves at risk of poverty. For such people, a State-sponsored welfare system represents a safety net to prevent them falling into absolute poverty.

Secondly, economic and political changes (the influence of *globalisation*, for example) frequently result in some groups (as the coal mining example suggests) no longer having the skills, training and qualifications needed in the workplace. Where such people become unemployed, the welfare system provides for a period of readjustment (where they retrain, develop required skills and qualifications or simply find work in a different area of the economy).

"Sad day for Selby as pit closes early"
Source: **Hazan** (2002)

"Coal miners were in shock today at…the closure of the country's biggest colliery complex. Selby miners are relatively young, with an average age of 45, and less likely to retire from the labour market following their dismissal. Most miners have worked in the mines, a well-paid manual job, since they left school. It will be very difficult for them to find alternative sources of work.

The Selby Task Force…with representatives from the Selby District Council, UK Coal and Yorkshire Forward, must now consider the retraining of the thousands of men and their reintroduction into the economy. UK Coal and the government's £43 million redundancy package is expected to payout an average of £27,000 per miner".

Again, State support for such people is seen as easing the strains of economic adjustments.

2. Political: If large numbers of the poor, living in conditions of destitution, exist in society with little or no means to support themselves (either through work or welfare) this becomes a *political problem* for governments - not least because such people are likely to turn to *illegal* means of money-making (crime, prostitution, drug-dealing and so forth). A welfare system, by alleviating the worst effects of poverty, not only has general *economic benefits* for society (allowing people to retrain, for example), it also has general *political benefits* in terms of preventing social unrest, the spread of disease and the like. However, a further political consideration is the:

Moral dimension to welfare. This has a couple of important aspects. Firstly, in a wealthy society such as our own, is it morally right for some people to exist in conditions of poverty while others have far more money than they need? Secondly, welfare systems represent an expression of *social solidarity*; that is, they recognise the bonds that exist between people and reflect the idea society is not simply a "collection of individuals living in families" (as some on the New Right like to suggest) but rather, a *social collective* in which those who are rich and successful, for example, give something back to society by helping to support those who exist in - and on the margins of - poverty.

The above describes a relatively *traditional* view of social democratic thinking, reflected perhaps in the post-war development of the *Welfare State*. Recent thinking, however, has turned towards the idea poverty doesn't simply have an economic dimension (not having enough money…), it also has dimensions related to participation / non-participation in social life - which is where ideas about social inclusion and exclusion come into the picture.

The **"Third Way"** expresses the idea of a different role for the State - one that rejects both the *market individualism* of the New Right and the traditional "Welfarism" of successive post-war governments in the UK (the idea, for example, all the poor require is money

in the form of government benefits to keep them out of poverty). The *Third Way*, therefore, focuses on the idea of an:

Enabling State, by which is meant the role of government is one that encourages people - through a variety of social policies - to play as full and active part in society as possible. By effectively redefining poverty (as "*exclusion*") the role of various agencies - informal, voluntary, private and governmental - becomes that of preventing poverty by *intervening* at different points to break the cycle / chain of events that both cause poverty and prevent people escaping its clutches. These social policy interventions are currently coordinated in the UK through the *Social Exclusion Unit* (a government department linked to various welfare agencies) and include a range of policies designed to promote social inclusion in a number of areas:

Policy Areas

Children and Young People: Policies here reflect concerns about the level of teenage pregnancy (something that links into a desire to prevent some forms of single-parent family developing), how to prevent disaffection, truancy and exclusion from school and the involvement of young people in criminal behaviour.

Specific policies in this area include action to prevent criminals re-offending, problems associated with children in care caused by parental imprisonment and the like. In addition, schemes to promote youth involvement in sport and the arts are also promoted as
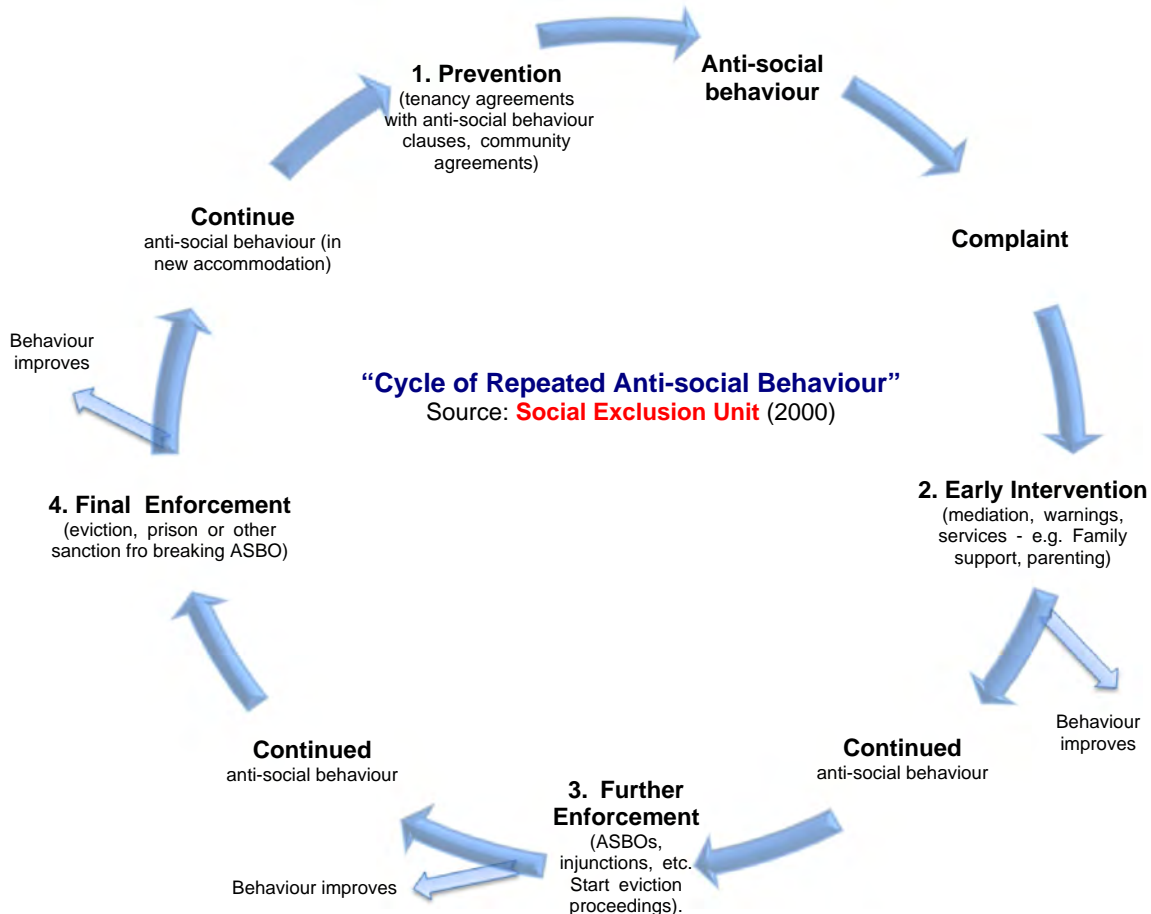
a way of "lowering long-term unemployment" through community involvement as well as "helping to develop the individual pride and capacity for responsibility that enable communities to run regeneration programmes themselves".

Crime: A range of polices have been developed to prevent adult re-offending and to punish "anti-social behaviour" - *Anti-social Behaviour Orders* (ASBOs), for example, can be issued against juveniles to control their behaviour (the punishment for breaking such an order can be imprisonment). Parenting orders have also been developed to make parents responsible (and punishable) for the behaviour of their children.

These policies are based on the concept of a "**Cycle of Repeated Anti-social Behaviour**" which, the more alert amongst you will notice, has a strong similarity to *cycle of deprivation* theory.

Employment policies are seen as the key to resolving problems of social exclusion, since unemployment is seen to lie at its heart - those who are *economically excluded* are, proportionately, more likely to suffer *social exclusion*. A range of employment-related polices (from offering advice about returning to work - as well as tax credits for childcare - to single parents, to a range of training schemes) are employed (pun intended) in this respect.

Policy in this area also involves regional regeneration initiatives (encouraging employers to relocate to areas of high unemployment, for example) as well as advice on debt management for the short-term unemployed.

1. Prevention
(tenancy agreements with anti-social behaviour clauses, community agreements)

Anti-social behaviour

Continue
anti-social behaviour (in new accommodation)

Complaint

Behaviour improves

"Cycle of Repeated Anti-social Behaviour"
Source: **Social Exclusion Unit** (2000)

4. Final Enforcement
(eviction, prison or other sanction fro breaking ASBO)

2. Early Intervention
(mediation, warnings, services - e.g. Family support, parenting)

Behaviour improves

Continued
anti-social behaviour

Continued
anti-social behaviour

3. Further Enforcement
(ASBOs, injunctions, etc. Start eviction proceedings).

Behaviour improves

Education: Qualifications, training and skills - especially those relating to new technologies (computing and information services, for example) are considered a further way to prevent social exclusion by equipping people with the skills needed for work (the connection is frequently made by social democratic writers between low educational achievement, low-paid work or unemployment and social exclusion). The introduction of *Educational Maintenance Allowances* across the UK in 2004, for example, pays post-16 students up to £30 a week if they stay in full-time education.

Neighbourhood regeneration: Part of the overall solution to poverty involves developing neighbourhood-based communities, which in turn involves policies to regenerate depressed neighbourhoods and create "*sustainable communities*". This is to be achieved, according to the *Social Exclusion Unit*, by: "Providing homes for key workers, regenerating towns and cities, providing parks for families and children. Above all it is about helping people to live…with pride in their community".

Social Democratic Responses: Explanations

As we've suggested, the concept of poverty has been widened in recent years to encompass a broad range of ideas - from social inclusion and exclusion to cycles of deprivation - that suggest "poverty" is something more than the simple lack of money. Whether or not this is actually the case is a debateable point - and whether the *Third Way* idea of "tackling social exclusion" is the same as offering a solution to poverty is also something that's up for discussion. However, we can dig a little deeper into social democratic solutions by questioning two of its basic principles, namely: does social exclusion actually exist and how valid is the concept of a cycle of deprivation? We can start, therefore, by looking at:

Social Exclusion

Many of the problems we've noted with the concepts of an **underclass** and c**ulture of dependency** apply to this idea, so I don't propose to rake over this ground. However, it's worth noting the following:

Measurement: Since social exclusion can't be directly observed, we have to use *indicators* of exclusion in order to measure it. The problem, however, is a lack of consensus about which indicators to use. **Le Grand et al** (1999), for example, used five indicators of social exclusion:

> • Active engagement in consumption.
> • Savings.
> • Productive paid work.
> • Political attachment / involvement.
> • Social interaction.

They found "Less than 1% had been excluded on all five dimensions for at least five years". However, when considering exclusion in terms of:

Life Chances - both *positive* (earning a living wage, enjoying good health and so forth) and *negative* (the chances of being unemployed, going to prison and the like) - **Howarth et al** (1998), used "*Forty-six indicators* to show the numbers of people facing difficulties at various points in their lives". The indicators were grouped in terms of life stages (children, the elderly and so forth) to reflect "…the importance of multiple disadvantage to individuals".

Cycle of Deprivation

In recent years at least, this theory has taken on an almost *axiomatic status* (the notion that something is self-evidently true) but **Townsend** (1974) has termed this idea a "confused thesis", in terms of:

Continuity: For **Walker** (1996) "The central idea was poverty persists because social problems reproduce themselves from one generation to the next". He notes, however, a massive UK research programme in the 1970's into a possible cycle of deprivation found "…no simple continuity of social problems between generations". In addition, the evidence suggests no simple:

Patterns of disadvantage between generations. **Rutter and Madge** (1976) found "at least half" of children born into a disadvantaged home didn't display the same levels of deprivation once they reached adulthood - which suggests poverty is not necessarily generational but that forms of disadvantage develop anew with each generation.

In addition, **Brown and Madge** (1982) found no "inevitable continuity of deprivation" in relation to poverty and the poor.

> **Module Link**　　　　　　　**Research Methods**
>
> "**Dependency culture**" is an idea that has gradually passed into the popular (commonsense) consciousness through constant repetition in the media, such that it is increasingly rare to see discussion of the relationship between poverty and the welfare state without the idea of a "dependency culture" being prominently featured as if its existence had been reliably proven rather than simply asserted (as "something everyone knows"). This concept is a good example of the way in which sociological research can shed light on ideas that are often "taken for granted".

Cumulative effects: The basic logic of cycle of deprivation theories is also questionable since, if they exist, effects would have to be cumulative - we would expect, even over a couple of generations, to see an expansion of poverty (think in terms of one set of parents producing 3 children who, in turn produce 3 children…). This simply hasn't happened - which either suggests government interventions to *break* the cycle of deprivation have been successful or, as both the figures for those in poverty and the available research suggests, such a cycle does not actually exist in any significant form.

production (Capitalists) and those who do not. This relationship is fundamentally unequal not simply because owners are able to make profits - by effectively charging more for goods and services than they cost to produce (a production process involving things like wages, raw materials, machine costs and so forth), but because these profits are kept in private hands, rather than being owned by those make the goods and provide the services - the working class.

Welfarism: State-sponsored welfare is seen as an attempt to limit the worst excesses of social and economic inequality by giving those at the bottom of society "just enough" to keep them from destitution. Welfare, from this perspective, operates on both an economic level (payments to people who have been ignored or discarded by employers) and a political level - to prevent social unrest and upheaval.

As **Sloan** (2003) puts it: "The raw effects of capitalist relations in class society have been softened to some extent by the effectiveness of…state welfare systems…as 'safety nets' to ensure the basic health and housing of the unemployed…and the unemployable, particularly when the capitalist economic system is undergoing one of its occasional recessions or depressions". Welfare, therefore, is another form of:

Social Control, in a couple of ways. Firstly, it's a means of "buying-off" discontent with a Capitalist system that condemns large numbers of people to poverty and, secondly, it allows the behaviour of the poor to be policed by the State in the form of social workers ("*soft policing*", as it's sometimes called).

Having examined individual / cultural examples of solutions to poverty, we can move-on to explore a couple of:

Structural responses that, for our purposes, involve examining **Marxist** and **Feminist** perspectives.

Marxist Responses: Observations

For Marxists there is not so much a "problem of poverty" in our society as, to paraphrase R.H.**Tawney** (1931) "**a problem of wealth**"; that is, they view the unequal distribution of wealth as a prime reason for the existence of poverty - whether you define it in absolute or relative terms. In this respect, Marxist analyses of "the problem" focus on:

Economic inequality: Capitalist societies are, by definition, unequal societies and the inequality that lies at the heart of this economic system is, as we've just noted, the *primary cause* of poverty. As we've seen in earlier sections, even in a society as wealthy as the UK, massive inequalities of income and wealth exist - such that a relatively small number of the very wealthy live in great comfort and luxury while those at the other end of the class scale exist on relatively little.

Economic inequality, for Marxists, is rooted in the relationship between Capital, on the one hand, and Labour on the other - or, to put this another way, the relationship between those who own the means of

Marxist Responses: Explanations

In general terms, the solution to poverty is the replacement of a Capitalist economic system by:

Communism - a political and economic system in which the private ownership of property is abolished; everything is held "in common" (owned "by everyone"). The organisation of the workplace along Communist principles effectively removes the relationships (owner-worker, employer - employee) that create economic and social inequality. In other words, Marxists see Capitalist societies as *incapable of reform* (in terms of either reducing levels of inequality or solving problems of poverty). On the contrary, inequality is built into the economic system and poverty has its social and economic uses for a ruling class

Is poverty a problem caused by the wealthy?

(providing, as we've noted, a *reserve army of labour*, for example).

Given the above, it makes it difficult to link Marxist perspectives to any particular social policies related to poverty - save, of the course, the most ambitious policy of all - the replacement of one form of society (Capitalism) with another (Communism). Until this should ever happen (and admittedly it's not looking too likely at the moment…) we can note a range of ideas associated with Marxist responses that look to both expose the ideological nature of "poverty discourses"; in other words, they seek to demonstrate how the existence of poverty is built into the social structure of Capitalist society such that "perpetuating poverty" is actually in the general interests of a ruling class. In this respect, therefore, we can note a number of "beneficial dimensions to poverty" for a ruling class:

| **Economic** | **Mulvihill and Swaminatha** (2006) argue that poverty serves a range of functions that ultimately benefit |

the "affluent"; these include, for example, "the performance of menial and undesirable jobs" that need to be performed if the economy is to continue to function.

Welfare programs effectively subsidise low-wage economies and are used by a ruling class to ensure that "essential, but menial" services continue to be provided and performed. In other words, the cost of welfare provision is spread across the whole of society (through, for example, the tax system) while the benefits this produces are effectively enjoyed by employers.

| **Political** | An important aspect of poverty is the idea of social exclusion – an idea shared with both New Right and |

Social Democratic perspectives and one that illustrates the different ways Marxist and New Right perspectives examine and understand poverty. For the **New Right** social exclusion is the fault of the poor since an Underclass is seen to "exclude itself" from participation in "everyday society" by its behaviour (economic dependence on the State, criminality and so forth). For **Marxists**, the opposite is true:

Social exclusion is part of a process whereby "the poor" are pitted against the "not-quite-poor". **Swanson et al** (2001) use the concept of "poor-bashing" here, described by **Barrett** (2004) in the following terms: "Poor-bashing and the politics of exclusion which portray the poor as unworthy, lazy, potentially criminal and a threat to social stability divert attention away from the actual causes of poverty and unemployment onto the victims of inequality - the poor and the unemployed".

| **Ideological** | The **Individualisation** of poverty, Marxists argue, is part of a "softening up" process that both |

distracts attention away from the idea that "poverty is created by the actions of the rich" (that is, it has

structural causes) and focuses on the "inadequacies of the poor" in ways that allow social control agencies to intervene in the lives of the poor (through the police and social workers, for example) in ways that would not be tolerated by the rich and powerful. As **Barrett** notes "Excluding people by "individualizing" the origins of the causes and of the solutions to poverty and unemployment deflects attention from the laws and corporate decisions that are designed to produce and reproduce the undermining of wages and employment conditions… By engaging in endless discussions of who are the "deserving poor" (the babies of the unemployed or their parents) a politics of   self-restraint is encouraged. Perhaps we are overdue for a critical analysis of the creation of profit and wealth among the undeserving rich".
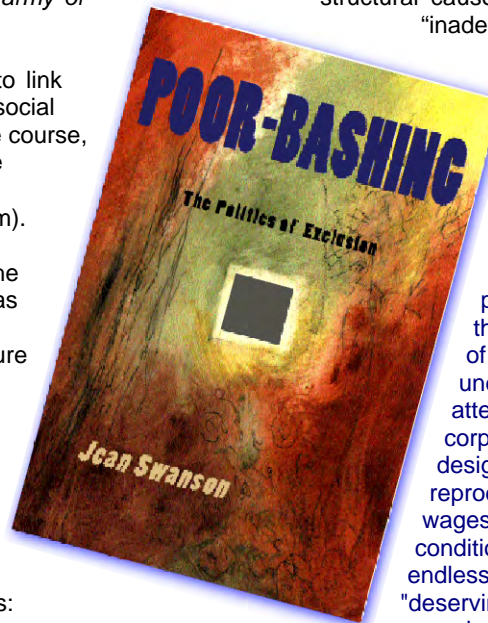
Feminist Responses: Observations

In a *global context*, women experience different levels of poverty to men, in a number of ways. **Sweetman** (1998) for example, notes women around the world:

> • Have less food and suffer greater levels of malnutrition.
> • Are less likely to have paid work.
> • Suffer greater ill-health.
> • Lack access to education.
> • Experience greater levels of homelessness.
> • Suffer greater levels of social exclusion.

In a *national context*, it would be useful to understand how ideas about poverty relate to female experiences in the UK, where we know, for example, women:

> • Have equal access to education - and out-perform men at just about every level.
> • Live longer, on average.
> • Are only slightly less likely to have a job than a man.
> • Are no more likely to be malnourished or homeless than men.

Rather than talk about the *feminisation of poverty*, therefore, should we not be examining how poverty is *masculinised*? The answer (as you probably, deep down, suspected) is "no" - which, given the ideas we've just noted, may seem surprising until you recognise that despite these apparent female advantages (or, at the very least, rough equalities with their male counterparts) women in the UK are far more likely to experience high levels of poverty than men.

This happens for a number of reasons, not the least of which, according to **Mellor** (2000) relate to the idea "Women are paying huge prices for being carers as well as breadwinners - lower pay, worse promotion prospects and ultimately poverty in old age because they make less contribution towards pensions". If women in general are more likely to experience poverty than men, therefore, we need to briefly note how and why this situation occurs:

Economic Factors

As we've discussed in previous Sections, female participation in the workplace is conditioned by a number of important factors, including:

Horizontal and vertical segregation that generally means women occupy lower-paid, lower-status, positions within the workplace - as **Ward** (2004) has suggested in the following terms:

Gender Pay Gap

"The entrenched split between traditionally "male" and "female" careers is just as glaring among today's teenagers as among their older workmates….even those entering the workplace at 16 are choosing occupations along traditional gender lines.

The continuing trend means "deep-rooted inequalities" in pay and employment prospects are mapped out for young people from the very first day of their working lives… Even among teenagers in their first jobs, young women earn 16% less than their male counterparts - blowing apart the myth that the effect on women's careers of having children is the sole cause of pay inequality".

Primary and **secondary labour markets**, where women are over-represented in *secondary markets* that involve, for example, insecure forms of part-time work. According to the **Office for National Statistics** (2004), the gender pay gap for full-time workers is 19.5% (female average hourly earnings are approximately 80% of male average hourly earnings) and 40% for part-time workers.

Family Life

Just as men and women experience family life and relationships differently, family arrangements affect the likelihood of greater female poverty in a number of ways:

Single-parenthood: Where women are more likely to be single-parents, this increases their chances of experiencing poverty because of the problems involved in juggling childcare responsibilities and paid work. One consequence of this is involvement in:

Homeworking: Both **Oxfam** (2003) and the **Equal Opportunities Commission** (2003a) note, for

example, "British women homeworkers are paid, on average, £2.53 per hour, receive no sick, holiday, or maternity pay, are made redundant without notice or compensation, are not subject to adequate health and safety checks [and] lose their jobs if they dare to claim the rights enjoyed by others".

The image is alluring...

Retirement / **Widowhood**:
One consequence of women living longer, coupled with inequalities in welfare and pension arrangements, is the greater likelihood of poverty in old age.

Welfare

The benefits system in the UK is both complicated and extensive, involving as it does a mix of:

Universal payments (such as Child Benefit - paid to all families who qualify as a right).

Means-tested payments (such as Housing Benefit), paid to claimants on a *sliding scale* related to income and savings - the higher these are, the less benefit you receive.

The reality less so...

Insurance-based payments (such as the Job Seeker's Allowance - pre-1996 this was called Unemployment Benefit). Receipt is based on the individual having paid National Insurance contributions for a specific qualifying period. This situation creates problems for women, in particular, because of the impact of their:

Dual role as both unpaid domestic workers and paid employees; in basic terms, female qualification for *insurance-based* payments is reduced, according to **Bradshaw et al** (2003) through: "A broken employment history because of child rearing and high rates of part-time work". Where benefits are *means-tested* (and assuming both a male and female in the household) **Bradshaw et al** note how "Women's poverty can be *hidden* by unequal income distribution within the household. When resources are tight, women are more likely than men to go without. Women tend to manage money when it is in short supply and there is debt, carrying the stressful burden of budgeting".

A further aspect of poverty here is how it "restricts social activity, causes stress in relationships and becomes a dominant feature of everyday life.". As **Bradshaw et al** argue: "There is some evidence that social isolation and depression are felt especially by young women, and that women and men may experience poverty in different ways".

Female poverty in *old age* (roughly 60% of pensioners are women) is also related to many of the above factors; a broken work record, for example, coupled with child care responsibilities makes it harder for women to make sufficient employment-related pension payments to receive a full pension - on average, female pensioners have only 50% of male retirement income.

Feminist Responses: Explanations

In terms of social policy, we can note a number of possible solutions to female poverty, in four main areas:

Work: The **Trades Union Congress Women's Conference** (2003) has suggested social policy changes to benefit women should include:

> • Raising the national minimum wage.
>
> • Setting government-backed and enforced targets for raising female incomes.

As **Mellor** (2003) argues "The Equal Pay Act has not brought about equal pay…If you take any of the lowest paid work – cleaning, catering, home care – you will find jobs done mainly by women. You will find women who juggle two or three of these jobs at a time, because one alone wouldn't pay enough to live on. You will find women scraping together a living for themselves and their families".

> • Setting targets for closing the gender pay gap (for both full time and part time workers).
>
> • The provision of affordable childcare and an increased level of childcare tax credits.

The **Equal Opportunities Commission** (2003) has argued policy work needs to be done to prevent women falling into poverty in old age by recognising different male and female working patterns. In particular:

> • **Employer pension schemes** need to include part-time workers.
>
> • **Flexible part-time working** needs to be made available "as retirement approaches without jeopardising retirement benefits".
>
> • **Pension entitlement** should be extended to more working women.

Family Life policies to reduce or solve female poverty suggested by the **TUC Women's Conference Report** (2003) include:

> • Child Support payment increases (from non-resident parents).
> • Paid carer leave from work.
> • Earnings-related maternity pay.
> • Increased Carer's Allowance.
> • More government funding for local authority care services.
> • Tax and pension credits "for those out of paid employment for parenting or family care reasons".

Education: Men and women still choose different work and career paths in our society which, in some respects, may be related to gender stereotyping in schools (when, given the choice, males and females study different subjects and are encouraged, through careers services for example, to pursue - or not as the case may be - different occupational paths and strategies). Social policy in this area, therefore, should be directed at ending this type of gendered curriculum.

Welfare: A range of policies could be implemented to significantly reduce disadvantages faced by women. Extending and increasing State pension payments and linking increases to average earnings (rather than average price increases - the latter tend to rise more slowly) would be one way of raising many women (and men, come to that) out of old age poverty. In addition, work-related State benefits need to reflect more closely the reality of male and female working lives.

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain the term "feminisation of poverty" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest **two** ways that poverty is a "problem of the wealthy" (4 marks).

(c) Suggest **three** reasons for female poverty (6 marks).

(d) Examine the view that poverty can be "beneficial to a ruling class" (24 marks).

(e) Assess the view that responses to poverty should focus on structural, not individual, reform (24 marks).

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5. The nature and role of public, private, voluntary and informal welfare provision in contemporary society.

Welfare Provision: Introduction

When we think about the provision of welfare services in our society (as most of us probably do in those idle moments when there's nothing much on TV), we tend to think about the **Welfare State** and the range of services it provides - from doctors and hospitals, through education to pensions. Welfare provision, however, is not simply a matter of government services - it is, as you'll no doubt be disappointed to learn, a little more complicated than that - which is why the general focus of this section is the nature and role of public, private, voluntary and informal welfare provision . Before we start to examine these types of provision, however, we need to clarify a few ideas:

Welfare: This idea, considered in terms of its widest definition, simply involves the idea of *help* being given to someone who needs it. If I'm "looking out for your welfare", it means I care about you, am considerate of your needs and will help you to overcome problems in your life (I'm not, by the way - this is just an example that makes me look good). We need to keep this definition in mind, since it means the concept of welfare provision potentially has many forms, the most obvious of which, perhaps, is:

• **Public** welfare that, for our purposes at least, refers to services and benefits provided by the State and generally funded through some form of direct or indirect taxation. Although the provision of public welfare - in some shape or form - has a relatively long history in Britain (the *"Ordinance of Labourers" in 1349*, for example, was designed to stop people giving relief to

Radio Fab FM DJ's Mike "Smashie" Smash and Dave "Nicey" Nice - two guys who do one Helluva lot of voluntary charridy work (not that

"able-bodied beggars", the idea being to make them work for a living - some ideas, if seems, never change), our main focus will be on the creation and development of the **Welfare State**, post-1945.

• **Private** welfare generally refers to the role of private companies in the provision of a range of personal and public services. This includes both companies who expressly exist to provide such services and also companies who provide welfare benefits to their workforce (such as a pension scheme) as part of their employment contract.

Voluntary provision, on the other hand, relates to services provided by a range of groups and individuals (*charities* and *self-help groups*, for example) independently of State provision - although, as we will see, the activities of such groups may be *regulated* and *coordinated*, on a local and national level, by the government.

As you might expect, voluntary provision of welfare by charitable and religious groups has a long history in our society.

Informal welfare: The final form of welfare, whose significance should not be overlooked or underestimated, is that provided by people such as family and friends - a potentially important source of welfare throughout peoples' lives. This type of provision is informal because there's no guarantee it will be offered when needed.

Welfare Provision: Observations

Public welfare: The concept of a *Welfare State* in Britain is something we tend to associate with developments during and immediately after the 2nd world war; while these are clearly very important (they formed the basis for State welfare provision that's still going strong 50 years later) some forms of State-sponsored welfare provision existed prior to this. In the early part of the last century, for example, old age pensions were introduced (however, given it was paid at age 70 - when average life expectancy for working class men was around 45 years - this didn't greatly benefit the poor); a rudimentary health service and unemployment benefit system also existed at this time.

The above notwithstanding, the focus here is on *post-war* developments, mainly because this period represents the most coherent attempt to develop a *universal* system of State welfare. In many ways, the nature, purpose and role of public welfare has changed over the past 50 years, reflecting a movement away from a simple government concern with the *relief of poverty* and the improvement of general living standards to thinking about how some, relatively poor, groups in society are *socially excluded* (and, by extension, how government action can lead to their social inclusion). We need, therefore, to understand welfare changes in:

Ideological terms - how ideas about the nature and purpose of public welfare have changed, as well as:

Through the 1980's and early 1990's Conservative politicians like Margaret Thatcher and Norman Tebbit forced a radical rethink of State welfare systems in the UK.

Political terms - how different political groups, for example, have attempted to stamp their ideas on welfare provision and, of course,

Economic terms - since, in many ways, questions of cost and affordability (a word we've probably just made up) have influenced the nature, extent and type of public provision available.

The Welfare State

We can track this sense of change in the nature of welfare provision (and, as we will see, the role of government) by thinking, initially, about the nature and purpose of the:

Welfare State, which developed in a social context very different to our present-day society. The ideas forming the basis for the Welfare State (brought to-gether in the so-called **Beveridge Report,** 1942) de-veloped against a background of war and environmental destruction as well as severe social and economic *privation* (hardship). The nature of welfare provision, in such a situation, focused on what **Bev-eridge** considered to be the "**Five Giants**" that needed to be conquered "on the road to reconstruction'.

Giant	Example Legislation
Ignorance	Butler Education Act (1944)
Want	Family Allowance Act (1945)
Idleness	National Insurance Act (1946)
Disease	National Health Act (1948)
Squalor	Building of good-quality, low-rent, "Council" housing in 1950s

The idea of "**Five Giants**" tells us something important about both the thinking behind the creation of a Welfare State and the nature of the welfare it was designed to provide - this was a society in which major social problems existed and, as such, required major, State-led, changes to the way welfare was provided.

The Welfare State reflected an important social democratic *consensus* about the desirability of both a national system of welfare provision (based on the principle of *need* rather than the ability to pay) and the way it should be funded - through a general taxation system which meant services were "free at the point of contact".

One of the interesting features of the post-war welfare consensus was the ambitious nature of the overall project - it aimed to provide a comprehensive system of:

 Health care, through a *National Health Service* integrating General Practitioners (neighbourhood doctor's surgeries) with hospital services.

Ignorance

Beveridge's Five Giants

Idleness

Want

Squalor

Disease
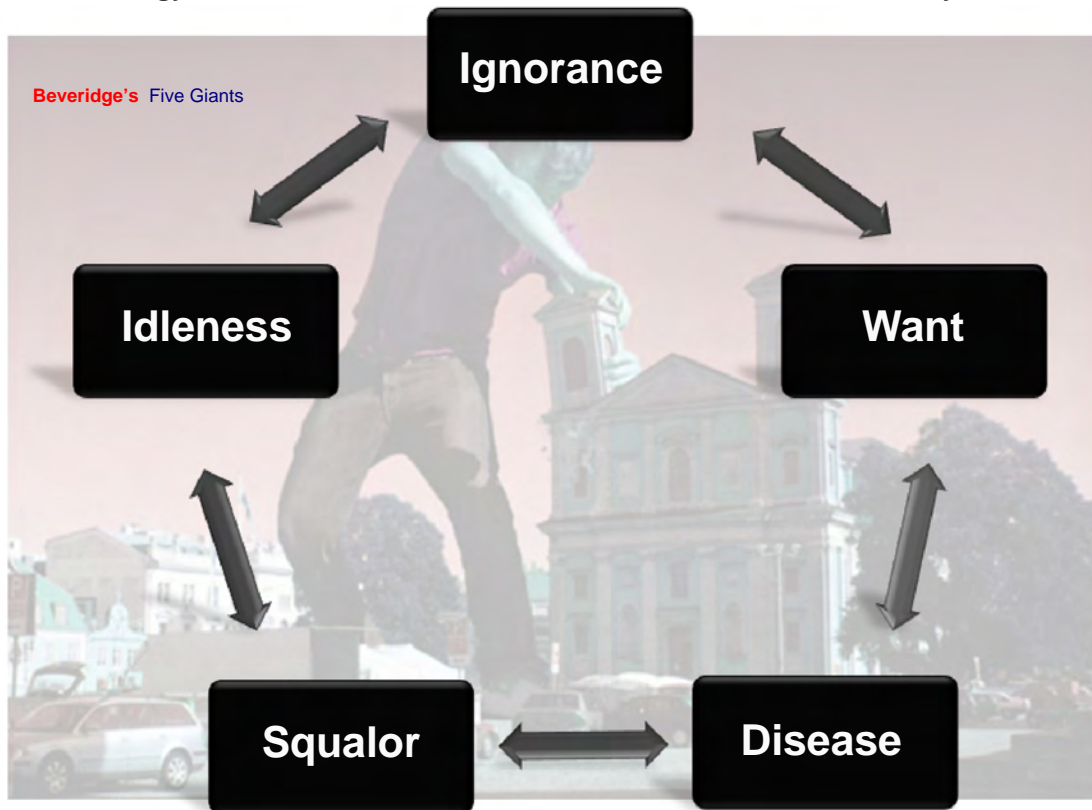
Housing, through a system of Local Authority ("Council") housing designed to provide relatively cheap - but good quality - rented accommodation for those most in need.

Education: Compulsory and free education was introduced for all children between the ages of 5 and 15, via a "Tri-partite system" of grammar, secondary modern and technical schools (a system explained in more detail in the Education chapter).

Insurance: A number of different forms of (compulsory) social insurance were introduced for groups such as the unemployed and the elderly, funded through a *National Insurance* levy on wages. Other forms of benefits were also made available for those without the required employment history to qualify for insurance payments.

With the exception of public housing, these general forms of State welfare provision have remained in place to the present day; however, there have been a number of changes in the way State-based welfare has been provided - and related debates about how it can and should be funded.

Anti-Welfarism

In the 1980's, for example, a radical shift in thinking about public welfare provision developed around three main factors:

1. Ideology: The rise of **New Right** ideas (initially in America and more gradually in the UK) prompted a reassessment of the nature and role of welfare provision. From a *libertarian*, New Right perspective, for example **Ashford** (1993) identified 6 reasons for arguing *against* public welfare:

• **Immorality** - income is "forcibly redistributed from taxpayers to those who are believed to deserve it by politicians".

• **Freedom of Choice**: Free, universal, provision makes it more difficult for other alternatives (such as private health care) to compete with State provision.

• **Welfare Dependency** - the creation of "a class…permanently dependent on the state for all their major decisions" (an idea we've examined in some detail in relation to New Right concepts of an **underclass** and **dependency culture**).

• **Ineffective** - State welfare systems rarely achieve the goals they are set and rarely benefit those most in need. "The middle classes", for example, "are the disproportionate beneficiaries of the nationalised health system".

• **Producer capture** involves the consumer lacking choice over welfare provision. "In a monopoly situation the service is provided in the interests of the producer" and, consequently, provides no consumer checks-and-balances on the quality of the service provided - you can't, for example, easily change your doctor if you don't like the service they provide.

• **Inefficient** - private welfare provision, selectively targeted at those in most need, can provide welfare services more cheaply and more responsively to the needs of the consumer.

2. Politics: Between 1979 and 1997, successive Conservative governments (under first Margaret Thatcher and then John Major) introduced a number of general changes to public welfare provision based, in part, on the general ideological principles just outlined. In particular, a system of:

The failings of State Welfare: **Ashford** (1993)

• Immoral

• Ineffective

Inefficient

Dependent

• Choice

• Captive
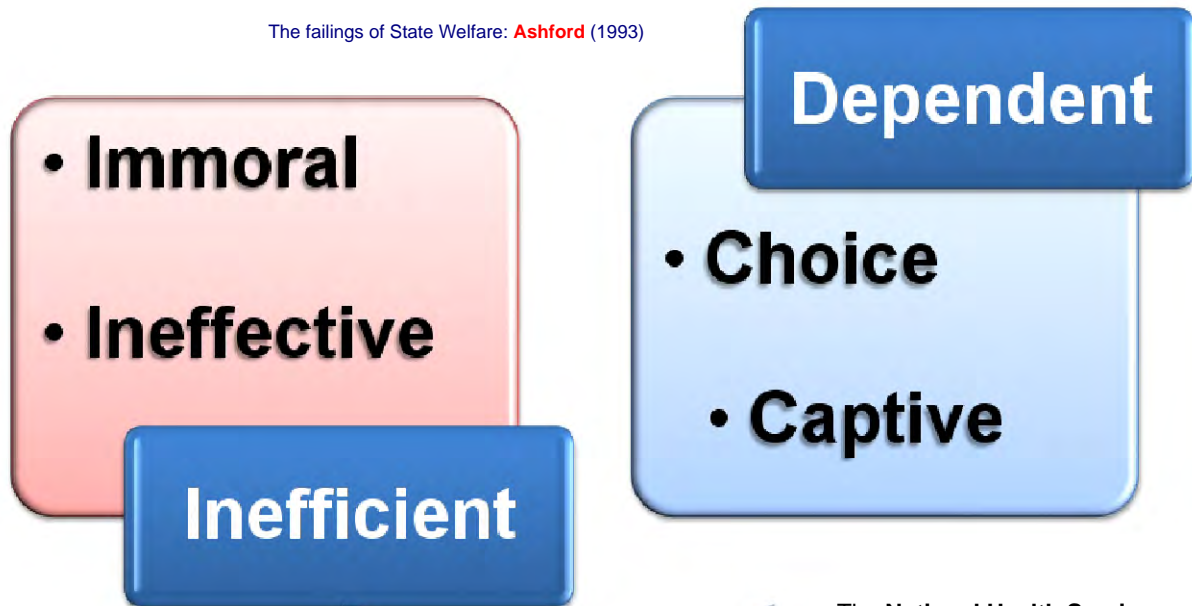
Internal markets, designed to "promote competition and increase effectiveness and efficiency" within the Welfare State was developed. The National Health Service, for example, saw competition between different hospitals and departments for the treatment of patients.

Privatisation policies were also pursued, whereby State-owned assets (such as British Gas and British Telecom) were sold to private shareholders. Privatisation extended directly into the welfare sphere through Council house tenants being given the "*Right To Buy*" their home at a market discount depending on a range of qualifying factors (such as having lived in the house for at least two years).

A further aspect of privatisation involved explicit government encouragement of *private pensions* (through media advertising. For example); the basic idea behind this was that people should save for their retirement throughout their working lifetime. Increased income in old age, it was believed, would lead to lower levels of elderly poverty. However, a major problem with this idea was the *misselling* of private pensions by insurance companies...

> **Royal & Sun Alliance fined £1.35m**
> Source: **Bachelor** (2002)
>
> "Royal & Sun Alliance, one of the UK's largest insurance groups, has been fined £1.35m for failing to provide compensation to over 13,000 of its customers who were mis-sold [private] pensions".

3. Economics: A third factor, as **Wrigley** (2004) notes, was the "escalating cost" of things like:

Unemployment-related benefits - the early 1980's saw a massive rise in the number of unemployed - and:

The **National Health Service:** This was partly caused by an *ageing population* - a combination of a *decline* in the birth rate and an *increase* in life expectancy. The elderly, for example, tend to make greater use of GP and hospital services than other age-related groups.

New Labour

The influence of these ideas has, it could be argued, led to a change in the nature of welfare provision and a reassessment of the role played by government. We can see this most noticeably in the changes introduced by:

New Labour governments (from 1997 onward). They continued the reform of public welfare provision begun under previous governments, partly, as **Wrigley** argues, because of a commitment to keep to previous financial spending targets and partly because of an *ideological change* in perceptions of the nature and role of public welfare. **Oppenheim** (1998), for example, argues the key elements of the New Labour approach to public welfare were:

Reciprocity - the idea welfare provision should be based on a system of "rights and responsibilities". Many original aspects of the Welfare State were based on this idea (individuals make national insurance contributions, for example, in order to receive benefits if and when they're needed). New Labour took this idea further, however, in a couple of ways:

Policies - such as the *Child Support Agency* (originally created by the Conservative government in 1993 and substantially reformed by New Labour), designed to promote "individual responsibility" for family welfare. The Child Support Agency targeted single-parent families by requiring an "absent parent" (one living apart from their partner) to contribute to the financial upkeep of their children.

Participation: One aspect of the changing role of welfare provision (over the past 5 or so years) has been

a desire to move away from a rigid, bureaucratic, professionally-administered system to one where the *consumers* of welfare (or "clients" as they're sometimes called) have greater involvement in the *delivery* of welfare (rather than simply being recipients of State aid). This has resulted in the development of a number of initiatives for delivering welfare and, by extension, a change in the relationship between public, private, voluntary and informal welfare providers.

Although we'll explore this idea in more detail in a moment, we can note for the moment how the State has developed a:

Coordination role in the delivery of welfare. In other words, although government is still involved in welfare as a primary provider, its role has been modified to accommodate, sponsor and co-ordinate the activities of a variety of private, voluntary and informal groups. **Craig et al** (1999), for example, studied the development of "national compacts" involving "joint working between government and the voluntary and community sectors" in areas such as:

• **Health Action Zones** - partnerships between the NHS, local authorities, community groups and the voluntary and business sectors.

• The **New Deal for Communities** - partnerships to tackle the problems of "poor job prospects; high levels of crime; educational under-achievement; poor health and problems with housing and the physical environment".

• **Sure Start** - designed to deliver programmes related to "early education, childcare, health and family support".

Welfare to Work

A key element in the **New Labour** welfare strategy is to make a distinction between *poverty* (in the sense of economic hardship) and *social exclusion* (in the sense of social - but not necessarily economic - inequality). The original focus of the Welfare State was the former; the *new focus* of welfare is the latter - and one way to promote social inclusion is through work (at least it is from a social democratic perspective).

To this end, various programmes have been developed with the aim of getting people (from the unemployed, through single-parents to the differently-abled) into some form of work (such as job creation schemes, the introduction of flexible working rules and so forth). An example of this type of thinking about the nature and role of welfare was the introduction of a:

Minimum wage, designed to *increase* the income differential between those in work and those out of work. This may, at first site, seem an odd way of tackling poverty, until you realise it's designed to tackle *exclusion* - a subtle, but important, difference. The thinking here, therefore, was that by increasing the income differential (by forcing all employers to pay a minimum level of wages) the option of work would become more attractive to those living on welfare payments. They would, therefore, be taken out of a "culture of dependency" (an idea, you will remember - or not as the case may be - that's central to both New Right and Social Democratic views on poverty and exclusion) and *reintegrated* into mainstream society.

We'll look in more detail in a moment at what all this means for the (changing) role of welfare provision in our society, but next we need to examine some aspects of:

Iain **Duncan Smith** (2007), the ex-leader of the Conservative Party, updated **Beveridge's** "Five Giants" to identify "Five Modern Giants" facing contemporary British society...

Family Breakdown

Welfare Dependency

Addiction

Debt

Educational Failure
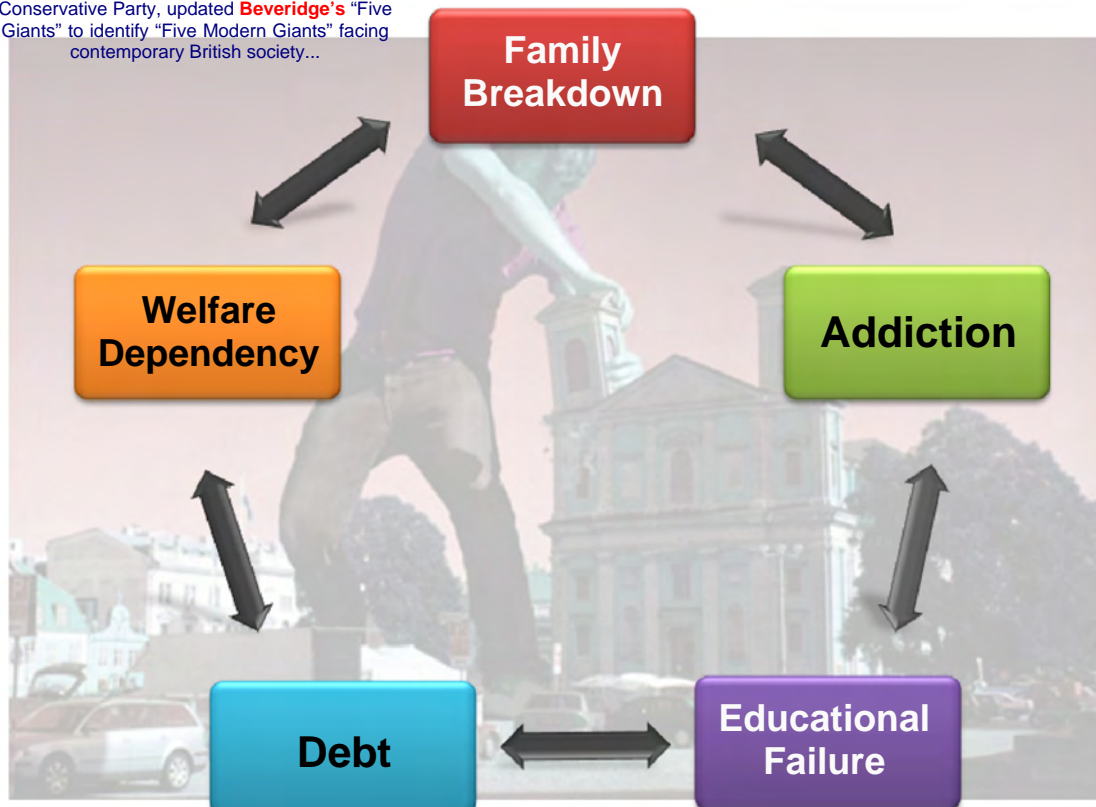
Private Welfare

As the name suggests, private welfare provision involves profit-making individuals and companies providing welfare services. This may involve things like:

• **Fees** - money paid directly to a company for a specific service (such as buying a place at an Independent (Public) school, a private consultation with a doctor, a hospital operation and so forth) and:

• **Insurance** - which involves things like paying money regularly into a fund (such as a private pension, for example) or buying a particular policy to cover a possible eventuality (such as the risk of falling ill and being unable to work). It is, of course, possible to take out insurance that, eventually, will be used to pay something like school fees.

There is, however, a further development we could note here, namely the increasing involvement of private companies in the:

Welfare infrastructure: That is, although private companies may not be directly involved in the provision of services (such as hospital treatment) they may have built (and technically own) the hospital in which the treatment takes place - which they then *lease* to the government. Private developers, according to the University of Ulster **Centre for Property and Planning** (1998), are also extensively involved in "urban regeneration" schemes on a similar basis.

As **Burchardt** (1999) points out, "Welfare has never been the exclusive preserve of the state". This was as true *before* the development of the Welfare State (most doctors, for example, charged fees for consultations) as it is today - you can, for example, buy private medical treatment and care if you can afford it. The main question here, however, is not so much the nature of private welfare provision (as indicated above), but more the changing role of private providers and, as a consequence, the changing role of public providers.

Although, as we will see, the public-private welfare provision relationship is becoming increasingly complex, we also need to consider a further aspect of this relationship, namely the role played by:

Voluntary Organisations

In general terms, we can characterise this type of welfare provider as:

Non-profit-making: This may involve the provision of free services or the charging of (small) fees to cover the actual cost of welfare provision.

Voluntary: An obvious point to make, perhaps, but the activities of many of these organisations are highly dependent on volunteer help - whether in terms of things like collecting money for charity or working in a community with disadvantaged individuals and groups.

Private medical insurance, care and treatment is now a multi-million pound industry in the UK - despite free health care being available on the NHS...

Niyazi (1996) has noted how the "image and culture of volunteering…perceived as a predominantly white, middle-class activity" meant groups such as the young, the elderly, the unemployed, the disabled and some ethnic minorities were likely to be underrepresented amongst volunteers.

Independent of government (although some groups work closely with - and may be funded by - local and national government departments).

Structured - usually, but not necessarily, along similar lines to private providers (in terms of having a skilled, professional workforce, a distinctive managerial organisation and so forth).

Regulated by government: *Charities* (such as Oxfam) are subject to rules governing how they may or may not use their funds, for example.

It's not uncommon, in contemporary British society, for Charities to work in association with private companies to provide certain types of welfare service. Less usual, but by no-means unique, are welfare services provided by private companies (usually through various Trusts).

The Pret Foundation Trust
Source: http://www.pret.com

"Julian Metcalfe and Sinclair Becham (the founders of Pret A Manger) set up The Pret Foundation Trust in 1995. The Trust is funded by money that we donate from the sales of some of our products (Lemon-Aid, Dolphin-Friendly Tuna Baguette and our Christmas sandwiches), and customer donations through collection boxes in shops. This primarily supports the Pret Charity Run, a fleet of electric vans, which collect and distribute our leftover food at the end of every day to charities for the homeless across London".

Having said this, one notable feature of voluntary organisations in the UK is their:

Diversity: Voluntary organisations actually take a number of different forms, ranging in size from large, national (and international) organisations (charities such as Oxfam, with an income of £188 million in 2002), to smaller, locally-based, *community groups* (Cardiff Action for Single Homeless, for example, with an income of £1.1 million in 2003) or even small *voluntary associations* based at neighbourhood level.

Although, traditionally, voluntary organisations have worked independently of government, this situation is increasingly changing as they become further integrated into the changing nature of welfare provision in the UK. This, in turn, perhaps, indicates something of a changing role for such groups - especially where they are funded - but not directly controlled - by the State and where their basic organisation and composition is regulated through government departments. The process of integration has not, however, necessarily been simple or smooth.

Kumar and Nunan (2002) have suggested the integration of community-based groups, for example, into the overall welfare system has been hindered by "…confusion and contradictions over their support arrangements and the way they are governed" - especially in terms of "unsuitable legal frameworks and poor, inappropriate constitutions".

Despite problems of integration, voluntary organisations have an important role to play in a welfare system that, although largely *centrally funded* and directed, is increasingly *localised* in terms of where and how some forms of welfare are delivered - especially those that focus on policies for social inclusion.

In some respects, the distinction between voluntary groups and informal types of care (see below) is becomingly blurred "at the margins"; for example, the development of "self-help" groups (characterised by **Wilson** (1994) as "…groups run by and for people who share a common problem or experience") involves a relatively *informal system* of help and care within communities, neighbourhoods and even families - an idea we can explore further when we examine:

Is "Care in the Community" just another way of saying "Care by women in the home" (but with few, if any, resources)?

Informal Provision

This type of care has, traditionally, been provided by and within family and friendship groups (mainly, it needs to be noted, by women). General features of this type of provision include the idea it is:

Unstructured (in the sense of not being formally organised).

Free (provided at little or no cost to the government).

Affective - people provide care for the elderly, sick, differently-abled and so forth because they feel love, affection and responsibility for their welfare. **Beresford** (1994), for example, noted "The pleasure and satisfaction gained through the relationship with the disabled child was the fundamental reason why parents felt able to continue to care for their child…[even though] the stresses associated with the care of their disabled child to be wide-ranging, unrelenting and sometimes overwhelming".

Although, as we've suggested, informal types of care are both traditional and, probably, the oldest form of welfare provision in our society, the recently developed welfare focus on inclusion and exclusion has tended to draw some forms of informal care into the general welfare net, leading to a distinct change in the role - if not necessarily the nature - of such care. For example, we can note the concept of:

Care in the Community - the idea that, rather than incarcerate ("lock-up") the mentally ill in large, impersonal, institutions, their welfare would, it was argued, be increased if they were cared for within the community - which, in effect, meant within the family group.

The **Community Care Act** (1990), for example, created a system of patient assessment, community care and progress reviews for mentally ill individuals who were professionally assessed as posing little or no risk to the community.

In some respects, therefore, **informal** types of care have become part of the general, formalised, system of welfare in the UK - whether this involves family members receiving government allowances as "carers" or the integration of a variety of self-help groups into community regeneration projects. However, although informal caring has certain **advantages**, which include things like:

• **Local** delivery.

• **Responsiveness** to individual needs

• **Personal** experiences of carers of the problems they are helping to resolve,

it also has some significant **disadvantages**, such as:

• **Patriarchy**: Feminists have generally pointed to the *patriarchal assumptions* underlying the establishment of the Welfare State (men as the breadwinners and women the homemakers - assumptions, as we've seen, that have resulted in women being in a weaker position to claim insurance-based benefits in the past), but increasingly this criticism has been applied to government involvement in **informal** care where, as we've noted, family care (a type of *emotional*, as well as physical, labour) very often means "care by women".

• **Resources**: Delivery of informal care is frequently provided "by the poor, for the poor" - in effect, some aspects of the burden of welfare are shifted from government responsibility to family responsibility without a consequent redistribution of resources.

Welfare Provision: Explanations

In the previous section we've looked at both the changing nature of welfare provision in our society and, to a slightly lesser degree, the changing role of welfare providers. In this respect, when we think about the provision of welfare benefits and services in 21st century Britain, they involve a complex interplay of two main areas:

1. Between different types of provider (public and private, voluntary and informal).

2. Within different types of provision: Government, for example, is not simply a provider of benefits and services, but also a purchaser of services from private, voluntary and informal providers.

The following table identifies some characteristics of the range of welfare **interconnections** in our society:

Provider	Example Provision
Publicly funded and administered	Unemployment benefit
Publicly funded privately administered	Some operations on the NHS are carried out in private hospitals.
Publicly funded and administered by voluntary groups	**Taylor et al** (1994) note the way responsibility for community care has been increasingly transferred to both private and voluntary organisations
Privately funded and publicly administered	Some aspects of the welfare infrastructure - such as school and hospital building - are privately funded but managed within the State system
Privately funded and privately administered	Private hospitals

To put the idea of welfare provision into some sort of overall context, therefore, we can note it involves the idea of:

Welfare Pluralism

This concept involves the idea of welfare being provided by a number of different groups and institutions. Pluralism is, of course, not a new idea; as we've seen, even before the creation of the Welfare State a variety of different formal and informal welfare providers existed.

However, **Burchardt** (1999) suggests, *welfare pluralism* can be theorised in a couple of different ways, in terms of, for example:

A **one-dimensional model**, where "welfare can be divided into a dominant and monolithic state sector with a residual 'private' category including anything that is not directly provided by the state or is not tax-funded".

A **two--dimensional model** which "allows for state purchases of private services, and private purchases of public services, as well as the more traditional all-public and all-private sectors".

She also, however, notes a possible **third dimension t**o the public-private relationship, namely:

Decision-making on the part of consumers. This involves the idea publicly funded welfare is provided by a range of private producers from which the consumer then chooses. Although this type of decision-making relationship has rarely been explored in the UK, one example was the introduction of a:

Voucher system for the purchase of nursery care: Introduced in 1996 / 97 (by the then Conservative government - it was subsequently scrapped by the incoming Labour government), government funds (in the form of a voucher) could be used by parents to purchase childcare from private providers.

Within the context of **welfare pluralism,** we can also note the changing nature of *welfare delivery*. In terms of:

Public welfare, for example, we can identify three basic modes of delivery for services and benefits:

1. Universal forms of delivery are based on the idea *everyone* in a given population has access to welfare benefits - whether they need them or not at any given time. Within this category we could note such things as the National Health Service as being "universally delivered". In terms of economic benefits, however, there are few forms of universal provision - *Child Benefit* (paid to parents with children, regardless of their income level) being a notable exception.

2. Selective forms of delivery, on the other hand, can be considered in terms of their *targeting* at specific groups, rather than the whole population. The selection process to decide eligibility is usually based on *means*

testing; for example, if your income is below a certain specified level you receive the benefit or service (Higher Education tuition fees, for example, are based around a means test of eligibility).

3. Insurance-based benefits and services are based around the idea certain forms of risk (such as unemployment or old age) are effectively pooled, in the sense people pay a proportion of their income to the government (through National Insurance contributions, for example) and receive benefits as and when (or if) they need them.

Depending on the precise relationship between these different types of delivery model, we can characterise the role of welfare systems (and, by extension, the role of welfare providers) as relating to what **Harris** (1998) identifies as the "Two chief models of welfare systems". In idealised terms, these involve:

Residual Models   based on ideas relating to:

Absolute poverty: Welfare provision is aimed at those who live beneath a specified poverty line, usually - but not necessarily - defined in terms of minimal biological and cultural needs.

Selectivity: Help, where it is provided by the State, for example, is targeted specifically at those considered to be in absolute poverty.

Safety net: Welfare is seen to provide a way of ensuring the very poorest in society do not fall below a minimum standard of living for the society in which they live.

Objectives: The main objective of welfare is to help people to eventually provide for themselves and their families through, for example, work.

Providers: Although, within this type of model, the State has some role to play in welfare provision, the main providers are normally voluntary organisations (such as charities) and private welfare agencies (which means individual welfare provision tends to be largely insurance-based; individuals buy private insurance against illness, unemployment and so forth).

Institutional Models   based around ideas such as:

Relative poverty: Welfare provision is aimed at those who live below an average level of living standards. These people, depending on the society in which they live, may not be considered destitute; rather, they are probably best viewed as being *relatively deprived* when compared to "normal and expected" standards of living in their society.

Universality: The focus of welfare provision is less on individual cases, as such, and more on the desire to ensure general levels of living standards for the majority of a population. Welfare, in this respect, is viewed in terms of social,

rather than specifically individual, needs. A National Health Service, for example, has general social benefits because it prevents the spread of disease by ensuring those who are ill receive treatment, regardless of their ability to pay for it.

Redistributive: Universal forms of provision are normally funded through general taxation, progressively levied on the individual's ability to pay. In the UK, for example, the greater your income, the more income tax you pay (at least in theory - the rich tend to develop ways of minimising the amount of tax they actually pay as, in some instances, do the very poor when they work "cash-in-hand" for example).

Objectives for this type of system vary. In the UK in the 21st century, for example, the State is faced with markedly different problems to solve than those faced at the end of the 2nd world war - then, the problems were ones of economic and environmental reconstruction, the relief of absolute poverty and so forth. Now, problems are essentially two-pronged:

Although poverty relief is still important, living standards have risen; this has tended to change the welfare focus to that of social inequality - as poverty has declined, for example, inequality has increased.

Secondly, problems of social inclusion and integration are increasingly significant now (when they weren't in 1950's). The impact of economic globalisation, the

problem of fragmenting social relationships, a greater sense of individual identities and needs, combined with the rise of New Right welfare ideologies and so forth have created problems of social inclusion and exclusion that, arguably, have to be solved by the State.

Providers: In general, the State is seen as the one institution in society with the power and capability to both provide universal forms of welfare and to co-ordinate the welfare efforts of a variety of different providers.

Tried and Tested

(a) Identify one example of publicly funded and administered welfare other than unemployment benefit (2 marks).

(b) Suggest **two** possible advantages for universal forms of welfare delivery (4 marks).

(c) Suggest two possible advantages for selective welfare delivery (4 marks).

(d) Examine the argument that universal forms of welfare delivery are superior to other possible forms in targeting poverty" (24 marks).

(e) Compare institutional and relative models of welfare (24 marks).

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Unit 2: Education

Contents

1. The role and purpose of education, including vocational education and training, in contemporary society.

The Role of Education: Introduction

There's little doubt that education, as a social institution, has an important role to play in our society. Whether you view that role positively or negatively, we need to examine a range of perspectives (Structuralist, Interactionist, Postmodern and New Right) that explore the role and purpose of the formal education system in contemporary UK society.

Structuralist Perspectives: Observations

Under this general heading we can outline and examine three main Structuralist perspectives - Functionalism, Marxism and Feminism - and we can begin by identifying the major ideas that characterise each perspective.

Functionalism

Although Functionalist theory has generally declined in sociological importance in the UK over the past 20 or so years, its influence in shaping educational policy – and hence the role played by the education system - shouldn't be underestimated. This is partly because the basic ideas that sit at the heart of this perspective - ideas about *consensus*, *competition* and *achievement* through *merit*, for example - sit relatively comfortably with modern Conservative, Liberal and Labour political ideas.

As a Structuralist perspective (one that focuses on broad groups of people and their behaviour) Functionalist arguments about the role of education focus on:

Institutional relationships and *functional linkages* with wider society. In this respect, therefore, the emphasis here is on how education links to other social institutions, such as the family and the workplace. The complexity of modern social systems means the education system becomes, in effect, a *bridge* between these institutions in a couple of ways.

Firstly, on an *institutional level*, social systems with a variety of different types of employment must develop ways of managing their human resources. Thus, while a society such as our own may need doctors, accountants, police officers and manual labourers (amongst many other types of work) there's little point in producing so many trained doctors they can't find

employment because there's no demand for their services.

Secondly, on an *individual level* (in the sense of how people actually experience the impact of institutional arrangements and relationships) the education system functions as an agency of:

Secondary Socialisation: In this respect, education is an institution that "broadens the individual's experience" of the social world and, in so doing, prepares children for adult role relationships in the workplace and wider society.

For the education system to function properly on both levels it must, according to Functionalists, be:

Meritocratic - a concept that reflects the idea rewards (such as high pay, high status, jobs) are *earned* through our abilities and efforts (working hard in school to gain qualifications, for example) rather than simply *allocated* on the basis of who you know, your family background and so forth. Merit-based systems are also, by their very nature, competitive systems in the sense that different levels of reward and given for different levels of achievement – and children, in this respect, have to continually prove themselves willing to "work to achieve" whatever rewards are on offer. In the contemporary UK educational system, for example, these rewards relate to things like educational qualifications (such as GCSEs and A-levels) that in turn qualify students for certain types of work or entrance to different Universities.

Module Link   Stratification and Differentiation

Educational qualifications are, as you might expect, a significant source of **social mobility** in our society. They are also, as you perhaps might not expect, a significant source of **elite self-recruitment** (the process by which the professional middle classes ensure their sons and daughters do not experience downward social mobility). By their domination of private schools and elite state schools this class effectively ensures their children achieve well-paid, high status, employment.

For a merit-based system to function there must be *equality of opportunity* between the participants since if some are disadvantaged (discriminated against or denied the opportunity to show their worth) society cannot be sure "the best people" occupy the most important, prestigious and well-rewarded adult roles. As

Parsons (1959), for example, expressed it: "...it is fair to give differential rewards for different levels of achievement, so long as there has been fair access to opportunity and fair that these rewards lead on to higher-order opportunities for the successful".

Marxism

This general perspective hasn't been particularly influential in terms of UK government policies (hardly surprising since its highly critical of Capitalist societies). However, ideas about the role of education have, arguably, filtered down into the teaching and learning process and some key ideas for Marxists include:

Cultural reproduction: This concept involves the idea of *secondary socialisation*, but with a twist. **Althusser** (1971), for example, argues the economic system (Capitalism) has to be *reproduced* from one generation to the next. In other words, each new generation has to be taught the skills, knowledge and ideas required for them to take up positions in the workplace. The twist, however, is that schools don't just *select*, *allocate* and *differentiate* children (through testing and public examinations) in the interests of "society as a whole" - education is *not meritocratic*. Rather, the role of education is to ensure the sons - and increasingly daughters - of the powerful achieve the levels of education required for them to follow in their fathers' (and mothers') footsteps into professional employment The trick, in other words, is to educate most people "just enough" for them to be useful employees and a small number "more than enough" to take up high-powered work roles.

For as long as he could remember Thompson had been groomed to be "something Big in the City"

One aspect of cultural reproduction is the:

Hidden Curriculum, a concept that reflects the way ideas about the social world - and the individual's place in that world - are transmitted through the education system. Schools, as part of the daily teaching process, don't just teach formal subjects (such as English or History) they also teach "hidden" values such as competition, individual learning and achievement, qualifications as a way of measuring people's worth and so forth.

Education and Society: The link between these ideas is that the education system responds to the demands of employers - there is a *correspondence* (to use a concept advanced by **Bowles and Gintis,** 1976 and 2002) between what employers generally want (socialised workers differentiated through qualifications, for example) and what schools provide.

Feminism

Although the main focus of feminist educational research (gender inequalities) has remained largely unchanged over the past 25 years, the emphasis of this research has shifted somewhat - from explanations about why girls achieve less than boys in the education system (because, in the main, they don't anymore) to explaining how girls learn to cope with a range of school and workplace disadvantages.

This subtle shift of emphasis doesn't necessarily mean we should dismiss historical feminist research out-of-hand, as being both outdated and irrelevant to our (present-day) understanding of the role of education. Although such studies originally focused on explanations for female *underachievement* they are, arguably, still relevant as explanations for differences in career choice and progress. In addition, these explanations assume a new relevance as political concerns about *boys' underachievement* have led to an educational focus on ways to help them "overcome the gender gap" (usually involving a resurrection of ideas and practices criticised in femin   ist research over the past 25 years…).

Broadly speaking therefore, current Feminist explanations of *female disadvantage*, centre around the following ideas:

Socialisation research. **Eichler** (1980) highlighted how differential socialisation experiences - and different social expectations - of males and females help to construct different gender identities and adult role expectations. In the past, for example, the education system contributed to the way women saw their primary adult role in terms of the *private sphere* of the family (as mother and housewife, for example) and, although female horizons have widened somewhat over the past 25 years, Feminists have argued traditional assumptions about masculinity and femininity continue to influence both family and work relationships.

An interesting example to illustrate this idea is that *subject choice* at the higher (non-

compulsory) levels of our education system is broadly **gendered**, in the sense we can identify different patterns of subject choice between males and females (more boys, for example, study science subjects like

Chemistry, while more girls opt for social science subjects). These educational choices are further reflected in adult career choices (engineering, for example, is male-dominated while something like nursing or secretarial work is female-dominated) and these patterns point us towards the idea of underlying social and educational processes that effectively push males and females into different career paths.

> **Module Link   Stratification and Differentiation**
>
> Although large numbers of men and women are in full (and part) time work in our society the workplace is **stratified** in two ways. **Horizontally** - men and women generally work in different occupations (women in areas like nursing, secretarial, teaching and shop work, for example) - and **vertically**; men and women are differently-placed in the same occupation. Although primary teaching, for example, is female dominated, men proportionately occupy more of the higher status positions (such as Headteacher).

Men's work?

Women's work?

Norman et al (1988), for example, argued *teacher expectations*, especially in early-years schooling, emphasised female roles related to the mother / carer axis and while this may no-longer *automatically* translate into women seeing their primary role in terms of caring for their family, work roles in our society continue to be framed around the basic idea of different male and female (mental and physical) capabilities.

Thus, although over 25 years ago, **Stanworth** (1981) found both male and female A-level pupils underestimated girl's academic performance and teachers saw female futures in terms of marriage, child-rearing and domestic work (while future careers were stereotyped into "caring" work such as secretarial, nursing and so forth) the question we have to consider is the extent to which, for all the evident changes in male and female educational performance, the general picture is still *broadly similar* in terms of the adult roles performed by men and women in our society.

Identity: Following from the above, Feminist research in the recent past focused, as we've suggested, on

ideas like the gendering of the school curriculum, in terms of how pupils saw different subjects as "masculine" or "feminine". Such gendered perception, it was argued by writers such as **Woods** (1976), helped to explain things like lower levels of female participation and general achievement in science subjects. Similarly, social policy initiatives, such as **Girls Into Science and Technology** (GIST), explored the general question of why girls were underrepresented in science subjects and the answers this initiative produced were informative on two levels; firstly, science was seen as both difficult and demanding and, secondly, the image of "scientists" was seen by girls to be both unflattering and, more significantly perhaps, unfeminine – and idea that keys into perceptions of both male and female identity in our society.

> **Module Link   Culture and Identity**
>
> This perception links into ideas about the way **personal identities** (what we individually feel about being male or female, for example) are filtered through **social identities** (how society in general suggests males and females should look and behave, for example). An individual choice – in this instance what educational subjects to study and, ultimately perhaps, what kind of work one does in adult society – is heavily influenced by the way others see the implications of such a choice.

Despite the introduction, in 1988, of a **National Curriculum** that ensured all pupils studied subjects such as science and maths (traditionally perceived as masculine subjects) up to GCSE, the evidence from *post-16 education* suggests the type of *gendered curriculum* identified by **Woods** still exists, as the following table demonstrates:

UK A-level or equivalent entries for young people: by selected subject.
Source: **Summerfield and Babb** (2004)

Subject	% Males	% Females
Physics	78	22
Computer Studies	76	24
Economics	74	26
Mathematics	60	40
Biology	38	62
English Literature	25	75
Social Science	24	76
Home Economics	03	97

The **Department for Children, Schools and Families** (formerly the **Department for Education and Skills)** (2007) has suggested that "Gender differences in subject choice become more accentuated post-16: Girls' most popular subject is English, while boys' is Maths. Psychology, Art and Design, Sociology and Media/Film/Television Studies are amongst the 10 most popular choices for girls (but not boys), while Physics, Business Studies, Geography and Physical Education are in the top 10 for boys (but not girls)".

As we might expect, this difference in subject choice at A-level translates into differences in subject choice at undergraduate level. **Self and Zealey** (2007), for example, note that "…a higher proportion of women than men studied subjects allied to medicine [such as nursing], while a greater proportion of men than women studied business and administrative services…Higher proportions of men than women studied engineering and technology subjects and computer sciences".

Thus, although the focus of feminist research in this particular area may have changed, over the years - from concerns about female underachievement to concerns about gendered participation - the post-16 evidence (where students are given a free choice of subjects to study) suggests participation levels are related to concepts of male and female identity. If this is the case, it seems unlikely the causes of this gendered participation only begin *after* the official school-leaving age. Thus, past feminist research into the:

School Curriculum still has both currency and usefulness. **Spender** (1982), for example, argued the curriculum was geared towards the needs and interests of boys, so as to render girls "invisible" within the classroom. Similarly, **Deem** (1980*)* argued the school curriculum and subject choices were highly gendered (which, as we've just seen, remains the case) and **Mahony** (1985) demonstrated how girls were frequently marginalised in the classroom by both boys and teachers. In addition, she pointed-out how staffing structures reflected male importance in the workplace (the highest status teaching jobs were - and remain - occupied by men). In the twenty or so years since **Mahony's** observation this discrepancy remains

apparent. **Mirza et al** (2005), for example, note that "Women make up over half (53%) of the secondary teaching population, but are still under-represented in secondary school senior management positions, particularly headships" (around 30% of secondary heads are women). In the nursery / primary sector **Department for Children, Schools and Families** (2007) figures show that while 16% of teachers are male "34% of head teachers are male".

> **Structuralist Perspectives: Explanations**

We can develop our understanding of the perspectives we're just outlined by looking at the concepts used by each to explain the role of education systems in society.

> **Functionalism**

From this perspective we can note two key aspects of the role of education in society:

1. Secondary Socialisation, a process **Parsons** (1959) termed the "emancipation of the child from primary attachment to the family" – in other words, a significant aspect of the role of the education system in modern society is its functional significance for the relationship between the family (childhood) and the workplace (adulthood). Schools, in this respect, involve a range of ideas related to secondary socialisation:

Instrumental relationships - or relationships based on what people can do for us in return for the things that we can do for them. Most of our adult relationships take this form (as opposed to the *affective* relationships experienced between people who share a close, personal, friendship). In school, instrumental relationships with teachers are different to affective relationships with friends and they mirror the general way we're expected to relate to people in wider society (outside the family).

Instrumentalism in action...

Social Control: Two types are significant here: Firstly, learning things like acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and, secondly, learning *self control* - the child learns to deal with things in an even-handed way. One aspect of self control, for example, involves:

Deferred gratification – the idea that we can't always have what we want when we want it (**immediate gratification**). In educational terms, successful students put-up with things they may dislike (boring lessons, the lack of money…) in the expectation of passing exams and gaining access to high-pay, high-status occupations. This relates to a further function of education, the:

Transmission of cultural values or, as **Parsons** (1959) puts it, the "internalisation of a level of society's values and norms that is a step higher than those learnt within the family group". Through interacting with others, children learn and internalise (adopt as part of their personality) wider cultural values. For example, they start to understand something of their history and geography as well as general cultural values (such as equality of opportunity, individual competition and so forth). This, in turn, is related to:

Eat Me Now!

Social solidarity - the idea that, as unique individuals, we have to establish things "in common" with others if we are to live and work together; we have, in short, to feel we *belong* to larger social groups (such as a school or a society). The promotion of social solidarity involves *social integration* - any institution, such as a school, has to develop *mechanisms* for helping people feel they belong to that group – and there are a several ways the education system tries to integrate people; these include things like uniforms (to encourage identification with a particular school), inter-school competitions and the like.

> **Module Link**   **Culture and Identity**
>
> Social integration and solidarity can be related to concept of identity in a couple of ways. Firstly, something like the wearing of a common uniform means everyone within the school is identified as belonging to same group. Secondly the idea of competition (and "friendly rivalry") between different schools creates a form of group solidarity in that it fosters concepts of both The Self (what "people like Us" have in common) and The Other (how We are different to Them).

2. The co-ordination of human resources relates to links with wider society and it involves things like:

Role Allocation - preparing children for their future adult roles (especially those relating to work), which is achieved by:

Social differentiation: Since work roles are clearly different (some require higher levels of skill and

knowledge, others do not), pupils have to be "made different". One way the school does this, of course, is through *testing* and *examinations* – which, for Functionalists, have to be *objective* demonstrations of ability (everyone should have an *equal opportunity* to take and pass such tests). In modern societies adult roles have to be *achieved* (on merit) rather than *ascribed* (given on the basis of something like family background) to ensure that the ablest and best qualified take-up the most important roles. This idea lead, in turn, to the idea that:

Social stratification (groups occupying different levels in society) is the inevitable outcome of the differentiation process. The classic Functionalist statement of the necessity for - and inevitability of - stratification in modern societies is probably **Davis and Moore's** (1945) argument that stratification represents a mechanism through which those who are intellectually most able and talented are allocated work roles that offer the highest rewards in terms of *income*, *power* and *status*. As they argue: "Education is the proving ground for ability and hence the selective agency for placing people in different statuses according to their abilities".
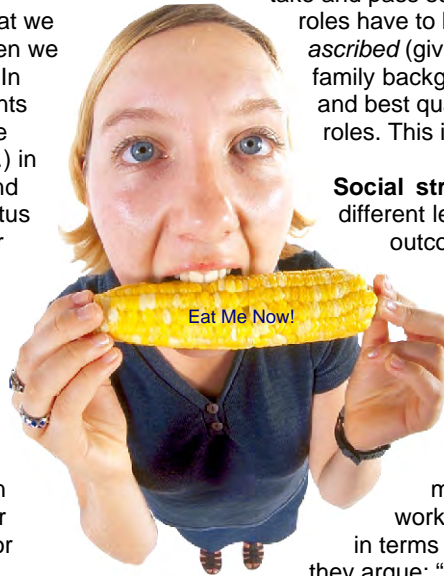
> **Education and Training**

In terms of these general ideas, therefore, the primary role of the education system from a Functionalist perspective is that of preparing children for adult (work) roles and responsibilities – something that involves orientating children in two main ways:

Firstly, the education system provides a (secondary) socialising mechanism that prepares children for the sociological and psychological transition from childhood to adulthood.

Secondly, the structure and practice of the education system must reflect the nature of adult life and work. For example, in a society where work is *highly differentiated* (there are many and varied types of work) the education system exists, as we've seen, to differentiate children (through testing and exams). If we think, for example, about two basic forms of work in our society – *professional careers* that require higher levels of abstract knowledge and lower levels of practical expertise and *non-professional work* that requires the opposite (lower levels of abstract knowledge and higher levels of practical skills) it follows that the education system must function to "sift and sort" people of different aptitudes and abilities into these different spheres – hence the necessity of different forms of education; vocational training, for example, where students are prepared for a particular form of skilled employment (mechanic, electrician, plumber and so forth) that requires strong practical skills and "professional training" which requires a more-abstract skill-set (such as the ability to construct coherent written arguments and analyses).

<div style="text-align:center">

Marxism

</div>

In developing this general perspective further, Marxist explanations for the role of education systems in Capitalist societies focus on a range of ideas.

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Cultural Reproduction

</div>

For **Althusser** (1971) cultural reproduction didn't simply relate to the general problem faced by any society of how to "reproduce itself over time" (how to transmit cultural norms and values from one generation to the next); rather, as with most Marxists, he was concerned with understanding how a *dominant social class* (the **ruling class** in Capitalist society) managed to reproduce its political and economic domination of the lower classes from one generation to the next – and one way this was achieved, he argued, was through the education system. For **Althusser** education was an *instrument* of class oppression and domination (although, to be fair, he did include institutions like the mass media and religion as, in their different ways, additional forms of cultural reproduction). For Althusser education performed its cultural reproduction purpose in a range of ways:

Formal education: Children have to learn the skills and knowledge (literacy and numeracy, for example) they will need in the workplace.

Access to knowledge, for example, is restricted through control of subjects appearing on the curriculum. The higher you go in the education system, the greater your access to knowledge. Restricting access is also useful as a way of limiting children's ambitions and expectations by:

Structuring knowledge: Preparing people for the differing levels of knowledge required in the workplace involves creating different levels of knowledge in the school. For example, academic (theoretical) knowledge (such as AS-levels) is valued more than practical (*vocational*) knowledge because the former is the type most useful for professional workers (those who, for Marxists, control both what is taught in the education system and how it is taught). Similarly, some forms of knowledge are more *valid* than others (the ability to do algebra, for example, is considered more-valid than the ability to remember who played in goal for Chelsea in the 1970 Cup Final - Peter "The Cat" Bonetti, just in case you're wondering).

Social control: Children have to learn to accept and respect "authority", since this will be important in the workplace. As you'll know from your own education, the higher you go, the *looser* are the controls on your behaviour (by the time you reach A-level you can be largely trusted to "do the right things").

Commodification of knowledge: testing and exams are part of a process where knowledge is given an *economic value*; in other words, it can be bought and sold. This is important because knowledge, unlike skills (such as the ability to mend a car – something whose usefulness can be easily measured; before the mechanic looks at it the car won't move and after it's been mended it will…), can't be easily valued unless you *certificate* it. Your knowledge of Sociology, for example, will be economically worthless unless you pass your AS level.

Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA's): The content of education is controlled by the State and, for Marxists, the means by which people think about the world is conditioned by what they learn in school (both in the formal and **hidden curriculum**). This, in turn, is related to:

Social learning, which refers to the role played by teachers in "transforming pupil consciousness" - to ensure they accept "the realities of life" and, by extension, their likely future social positions.

Althusser's characterisation of the general role of education systems as being concerned with cultural reproduction has been widely shared with other Marxist theorists – albeit in slightly different ways. **Gramsci** (1971) and his followers, for example, developed a different way of viewing the role of education – not as an instrument of class oppression but as an institution in Capitalist society concerned with:

Hegemony: **Gramsci** (1971) used this concept to describe the idea of *legitimate leadership*. In other words, people obey authority because they believe it right to do so. For example, most people would accept that the Prime Minister, **Gordon Brown,** has a right to exercise political leadership because he was democratically elected. As **Strinati** (1995) puts it: "Dominant groups in society…maintain their dominance by securing the spontaneous consent' of subordinate groups". This idea is important, when thinking about the role of education because if people believe education is *meritocratic* they will believe failure is their fault, not that of a system designed to ensure their failure.

Correspondence Theory: Bowles and Gintis (1976 and 2002) argued education is a *proving ground* in which the organisation of the workplace is reflected in the organisation of

The commodification of knowledge through qualifications

schools. Education, therefore, becomes a test of control and conformity - those who conform are allowed into the higher areas of education (and, by extension, work) whereas those who do not are excluded.

The *unstated role* of education, therefore, is *cultural reproduction*: workplace inequality is reflected and reproduced in the organisation of schooling.

In this respect the distinction between academic forms of education and vocational training merely reflects the education – workplace correspondence; academic education is the preserve of those (largely upper and middle class) students destined for professional employment while working class students (in the main) are encouraged to pursue various forms of vocational training that will prepare and qualify them for (lower-paid and lower status) employment.

Module Link   Stratification and Differentiation

The theory of cultural reproduction has been used by writers such as **Bowles and Gintis** (1973) and **Willis** (1977) to explain the relative lack of **social mobility** at the lower levels of modern British society. It can also, of course, be applied to the idea of **elite self-recruitment** to explain how those at the top of the social scale "close off" mobility for those lower down the class structure.

Social Reproduction

Bourdieu (1986) attacks the (Functionalist) idea that education systems are *meritocratic*; like **Bowles and Gintis** he sees their real role as being that of helping to reproduce the power and domination of powerful social classes through a combination of what he termed **habitus** and **cultural capital**:

Habitus: An easy way to grasp this idea is to think about the idea of a *habitat* - the environment in which a group lives and flourishes. The natural habitat of fish, for example (the environment it needs) would not be suitable for humans (and vice versa). For **Bourdieu**, schools are the "natural habitat" of the middle and upper classes - they reflect their interests, values and beliefs. The working class child is like "a fish out of water" - their values and beliefs are different because of:

Cultural capital - the idea, in basic terms, that our social backgrounds give us certain advantages and disadvantages in life. Thus, working class and middle class children enter the education system with skills and abilities (such as how we speak and express ourselves) that advantage the middle class child (because their cultural background is similar to that of the school). Thus, working class children have to "learn how to learn" before they can actually learn the things on the school curriculum - which gives them a decided *disadvantage* in the educational game. **Beron and Farkas** (2001), for example, found significant linguistic and vocabulary differences between different social classes

of white and black children in America which, they argued, disadvantaged working class children in both preschool and school environments.

Meritocracy: **Bourdieu** is critical of this idea because differences in *cultural capital* influence the relative starting-points of students (middle and upper class children have a hidden advantage). However, as he notes, the objective of schooling is *cultural reproduction* by progressively eliminating lower class children from the school system in ways that make their failure appear their own fault - by examination failure and self-elimination (they give up and leave school at the earliest opportunity).

Feminism

As we've suggested, the focus of feminist research has changed somewhat in recent years in the light of increasing female educational achievement - something that's reflected in two main ways:

Work: Despite their educational achievements, women consistently lose out in the workplace. As **Treneman** (1998) notes: 'The statistical under-achievement of boys in schools is nothing compared with the statistical over-achievement of men in life' – an idea reflected in a couple of ways:

1. Earnings: For the past 38 years it has been illegal to pay men and women different rates of pay if they are doing the same – or roughly comparable – types of work (the **Equal Pay Act**, 1970) and yet the government's **Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings** (2007) showed that , in 2007, "…women's average hourly pay was 17.2% less than men's pay" (although the good news is the gap has narrowed, from 17.5% in 2006).

This pay-gap seems to occur right across the board – from part-time workers (who earn around 35% less than men) through university graduates ("Women graduates are paid less from the very beginning of their careers, with men earning £1,000 more than their college classmates within three years of leaving university": **Benfield**, 2007) to the boardroom ("Female directors earn up to 26% less than men": **Ward**, 2007).

Does the cultural capital of middle class children give them a head start in the race for educational qualifications?

2. Gender Stereotypes:

Warrington and Younger (2000) noted male and female career aspirations still reflected traditional gender stereotypes (childcare, nursing, hairdressing and secretarial for girls, computing, accountancy and plumbing for boys) and **Gordon** (1996) found that although teachers frequently praised girls' efforts they reported finding boys more interesting to teach and gave more time and effort to motivate and retain their attention - once again suggesting the different levels of importance teachers give to male and female work. In this respect the **Equal Opportunities Commission** (2007) has argued: "Girls' educational achievements are not necessarily helping them into well-paid jobs [and] Eliminating gender stereotyping in school education, in vocational training, and in careers choices is a vital step towards tackling the gender pay gap in employment" .

Roger and Duffield (2000) suggest a number of reasons why girls tend to avoid science subjects that are equally applicable to a range of gendered curriculum choices:

> "**Jodie**: Girls are crap, all the girls in this class act all stupid and girlie.
>
> **Diane**: So does that include you?
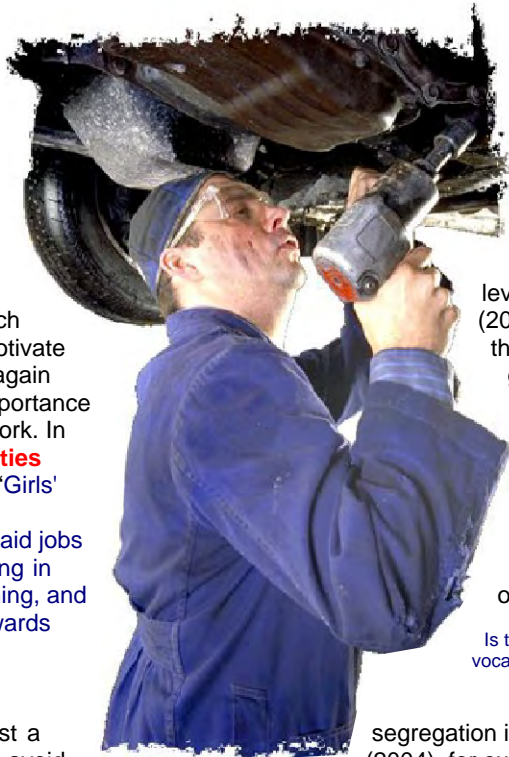>
> **Jodie**: No, cos I'm not a girl, I'm a tomboy".

Primary socialisation entrenches concepts of gender identity in males and females, conditioning the choices they make in school. **Reay** (2001), for example, found a variety of female identities developing in the primary classroom, including, most interestingly, as the following exchange suggests, girls who wanted to be like boys:

Role Models: In primary teaching, for example, nearly 90% of classroom teachers are female, leading to an early connection between gender and work.

Careers advice tends to reinforce traditional male - female work roles and divisions.

Work experience places boys and girls into traditionally stereotyped jobs. **Mackenzie's** (1997) study of "school-based work experience" placements found, for example: "45% of girls [in the study] were allocated to caring placements but these did not always reflect their choices. Boys who did not get their preferred placement tended to be allocated to occupations which were regarded by them as either neutral or as traditionally male while girls who were unsuccessful were allocated to traditionally female occupations".

One conclusion we can draw from this type of research is the relationship between vocational forms of education and training and gender stereotypes in the sense that "vocational training" is much more likely to result in both males and females being channelled into "traditional" forms of gendered employment. This observation will, of course, have significant ramifications for the "vocational GCSE and A-level" qualifications currently (2008) being introduced - will they, in short, reinforce the gendered relationship between education and the workplace?

Be that as it may, the argument here is not that "academic education" somehow guarantees a lack of gender stereotyping and

Is there a strong correlation between vocational education and training and a gendered workplace?

segregation in the workplace - **Kampmeier** (2004), for example, found that across the European Community "Gender segregation in the labour market has not been considerably reduced during the last decades, as far as "typical" male and female occupations – like electricians and nursery nurses – are concerned" – but rather that there are greater opportunities for stereotyping and segregation in vocational training.

The implication, therefore, is that – probably unintentionally – one role of vocational forms of education is to reinforce gender (and indeed class for that matter) stereotypes and divisions in ways that are not quite so apparent with academic forms of education (because they don't necessarily channel young people into particular forms of work at a relatively early age).

Identity: The emphasis here is on understanding different levels of achievement amongst females by examining different forms of identity (how class and ethnicity, for example, impact on gender). **Warrington and Younger** (2000) for example, found very little difference between the percentage of boys and girls who leave school with no qualifications.

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by the term "hidden curriculum" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest **three** functions that education may perform for individuals and / or society. (6 marks).

(c) Outline some of the ways education contributes to cultural reproduction (12 marks).

(d) Compare Functionalist perspectives on the role of education with *either* Marxist *or* Feminist perspectives (20 marks).

Interactionist Perspectives: Observations

Interactionist perspectives focus on the role of education as a *process* rather than a *system*. In other words, they're interested in examining the idea education is a *social construction* whose role isn't fixed and unchanging but, on the contrary, fluid and open to a wide range of interpretations. A classic example of this is the question of whether the role of the education system is one of two things:

1. Education: **Dewey** (1916), an influential education theorist in the 20th century, argued education should be "*transformative*"; focusing on individuals and their social, psychological and moral development as people. Education, in this respect, involves providing the means for individuals to achieve their "full potential" (whatever that may, in reality, turn out to be).

2. Training: The role of education is to give people the knowledge and skills they need to perform specific work-related roles (doctor, mechanic, etc.).

This general debate over the role and purpose of schooling is played out in a number of areas, two of the most significant being:

Outside the school: The role of education is never clear-cut and *uncontested;* various *interest groups* (parents, teachers, governments, businesses) have an input into the system, trying to shape it to reflect their interests, prejudices and concerns. Some groups, of course, are more successful in getting their views heard (government and business organisations over the past 20 years, for example, have been powerful shaping forces in education). The dominance of these groups has resulted in the role of education being "officially" defined in terms of its *training role* - the objective (through policies such as the **National Curriculum**, and **Key Stage testing**) is to produce "a highly skilled and trained workforce".

Inside the school: While official declarations and definitions of the role of education are important influences on behaviour within schools, the relationship between the various *actors* involved in "doing education" (teachers and their students, for example) is important and worthy of study. This is because Interactionists want to consider how these social actors *interpret their roles* within the context of the education system itself.

To illustrate this with a simple example, the Sociology course you're following (for whatever reason - you like the subject, your friends took it so you did too, you ticked the wrong box when deciding your options and now you're stuck with it…) has, in terms of its *structure and content*, been decided by the exam board (or Awarding Body as it's

now known). Thus, if you want the qualification you have to study what's laid-down in the Specification (don't ask). However, teachers don't all teach Sociology in the same way - for some the objective may be to get you through the exam, while for others it may be to provide an "interesting learning experience" on a wet Friday afternoon – and in the same style (interactive, didactic, a combination or the two or whatever). The main point here, therefore, is that whatever the specific structure of education (in this particular example the one laid-down in the A-level Sociology Specification) different students and different teachers will interpret

Politicians (and political parties / ideologies) have a significant input into the role of education in our society.

their role differently and produce different ways of achieving the same basic goals. What happens "inside schools", therefore, is a process that can be shaped - but not determined - by official definitions of the role of education and is, therefore, something worthy of study.

Interactionist Perspectives: Explanations

Interactionists, as we've suggested, are particularly interested in what goes on "inside schools" and it is from this general perspective that they tend to focus their explanations of the role of education and training mainly, as we've argued, in terms of:

School Processes: These involve ideas about how educational roles are interpreted and negotiated "at the chalk face". In this respect, Interactionists employ a range of ideas to understand the ways teachers and pupils *construct* "education", many of which are anchored around the idea of *labelling*.

Labelling theory has traditionally been used to describe how teachers, as powerful actors in the education game, classify (or *stereotype*) students and, by so doing, influence the way they understand their role and status within the school - **Padfield** (1997), for example, has explored the way "informal reputations" gained within the school influenced official definitions of pupils. Labelling theory has been used to show how school processes are inherently *divisive* (they encourage students to think of themselves - and each other - in terms of fixed educational abilities). This, for example, includes common school practices and processes like:

• S*treaming* (grouping by ability on a yearly basis),

• *Banding* (students taught at different levels - Intermediate and Higher Maths, for example) and

• *Setting* (grouping by ability on a subject-by-subject basis)

For Interactionists, where much of the focus is on what happens in and around classrooms, teachers are seen as powerful educational players when it comes to things like determining educational achievement.

Module Link **Crime and Deviance**

Labelling theory has been applied to good effect in the study of crime of and deviance; it has, for example, been used to show how the police and judicial system label and stereotype potential offenders by class, gender, age and ethnicity.

Lupton (2004) notes the decision made by the head teacher of one school to abandon banding: "…principally to counter problems of low self-esteem among pupils in the lower band. Within the context of the selective system and the school's poor performance and reputation, mixed ability teaching was seen as an important way to give all pupils the message they were equally valued". Additionally, **Hattersley and Francis** (2004) argue that we increasingly have an educational system that labels whole schools as either "good" (academically successful) or "bad" (academically failing) - and the consequences of the latter label frequently means closure. This example serves to illustrate a significant aspect of labelling theory, namely the impact of labels on:

Self-concepts: Labelling relates specifically to this idea in terms of questions like:

• How do you know if you are a good or bad student?

• How does your teacher know if they're good or bad at their job?

• How good is the reputation of your school?

These questions relate to how we see ourselves and, for Interactionists, *self perception* is fluid and intangible, mainly because we look to others to tell us how we're doing. You may, for example, look to your teacher to tell you how "good" or "bad" a student you are. Equally, your teacher may look to you to tell them something about their teaching abilities and the school itself may gain a certain reputation – for good or ill – based

around how successful or otherwise it is in terms of GCSE / A-level examination results.

Labelling is an important aspect of this process of *self-construction* (if your teacher continually gives you poor grades or students continually misbehave in a class we soon start to get the picture), based on the idea of:

Reference groups - the people we use to check "how we're doing" in whatever role we're playing. Not everyone in our reference group is equally important:

Significant others are people whose opinion we value while

Insignificant others are people we don't really care about (if your teacher *isn't* a significant other, you won't particularly care how they label you, although the labels that *stick* will always have consequences for students throughout – and possibly even after – their school career).

Module Link **Culture and Identity**

The significance of labelling in relation to personal and social identities is explored in more detail in this Chapter. The concept of a "**looking glass self**" (the theory that we come to see ourselves as others define us) is particularly relevant in the context of education.

This idea can, as we've just indicated, be applied to whole schools as well as groups and individuals within them. One outcome of all the processes just described may be a:

Self-fulfilling prophecy - a prediction we make that, by making, we bring about. On an individual level, if we're labelled by teachers as "dim" because, despite our best efforts, we get poor grades then perhaps we start to see our self in terms of this label and stop trying to get decent grades (what's the point - we're dim) and, in effect, confirm the teacher's label.

Nash (1972) demonstrated how the values held by teachers about "good" and "bad" pupils were rapidly transmitted to pupils through attitudes and behaviours. **Nash** concluded: "Certainly children of low social origin do poorly at school because they lack encouragement at home, because they use language in a different way from their teachers, because they have their own attitudes to learning and so on. But also because of the expectations their teachers have of them.". **Nash's** study has two significant dimensions that impact on how Interactionists theorise the role of education:

Firstly, as **Brimi** (2005) suggests, it involves a concept of **cultural capital** – that what students bring into the school from their home / family background has a significant impact on both their experience of education and, of course, how successfully or otherwise they are able to negotiate the various "barriers to success" (such as exams) placed in their path during their time in school.

Secondly, however, **Nash** suggests that "success" or "failure" (in terms of examination passes) is not simply a matter of "where you come from" or "the size of your parents' wallet" – there are more subtle processes at play in the classroom relating to how teachers and students manage their impressions of each other. If a student is able to employ sufficient cultural capital within the classroom to be able to conform to the teacher's perception of a "good pupil" it's possible for them to overcome particular disadvantages in their home background – something that provides an interesting explanation for the ability of pupils from disadvantaged social backgrounds to succeed in the education system.

The concept of a self-fulfilling prophecy also applies to whole classes of students who may find themselves negatively labelled. Studies abound (**Willis,** 1977, **Ball,** 1981, **Wright,** 1992, **Troyna and Hatcher,** 1992) to demonstrate how this occurs through practices such as streaming, setting and banding, ethnic stereotyping and so forth.

Finally, whole schools may be enveloped by a *self-fulfilling prophecy*. If schools do badly in League Tables of GCSE results, middle class parents stop sending their children to the "bad school", whose results may continue to fall.

The repeated appearance of Public Schools such as Winchester at the top of school league tables does, of course, come at a price (£26,000 per year at a school such as Harrow)

Whatever cultural capital Wayne may once have possessed it was increasingly clear his account was now in debit...

Postmodern Perspectives: Observations

Post-modernist views on the "role of education" are difficult to categorise for the deceptively simple reason that, as **Collins** (1993) suggests: "The term describes cultural changes happening to people throughout the post-industrial world, willy-nilly". The "willy-nilly" tag is important because it suggests postmodernism is concerned with describing cultural tendencies and processes, in all their (glorious) confusion, for both our amusement and, probably, bemusement. In other words, postmodernists don't have a specific view, as such, on the role of education since this suggests there is some essential "right" or "wrong" position on the subject. What they do have is ideas about the relationship - and tension - between two competing, increasingly opposed, processes:

1. Modern institutions, such as schools, were born out of the Industrial Revolution and the development of modern society. As such, they exist to serve a number of purposes all of which, according to writers such as **Foucault** (1977), are to do with *power* ("Everything reduces to power", as he helpfully puts it – a maxim that will serve you well on your a-level course…). The *power principle*, in this context, relates to how the modern State tries to exert social control through institutions such as education.

2. **Postmodern people**: The other side of this spectacle is the increasing *resistance* and *decentralising attitudes* of students (and indeed teachers) to the *centralising tendencies* of modernist education systems.

In other words, we have a situation where, on the one hand, the education system has, over the past few years, been subjected to increasingly *centralised control* by government. This idea of "control from the centre" has been evidenced by things like the introduction of a:

National Curriculum (introduced in 1988) that sets-out the subjects to be taught in all State schools.

Key Stage testing, at ages 7, 11 and 14, that sets attainment targets in English, Science and Maths for all pupils. Key Stage testing, also introduced in 1988, was originally intended to involve all subjects studied within the **National Curriculum** (Technology, Music, Art, History, Modern Foreign Language, Geography and Physical Education).

Literacy and **numeracy hours** introduced into primary schools in 1998. Commenting on the introduction of the Literacy hour, the **National Literacy Trust** (2004) noted:
"The National Literacy Strategy is an unprecedented intervention in classroom teaching methods.[It] describes term by term how reading and writing should be taught….The policy requires primary teachers to teach a daily English lesson in which pupils are taught for the first half of the lesson as a whole class, reading together, extending their vocabulary…and being taught grammar, punctuation and spelling".

On the other hand, however, we have a situation that **Elkind** (1998), characterises in terms of the idea that: "Whereas *modern* childhood was defined in terms of differences *between* age groups, post-modern childhood is identified with differences *within* age groups". In other words, there is a sense of what **Willis** (2003) describes as "Decentralising education from government and reducing the number of tests and targets" in order to "…free schools up to deal with the needs of individual children".

Postmodern Perspectives: Explanations

We can develop the distinction between modern institutions and postmodern people in the following way:

Modern Institutions...

The idea of control, for postmodernists, works on two levels:

1. Intellectual control involves how people think and act in several ways:

The **Curriculum**, for example, specifies the things (subjects) considered worthy of being known and its content is controlled down to the finest detail (think about the Sociology Specification or government initiatives involving the aforementioned *literacy hours* and detailed lesson plans for primary school teachers).

Knowledge is also controlled in terms of what you learn. English literature, for example, involves learning "classic texts" (Shakespeare, Dickens and so forth - sometimes called "*high culture*" - what governments and educationalists view as the best possible examples of our culture) and largely excludes *popular culture* (the

books and magazines most people actually read, the computer games they play, the films they watch…) that is considered, within the National Curriculum for example, as being largely unworthy of serious, detailed, study.

Sites of control: In an overall sense, schools are sites which attempt (through their captive audiences) to distribute (and legitimise) certain forms of what **Provenzo** *(*2002*)* identifies as: language, practices, values, ways of talking and acting, moving, dressing and socializing (to name but a few). Schools, from this viewpoint, are not simply organised for "education", but also for institutionalising the culture of powerful groups.

2. Physical: This involves control over both:

Body: Think about what you can and can't do in school. You must attend (or your parents may be prosecuted) and you must be in certain lessons (and places) at certain times. Once in those lessons there may be restrictions on when you can speak, who you can speak to, how you speak to them, as well as movement restrictions (such as asking permission to go to the toilet and not being in corridors when you should be in a lesson).

Space: Schools are increasingly introducing *closed-circuit television* (both inside and outside the classroom) for the purpose of patrolling and controlling space - who's allowed to be in certain spaces (classrooms, corridors, staffrooms) and when they're allowed to be there.

Postmodern People...

For postmodernists, what we are seeing are changes in people's behaviour (under the influence of *globalisation* and cross-cultural contacts and exchanges) which include:

Active Consumption: **Taylor** (2004) argues students are changing: "They are the most academically disengaged, or even compliant college students with all time low measures for time spent studying and all time high measures for boredom and tardiness… bringing educational and social characteristics to campus that are challenging educators".

Taylor characterises these students in a range of ways (not all of them particularly flattering): Consumer oriented, wanting instant gratification, adaptable to new situations, skeptical and cynical to name but a few.

However, the crucial point here is the tension that exists between, on the one hand, an increasingly tightly-controlled, patrolled and policed education system (in both the intellectual and physical senses)

that seeks to specify exactly what should be learned, how it should be learned and when it should be learned and, on the other, increasingly independent and individualistic educational consumers (or students as they're sometimes called). In this respect, while education systems in modern society become, to all intents and purposes, *homogenised* (one size fits all, as it were) the consumers of education are increasingly:

Watching you, watching me - sousveillance in the year 2000

Differentiated: **Elkind** (1998) suggests a key characteristic here is the idea of difference and, in a sense, the *fragmentation of identities*. In other words, students want to be recognised and treated as unique individuals rather than as groups (genders, classes. ethnicities and so forth). To use **Giroux's** (1994) phrase, students are increasingly "**border youths"** whose identities cut-across class, ethnicity and gender categories. This general idea is encapsulated by the idea of:

Sousveillance (the opposite of **surveillance** - to watch from above) means "*to watch from below*" and expresses the idea students (and teachers) are increasingly critical and dissatisfied with their treatment in the education system. As **Hanafin and Lynch** (2002) argue: "Mainstream education is constructed on a flawed notion of intelligence and consequently disables many learners, perhaps even the majority…Through over reliance on a narrow range of teaching methods, students are denied access to curriculum content. Narrow assessment approaches further compound disablement. At its most extreme, mainstream education supports and structures unnecessary failure and exclusion".

In addition, we could also note here the development of new:

Subjects, such as media, film and cultural studies.

Ideas about learning. **Gardner's** (1993) theory of *multiple intelligences*, for example, expresses the notion that "…it was generally believed intelligence was a single entity that was inherited; and that human beings - initially a blank slate - could be trained to learn anything, provided it was presented in an appropriate way. Nowadays an increasing number of researchers believe precisely the opposite; that there exists a multitude of intelligences, quite independent of each other".
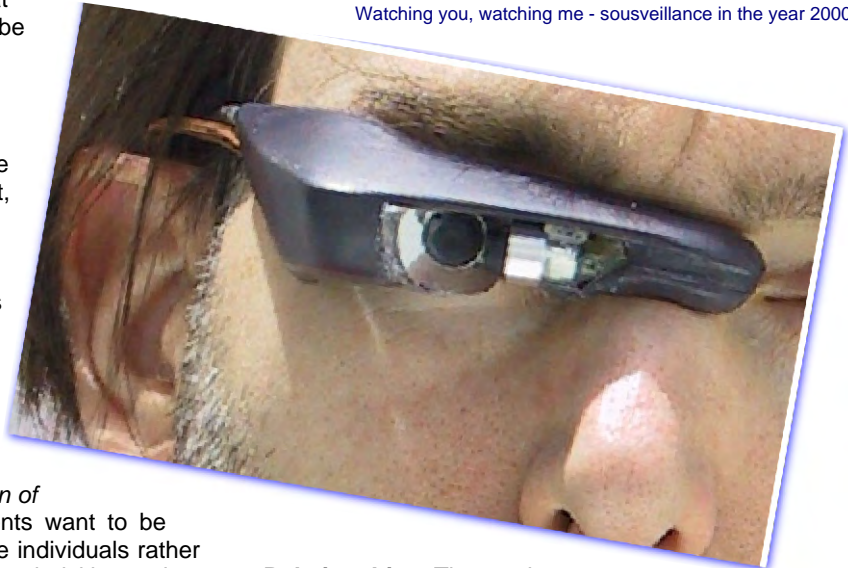
Relationships: The teacher as "facilitator", for example, helping students to learn in an independent way that takes advantages for their individual strengths and aptitudes.

Finally, postmodernists note that some contributing processes to the above involve:

Globalisation – as our culture is exposed to the influence of other cultures (through immigration, mass media, technology such as the Internet and so forth) new ways of thinking and doing open up. Conversely, as **Yang** (2002) notes, globalisation also promotes a new interest in *local cultures* (your immediate and personal environment, for example).

Uncertainty (both for students and teachers) about the teaching and learning process - what, for example, is expected of people? Have they made the right choices about what to study? and so forth. One upshot of uncertainty is a contradictory outcome to that noted by **Taylor** (2004). **Howe and Strauss** (2000), for example, characterise the "post modern generation" as being well focused on grades and performance, interested in extracurricular and community activities, demanding of secure environments and more interested in maths and science than in humanities.

On the other hand, as we will see when we look at New Right perspectives, governments have responded to uncertainty by increased efforts at centralisation and control. The National Curriculum, key stage tests and so forth. are all attempts, it could be argued, to maintain an outdated perception of the role and purpose of education.

Globalisation is one of the key concepts of postmodernist sociology.

New Right perspectives are difficult to classify because they tend to straddle an uneasy divide between, on the

one hand, Functionalist theories (involving, for example, structural concepts like role allocation and social differentiation) and, on the other, individualistic views about people as consumers who exercise choices about the education their sons and daughters receive. Problems of classification notwithstanding, we can note how New Right perspectives generally focus on two basic areas:

1. Society: Although Margaret **Thatcher's** (in)famous observation "There is no such thing as society, only individuals and families" suggests these perspectives take a rather dim view of sociological arguments about society and culture (they also take a dim view of sociologists, come to that), this is not to say they don't have strong views about the State which, in basic terms, involves the idea that the role of government is to guarantee the freedom of:

2. Individuals: From this perspective, people are seen as *consumers*, able and willing to make informed choices about their lives and families (which, *pace* **Thatcher**, is seen as the basic social unit in any society). However, they argue consumer choice is limited, in societies such as our own, by the way governments have allowed teachers to set the education agenda - an idea we will develop in more detail in a moment.

Rather than concern ourselves with trying to specify,

Individuals as informed consumers.

from this perspective, the exact relationship between the individual and society, it's perhaps easier to think in terms of the relationship between individuals and the State (which includes things like political government, the Civil Service and social control agencies such as the police and armed forces). In this respect, New Right perspectives argue for a:

Minimal State: In other words, the ideal role of government in any society is that of creating the conditions under which private enterprise can flourish and in which individuals can go about their daily lives with the minimum of political interference. The role of

the State, therefore, is largely reduced to one that guarantees the safety of its citizens - both internally, through agencies such as the police, and externally through agencies such as the armed forces.

Although this characterisation oversimplifies New Right arguments somewhat, it does give a general flavour for the perspective and its emphasis on the rights and responsibilities of individuals (to provide, for example, for both themselves and their families) and the general belief that Capitalism (and private enterprise) is the best possible way of ensuring the largest number of people have the highest possible standard of living.

These ideas, as I'm sure you appreciate, mean that when we consider the role of education from this perspective the general argument is that government should not be involved in its provision.

New Right Perspectives: Explanations

New Right perspectives on the role of education have been influential in both Britain and America in recent years and we can develop the ideas we've just noted in the following way:

1. Society: From this perspective:

Business organisations are seen as *wealth creators* and, as such, should be allowed to get on with the thing they do best (creating wealth if you have to ask), free from State "interference". Schools should, ideally, be privately owned for a couple of reasons:

Governments are seen as *bureaucratic organisations*, unable and unwilling to adjust quickly and easily to change (unlike private companies whose ability to respond quickly to changes in the marketplace is essential if they are to survive and prosper). Government should be involved in areas (such as industry and commerce) where businesses can, it is argued, do a far better, more cost effective job. The role of government, therefore, is not to "do things" (like manage schools or… err… railways) but rather to create the conditions under which businesses can successfully operate. One reason for this is:

Why are bureaucrats always "faceless"?

Competition: Businesses, unlike governments, are competitive organisations, forced to innovate (find new and better ways of doing things) if they are to attract and retain customers. They are, in other words, "*consumer captured*" organisations – private businesses in a competitative environment must respond to the demands of consumers or the customer will go elsewhere (to a competitor). Private businesses, therefore, have an incentive to be efficient, cost-effective and responsive to their customers in a way that governments do not – where the government is effectively a monopoly supplier of education parents have little or no choice about their off-spring's education; not only do schools effectively choose which children they will take (as opposed to parents choosing schools) they have little or no incentive to improve the education they offer (since they were – until very recently - unlikely to be closed down…).

2. Individuals:. **Pateman** (1991) notes that the New Right sees *consumer choice* as being limited by *producer capture*: "Teachers (the 'producers') have set their own agendas for schools when it should be parents (the 'consumers') who set agendas for teachers. The New Right then argues for breaking up schooling monopolies and for enfranchizing the consumer". The role of government, in this respect, is to guarantee:

Choice: This is achieved in a variety of ways: by encouraging different types of school; allowing businesses a say in the building, ownership and running of state schools; encouraging fee-paying, private, schools (thereby contributing to the diversity of educational provision and the enhancing of parental choice).

Standards, in the sense of ensuring teachers teach the same (National) curriculum, testing (at various Key Stages) to ensure schools are performing their role properly and to identify schools "failing their customers". League Tables (based around raw exam passes or value-added calculations) which show the "best" and "worst" performing schools are also designed to give consumers choice over where they send their children (because they provide an "objective" measure of school performance).

The decentralisation of education: Are school governors necessarily more in-tune with the needs of schools than elected local politicians?

Finally we can sum-up New Right approaches by noting what **Boyd** (1991) has characterised as the "5 Ds" and "3Cs" of their perception of the role of education and training in contemporary Western societies:

Disestablishment: The school system should be decoupled from State control; private businesses should be encouraged to own and run schools, just as

private companies run supermarkets or accountancy firms. The government doesn't, for example, tell Tesco how to organise and run its shops so the New Right see little reason for governments playing such a role in education.

Deregulation: Within certain broad limits private owners should be free to offer the kind of educational facilities and choices they believe parents want; schools should be "freed" from Local Authority / government control.

Disestablishment

Deregulation

Decentralisation

Diminution

De-Emphasis

New Right key concepts (**Boyd**, 1991)

Decentralisation: Control over the day-to-day decision-making within a school should fall on the shoulders of those best-placed to make decisions in the interests of their clients - something that involves giving power to those closest to individual schools (governors and headteachers) rather than decision-making being in the hands of those who are remote from the specific needs of such schools (governments, politicians and the like). Power, in this respect, is seen to be most efficiently exercised by those furthest away (school leaders) from the centre of government power (because they know and understand particular local conditions and circumstances and can respond quickly to change in a way government bureaucracies cannot).

Diminution: Once each of the above ideas are operating the State has a much-reduced role to play in education and hence national education spending should fall (to be replaced by a variety of localised initiatives – including private, fee-paying, education, local forms of taxation and so forth). This idea dovetails with the idea of consumer choice (see below) and general New Right thinking about the size and role of the State; if education takes a smaller part of the national tax budget people pay less tax and are free to spend that money on the education of their choice.

De-emphasis: With each of the above in place the power of government is diminished (or de-emphasised) with the power to make educational decisions focused at the local level of individual schools.

> **Module Link** **Education**
>
> These ideas are examined and evaluated in more detail in Section 3: **State polices**

Character (moral): The **socialisation** function of education means schools have an important role in both producing new consumers and workers and also ensuring children have the "right attitudes" for these roles. Part of this process involves (in a similar sort of argument to that used by Functionalists) instilling respect for legitimate authority and the development of future business leaders.

Core Content: The emphasis here, as we've suggested, is the establishment of a curriculum designed to meet the needs of the *economy* - the main objective for schools is to adequately prepare children for their working adult lives in ways that benefit the overall economy. This generally involves the idea that there should be a mix of academic and vocational courses and qualifications open to students; in the past this has meant the New Right championing *Grammar schools* that provided an academic type of

Over the past 10 years a wide range of vocational education qualifications have been introduced (such as NVQs, GNVQs, Modern Apprenticeships and, most recently, vocational GCSEs and A-levels).

education for a relatively small elite (around 20%) of children and *Secondary Modern / Technical schools* that provided a vocational type of education. Currently the vogue is to provide different types of academic / vocational qualifications (such as "ordinary" GCSEs and "vocational" GCSEs) within the same school.

For the majority of students the curriculum emphasis should be on some variety of training with the objective being to ensure schools produce students with the skills businesses need ("Key Skills", for example, such as Maths, English and ICT). The New Right is keen on "traditional subjects" (English, Maths and History) and antagonistic to subjects like Media and Film Studies - and, of course, Sociology.

Choice of school: Parents should be free to choose the school they want their children to attend – whether this be State maintained or private. The basic model here is a business one – just like with any business, those that offer the customer good value will thrive and those that offer poor value will fold. When parents exercise choice "good" schools will expand to accommodate all those who want a place and "bad" schools will close as their numbers decline.

New Right key concepts (**Boyd,** 1991)
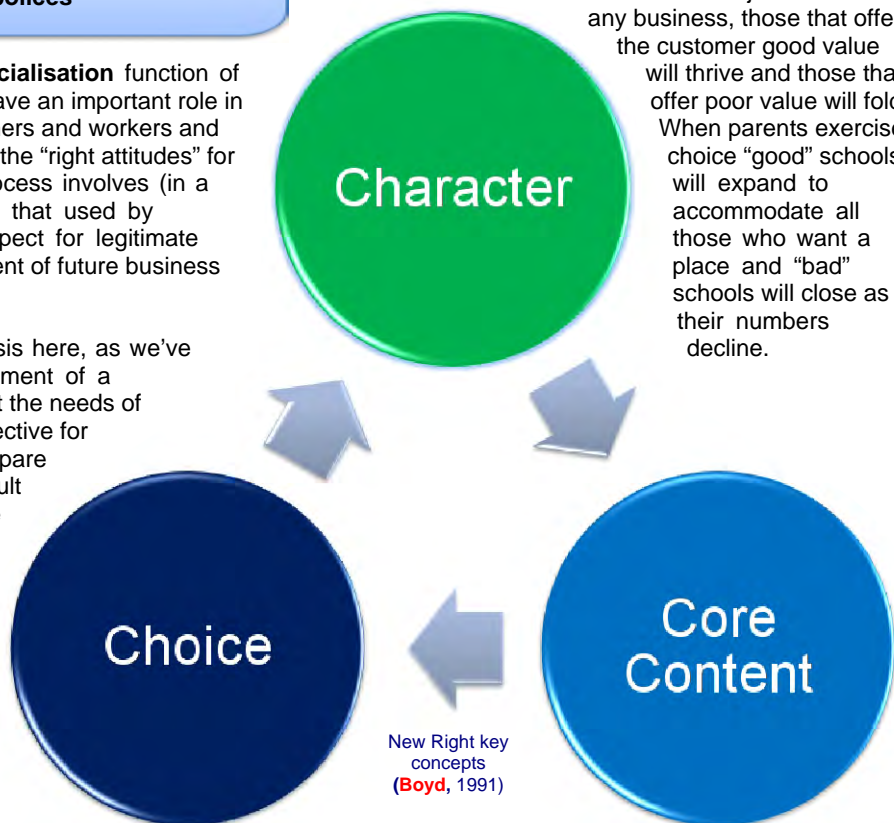
Emmanuel College

Marlowe Academy

"New academy schools fuel education row"
Source: **Taylor and Smithers** (2005)

"Ten new academy schools, including one backed by the former boss of Saga holidays and another by an evangelical Christian group linked to the teaching of creationism, will open this week as the government presses ahead with its most radical reform of the state school system. The expansion - the largest since the first academy opened in 2002 - means there are 27 schools open with 30 more in the pipeline. The programme is one of the government's most divisive proposals for reforming the school system. Private sponsors give a maximum of £2m in return for a large degree of control over the school's curriculum, ethos and staffing.

The Emmanuel Schools Foundation, an evangelical Christian group which has been linked to the teaching creationism at Emmanuel College in Gateshead, is sponsoring the Trinity Academy in Doncaster. Four out of the 10 new schools opening this week are backed by Christian organisations and almost half of those under development are due to be sponsored by religious groups of some sort.

Yesterday campaigners warned that academies were being used as "trojan horses" by some Christians. Keith Porteous Wood, director of the National Secular Society, said: "Given that only 7% of the population are in church on any given Sunday this is a disproportionately high number of academies. Religious organisations are seeing the captive audience that academies provide as being their best, and sometimes only, chance of survival.".

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by the term "self-fulfilling prophecy" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest **three** factors that occur inside schools that affect the role of education (6 marks).

(c) Outline the contribution of labelling theory to our understanding of the role of education (12 marks).

(d) Compare New Right perspectives on the role of education with either Interactionist or Postmodernist perspectives.(20 marks).

Tried and Tested: Research Methods

Using material from this Chapter and elsewhere, assess the strengths and limitations of **one** of the following methods for our understanding of the role of education in society:

(i) Postal questionnaires.
(ii) Participant observation (20 marks).

This question requires you to **apply** your knowledge and understanding of sociological research methods to the study of this **particular** issue in education.

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2. Differential educational achievement of social groups by social class, gender and ethnicity in contemporary society.

Differential Achievement: Introduction

In the opening section we looked at a range of different perspectives on the role of education and training in our society and one aspect of that general role, common to all perspectives, is the significance of educational qualifications. The focus of this section is not, however, about educational achievement *per se* (although this is discussed at various points throughout the section); rather, what we're mainly interested in here is looking at how various sociological factors (class, gender and ethnicity) impact on the achievement levels of different broad groupings in contemporary Britain. In this respect, therefore, we can examine each of these groupings in turn in relation to, firstly, observations about achievement levels and secondly sociological explanations for differing levels of educational achievement.

Class, Age, Gender and Ethnicity are all significant social factors in the explanation of differential educational achievement.

Social Class: Observations

We can begin this section by identifying some of the ways social class impacts on educational performance at various levels of our education system, from achievement at Key Stage 1 (7 year olds) to participation at degree level. Once we've outlined the basic relationship between class and educational performance we can then move-on to examine some explanations for this relationship.

Key Stage 1 - 3

The following table illustrates achievement differences between social classes using eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM) as a measure of attainment. This does, of course, assume (arguably quite reasonably) that pupils with FSM status come from the lower social classes.
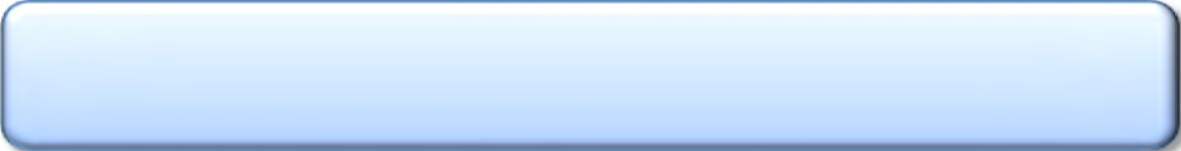
The most notable feature of these figures is the comparatively lower performance of FSM pupils at

Key Stage 4

% Achievement: Key Stage 4 (GCSE)
Source: **Self and Zealey** (2007)

	5 or more A*-C	5 grades A* to C including English and mathematics	No Passes
Non FSM	61	48	2
FSM	33	20	6

all stages of compulsory schooling, from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 4 (GCSE).

If we look in a bit more detail at Key Stage 4, by breaking the figures down into specific social classes, we can see more-clearly the general relationship

% Achievement: Key Stages 1 - 3 (ages 7, 11 and 14)
Source: **Department for Education and Skills**, 2004

	KS1	KS2	KS3	KS1	KS2	KS3	KS1	KS2	KS3
	Reading	English		Writing	Science			Maths	
Non FSM	88	79	74	85	79	74	96	76	75
FSM	69	54	44	64	52	42	80	53	46

between class membership and achievement. Firstly, middle class (professional) children perform comparatively better than working class (skilled and unskilled manual) children - but there are also clear achievement divisions within the working class. Secondly, educational performance for all social classes has improved in recent years, although, as we've just noted, the performance gap between the higher and lower social classes is still apparent.

% of selected social classes gaining 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C
Source: **Department for Education and Skills**, 2004

	1989	2000	2002
Professional	52	74	77
Skilled Manual	21	45	52
Unskilled Manual	12	26	32

If we look at **Further Education** participation (or "staying-on") figures for those in full-time Further Education (roughly 16 - 18 year olds) by social class, an interesting picture begins to emerge. Working class participation, although still generally lower than middle class participation, has increased significantly in recent times (unskilled manual participation, for example, has more than doubled since 1989). This suggests a couple of things:

Vocational qualifications: Many working class children stay-on in education, post-16, to study for vocational qualifications - qualifications that are directly related to specific occupations (bricklaying, for example) or types of occupation (such as Tourism) not offered during their period of compulsory schooling.

Educational value: Many working class children (and presumably their parents who may have to support them financially during their period of study) place a value on educational qualifications. The interesting thing to note here, perhaps, is the possibility such children have problems with their school (in terms of achievement, what they are required to study and so forth), not with the idea of education itself. In other words, although working class children are likely to leave school at the earliest opportunity (currently 16 although with a proposal (2008) to increase this to 18) they don't necessarily all leave education (although, of course, a substantial number do just that); rather, they take-up a different form of educational experience (Further Education) that presumably offers courses and qualifications more-suited to their particular academic / vocational needs.

% in full-time education at age 16 by selected social classes
Source: **Department for Education and Skills**, 2004

	1989	2000	2002
Professional	68	82	87
Skilled Manual	39	66	69
Unskilled Manual	27	59	60

Higher Education

If we look at participation in Higher (degree-level) Education, a similar trend - in terms of middle class (non-manual) children having a higher level of participation than working class (manual) children - is again evident. However, we need to keep in mind that if relatively large numbers of working class children are participating, post-16, in vocational education courses it makes it less-likely they will be subsequently involved in Higher Education than their middle class peers - principally because the type of vocational courses the majority follow lead almost directly from education into work. For this reason, therefore, it's important to consider the idea that different social classes may develop different routes through the education system

% Participation in HE by social classes
Source: **Summerfield and Babb** (2004)

	1981	1988	2002
Non- Manual	36	48	51
Manual	11	18	19

Social Class: Explanations

In terms of the figures we've just examined, the general patterns of achievement we've noted suggest the higher your social class, the greater your level of educational attainment. Sociologists have, of course, developed several possible explanations for this situation which, for convenience, we can examine in terms of two general categories:
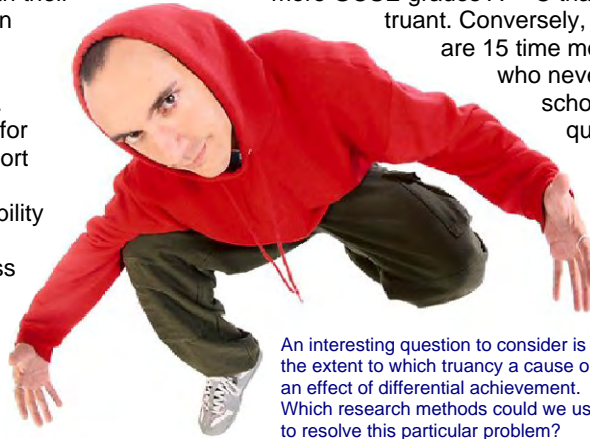
1. Outside School Factors

This category involves explanations focusing on the home background (both material and cultural) of pupils. These include, for example:

Material deprivation, which refers to things like poor diet / nutrition, lack of private study facilities and resources, the need to work to supplement family

income and so forth. These combine to give affluent ("well-off") pupils a relative advantage in school (the ability to use computers and the Internet for homework / coursework, for example).

Attitudes to education focuses on the idea middle class parents take an active interest in their children's education. **Reay** (2000) suggests middle and upper class parents are better-positioned than their working class counterparts to draw on emotional capital – the ability to decisively influence the focus and direction of their children's education. **Reay** suggests middle class mothers, for example, invest a lot of time and effort (emotional labour) in their children's education. This includes not just the ability to help with things like homework but, more importantly perhaps, a willingness to ensure that the school their child attends is providing what the parents believe are appropriate levels of support, teaching, testing and so forth – and to act swiftly and decisively if they are not.

To what extent do adult and child attitudes to education explain differential achievement?

The other side of this particular coin is that working class parents have lower levels of emotional capital to invest in their children; at one extreme here might be the idea that some working class parents don't particularly care about their children's education (the classic argument being they prefer their children to leave school and start work at the earliest possible opportunity); for others an inability to control, for whatever reason, their children's behaviour results in things like truancy, exclusion and its by-product, underachievement. For example:

Self and Zealey (2007) point to a strong positive correlation between the number of evenings each week a child completes homework and their test scores at Key Stage 3 – the more evenings spent completing homework the higher the individual test score. **Babb et al** (2006) also demonstrate a strong positive correlation between levels of truancy and academic achievement – persistent truants are 6 times less likely to achieve 5 or more GCSE grades A* - C than those who never truant. Conversely, persistent truants are 15 time more likely than those who never truant to leave school at 16 with no qualifications.

An interesting question to consider is the extent to which truancy a cause or an effect of differential achievement. Which research methods could we use to resolve this particular problem?

For the majority of working class parents it's perhaps not so much a case of not recognising the importance of education for their children as an inability to invest the resources – cultural and emotional – in their children's education in an equivalent way to their more-affluent peers. Culturally, things like the type of school a child attends, the expectations teachers hold about ability levels and general perceptions about the type of work a child might realistically do in adult life contribute to lower academic achievement; in terms of emotional labour working class parents have fewer resources (they are, for example, unlikely to have achieved higher educational qualifications through their own schooling) and levels of influence with, for example, teachers. The cultural aspect of attitudes to schooling (held by both parents and their children) links into:

Cultural deprivation theory and the idea working class culture is somehow "lacking" in the attributes (such as positive parental attitudes about the value of education) and practices (reading to children, helping with homework and so forth) that make the middle classes educationally successful. Solutions to cultural deprivation focus around "compensating" working class children for their cultural deprivation by providing extra educational resources to give them an equal opportunity to compete with their culturally advantaged middle class peers.

> **Module Link**   **Education**
>
> "Compensatory education" is outlined and examined in more detail in Section 3: "**The significance of educational policies**".

By and large, this type of theory has in recent times been submerged into:

Underclass theory that argues a combination of material and cultural factors are the cause of educational failure among people who are increasingly disconnected from mainstream society. According to **New Right** theorists like **Murray and Phillips** (2001), the **Underclass** involves "people at the margins of

Straight hair that's
bleached on top
and dyed dark
below.

Loud mouth

Moblie Phone

Bra straps
showing

Bottle of
vodka

Cleavage

Tiny top

Bare tummy,
whatever the
weather

Top of thong visible

Belly ring

Wide belt

Handbag

Naked legs

Skirt that's
barely wider
than belt.

Average age 17
but can range
up to 55.

Calf high boots
(also available
in beige.)

classes, educational qualifications are an important way of reproducing individual class positions, whereas for the working classes the work-based route to money and status has always been more important. Class differences are demonstrated in a variety of ways: **deferred** / **immediate gratification**, parental experiences of Higher Education (or not as the case may be) etc.

Class subculture theory takes this a little further by arguing State schools are institutions dominated by "middle class norms, values, beliefs and ideologies" and some working class subcultural groups succeed by adapting successfully to this school environment - whereas others, of course, do not. A contemporary version of this theory relates to:

Identities, which pinpoints changing gender identities as causes of differential achievement; the idea, for example, some working class boys develop a "laddish, anti-school, anti-learning" culture. **Francis'** (2000) secondary school study argues teenage boys used "laddish" behaviour in the classroom as a way of offsetting the generally low levels of esteem they received from both teachers and (female) pupils (findings that link back to earlier subcultural studies - such as **Cohen's** (1955) study of delinquent boys that focused on **status deprivation** as a cause of educational disaffection).

society, unsocialised and often violent…parents who mean well but who cannot provide for themselves, who give nothing back to the neighbourhood, and whose children are the despair of the teachers who have to deal with them".

Although the idea of an "underclass" is increasingly used in everyday language, it's sociological significance and meaning is by no-means clear, for two main reasons: Firstly, does "an underclass" actually exist (outside of the imagination of those who use the concept) and, secondly, who exactly is part of "the underclass" (people as diverse as single parents, criminals, "chavs", "Travellers" and the long-term unemployed - amongst others - are included by different writers)?

Underachievement is explained by arguing material factors (economic deprivation) and cultural factors (a moral relativism that fails to condemn unacceptable behaviour, for example) combine to produce, in **Phillips'** (2001) words, "…the socially excluded who are no longer just poor but the victims of anti-education, anti-marriage policies which have undermined personal responsibility". This theory identifies the Underclass as a group mainly responsible for underachievement - through things like truancy, misbehaviour and general beliefs (state handouts and petty crime as preferable to qualifications and hard work, for example). The blame, in other words, is placed on governments (for creating a class dependent on State handouts) and parents (for failing to take moral responsibility for child care and socialisation). A different, take on this involves:

Class culture theory, which argues different classes develop different values and norms based around their different cultural experiences and needs. For the middle

Cultural capital is an idea we've outlined in the previous section and its application to educational achievement lies in areas such as those identified by **Reay** (2000) when, as we've noted, she identified the importance of "mothers' emotional engagement with their children's education" - in areas such as help and encouragement with school work and pressurising teachers to improve their children's performance. Middle class women, according to **Reay's** research, were particularly successful in investing **emotional capital i**n their child's education.

2. Inside School Factors

This category (sometimes called the **hidden curriculum**) involve explanations for differential achievement that focus on things like:

Type of School: Different types of school (private, grammar, comprehensive…) involve different levels of teacher, parent and pupil expectations - in other words, top performing schools, whether in the Private or State sector, create a climate of expectation that pushes pupils into higher levels of achievement. In addition, status differences between schools also tell pupils something about their relative educational (and social) identity and worth. **Gewirtz** (1998), for example, demonstrated that within the Maintained schools sector there is a huge difference between a top State school and an inner city school labelled as "failing". In the latter, for example, she found, "…difficulties in staff recruitment and parental involvement, and strained relationships between management and staff as improvement agendas became hijacked by day-to-day fire-fighting".

Teacher Attitudes involves the ideas of **labelling** and **self-fulfilling prophecies** (which we've previously encountered). The basic idea here is teachers communicate, (consciously and subconsciously), positive or negative beliefs about the value of their pupils. Pupils pick up on these ideas and, in the process, see themselves in terms of the labels given to them by their teachers (as intelligent or unintelligent, for example).

Some of his colleagues thought Robert had the wrong approach to teaching the bottom set Maths...

Social inclusion / exclusion takes one obvious form - physical exclusion or suspension from school. **Self and Zealey** (2007) note that figures for English schools show that around 12,000 pupils were permanently excluded in 1997, as opposed to around 9,400 in 2005. A less obvious form of exclusion is self-exclusion (or truancy as it's more commonly known) – around 55,000 pupils each day take unauthorised absence from school. **Malcolm et al** (2003) found broad agreement amongst Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and teachers that unauthorized absence correlated with lower attainment (which is not too surprising, all things considered).

Another, less obvious form of inclusion / exclusion is ability grouping (a general label for practices such as streaming, setting and banding). **Harlen and Malcolm's** (1999) wide-ranging analysis of setting and streaming practices, for example, concluded educational performance was affected by many school processes - "class size, pupil ability range, teaching

Private school

State school

Spot The Difference?

Class sizes: Private (fee-paying) schools dominate government school League Tables and one explanation for this is teachers give more time to individual students because of smaller class sizes. According to the **Department for Education and Skills** in 1999 average class size in State secondary schools was 20 pupils, whereas in Private schools it was 10.

methods and materials…and teachers' attitudes towards mixed-ability teaching".

In addition, **Hallam et al** (2001) noted how setting, for example, had both benefits for pupils (minimising disruptive behaviour) and disadvantages (stigmatising lower set pupils, the association between lower sets and unemployment, higher sets and good exam

grades). They also noted a familiar trend in this type of research (from **Keddie**, 1971 onwards) - teachers gave "more creative work and privileges to higher set students while restricting lower sets to tedious, routine tasks".

Hallam et al's research highlighting how high and low set pupils attracted different stigmatising labels ('thick', 'dumb', 'boffin', 'clever clogs'…) relates to ideas about:

Pupil subcultures: As an explanation for differential achievement, this idea has a long and respectable history - see, for example, **Hargreaves** (1967) and **Woods** (1979) - the latter noting the existence of pro and anti school subcultures (from ingratiating, compliant pupils, through ritualists "going through the motions" to outright rebels). More recently, **Johnson** (1999) has described schools in Northern Ireland where some pupil subcultures were marked by "hostility and indifference" to learning, which correlated with high levels of absence and lower levels of educational achievement. Finally, **Lacey** (1970) noted streaming and setting created the belief, even among relatively successful grammar school students, that they were failures when compared to their peers. Thirty years later, **Power et al** (2003") found much the same sort of subcultural labelling process at work when they noted how successful middle class students labelled themselves as failures for their inability to match the achievements of some of their high-flying peers.

Although we've identified a range of possible explanations for class-based differential achievement, we need to remember two things:

Firstly, as **Mac an Ghaill** (1996) argues, social class origins remain the single best predictor of educational success or failure. **Demack et al** (1998) also note "Whilst school effectiveness research has focused on school differences, social class differences are still the largest differences of all and the children of professional parents have the largest advantage of all".

Secondly, we should avoid the assumption that "the majority" of working class children are necessarily academic underachievers. Significant numbers do succeed educationally and they've been increasingly successful

(albeit from a low starting point) over the past 15 years at GCSE. Working class children are also increasingly present in post-16 education. The fact they remain, despite increases in recent years, underrepresented in Higher Education also tells us something about the activities and preoccupations of this group.

Keeping these ideas in mind we can offer some evaluative comments about the respective merits of both "outside" and "inside" school factors:

Outside School

Material deprivation: Although studies over the past 40 years have shown there's no clear and simple relationship between poverty / deprivation and educational performance, there is, nevertheless, a link: **Douglas** (1967) concluded material deprivation was too broad an explanation for relative working class failure because some materially-deprived children managed to succeed. Working class attainment also tended to fall throughout a child's education, suggesting other processes, within the school itself, contributed to differential achievement levels.

Material deprivation is a factor in differential educational achievement - but is it the most important factor?

Mortimore (1998), however, argues "In any country in the world…there is a strong relationship between deprivation in the early years and later educational outcomes" and **Robinson** (1998) concludes: "A serious policy to alleviate child poverty might do far more for boosting attainment in literacy and numeracy than any modest interventions in schooling".

Parental Attitudes: We need to be careful when suggesting attitudes and a lack of involvement by working class parents in their children's education are a cause of differential achievement. As **Hanafin and Lynch** (2002) argue, many working class parents take an interest in their children's education and progress, but they "felt excluded from participation in decision-making", which suggests the "problem" lies not so much with parents but with schools - something addressed by New Labour educational policies that have attempted to

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Tried and Tested: Research Methods

Assess the strengths and limitations of **one** of the following methods for the study of inside school factors and differential achievement.

(i) Unstructured interviews.
(ii) Overt Participant Observation (20 marks).

*This question requires you to **apply** your knowledge and understanding of sociological research methods to the study of this **particular** issue in education.*

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involve parents in the running of their child's school. **Desforges'** (2003) literature review on the other hand also suggests "at-home good parenting" has a positive effect on achievement.

Is there a positive correlation between "good parenting" and educational achievement?

Cultural deprivation / Underclass explanations have a superficial attractiveness, but **MacDonald and Marsh** (2005) found "no evidence of a distinct, deviant, underclass culture" in their research on Teesside, Middlesbrough . What they found was a complicated picture of "marginalised youth" struggling to come to terms with their low status and social exclusion. As **Mac an Ghaill** (1996) argues, the problem of working class educational underachievement is not the culture of working class boys; rather, changes in the labour market (and in particular the decline in manufacturing jobs) have effectively excluded such boys from their traditional forms of industrial employment and left them as a relatively marginalised group within the education system.

In many ways changes to the labour market have created a reversal of the situation within which **Willis** (1977) observed that many working class boys were unconcerned with educational achievement because their objective was to leave school and start earning money at the earliest opportunity – mainly because a job (however mundane and menial at the start) offered financial and psychological independence, social status and a relatively level playing field from which to try to work your way up the career ladder. Where once there were jobs (and apprenticeships) that working class boys could move into once their period of education was completed this is no-longer necessarily the case. For writers like **Mac an Ghaill**, therefore, the situation is the same (underachievement) but the exact causality is reversed; while working class boys, in particular, see little point in trying to the gain educational qualifications the reason is no-longer that work is plentiful but rather the reverse – it is scarce, qualitatively different to the kinds of jobs their families have traditionally performed and subject to intense levels of competition from (higher achieving) girls.

Inside School

Keddie (1973), has argued that the concept of cultural deprivation is not only a myth but that if sociologists focus their attention on the supposed deficiencies of children (as embodied in the idea of cultural deprivation), we may not notice the shortcomings of schools - something particularly evident over the past 30 years in terms of strategies designed to improve the performance of underachieving students:

School Effects: Taking a range of general factors into account, **Lupton** (2003) concluded "neighbourhood poverty" and "poor schooling" go hand-in-hand - the main question being, of course, which comes first; are schools "poor" because of their ability intake or do schools - through processes such as labelling and self-fulfilling prophecies - fail to inspire and educate their pupils?

Value-added: **Thomas and Mortimore** (1996) argue that, controlling for social class and applying value-added analyses to educational attainment (measuring the relative improvement - or lack of same - of children within a school between, for example, one Key Stage and the next), schools can substantially raise pupil achievement.

League Tables: **Robinson** (1998) has additionally noted the impact of school league tables on achievement; while overall levels of achievement have risen in recent years, he argues this is at the expense of the lowest achieving children because teachers have concentrated their efforts on "marginal pupils" (those just below the magic "C" grade at GCSE). Slight improvements in their attainment results, Robinson argues, in hugely-improved pass rates at GCSE.

Study Support: A number of writers have noted how changing ways of supporting students can affect achievement. **MacBeth et al** (2001) for example, noted that things like attendance, attitudes to school and attainment increased for students who participated in out-of-school-hours learning - something incorporated into New Labour educational policy in the shape of Extended Schools.

Module Link   **Education**

New Labour educational policy (including the concept of "Extended Schools") is outlined and examined in more detail in Section 3: "**The significance of educational policies**".

To put the above into an overall context, **Ward** (2004) reports that, according to **DfES** research, of differences in performance between schools:

• 73% is due to a child's level of achievement on starting secondary school.

• 19% on the proportion of pupils qualifying for free school meals.

• 8% on the effectiveness of teaching.

As we've seen, the relationship between social class and differential educational achievement is complex and, according to **Gazley and Dunne** (2005), "largely invisible as a determinant of educational achievement" (at least in terms of the popular imagination where more effort is currently given over to explaining differences within gender and ethnic groups). This general "invisibility" partly stems from engrained beliefs about class-based educational abilities, aptitudes and attitudes and partly from a decline in the significance of

class analysis and identity in the contemporary UK. In terms of the former, however, **Gazley and Dunne** offer an interesting insight into the relationship between class and (under)achievement in that, following writers such as **Nash** (1972), they suggest teachers are "influenced by perceptions and expectations of pupils which may be linked (unconsciously) to their social class" – whereby "teachers and trainee teachers often hold stereotypical ideas about pupils and parents according to their social class".

The "class expectations" teachers hold (which work both ways, of course – just as *working class* children tend to attract stereotypes of *underachievement middle class* children are generally labelled in terms of their potential for *achievement*) translate into classroom practices that "often located the source of a pupil's underachievement within the pupil or the home". In their sample of teachers, for example, they found general attitudes related to:

Class blindness: "Teachers were uncomfortable talking about social class even though inequalities relating to social class and education are widely recognised".

Deficit views: The causes of underachievement were located in the "individual pupil or the home rather than in the classroom or the school" – which means, in effect, that some teachers held fatalistic views about the ability of working class children to succeed in the education system (they were, in effect, "destined to fail" because of their class and individual family backgrounds, regardless of what the teacher did or didn't do).

Pupils: "Middle class pupils and parents were viewed more positively" and "Teachers had higher expectations and aspirations for the future for middle class pupils than for working class pupils" – ideas that are particularly interesting in the context of the observation that "Pupils identified positive relationships with teachers as crucial to their learning".

Gazley and Dunne's research suggests that the relationship between class and achievement is a complex interplay of factors – from home background and material disadvantage, through children's perceptions of their futures and teacher's perceptions of their pupils.

While material class differences clearly create an unequal educational playing field between, for example, working class children and their upper / middle class peers (children bring to the school wide varieties of **cultural capital)**, this *alone* doesn't adequately explain general working class underachievement – for the deceptively simple reason, we've previously noted, that not all working class children underachieve. This suggests, therefore, that what happens in the school and classroom has an important effect within the context of class background for some working class children in that their levels of achievement can be raised (schools and teachers, in other words,

can make a difference to achievement). However, the converse is also true – the behaviour and expectations of teachers can serve to confirm and compound the levels of material and cultural disadvantage many working class bring to the school.

As one of **Gazley and Dunne's** teacher respondents put it: ""I believe there is a danger in setting low expectations of a child. If a child already does not expect to do well the last thing a teacher should be doing is reinforcing that view".

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by the terms "deferred gratification" and "immediate gratification" (4 marks).

(b) Suggest **three** factors that impact on educational achievement by social class (6 marks).

(c) Outline some of the reasons for the educational underachievement of working class boys (12 marks).

(d) Assess the view that working-class underachievement in education is the result of home circumstances and family background (20 marks).

Gender: Observations

As with the concept of class there are several initial observations we can make about the relationship between gender and achievement:

Key Stage 1 - 3

According to **Self and Zealey** (2007), girls outperformed boys at every Key Stage in 2006 (with the exception of Key Stage 2 Maths where levels of achievement were the same) – a situation that has remained largely unchanged for the past 10 years (although in 1996 girls outperformed boys at every Key Stage). This general situation does, however, hide some complications that we need to keep in mind in – especially when we factor social class into the analysis.

Free School Meals (FSM) children: Both boys and girls in this category achieved less than their non-FSM peers. *Within* this group, however, in 2004 girls outperformed boys at every Key Stage with the exception of Key Stage 3 Science and Key Stage 2 Maths (where small percentage differences in achievement in favour of boys were apparent).

Teachers can make some difference for good or ill - so be nice to them just to be on the safe side...

Non Free School Meals children: The general pattern of achievement for this group was similar to the FSM group - girls outperformed boys with the exception of Key Stage 2 Maths.

We can add two further observations to the above:

Marginal differences: Although achievements in English show substantial differences between girls and boys through the Key Stages (averaging around 10%) the same is not true for Maths and Science (an average 2% difference).

Social class: FSM girls achieved less than their non-FSM boys. This suggests, at the very least, social class is a significant factor in explaining male and female educational achievement.

Key Stage 4

The pattern of gender achievement at Key Stage 4 (GCSE) is similar to that at Key Stage 1 - 3; girls have consistently outperformed boys.

% gaining 5 or more GCSEs A*-C by gender
Source: **Office for National Statistics**: 2004 - 2007

	1989	2000	2002	2005
Males	28	44	46	52
Females	31	54	56	62

Are boys underachieving at school?

Source: http://www.bbc.co.uk_[2008]

"English is generally seen as having the largest gap…girls achieve up to 17% higher scores in this subject. The gap is smaller in other subjects. Girls get on average 10% higher scores in history, geography, design and technology and modern languages.

In the 2004 GCSEs in English, 58.4% of girls gained grades A* - C, compared with 48.4% of boys. Even in traditional 'male' subjects, girls outperformed the boys. For example, 50.1% of girls gained the top marks in maths, compared to 49.7% of boys. In double science the figures are 52.4% of girls to 51.1% of boys.

Interestingly, researchers at the University of Cardiff found that at the lowest levels, achievement of boys and girls is the same; it is at the highest levels that there are the biggest gaps".

Further Education

At A-level or equivalent the pattern of relative achievement between the sexes is maintained, with 45% of women and 35% of men achieving 2 or more passes (**DfES**, 2006). In terms of vocational training -

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ) – more awards were made to women than to men in 2005. At Level 3 (equivalent to A-level) around 60% of awards were made to women.

In terms of participation in post-16 education, enrolment figures for males and females on full-time courses in 2005 are roughly similar (532,000 as opposed to 551,000 respectively).

Gender: Explanations

The general patterns of achievement we've identified suggest a strong correlation between gender and educational achievement that runs right through our education system and we can examine a number of possible explanations for this situation in terms of "outside" and "inside" school factors:

Outside School

We can outline a range of different reasons for differential gender achievement , starting with:

Social Changes: Wilkinson (1994) has identified a range of changes that, she argues, represented a "historic shift in the relationship between men and women". These included:

• **Cultural** changes, such as female contraception, the availability of abortion and the outlawing of sexual discrimination.

• **Labour market** changes that increasingly drew women into the workforce. The gradual change from manufacturing to service industries has seen the development of a "knowledge-based" economy that "values brains more than it does brawn" and demands flexibility and dexterity. **Wilkinson** identifies skills women have traditionally demonstrated in the home (or private sphere) - conflict resolution and interpersonal communication skills, for example - as increasingly valued in the (post) modern workplace (or *public sphere*). These changes mean an increased importance being placed by women on:

• **Educational qualifications** - the route into areas of the labour market traditionally dominated by men. In other words, by acquiring measurable credentials (qualifications), women are increasingly able to enter the workforce and compete for jobs with men. This change is reflected in:

• **Workforce participation**: **Summerfield and Babb** (2004) note that in 1997 women in paid employment outnumbered men for the first time (11.248 million to 11.236 million) – a situation that has stayed relatively constant to the present. However, these figures hide a couple of important differences. Firstly, men are almost twice as likely as women to be in full-time employment and secondly while around 50% of female employment is part-time, only around 15% of male employment has this status.

• **Globalisation**: **Coward** (1999) identifies economic globalisation, which encourages greater workplace flexibility and opportunities for home-working using computer technology, as further evidence of a seismic shift (or "Genderquake" as **Wilkinson** (1994) terms it) in male - female relationships.

Is The Future Female?

The relevance to educational achievement of the type of social changes we've just described relates to the idea that women in the contemporary UK are much more likely than their parents or grandparents to see their adult roles in terms of a job or career – and if this is the case then it's but a short step to understand the importance of educational qualifications to this particular scenario – that they are increasingly a career requirement.

For this type of explanation to be valid we would expect to see a substantial increase in female educational achievement – and this is indeed the case. **Department of Education and Skills** (2006) - renamed (2007) as the **Department for Children, Families and Schools** for reasons best known to the government - figures, for example, show that the proportion of women achieving 2 or more A-level passes has risen from 20% in 1991 to its current level (2007) of 45%.

Socialisation: Although such things are difficult to track precisely there's evidence to suggest substantial changes have occurred in female primary socialisation in recent times - **Carter and Wojtkiewicz** (2000), for example, found greater parental involvement, help and attention in the education of their daughters. In terms of how socialisation impacts on gender identities (especially conceptions of masculinity and femininity) **Crespi** (2003) argues adolescent girls now have a range of

Changing concepts of femininity?

possible gender identities available to them, rather than the restricted range (part-time employee / domestic worker) of even the recent past. In this respect, two things may be happening to help explain changes in female educational achievement:

1. Opportunities: Females have more opportunities to express a range of different "femininities" - including ones that involve a career, rather than just part-time work.

2. Workplace: As changes occur in the workplace these reflect back onto family socialisation processes. Parents, for example, change their perception of their children's future adult roles and, consequently, the relative importance they place on male and female educational achievement.

Identities: The idea of changing male identities - what **Jones and Myhill** (2004) term "hyper-masculinity" (an exaggerated form of masculinity that emphasises things like physical strength, sexual virility and aggressiveness – what might be termed laddishness in young men) may also contribute to differential educational achievement as boys redefine their future adult roles. Both **Epstein et al** (1998) and **Lydon** (1996) pinpoint the idea of males losing control of both

Hyper-Masculinity as a role model?

their unique identities and their lives as a result of changes in both female behaviour and the workplace. In this respect, the argument is that, as a result of changing identities, some boys see education as irrelevant to their future and this, coupled with rising female achievement, has contributed to differences in gender attainment. **Platten** (1999) takes issues of identity further by arguing boys are increasingly victims of *negative gender stereotyping* when compared to girls (boys "command" but girls "request", for example). In other words, traditional male behaviour is reinterpreted (largely negatively) by teachers – an idea that leads us neatly (almost as if it were planned…) to consider an alternative range of factors.

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by the term "Hyper-masculinity" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest **three** "outside school" factors that impact on educational achievement by gender (6 marks).

(c) Outline changes in male and female identities and show how these changes might impact on educational achievement (12 marks).

As we've suggested with social class, there are a range of factors "inside schools" that potentially contribute to differential educational achievement between males and females:

Labelling and stereotyping explanations suggest a reversal of traditional forms of gender labelling, with girls increasingly being *positively labelled* (as high achievers who work hard and have least behavioural problems). Boys, on the other hand, are increasingly *negatively labelled* in terms of underachievement, laziness and behavioural problems (although class perceptions are also significant here, with working class boys, in particular, attracting negative labels).

National curriculum: Passed into law in 1988 and introduced into schools in 1990, this made subjects such as maths and science compulsory up to GCSE level and encouraged the breakdown of gendered subject choices. This resulted in increased female achievement in these subjects.

Coursework: The expansion of this option, mainly through the introduction of GCSE, benefits girls because it demands steady, consistent, work over time (something which is, supposedly, more suited to the way girls work). From September 2008 the amount of coursework that students can choose to do – initially at A-level and eventually at GCSE level – will be substantially curtailed, partly as a government response to "concerns" about male underachievement.

Will the removal of Coursework from 2008 as an option in the majority of A-level Specifications result in a decline in female achievement relative to makes?

Curriculum initiatives such as "**Girls into Science and Technology**" (GIST) encouraged the breakdown of barriers around traditionally male subjects, whereas work experience initiatives introduced girls to the possibility of full-time work at an early age (although, as **Mackenzie** (1997) has demonstrated, there are arguments about whether girls and boys are still

encouraged to follow "traditional" employment options). Evidence from vocational qualifications (**DfES**, 2006) suggests they are. In 2005, for example: "Nearly all vocational qualifications awarded for construction, planning and the built environment were to men and a negligible amount to women. This compared with around 90 per cent vocational qualifications for health, public services and care being awarded to women".

Identities: **Francis** (2000) argues changes within the school and wider society have altered the way girls construct femininity (they no longer see it mainly in terms of the home) whereas concepts of masculinity have remained largely unchanged. This fits neatly with the fact higher levels of female achievement over the past 25 years have *not* been at the expense of male achievement - the "underachievement of boys" is relative to improvements in girls' achievement; it hasn't necessarily declined. **Walker** (1996) similarly identifies changing conceptions of masculinity, in terms of "…finding a role in a fast-changing world" as a challenge many young men are unable to resolve in the education system, an idea that leads into:

School Subcultures: These have traditionally been cited in explanations for male underachievement. **Barber** (1994), for example, identified three main types of underachieving male subculture:

• **Disappointed** boys were not inclined to do much at school outside the maintenance of their peer group relationships.

• **Disaffected** boys disliked school but used it as an arena for their general disaffection (bad behaviour, in other words).

• **Disappeared** boys attended school as little as possible.

Similarly, the **Northern Ireland Department of Education** (1997) linked male underachievement to "anti-school subcultures and peer-group pressures".

Framing the Problem

We've previously suggested that contemporary concerns over differential achievement have been framed in terms of *boys' underachievement* rather than increases in female achievement and this observation is important for what it tells us about how the concept of differential achievement is interpreted: As **Spendlove** (2001), for example, notes: "With the examination period now upon us again, we await the inevitable results showing that girls have out-performed boys in all subjects and at all levels. There then follows the usual media frenzy with headlines about boys' underachievement…".

Patriarchy: By framing "the problem" in terms of *male* underachievement (rather than, for example, in terms of significant historical changes in female achievement) the implication drawn is that differential achievement is a problem of *gender*; the idea, in short, that explanations of – and resolutions to – the problem

require us to focus on the social and / or psychological qualities of young males and females. If this were simply the case, however, it would be reasonable to assume that male underachievement is a problem "across the board" – that *all* boys, in comparison to *all* girls, underachieve. This, as we've suggested is *not* the case.

Social Class: One reason for this is the fact that when we include social class variables in our analysis we find a much closer correlation between academic performance and class than with gender *per se*. Middle and upper class boys, for example, perform far better in educational terms than working class girls. This suggests, at the very least, that we need to reframe and refocus questions of underachievement in terms of:

Working class boys: Substantial numbers of (mainly working class) boys have always "underachieved" in our education system - a "problem" that has only merited (media) attention in the context of a general rise in female achievement. In this respect, it's tempting, perhaps, to note **Cohen's** (1988) observation: "The question to ask is not 'why are boys underachieving?' but 'why are we concerned about it now?'".

> **Module Link**   **Crime and Deviance**
>
> This argument leads into the idea that concerns about "male underachievement" reflect a **moral panic** in our society. In addition, *surface* concerns about relative educational achievement mask *deeper* concerns about the changing nature of male and female identities in our society - if women are educationally more successful will their relative status in society change, to the detriment of men?

This is perhaps a little more puzzling in the context of *rising educational achievement* across both gender and class in the UK over the past 50 or so years – arguably the product of, firstly, a universal system of free education introduced with the **1944 Education Act** and secondly (although perhaps more contentiously) the introduction of **Comprehensive schooling** (particularly from the mid-1970s) that gave move children the opportunity to take academic examinations. As **DfES** (2006) figures demonstrate, for example: "Over recent years there has been an increase in the proportion of both young men and young women in the UK gaining two or more GCE A levels (or equivalent)".

However we personally decide to view the question of "male underachievement" (from media-fuelled moral panic to much ado about very little – and all points in between) it's useful to note two different ways the question has been framed. The first reflects a postmodern influenced concern with **identities** and:

Three types of "underachieving male school subculture" (**Barber**, 1994)

Disappointed

Disaffected

Disappeared

Gender Discourses: Following the lead suggested by the **Queensland Department of Education** (2002) we can note how debates about gendered differential achievement have focused around four main ideas (or **discourses** if you're feeling a little bit postmodern):

• **Boys as Victims** suggests underachievement results from the "feminisation of school and work", whereby male role models, ways of teaching and learning that have traditionally favoured boys and so forth have been replaced by ideas and practices favouring girls.

• **Failing Schools** locates the problem within the school, in terms of narrow measures of intelligence and achievement and teaching / testing regimes that favour female ways of thinking and working. In addition, schools fail to address or resolve problems associated with material deprivation.

Girls on top.
The "feminisation of society"?

• **Boys will be boys** focuses on the idea certain aspects of masculinity (aggression, later maturity and so forth) are biologically determined and, therefore, fixed at birth. Solutions to underachievement here focus on schools developing ways to "engage boys effectively and actively".

Jeremy spent many happy hours perfecting his Mick Jaggier impression (ask your granddad...).

rationalise achievement differences in terms of their perceptions of the nature of male and female abilities; female achievements, for example, are characterised in terms of "performance" - understanding what an examiner wants and delivering it - whereas males are characterised in terms of "ability". Teachers, in other words - according to **Jones and Myhill -** define and re-evaluate their role in terms of how to stimulate boys' natural abilities.

The second (modernist) strand reflects a concern with:

Social class, rather than gender. In this respect, the question is framed in terms of the extent to which gendered educational achievement is primarily an issue of class. **Murphy and Elwood** (1998), for example, note how recent improvements in female educational achievement is "…not shared by girls from low socio-economic backgrounds".

• **Gender relationships** focuses on how different notions of masculinity and femininity affect student beliefs and practices - for example, how students choose different subjects to study (the **gendered curriculum**) and why male classroom behaviour is more disruptive than female behaviour. The concern here, therefore, is the various ways gender identities are constructed and how they might be changed.

In a UK, as opposed to Australian, context (although the above illustrates the idea that concerns about "male underachievement" (or, more accurately perhaps, *relative* underachievement) have an international dimension), **Francis and Skelton** (2005) note that explanations have largely focused around three main ideas:

1. Natural differences between boys and girls (such as differences in brain functions) explains discrepancies in achievement.

2. The feminisation of schooling that gives girls distinct advantages over boys. Culprits here range from the lack of male role models to "female friendly" teaching practices, curricula and assessment criteria.

3. Gender constructions and interpretations that "produce different behaviours which impact on achievement". This would include, for example, boys "laddish" behaviour, anti-school subcultures and the like.

Finally, we can note two further strands of thought in relation to gender and achievement. The first focuses on the concept of:

Underachievement: **Jones and Myhill** (2003), for example, suggest that "underachievement" is constructed in a number of ways by teachers who are, they argue, increasingly-likely to identify boys as "potential underachievers". Ideas about what counts as "underachievement" also vary in terms of gender. Female underachievement (amongst working class and minority ethnic group girls, for example), frequently becomes invisible in the rush to identify and explain male underachievement. In addition, teachers

Epstein et al (1998) have also questioned the idea of "male underachievement" as a general category when they ask which boys underachieve, at what stages in the education system is underachievement apparent and, perhaps most importantly, what are the criteria used to measure underachievement? In addition, as we've suggested at the start of this section**, DfES** (2004) figures relating to class, gender and achievement at Key Stages 1 - 4 suggest social class is a very significant factor here.

Gorard et al (2001) also note there is little difference in male / female attainment in maths and science and no significant gender difference at the lowest attainment levels for all other curriculum subjects. The "problem", they argue, is one that exists among "mid-to-high-achievers", where girls achieve higher grades than boys. Supporting this argument, a study by Birmingham's education authority (**Times Educational Supplement,** September 2000), demonstrated "…the most disadvantaged pupils are boys from a poor, ethnic minority, background who were born in the summer, never went to nursery and spent their primary school years moving from school to school" – which is as good a way as we could think of to link into a discussion of ethnicity and educational achievement.

> **Tried and Tested**
>
> (a) Identify and explain one example of the "feminisation of schooling" (2 marks).
>
> (b) Suggest **three** "inside school" factors that impact on educational achievement by gender (6 marks).
>
> (c) Outline some of the reasons for the educational underachievement of boys. (12 marks).
>
> (d) Assess the view that male underachievement in education is attributable to a "female-friendly" education system (20 marks).

Ethnicity: Observations

As with the previous sections we can begin by identifying some of the ways ethnicity relates to educational performance at various levels of our education system. Once we've examined these data we can identify some possible explanations for this relationship.

Please Note: In the following, the identification of different ethnic groups (Indian, White and so forth) uses the UK government's classification system for ethnicity.

Module Link   Culture and Identity

Along with class, age and gender, **ethnicity** is one of the most significant sources of individual and group identity in our society. The concept is defined and explored in more depth and detail in this Chapter.

Key Stage 1 and 2

Department for Education and Skills figures (2005), show children from different ethnic backgrounds had different levels of achievement at these Key Stages and, in *descending* order of attainment, these were:

- Chinese Indian
- White British
- Mixed
- Bangladeshi
- Black Caribbean
- Black African
- Pakistani

We can add to the above a number of observations:

1. **Chinese**: The number of such pupils is relatively small in comparison with other ethnic groups (around 2,000 pupils) and achievement levels are likely to be biased by class factors.

2. **Mixed Ethnicity**: Noting how children from mixed ethnic backgrounds (for example, pupils with White and Black Caribbean parentage) performed may tell us something about the influence of cultural factors on achievement levels. Thus, the top achieving ethnic group at this level in 2003 was White and Asian; interestingly, White and Black Caribbean children showed some significantly higher levels of achievement than Black Caribbean children.

3. **Gender**: Girls generally perform marginally better than boys for all ethnic groups at this level.

4. **Black minorities**: This group "fall consistently below the national average across all Key Stages" (as well as at GCSE and post-16 to boot)..

5. **Value-added**: When measures of the levels of improvement made between Key Stages are applied to ethnicity "Bangladeshi and Black African pupils consistently had higher Value Added scores (and thus made more progress) than the average for all pupils" – an observation that reminds us, perhaps, that "measuring achievement" is not necessarily a simple, objective, matter.

Key Stage 4

At GCSE the pattern identified in the previous Key Stages is largely reproduced - the main exception being the relative underachievement of Black Caribbean ethnic groups. Although their performance has improved markedly over the past 15 years, they still, as a group, achieve least at this educational level.

% with 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C by ethnicity
Source: **Babb et al** (2006)

	1989	1992	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004
Indian	N/a	38	48	54	60	60	72
White	30	37	45	47	50	52	54
Bangladeshi	N/a	25	25	33	29	41	46
Pakistani	N/a	23	23	29	29	40	37
Black	18	23	23	29	39	36	35

When we include gender in the equation, we once more find girls outperforming boys in all ethnic groups (including mixed groups) at this level. Similarly, for all ethnic groups boys are more-likely to leave school with no A*-C passes at GCSE.

Further Education

One interesting thing to note about participation in post-16 education, as the following table demonstrates, is the relatively-low level of White - and the relatively high level of Black - participation.

%whose main activity is full-time education at age 16 by ethnicity
Source: **Department for Education and Skills**, 2004

	1989	2000	2002
Indian	N/a	392	91
Black	68	84	82
Bangladeshi	N/a	81	79
Pakistani	N/a	81	77
White	47	70	69

Mirza (1992) has noted one reason for higher Black participation is the number of black *women* staying in education post-16. More-recently, **Nehaul** (1999) has noted how black parents "…valued education for the enhanced life chances it offered…The importance attached to education was reflected in the myriad of ways in which all parents supported children's schooling…the encouragement given to reading, the priority placed on talking regularly with children about the school day, the provision of materials and books for school, and the commitment to supporting homework".

These ideas are interesting - in terms of participation and achievement levels of black children - because, as with social class, they point us towards the idea that, for some ethnic minorities (as with some social classes), problems related to differential achievement and participation appear to be more-marked *pre* rather than *post*-16.

Ethnicity: Observations

When we consider patterns of ethnic educational achievement the picture is complicated not only by class and gender but also, as we've suggested, by mixed ethnicities (or, if you want to be technical about it, "**hybrid ethnicities**"). Keeping these ideas in mind, there are a range of explanations for differential achievement to consider, split for convenience between outside and inside school factors.

Outside School Factors

Social Class, as we have seen (**Demack et al** (1998) for example) is a good general predictor of educational attainment and there's little reason to suppose this doesn't apply to ethnic *minorities* in the same way it applies to the (white)

ethnic *majority*. Given Black and South Asian (Pakistani and Bangladeshi) minorities are relatively *over-represented* in the lower social classes it should not, according to this analysis, be too surprising to find lower educational attainment amongst these groups. However, one exception to this is the educational performance of Indian children who, in the main, are one of the most educationally successful groups in our society. We can explore this idea further, therefore, by looking at:

Poverty: The **Cabinet Office Performance and Innovation Unit** (2002) noted a couple of interesting points. Firstly, that employment rates are lower - and unemployment rates higher - for ethnic minorities. Within South Asian minorities, Pakistani and Bangladeshi families are 4 times more likely to be poor than a White family. Indian families, on the other hand, generally had incomes comparable to White families. The **2001 Census** (2003) confirms these trends. In addition, even *working* Pakistani and Bangladeshi households are likely to experience poverty. Secondly:

Family structures correlate with differential educational achievement in the sense children from single-parent families, for example, do relatively badly across all ethnic groups. Black Caribbean families have the highest rates of single-parenthood and the lowest rates of educational achievement. **Self and Zealey** (2007) note 6% of White families were headed by a single parent in 2001, compared with 18% for Black Caribbean families.

Asian family life, on the other hand, is often (stereotypically) characterised as tight-knit and supportive (highly-pressurising even) which leads to greater achievement. While **Goodwin** (1997) found "a strong sense of inter-family cohesion and regular contact with immediate family is actively encouraged and maintained" amongst Hindu-Gujarati (Indian) families, **Berridge et al** (2000), found "…close-knit communities could generate social isolation, and families undergoing acute stress could feel a sense of shame about their difficulties".

How important are different family structures in determining educational achievement?

Black Identities...

All ethnic groups contain a range of different identities - but are some Black identities more-likely to be viewed negatively by teachers?

Parental involvement / attitudes: One significant idea here, noted by **Mirza (**2001) is the development of "Saturday Schools" amongst Black Caribbean communities . Their existence and increasing popularity is, according to **Mac an Ghaill** (1995), indicative of a general dissatisfaction, amongst black parents and children, with "white institutions" that seem to regularly fail them - an idea we'll explore in more detail in a moment. When considering this idea as a possible explanation for differential achievement (in basic terms, White and Indian parents, for example, have different attitudes to - and involvement with - their children's education, **Nehaul's** (1999) work suggests this argument lacks validity).

Identity: The underachievement of Black Caribbean boys is a striking feature of our education system. In addition, as they move through school, achievement seems to *fall* (until, at GCSE, they have the worst academic performance of all children). Black Caribbean girls perform significantly better at GCSE (although achievement levels are lower than for any other group of girls). White and Black Caribbean boys also achieve more, which suggests identity (and possibly concepts of *masculinity* that lead to rebellion against "white" schooling) may be significant factors in the explanation for the decline in performance of Black Caribbean boys.

Inside School Factors

We can note a number of specific ideas here:

School cultures, for example, covers a general range of possible explanations:

The Curriculum may involve, according to **Blair et al** (2003) teaching practices and expectations based on cultural norms, histories and general cultural references unfamiliar to many ethnic minority pupils.

Role models: **Blair et al** (2003) also point to a lack of role models within the school for ethnic minority pupils. Although, as **Basit et al** (2007) note, "No national statistics are currently available on the ethnicity of teachers in British schools, as schools have only recently been advised to undertake ethnic monitoring of their staff" it is possible to estimate the number of ethnic minority teachers is schools using Local Education Authority records. **Ross** (2001), for example, estimates around 5% of teachers are currently drawn from ethnic minorities (which contrasts with around 15% of English school pupils having an ethnic minority background). **Blair et al** (2003) noted around 7% of trainee teachers were from ethnic minorities (but this doesn't, however, mean they will all decide to go on to be full-time teachers).

In Further Education colleges 7% of staff were drawn from ethnic minority groups (which is roughly in line with their representation in the general population). In Scotland (not, admittedly, the most ethnically diverse or representative part of the UK), 1% of secondary and 0.4% of primary teachers were from ethnic minorities (**Scottish Executive National Statistics**, 2004)

Racism: **Aymer and Okitikpi** (2001) argue Black Caribbean boys are more likely to report negative

Are schools a bastion of institutional racism?

experiences of schooling, some of which include racial abuse and harassment from their peers. It's perhaps instructive to note, therefore, that **Kerr et al** (2002) found British students had less positive attitudes towards "immigrants" than in many other countries. This, they argued, was likely to shape peer group interaction.

Although school cultural factors can be significant, they may be too generalised to adequately explain the intricacies of ethnic group attainment differences (why, for example, should high-achieving Indian pupils experience less racism than lower-achieving Black Caribbean pupils?). We can, therefore, look at a range of more targeted explanations:

Teacher - Pupil interactions focus on the specific relationships found within different schools. **The Runnymede Trust** (1997) argued a range of *hidden processes* occur within schools that "deny equal opportunities". Ethnic minority students, for example, reported:

• High levels of control and criticism from teachers.

• Stereotypes of cultural differences, communities and speech that betrayed negative and patronising attitudes.

Diane Abbott (a black Labour MP) has argued (see: **Hinsliff**, 2002): "White women teachers fail to relate to black boys because they're frightened and intimidated by them.

Because Boyz just wanna B gangstas?

A failure to challenge disruptive behaviour, she argues, leads to an escalating situation which results in black boys being excluded from school (Black Caribbean boys are more frequently excluded than any other ethnic group)". **Foster et al** (1996), on the other hand, suggest the overrepresentation of Black Caribbean boys in low status sets and bands within the school is simply a result of "unacceptable behaviour" on their part. **MacBeth et al** (2001) also noted schools are increasingly concerned about low ethnic minority achievement and take steps to address the problem - the use of out-of-school-hours learning support for

example, served to raise achievement levels amongst Asian students in particular.

Labelling: Although we may - or indeed may not - reject the idea schools are "institutionally racist" (the idea racist attitudes and practices go unchallenged - or are secretly encouraged - within schools), various forms of subtle *labelling* and *stereotyping* (intentional or otherwise) do seem to impact on ethnic achievement. Generally positive teacher attitudes to Indian pupils (based on the knowledge of their high levels of attainment) may be offset by negative beliefs about Black Caribbean pupils. **Gillborn** (2002) thinks schools are institutionally racist, especially in the light of curriculum developments that, he argues, are "based on approaches known to disadvantage black pupils". These include: selection in schools by setting, schemes for "gifted and talented" pupils and vocational schemes for "non-academic" pupils. Teachers, **Gillborn** argues, "generally underrate the abilities of black youngsters" which results in their assignment to low-ability groups, a restricted curriculum and entry for lower-level exams.

The **Pupil Level Annual School Census** (2002), for example, shows black pupils are more likely to be classified in terms of Special Educational Needs (SEN) - 28% of Black Caribbean secondary pupils as against 18% of White pupils. **Sammons et al** (2002) also suggest pre-school minority group children are more likely to be "at risk" of SEN than White children. Again, whether this reflects beliefs about ethnic groups or is the result of socio-economic factors is a point for debate.

Stereotyping: **Figueroa** (1991) suggested teachers frequently limit ethnic minority opportunities through the use of culturally-biased forms of assessment (the way students are expected to speak and write, for example) and by consigning pupils to lower bands and sets on the basis of teacher-assessment. Teachers generally have lower opinions of the abilities of some ethnic minority groups, which results in a self-fulfilling prophecy of underachievement - something the **Runnymede Trust** (1997) report into ethnic minority educational disadvantage also suggests.

Ethnic Majority...

When examining explanations for the educational underachievement of some ethnic groups relative to other ethnic groups, it's easy to overlook the fact one of the largest groups of underachieving pupils is White working class boys. Thus, while explanations focusing on factors such as racism, school processes and teacher-pupil relationships are significant in explaining some forms of ethnic underachievement, they don't necessarily apply to this group. When studying all forms of differential achievement, therefore, we need to keep in mind how class, gender and ethnic factors *intersect* and, in this respect, we can note a range of ideas:

Achievement is a relative concept. In other words, it depends on:

• **What** we measure - is it, for example, measured in terms of simple *exam passes* (and, if so, at what level and grade?) or can it be measured in terms of *participation rates* in, for example, post-16 education and training?

• **When** we measure it - again, the point at which we measure achievement (however it's defined) will be significant. In addition, ethnicity is a changing status, in the sense that changes occur over time. Bangladeshi children, for example, are one of the most recent immigrant groups to the UK. Their achievement levels (initially amongst the lowest for all ethnic groups) have increased significantly over the past few years as second-generation Bangladeshi children start to develop English as a first language.

• **How** we measure it - are we, for example, interested in exam passes or in progress made from different starting points (a value-added assessment)?

This idea suggests the concept of *achievement* involves at least two related ideas:

1. Meanings: The concept can mean different things, depending on how you specify it's possible:

2. Measurement: For example, is it measured in terms of a *product* (such as an exam grade) or in terms of a *process* (such as a *value-added assessment* that measures the progress made by a pupil between a measurable start and an end point - such as, for example, the distance traveled, in terms of achievement, between GCSE grades and A-level grades)?

If we measure achievement in terms of product, no account is taken of the social and cultural backgrounds of different pupils - their levels of **cultural capital** (**Bourdieu**, 1986) that give some students a range of advantages (and disadvantages) in the education race. If, on the other hand, we measure achievement in terms of process, recognition and understanding of different levels of cultural capital can be built into the measurement process.

Underachievement is, similarly, a relative concept. If we look, for example, at Black Caribbean achievement in terms of GCSE passes, then evidence of underachievement (both within and between ethnic groups) is not difficult to find. Alternatively, if we look at post-16 participation in full-time education, White children, as we've seen, seem to participate least.

Participation: In addition, evidence of underachievement in compulsory education should not automatically be considered evidence of wider underachievement. As noted earlier, Black Caribbean Saturday Schools don't appear to have significantly impacted on performance at GCSE level. However,

How do we define and measure "educational achievement"?

since post-16 participation rates for black children (especially in FE colleges), ranks second only to Indian children, this suggests black parents - and children - value education but have problems with the kind of education offered in schools. Further Education seems to meet the needs of this ethnic group in ways that schools do not, an explanation supported by **Aymer and Okitikpi** (2001), among others - such as **Blair et al** (2003), who suggest colleges "Can provide a space where young Black men are supported by a community of Black students, an opportunity to study a curriculum that celebrates Black cultures and histories and to develop positive relationships with tutors".

Social class: Just as we shouldn't underestimate the importance of ethnicity and gender, social class is also significant. As **Blair et al** (2003) note, children who receive Free School Meals are less likely to achieve than children of the *same ethnic group* who do not qualify for FSM.

A final word, in this respect, might be to note **Gillborn and Gipps's** observation (1996) that, whatever a student's gender or ethnic background, those from the higher social classes, on average, achieve more in terms of exam passes and grades.

Tried and Tested: Research Methods

Assess the strengths and limitations of **one** of the following methods for the study of differential achievement and ethnicity.

(i) Unstructured interviews.
(ii) Official Statistics (20 marks).

*This question requires you to **apply** your knowledge and understanding of sociological research methods to the study of this **particular** issue in education.*

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by the terms "hybrid ethnicities" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest **three** factors that impact on ethnic *minority* educational achievement (6 marks).

(c) Outline some of the reasons for the educational underachievement of black (Afro-Caribbean) boys (12 marks).

(d) Assess the view that ethnic minority achievement in education is the result of school-based factors.(20 marks).

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Educational Policies: Introduction

Although *mass education* (whereby most of the population – regardless of class, gender or ethnic background – attended some form of schooling) has, as we will see, a relatively short history in our society, the provision of education itself (particularly if you were upper class, male and of the appropriate religion) has a somewhat longer history. The oldest university in Britain (Oxford), for example, was founded sometime in the late 12th century and until the late 19th century a variety of different establishments – mainly, but not always exclusively, created and run by *religious organisations* – provided a range of educational opportunities for, initially the upper and middle classes and, eventually the working classes.

The late 19th century is a significant time in any chronology of education in Britain because, for our purposes at least, it marks the first real period of sustained government involvement in educational provision. The **Forster Education Act** (1870), for example, arguably represents the first attempt by the State to both provide – and regulate – educational provision aimed at the majority of the population (which, at this particular stage, didn't necessarily include women – an observation that provides a significant insight into the perceived role, impact and experience of education at this time).

These early attempts to formulate and apply educational policy were not particularly successful, although the fact the Elementary schools established in 1870 were neither free nor compulsory probably explains the general lack of participation in them by the majority of the working classes. Various attempts were made, over the following 60 years, to "educate the working class" with varying degrees of success.

If the impact of these attempts to provide schooling was not particularly great (in terms of the numbers of children experiencing State education), the role of education, if not explicitly defined, was laid-out in terms of meeting two needs:

Economic - the increasing need, as modern, industrial society developed, for a *literate and numerate* population to work machines in factories and administer the increasingly complex organisation of work.

Political - the need for a population socialised into the demands of an increasingly *complex division of labour* (in particular, one that was well-schooled in the disciplines required by factory forms of production).

While it's wrong to argue that little of educational importance happened for the next 70 or so years – governments attempted, with varying degrees of success and failure to introduce a mass system of education through a variety of different Education Acts – the most significant initial development in terms of educational policy, at least for our purpose, is the **1944 Education Act**.

Educational Polices - like London buses you don't see one for 70 years then hundreds of the damn things suddenly appear...

Butler Education Act (1944): Observations

This educational reform (part of a much-wider set of social reforms introduced in the immediate post-2nd World War period) introduced two main elements into the role and experience of education:

1. Universal Education: Free, compulsory education for all between the ages of 5 and 15 (until this point secondary schooling wasn't free, although *Elementary Schools* had a *nominal* leaving age of 14 for most children who bothered to attend).

2. Structural Reform: The Act aimed to reform the structure of education in a couple of ways:

Firstly, a **three-tiered structure** of **primary**, **secondary** and **tertiary** education was established.

Secondly, the structure of secondary education (from 11 – 15) was reformed to produce a school system in three distinctive parts; what is usually – if not always correctly - called the:

Tripartite ("3-part") system: Although, as **Bell** (2004) notes, the 1944 Act didn't actually specify a *tripartite system*, compulsory secondary education was effectively structured around the idea of three different types of secondary school (for, in effect, three types of pupil):

• **Grammar schools** were intended to provide a predominantly academic education.

• **Secondary Modern** schools would provide a mix of vocational and academic education (with the emphasis on the former).

• **Secondary Technical** schools would provide a largely work-related technical / vocational education.

Module Link   Wealth, Poverty and Welfare

The restructuring of the education system was one element in the post-2nd World War creation of the **Welfare State.**

Selection: Before the 1944 Act education in Britain effectively involved a form of **selection** based on things like:

Income / family background (generally it was the upper and middle classes who received any kind of education).

Gender: The education of boys was seen to more important than that of girls.

The Tripartite System

Separate? Certainly.

Equal? Certainly not.
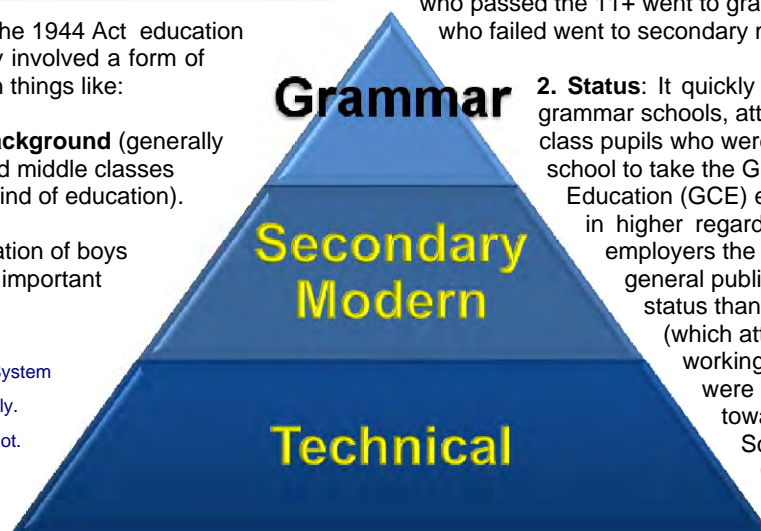
Culture: Religious affiliation (both to a religion in general and particular religious) was a significant criterion in educational selection in two ways: firstly, attending Church Schools required a general religious commitment and, secondly, particular religious groups (such as Anglicans, Catholics or Jews) frequently established "schools" (usually offering elementary levels of instruction) for members of their faith.

The 1944 Act took the idea of educational selection in a different direction in that children were assigned to each type of school on the basis of on an **intelligence (IQ) test** that claimed to identify different types of learner - in basic terms, those suited to an academic-type (theory-based) education and those suited to a vocational (practice-based) education. Students were tested at 10 (the so-called "11+" exam) and assigned a school based on their test performance (with roughly the top 15- 20% of pupils awarded grammar school places). The selection process reflected a number of beliefs that, in recent times, have come to be questioned. These included the ideas of:

• Natural levels of academic ability that remained largely fixed after a certain age.

• Objective testing.

• A basic educational division between "academic" and "vocational" capabilities (most children were assumed to have a "natural capability" for one or the other).

Although the tripartite system envisaged separate schools for different types of pupil the system as a whole was supposed to involve:

Parity of Esteem or the idea each type of school was "*separate but equal*". Children were literally separated by attending different schools, but the idea of "equality" was rather more questionable, for a couple of reasons.

1. Bipartite education: Few technical schools were built / established (partly because it proved difficult to quantify "technical ability" in an IQ test and partly because of the expense) which effectively meant a **two-type** (*bipartite*) State system developed - those who passed the 11+ went to grammar schools, those who failed went to secondary modern schools.

2. Status: It quickly became clear that grammar schools, attracting mainly middle-class pupils who were more likely to stay in school to take the General Certificate of Education (GCE) exams at 16, were held in higher regard (by Universities, employers the media and, indeed the general public). They had greater status than secondary moderns (which attracted predominantly working class pupils who were supposed to work towards a (non-examined) School Leaving Certificate at 15).

Grammar

Secondary Modern

Technical

A couple of exceptions to this general situation were:

Private schools: Fee-charging schools were not covered by the Act and could operate outside its general scope. These, by-and-large, remained the preserve of upper class pupils although many developed and extended their scholarship systems that recruited some (mainly middle class) children.

Comprehensive schools: Local Education Authorities (LEA's) were given responsibility for introducing the educational reforms in their area and some chose to interpret the injunction to provide "free and equal" education differently. In London, for example, 8 Comprehensive schools were built between 1946 and 1949.

One Law for the Rich?

Public (fee-charging) schools such as Harrow (pictured here before the invention of colour), Winchester and Eton have always been outside the State schooling system. Such schools do not, for example, have to tech the National Curriculum (something that would be illegal for State schools).

Butler Education Act (1944): Explanations

Role

The tripartite system, whatever its actual weaknesses in terms of scope and implementation, represented a clear statement of the role of education in modern society, in terms of the relationship between schools and the economy. It adopted a broadly *Functionalist perspective* by defining the education system in terms of *differentiation* and *role allocation*. The relationship between academic schooling and professional careers, vocational schooling and non-professional / manual work is evident here (as indeed it was in the practice of each type of school - secondary moderns, for example, emphasized the learning of manual skills (woodwork, bricklaying and so forth) for boys and domestic skills - needlework, cookery and the like - for girls). In this respect, the system was underpinned by two main ideas:

1. Ability: Children were defined and labelled, as we've suggested, in terms of differing abilities and aptitudes which, coincidentally or not, reflected both the economic structure of the time (a plentiful supply of manufacturing jobs, for example) and ideas about the respective adult roles of males and females. The latter's experience of secondary modern schooling, for example, focused primarily on the knowledge and skills women would need for their "traditional" roles of wife and mother.

The concept of "separate abilities" was, however, underpinned, as **McCulloch** (1988) has noted, by *psychological* ideas about the nature of intelligence. In particular, the academic / vocational division for different types of schooling reflected the idea, popularised by psychologists such as Cyril **Burt**, on whose research the tripartite system was largely based (although, in recent years, an unresolved controversy has raged over whether **Burt** falsified his original research data), that intelligence was both *innate* and relatively *fixed* at around the age of 10 or 11.

2. Academic / Vocational aptitudes were reflected in the basic premise of the tripartite system, with secondary modern schools being organised - at least initially - around a vocational type of education designed to prepare boys for various forms of skilled manual work (agricultural and well as industrial) and girls for lower level non-manual occupations (secretarial, office and nursing, for example) that reflected both their general economic position and family role - working class women were generally expected to work until they married and then replace full-time work with domestic responsibilities.

Impact

The impact of the general policies (economic, political and educational) embodied in the tripartite system should not be underestimated or discounted, even in the light of the numerous weaknesses and problems – both philosophical and practical – that bedeviled the system:

Sir Cyril **Burt** (.1883 - 1971)

Philosophical arguments, for example, raged around such ideas as:

Intelligence: Major questions here, for example, relate to the status of "intelligence" Do young children, for example, have innate levels of intelligence that, once developed, is relatively fixed and stable?

Measurement: Can "intelligence" be easily defined and measured? IQ tests designed to do *measure* IQ (and, by extension, *define* what we mean by intelligence) have been around for just over a century but over that period we've moved no-closer to providing an answer to the question "what is intelligence?" that is fully accepted by social scientists. IQ tests, for example, generally measure three "types of intelligence": language, maths and spatial abilities.

Objectivity: Are "IQ tests" objective measures of "intelligence" or are they subject to a range of cultural biases and weaknesses?

Classification: Can children be simply classified in terms of "academic" and "vocational" abilities and categories on the basis of their performance in IQ tests at the age of 10?
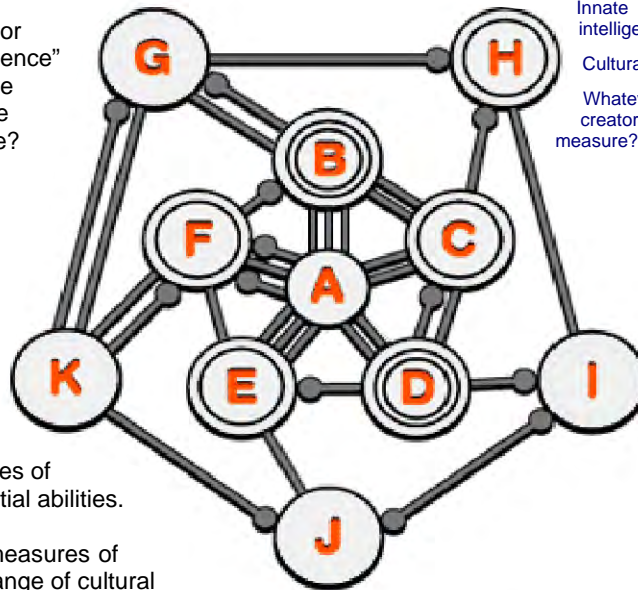
What do IQ tests actually measure?

Innate levels of intelligence?

Cultural learning?

Whatever the test creators say they measure?

Module Link　　　　Research Methods

The main problem with IQ tests relates to their **validity** (do they measure what they claim to measure?). An IQ test clearly measures (and **quantifies**) something; the question here, however, is what is that "something"? For sociologists (amongst others) IQ tests generally lack validity, for the reasons we've just noted.

On a practical level the tripartite system had a number of significant effects, not all of them beneficial to either the individuals involved or society as a whole:

Compulsory education became fully established for the mass of the population and, for perhaps the first time, the education of working class boys and girls was included as a significant aspect of government policy.

Social inequality was not only embedded in the system, it was also **routinised** (made to seem to normal and inevitable) and **ideologically justified** (on the basis of the "objective testing" of innate genetic characteristics).

Social segregation was also established as a routine educational practice with the classes "unofficially" separated, to all intents and purposes, in different schools. Although it was possible to move from, say a secondary

modern school to a grammar school after the age of 11 few children, in practice, ever made the transition.

Experience

The impact of the tripartite system on the experience of schooling for many pupils differed in terms of:

Labelling: Grammar schools were seen as "superior" in terms of both the education offered and the status of the children who attended. Grammar school teachers were also more highly qualified - and paid more - than their Secondary Modern counterparts.

Stereotyping: Secondary Modern children faced two related forms here. Firstly, the fact of failing the 11+ and, secondly, in terms of the idea they had lower natural levels of intelligence.

Gender: Apart from the differences in what girls and boys were taught, there were more grammar school places available for boys than girls (a legacy of the pre-1944 situation of single-sex secondary schools). This meant girls with higher measured levels of IQ were often denied places at grammar schools in favour of boys with lower measured IQ's.

Grammar schools: A better class of school for a better class of pupil?

Comprehensivisation: Observations

In the 1970s, under a Labour government, a general movement took root for the introduction of comprehensive schooling – something that reflected three basic ideas:

Selection (by IQ test) was questioned on the basis that it was both educationally and socially divisive – the former because it effectively created a rigid two-tier system (academic grammar schools and vocational secondary moderns) and the latter because of the general class composition of each type of school. Under comprehensivisation all children, regardless of prior academic achievement, would receive the same secondary education in the same school. A new exam (GCSE) was phased-in to replace the Ordinary Level ("O-level" – mainly taken by grammar school pupils) and Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE – aimed at a lower level than "O-Level" and mainly taken by secondary modern pupils) divide.

An additional factor in the introduction of Comprehensive schools was that of *merit* – the idea that all pupils should have the same basic opportunities for achievement, regardless of class, gender and ethnic factors. *Mixed ability teaching* (where children of differing levels of attainment are taught in the same class, by the same teacher, the same curriculum to the same level) was seen as the way forward. 30-odd years later the jury's still out on this one – **Hallam et al** (2001) suggest some subjects (English and Humanities) were considered by teachers as more appropriate for mixed ability classes than others like maths and modern languages.

Social integration: One of the guiding principles of Comprehensive schooling was the desire to remove the *socially divisive* tripartite system. Education, therefore, was used to promote social mixing. Initially, this meant ensuring each school had a mix of different social classes, although this ideal has effectively been replaced by a form of "self-selection" by catchment area (you become eligible to attend the school if you live within a certain radius of it). In recent times this practice has become reviled in some quarters as "selection by postcode"- the idea that middle class parents are able to ensure their children

attend a school with a good academic record by buying a house in the school's catchment area.

Economic Changes, in tandem with a desire for a more *meritocratic* education system, were also an important motor of change, for three closely related reasons.

• **Work changes**: The decline in manufacturing industry meant fewer manual jobs available as a "vocation" and, in consequence, a form of vocational education geared specifically to lower-level manual work was no-longer seen as either appropriate or desirable. This, in turn, can be related to:

• **Technological changes** that produced an increasing demand for a better-educated general workforce. The newer *service industries* (financial, banking, Information Technology and the like) produced an expansion in non-manual employment that has led to:

• **Social changes**: Increasing numbers of women were drawn into in the new "service industry" workforce as full-time employees creating both a demand for the kind of academic qualifications required by higher level services and, in consequence perhaps, a general resistance to the type of "traditional" education they received in secondary modern schools.

The above notwithstanding, the gradual domination of secondary education by Comprehensive schools didn't happen overnight. On the contrary, their introduction was:

Protracted: A lengthy process, mainly started in 1950's, encouraged by **Wilson's** Labour Government in the 1960's (*Circular 10/65* tends to be seen as the start of a 10-year effort to reform the tripartite system) and finally (almost) completed by Shirley **Williams** (the then Labour Education Minister) in 1976 when an Education Act instructed all councils to "prepare plans for Comprehensive schooling" in their area.

Challenged, not least by influential advocates of grammar schooling but also by some LEA's who fought to retain grammar schooling through the Courts. Hence:

Has "selection by IQ test" been replaced by "selection by mortgage"?

Partial, given that some LEAs (having "produced plans" for Comprehensive schooling never implemented them) still operate grammar schools - around 160 such schools still exist within the education system in various parts of the country (mainly those with a history of Conservative Council control). Some grammar schools also avoided comprehensivisation by changing their status to that of Public, fee-charging, schools.

Comprehensivisation: Explanations

The introduction of comprehensive schooling – however gradual, protracted and partial – changed the educational landscape in a range of ways in terms of role, impact and the experience of secondary schooling.

Role

Comprehensive education was designed to change the general role of the education system in a couple of ways:

Ideologically: Comprehensive schools represented the idea social class divisions could be, at best abolished and at worst mitigated through a system of education that encouraged "social class mixing", *equality of opportunity* and achievement through talent and hard work. In other words, it represented ideas about *social integration*, *meritocracy* and *egalitarianism* (equality). In this respect, we can see these ideas reflect a general *Functionalist* view of society, with its stress on *consensus*, *shared values* and the *allocation of adult roles* through proven *merit*.

Economically: A central theme of Comprehensive education was that the population contained a larger *pool of talent* than was generally recognized by any previous system. The changing nature of economic production - and the increasing importance of *service industries* - led to a reappraisal of both the purpose of education and the general skills / qualification base. The role of education, in this respect, was to respond to the changing economic needs of society by producing a highly-educated, skilled and trained workforce.

Impact

The impact of Comprehensive education was felt in several ways:

Provision: New purpose-built co-educational schools, for example, developed in many areas to replace closed / amalgamated schools. A Comprehensive school, for example, might typically replace a couple of grammar schools (boys' and girls') and a secondary modern school - creating a large institution with better facilities and more curriculum choice.

Exams: The school-leaving age had been raised to 16 in 1972 and this was accompanied by the gradual introduction of a new GCSE exam taken at 16 by all students. Differentiation *between* exam systems (pupils of different abilities taking different exam at different

levels) was replaced by differentiation *within* a single exam system. The GCSE exam system was designed, in the light of sociological research warning about the problems created by labelling was designed to be a "no fail" exam; students were graded (originally A – G) on the basis of the standard they achieved. Although this grading system largely remains in place (with the recent addition of an A* grade to counteract media claims that the exam was becoming "too easy") the *de facto* ("in fact") pass grade is the one accepted by most employers – grades A* - C.

Diversity: The continued existence of Grammar, Secondary Modern and Public schools within a nominally "Comprehensive" system created problems in that parents who had the money and / or desire could continue to buy a different (higher status) type of education, perpetuating the class divisions Comprehensive education was (theoretically) designed to remove. Currently (2008) the majority of grammar schools are in rural, as opposed to urban, areas and public schools educate around 7% of the school-age population (although this rises to around 16% in school 6th forms and some parts of the South-East).

Experience

In some respects, Comprehensive schools did provide a different set of experiences for both teachers and pupils in terms of things like:

Size: Comprehensives, as we've noted, are generally larger and more impersonal than the schools they replaced.

Labelling: Children were no longer stigmatised by either the label of failure at 11 or "secondary modern" status.

Gender: New opportunities for girls (especially working class girls) developed as they followed a similar curriculum to boys (although some differences remained in terms of a gendered curriculum choice - girls were still expected to take subjects such as Home Economics, for example).

On the other hand, some school practices simply transferred from the tripartite system to the Comprehensive school (as part of a *hidden curriculum* discussed in more detail in the final section). These included, for example:

Streaming, setting and **banding**: These developed to differentiate pupils *within* the school (rather than between different schools as was previously the case). The general outcome was to find *middle class* children in the *higher streams*, *sets or bands* and *working class* children in the lower, which, of course, raised the question of:

Labelling: These practices effectively created a system of positive and negative labelling within the school - with some pupils being almost entirely separated from

others. Another form of selection and separation involved:

Catchment areas: Originally, schools were supposed to have a social mix of pupils (which invariably meant some children faced long journeys to school) but fairly rapidly this devolved into "selection by area" - inner city schools attracted high levels of working class kids and suburban schools attracted middle class kids.

Regional Differences: As **Croxford** (2000) notes, different parts of the UK operated different systems - in Scotland and Wales all State-funded secondary schooling was comprehensive, in Northern Ireland it was selective, and England had, as we've seen, a number of regional variations. **Croxford''s** research also suggested:

Social segregation was lower in Scotland and Wales.

Attainment was, on average, the same in Wales, England and Northern Ireland, although girls outperformed boys in all four systems.

Social class was a major determinant of attainment, although it made less difference in Scotland than in England.

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by the terms "Comprehensivisation" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest **three** reasons for the introduction of the Comprehensive system (6 marks).

(c) Outline some of the ways the introduction of Comprehensive schooling has impacted on the *experience* of education (12 marks).

Tried and Tested: Research Methods

Assess the strengths and limitations of **one** of the following methods for the study of educational policy.

(i) Content Analysis.
(ii) Focused Interviews (20 marks).

*This question requires you to **apply** your knowledge and understanding of sociological research methods to the study of this **particular** issue in education.*

Module Link　　　　　　　　**Education**

The following material (covering educational policy in England and Wales over the past 30 years) provides a range of examples of the New Right approach to educational policy we outlined in Section 1.

Marketisation

The Conservative Years: Observations

In 1976, the then Labour Prime Minister James (later Lord) **Callaghan** gave a speech at Ruskin College in Oxford to start a

1979 - 1997

so-called *Great Debate* about education (which, true to form, was neither "Great" nor actually a "debate"). Although no major educational reforms came from this speech, it paved the way for substantial reforms under the subsequent **Thatcher** (Conservative) government elected in 1979 – and a period of what is sometimes characterised as the "marketisation of education". **Callaghan's** speech identified the necessity for two major educational reforms:

1. **Basic Skills**: It suggested schools were failing to instill "basic skills" in their pupils. As **Callaghan** stated: "I am concerned…to find complaints from industry that new recruits from schools sometimes do not have the basic tools to do the job" (to put this in perspective, however, it should be noted that nearly 30 years later, following a period of arguably the greatest sustained level of educational development and change in our society's history "industry" is still making the same complaints…).

In 1978, the **Youth Opportunities Programme** (YOP) was introduced, aimed at 16-18 year old school leavers, paying a small allowance as part of its training programme. Interestingly, it was described at the time, by Albert **Booth** the Employment Secretary, as a "New Deal" for the young unemployed - an evocative echo of the American "New Deal" programmes of the 1930's credited with dragging America out of the deep economic recession of the period.

2. **Core curriculum**: It floated the idea of a "core curriculum of basic knowledge" (something that was subsequently introduced into the educations system as the **National Curriculum** in 1988).

These ideas, it could be argued, set the agenda for the marketisation of the education system – a concept that relates to the application of New Right economic ideas to the cultural sphere of education.

The "marketisation of education" is not something that happened overnight; on the contrary it represents a gradual, and by no means complete, process over the past 25 or so years (both the **Blair** and **Brown** Labour governments have not only shown continuity with the reforms started by the **Thatcher** and **Major** Conservative governments, they have in many ways taken them a number of steps further). The main educational reforms and changes in the "Conservative Years" fall into two main areas:

1. Institutional freedom involved the idea of "freeing" schools from the "bureaucracy" of Local Government control in a number of ways: **Boyd's** (1991) characterisation of New Right thinking that we outlined in the opening section is instructive here because of the way it can be applied in this context. For example:

Disestablishment: City Technology Colleges - new schools specialising in the application of Information Technology to all aspects of the curriculum - were introduced, partly-funded by private companies (at least in theory - some funding was forthcoming from a few wealthy individuals who supported the government's New Right agenda, but the bulk of the expenditure came from government); around 20 such colleges were actually completed, although many more were originally intended.

Deregulation: The **Local Management of Schools** (LMS) initiative gave Head teachers and governing bodies direct control over how they spent the school budget. This, in turn, related to the idea of:

De-emphasis in the sense that LMS went some way towards giving the power to make at least some educational decisions to individual schools.

Decentralisation: Apart from **LMS** a further example of the decentralising tendency might be something like **Grant-Maintained** schools, directly funded by government, rather than through LEA's (and local taxation). To encourage schools to "opt-out" of LEA control, very generous funding packages were offered, although very few schools actually took-on this new status.

Alongside these institutional developments two further notable policies were introduced in an attempt to provide parents with more information and choice about their children's schooling:

Open enrolment policies were developed whereby popular and "successful" schools were allowed to expand at the expense of "unsuccessful" schools. Parents were, in theory, given more choice about where to send their children and LEA's couldn't set limits on school size to reduce parental choice.

A **Parents' Charter** conferred the right to information from a school about its academic and social performance.

2. Curriculum development, on the other hand, focused on changes to what was taught (and in some respects how it should be taught) within the school – a good example here might be the:

From US President **Roosevelt** in the thirties through UK Prime Ministers **Thatcher** in the eighties, **Major** in the nineties to **Blair** in the noughties - politicians everywhere just love to sing to the ring of that New Deal thing...

Education Reform Act (1998) - a major curriculum development relating to the reforms it introduced. These included things like:

National curriculum: Strange as it may seem, the subjects taught in school were never specified by governments until 1988 (until this point, Religious Education was the only compulsory subject). The following table explains how the National Curriculum was originally constructed.

1. "Core Subjects" 30 - 40% of the timetable	**English Maths Science**
2. "Non Core" subjects 50% of the timetable	**Technology Music Art History Modern Foreign Language Geography Physical Education**
3. Optional Subjects: 10% - 20% of timetable if required.	**Religious Education** etc.

Other Requirements:
• "A daily act of worship" of a "broadly Christian nature" (parents have the right to withdraw children from this).
• Sex education
• Citizenship Lessons added in 2003

Ball (1995) argues Conservative reforms tried to "…deconstruct the comprehensive, modernist curriculum and replace it with an…authoritative curriculum of tradition" - in other words, an attempt to specify a school curriculum that focused on learning "facts" and which gave central importance (by enshrining them in law) to traditional curriculum subjects such as Maths and Science. It was, almost

literally a "curriculum of the dead" because this is where its focus, according to **Ball**, lay - the distant past.

Key Stage testing was introduced at 7, 11 and 14 (Stages 1, 2 and 3 respectively). Key Stage 4 was GCSE. At the end of each Stage children were assessed - using *Standard Attainment Tests* (SATs) - against national "Assessment Targets" with the aim being to eventually ensure all children achieved a certain level of competence relative to their age. The original testing regime has been severely curtailed over the years - testing and teacher assessments of the *core* subjects (rather than *all* subjects) at Stages' 1 - 3 are now the norm.

> ### The New Vocationalism

Alongside these general reforms to the academic school curriculum a simultaneous development was that of the:

New Vocationalism: High levels of youth (especially school-leaver) unemployment in the early 1980's led to the development of the *New Vocationalism* (presumably to differentiate it from the "Old Vocationalism" of the tripartite system). A new emphasis was placed on the idea of *training*, as opposed to *education* (remember the distinction we made earlier?); initially, the focus was on post-16 training, with some forms of vocationalism gradually introduced into the pre-16 curriculum. During the 1980s, a range of New Vocational schemes were started, developed...and discarded. These included:

Youth Training Schemes: Introduced in 1980 (as a development of YOPs) and aimed at unemployed school leavers, these offered job training with trainees receiving a small payment over-and-above any State benefits. This expansion of the Youth Opportunity Programme was described by James **Prior**, the then Employment Secretary, as a "New Deal" for young people (are you beginning to see a theme developing here?)
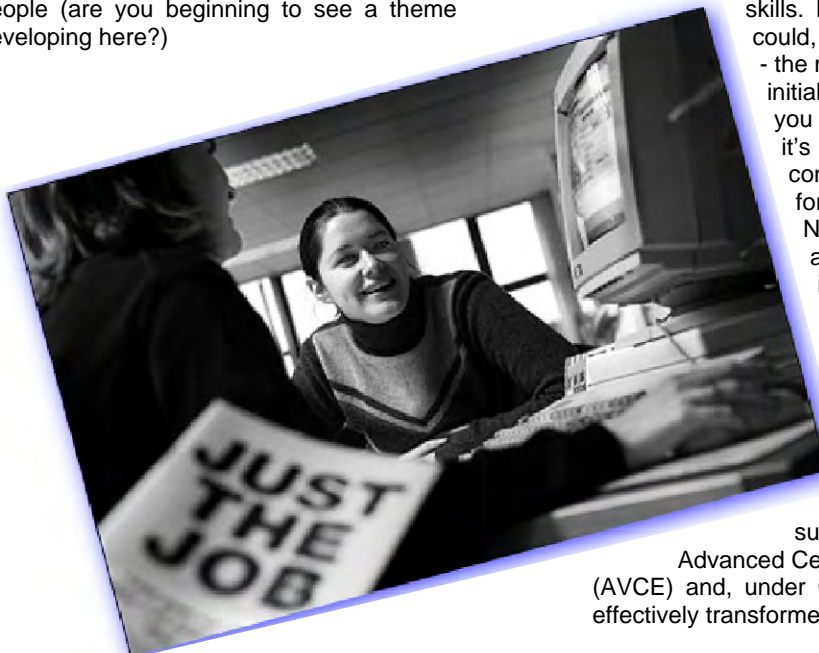
A New Dealer in Sheffield, 1998: Source: www.guardian.co.uk

Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI): This initiative - piloted in 1982 and fully introduced in 1987 - marked an important development because it aimed to introduce technical / vocational education to 14 - 18 year olds *within* schools. As **Bell et al** (1988) noted at the time "TVEI remains unambiguously education-led". TVEI was a collection of *initiatives* rather than a vocational curriculum, some of which came from government (the unlamented and short-lived "Records of Achievement" and "work experience", for example) and some from schools (such as developing the use of Information Technology and equal opportunity schemes for expanding the number of women going into traditionally male forms of employment).

The Youth Training Scheme (YTS) was originally introduced in 1983 as a one year, post-16, course and the intention was for it to be a logical vocational extension of the kind of TVEI courses developed within schools. In 1988, the "Youth Training Guarantee" required all unemployed 16 and 17 year olds to register with YTS - which was renamed "Youth Training" (YT) - for education or training.

Vocational Qualifications: Two forms of qualification were introduced in 1986; firstly, the Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE) - a one-year, post-16, course designed as a preparation for work or further vocational study – and, perhaps more significantly:

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) introduced the idea of *workplace competencies* - every job had a set of identifiable, measurable, skills. Every job could, in theory, be vocationally certified - the main drawback, however, was you initially had to be doing a job before you could achieve the qualification (so it's debateable how much NVQ contributed to "training"). However, for various reasons aspects of NVQ's were introduced into schools and led, directly, to the introduction, in 1993, of:

General National Vocational Qualifications: GNVQs were offered at three levels - Foundation, Intermediate (equivalent to GCSE) and Advanced (equivalent to A-level). The latter was subsequently renamed the Advanced Certificate of Vocational Education (AVCE) and, under Curriculum 2000, they were effectively transformed into:

Vocational A-levels: These are currently designed to mirror the conventional (GCE) A-level (in the sense they are available at AS / A2 and as a "Double Award") but are designed as the **Qualifications and Curriculum Authority** (2004) puts it "…to equip students with up-to-date knowledge, skills and understanding of the underpinning principles and processes of the sectors they represent". We can also note that, indirectly, the development of GNVQs led to the introduction of **Key Skills** with Curriculum 2000.

Modern Apprenticeships were introduced in 1995 for 18 - 19 year olds and linked to NVQ's. Although designed to be a "quality training scheme", an ironic note here is the reintroduction of apprenticeship training after it was effectively abolished by the Conservative government because it led to "restrictive labour market practices" (New Right-speak for Trade Union involvement).

Yeomans (2002) neatly summarises the focus of the New Vocationalism when he notes it reflected a general New Right belief that:

> "Better vocational education and training
> =
> Greater individual productivity
> =
> Economic growth".

In respect of these two areas we can see two strands of New Right thinking coming together in the arena of education. On the one hand economic freedom, deregulation and a move away from government, bureaucratic, control and, on the other, a clear statement of moral intent – one that specified exactly what was to be taught to children…

The Conservative Years: Explanations

With the development of vocational education and the 1988 Reform Act we can see the influence of New Right thinking on education during this period, especially in terms of:

Role

The education system became more closely aligned with the needs of industry over this period, in terms of both the development of explicitly vocational elements and the range of subjects that schools could teach. The "core curriculum" of English, Maths and Science, in particular, was designed to satisfy employer-led demands for workers with "basic skills" of literacy and numeracy. At the time, some writers (such as **Lacey**, 1985) argued such *prescription* (that is, setting out the subjects that had to be taught in all State schools) would not improve the quality of education but, rather, result in greater bureaucracy. Opinions about the New Vocationalism are generally divided.

Negative: For some, such as **Finn** (1988), youth training schemes involved:

• **Cheap labour** for employers to use for as short time and then discard without penalty.

• **Bonded labour** - "trainees" who left a job risked losing State benefits so they were effectively tied to a particular employer, whatever the conditions of the job.

• **Pretend jobs** - many trainees were either on "work creation schemes" devised and funded by government or in work offering no prospect of further employment once the "training period" was over (and the government subsidy ended).

• **Little training** - and certainly not in the skills required for work in a high technology, service-based, economy.

• **Hidden subsidies** that shifted the burden of training costs from employers to the taxpayer.

In addition, for Marxist writers such as **Bates et al** (1984) and **Bates and Riseborough** (1993), the New Vocationalism had a number of features:

• **Class division**: Most (white) middle class pupils followed the academic education route to higher pay, skill and status employment whereas (white and black) working class pupils were encouraged along the vocational route to lower paid / lower status work.

• **Social control**: Taking potentially troublesome unemployed youth "off-the-streets" and subjecting them to workplace discipline.

• **Lowering wages** for all young people by subsidising some employers.

• **Lowering unemployment** figures.

Feminist writers also criticised vocationalism for channelling girls into "traditional" female areas of the workforce - hairdressing, secretarial and "caring professional" work such as nursing.

Positive: Despite this general level of criticism – from a variety of sources and perspectives – not everyone saw the New Vocationalism in such a negative light. **Yeomans** (2002), for example, noted that the general political belief "…education in general, and vocational education in particular, will have an economic pay off remains strong and continues to have a powerful influence on the education policy of the major political parties".

Heath (1997) also suggested that something like TVEI helped involve women in areas of schooling (and eventually work) that were traditionally male preserves by insisting on equal opportunities.

Impact

Murray (2002) argues most of the 1988 Education Act's reforms, such as the development of City Technology Colleges and the ability of individual schools to "opt-out" of local government control (to be directly funded by central government), actually had very little impact on the education scene; the school curriculum didn't really change that much from the kinds of subjects that has always been taught in schools and Key Stage testing has generally been watered down over the years. However, one way Conservative government changes have impacted is by *setting the agenda* for subsequent educational reform under New Labour in the 1990s (as we will see in a moment).

Experience

One interesting thing to note in this context is how the changes just outlined reflect some of the contradictions in New Right thinking (contradictions which, it could be argued, have been carried through to New Labour's education policy in the 21st century). In this respect we can note two tendencies:

Economic liberalism, relating to control of school budgets and decision-making about teaching resources etc. One objective here seems to have been to remove schools from local government control and influence.

Centralized control of the 16 - 18 curriculum. Post-16 vocational training had, for example, a strong compulsory element (school-leavers who refused training could have State benefits removed) whereas, as we've noted, the secondary school curriculum (and eventually that of primary schools too) became increasingly *prescriptive*; what could be taught - and even how it was to be taught - was effectively decided by the government.

In this respect, **New Right** perspectives (like their **postmodern** counterparts) recognise the significance of economic change but, unlike the latter, want to retain highly centralised control over some areas of society (schools and family life for example). In some respects this tension between economic freedom and cultural control symbolises a central unresolved problem with the education system which, to paraphrase **Lea** (2001), involves the unanswered question "What are schools for?"

New Labour: Observations

1997 - Present During the 1997 election campaign, when asked to name his "top three priorities", should a New Labour government be elected, Tony **Blair** replied "Education, Education, Education", something we mention not because it's particularly profound but rather because it symbolises an increasing State (government) *interest* in education over the past 25 years – but one that still reflects an ambivalence about the role of the State in the education system inherited from previous governments.

In this respect "the **Blair** (and now **Brown**) years" have been characterised, on one level, by a serious of wide-ranging educational changes and adjustments and, on another, by the application of a set of broadly New Right principles to the general education system. We can begin this section, therefore, by documenting some of the educational changes made over the past decade in primary, secondary and tertiary education.

Primary

Literacy and numeracy hours were introduced as part of the curriculum. All primary pupils had to have one hour each day devoted to Reading and Writing. The prescriptive nature of the strategy (telling teachers *how* to teach as well as *what* to teach) was unique, at the time, for primary education.

Nursery education encouraged through tax credits for parents.

Class sizes of more than 30 children at Key Stage 1 were made illegal in 1997 (although it's debatable how strictly the law is enforced).

Secondary

Curriculum 2000: A-levels split into two qualifications (AS and A2) and Key Skills introduced (**Main skills**: Communication, Application of Number and IT. **Wider skills**: Improving Own Learning, Working with Others and Problem Solving) as part of a "basic skills" strategy.

Types of school: Within the Comprehensive system, school *diversity* has developed along the following lines:

• **Specialist schools** - specialising in a particular curriculum area (such as modern languages) can select up to 10% of their intake by "aptitude".

• **Beacon schools**, FE and 6th Form Colleges were, from late 1998, given increased funds to from partnerships with other schools and colleges in order to spread "high quality teaching practice". The basic idea here was that the "good teaching practices" that had made the Beacon school successful could be introduced and applied in "less successful schools".

Beacon Schools - rays of light in the educational darkness or just another expensive educational policy doomed to failure?

> **Module Link**   **Education**
>
> The Beacon School initiative / policy can be linked into ideas about **differential achievement**. The assumption underpinning this policy is that achievement flows from the way teaching and learning is organised and delivered (hence the idea of spreading "good practice"). In other words, failure to achieve is seen as the fault of teachers rather than the result of factors (such as social class or family attitudes) that are beyond the control of teachers.

• **Foundation schools** (as part of the "5 Year Strategy" - see below) will be allowed to set their own curriculum.

• **Academies** (the latest addition in a growing – and somewhat confusing - trend) were established in 2002 as "publicly funded independent schools" located in "areas of social and educational disadvantage". The basic idea was that an Academy school would either replace one or more "failing schools" or be newly-established in areas where more school places were required. As with conventional Maintained schools (such as Comprehensive or Grammar schools) the *capital* costs (for example, the cost of building a new school) and *running* costs (teacher's salaries, for example) are met by the government (through, currently, the **Department for Children, Schools and Families**).

However, a major (and controversial) difference between Academies and conventional schools was the fact that a private investor could sponsor an Academy and, in so doing, be given effect control over the school. For an investment of around 10% of the cost of creating an Academy (around £2 million - £3 million – the remained, as we've noted, is supplied by the government) a private individual or company is given control over areas like the curriculum (Academies do not have to follow the National Curriculum) and governance of a school. Academies may also select up to 10% of their intake by aptitude There are currently (2008) 83 academies with others planned to take the number to 200 by 2010.

Tomlinson Report (2004): This review of the 14 - 19 curriculum recommended, among other things, the reform of examinations such as GCSE and A-level into a *School Diploma* modeled on the International Baccalaureate. A more-detailed examination of the Report can be found at the end of this section.

Home-school agreements (where, since their introduction in 1998, parents promise to ensure their children attend school etc.) were made legally binding, although never enforced. These agreements have been largely superseded by things like the **Anti-Social Behaviour Act** (2003) under which

parents can (and have been) jailed for failing to ensure their child attends school. In Wolverhampton (2007) , for example, Dawn **Joyce** was jailed for two weeks for this offence.

Targets: Literacy strategy and learning targets were introduced (**Moser** Report, 1999).

Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) introduced in 2004 for 16 year olds in full-time education. Payment depends on attendance (and progress)targets being met by individual students.

Performance Indicators (commonly known as *League Tables*) were expanded to include all primary and secondary schools in England (Scotland and Wales abolished such tables). Based initially on GCSE / A-level results and, increasingly, Key Stage assessment test results, these tables have been extensively criticised for their bias in favour of schools with selective intakes (Public and Grammar schools) and against schools with high levels of SEN ("Special Educational Needs") and Free School Meals (FSM) children. To counter-act this in-built disadvantage, the government now publishes "Value-Added" League Tables measuring progress (rather than actual level of achievement) made by a pupil between, for example Key Stage 3 and 4.

An important aspect of the current government's educational strategy revolves around the concept of:
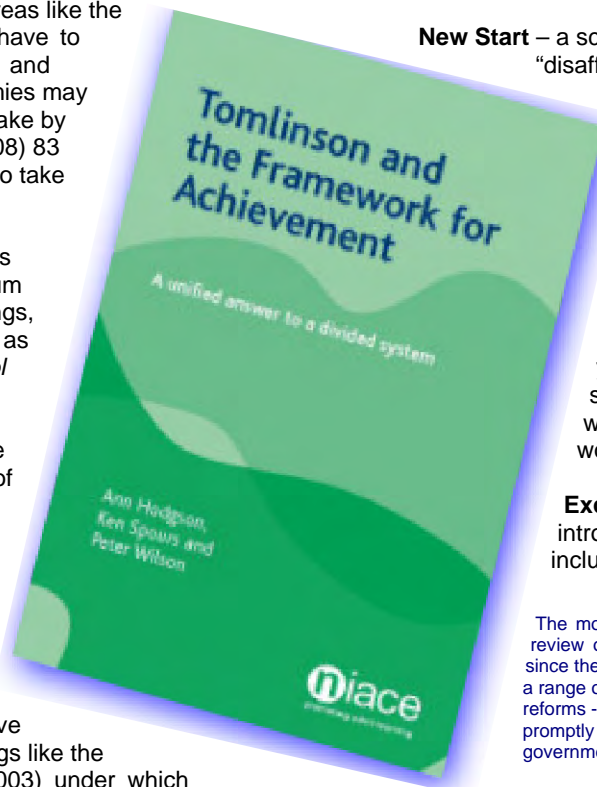
Social inclusion – an idea evidenced in a range of social contexts (from crime to poverty) but one particularly focused on the education system. Inclusion, in this respect, relates to such things as attempting to improve attainment levels amongst the lowest achievers to increasing retention rates, preventing and limiting truancy and so forth. Under this general heading, therefore, we can outline a range of initiatives:

New Start – a scheme aimed to target "disaffected or underachieving" 14 -17 year olds by encouraging schools to develop new ways of motivating such pupils.

Vocational Training: "Disaffected" 14 - 16 year olds allowed to spend part of the school week at FE College or work experience.

Excellence in Cities (2000) introduced a range of ideas, including: Learning Mentors

The most wide-ranging and radical review of the secondary curriculum since the 1944 Education Act proposed a range of curriculum developments and reforms - the vast majority of which were promptly ignored by the Labour government...

Tomlinson and the Framework for Achievement

A unified answer to a divided system

Ann Hodgson
Ken Spours and
Peter Wilson

niace

and Support Units, City Learning Centres, more Beacon and Specialist schools, support for Gifted and Talented pupils and small **Education Action Zones** (that involve clusters of Primary and Secondary schools joining forces with parents, LEA's and local business to improve educational services).

Sure Start (2000) programmes were designed to improve services to poorest pre-school children and families to prevent truancy and increase achievement. Additional schemes were subsequently aimed at pregnant teenagers to help them back to education / employment.

Extended Schools: Following an American model, schools offer a range of services / facilities (crèches, support for parents, curriculum and leisure opportunities for pupils outside the traditional school timetable) to engage pupils and parents in their child's education. **Wilkin et al** (2002) found a positive impact on "attainment, attendance and behaviour" by offering activities that increased "engagement and motivation".

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by the term "New Vocationalism" (2 marks).

(b) Identify and briefly explain **three** criticisms of the "New Vocationalism" (6 marks).

(c) Outline some of the educational policies introduced over the past 25 years aimed at improving the educational achievement of *either* working class boys *or* ethnic minorities (12 marks).

(d) Assess the view that educational policies over the past 25 years have had little or no effect on levels of educational achievement (20 marks).

Vocational Education

As part of the general **social inclusion** agenda, vocational education has once again come to the fore over the past few years – culminating, perhaps, in the wide-ranging **Tomlinson Report** (2004) – whose content and impact we outline below. Whether we consider vocational changes in terms of the **New "New Vocationalism"** (a radical departure from previous attempts to reform vocational education) or simply an extension of existing vocational initiatives, a number of developments are worthy of mention:

Integrating provision has involved attempts to link post-16 training more-closely with school and work. National Traineeships, for example, were an early introduction, designed to provide a link between school-leaving and Modern Apprenticeships.

New Deal: With a name showing either a distinct lack of imagination or a touching triumph of hope over expectation, this required all unemployed under 25's to take either a subsidised job, voluntary work or full time education / training.

Nice logo. Shame about the policy?

The New Deal has increasingly focused on so-labelled "NEET's" – those 16 – 18 year olds "Neither in Education, Employment nor Training". According to the government's **Social Exclusion Unit** (1999) "At any one time, 9% of 16 to 18-year-olds are not taking part in learning or work. This rate has remained fairly constant since 1994".

Caton's (2002) research suggests this group are drawn *predominantly* (but not exclusively) from "lower socio-economic groups" – an observation reinforced by **Linklater** (2007) who notes: "…more boys at Eton [one of the top Private schools in the UK] get five good GCSEs than the entire borough of Hackney" (one of the most economically-deprived areas of London).

Careers: All schools must provide careers education for 13 - 18 year old pupils. "*ConneXions*" (the funkily-renamed "Investors in Young People" careers' service) was introduced - with a 'cool' name, presumably to appeal to "The Kids" (a further example, if you're interested, of the power of labelling…).

Education to Employment (or "e2e" as the government insists on calling it - probably in yet another misguided attempt to "get down with da Kidz") was established in 2003 as a "development programme" aimed primarily at NEETs. The basic idea was, in effect, to combine various aspects of past (largely failed) schemes to provide a kind of "rounded package" encompassing both study for educational qualifications and work placements. Although one aim of the scheme is to get young people into work it also means that those who leave school with few, if any, qualifications can progress to schemes like Apprenticeships or Further Education.

Although this type of scheme probably avoids some of the worst aspects of the earlier "youth training schemes" identified by **Finn** (1988) it's by no-means clear how successful this integrated policy (combining education with work training) has been – or will – be.

Providers: Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) were replaced by the **Learning and Skills Council** (LSC) whose role was, amongst other things, that of coordinating educational provision locally and nationally - encouraging, for example, schools and FE colleges to develop links, exchange services (and in some cases students) and the like.

Work experience was expanded to a 2-week placement for all State maintained school pupils. As part of increased vocational awareness, pupils were also to be taught "job skills" such as interview techniques.

Vocational GCSEs were introduced to replace Intermediate GNVQs and, as we've seen earlier, vocational A-levels were subsequently introduced to replace Higher GNVQs.

Further Education

The **Dearing** Report (1997) was a major review of Conservative education policy that led to changes in Key Stage testing by the subsequent (**Blair**) Labour government. It also indirectly laid the ground for the proposed reform of the 14 - 19 curriculum set-out in the eagerly-awaited and lukewarm-received **Tomlinson Report (**2004). **Dearing** also recommended university students should be charged for their tuition fees (so you know who to blame).

Teaching and Higher Education Act (1998): This created a new system of student loans and fees. Student grants were largely abolished but "poorer families" were exempted from fees after political

criticism that working class students would be unfairly penalised.

Participation: A target of 50% of those under-30 to "experience Higher Education" (whatever that actually means) by 2010 was set. At the time of writing (2008) whether or not this will be achieved probably depends on how the phrase is interpreted (it probably doesn't mean all of these students will necessarily be studying for a degree).

Just prior to their subsequent re-election (2004), the Labour Party issued two strategy documents detailing their policy plans to 2015 (something that assumes a further term of office in government).,

1. Five Year Strategy

The first part of the long-term educational strategy involved commitments to develop:

Providers: Greater private industry involvement in the funding, owning and running of schools (the aforementioned Academies). Whereas previously there were certain limitations on who could set up a new school (Muslim groups, for example, could not apply for government funding for faith schools in the way that the Church of England could) new providers can potentially be drawn from parent groups, private businesses and religious organisations – something that has sparked both political and educational controversy; the former because, for a relatively small outlay religious organisations can effectively control the ethos of a school and the latter because of curriculum changes to some Academy schools.

Taylor and Smithies (2005),for example, reported that "Four out of the 10 new schools opening this week are backed by Christian organisations and almost half of those under development are due to be sponsored by religious groups of some sort". One such Academy was sponsored by "The Emmanuel Schools Foundation, an evangelical Christian group which has been linked to the teaching of creationism".

Personalised learning will expand, with the objective being to "tailor the curriculum" to the needs of each individual pupil. Although the government has suggested that each child should have an "individualised learning plan" for each lesson it's by
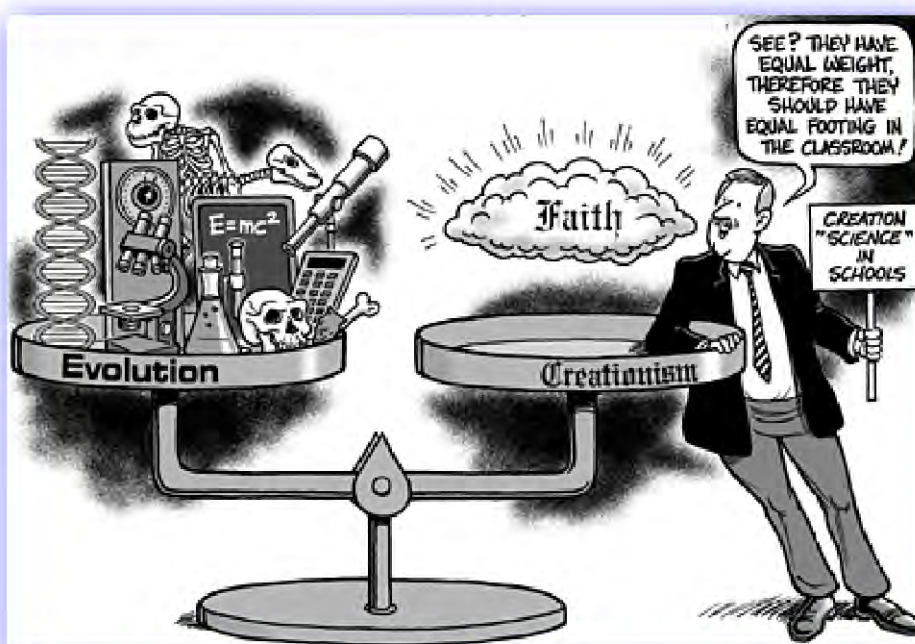
no means clear how this might work. In addition, any attempt to implement such provision would raise serious **labelling** issues or the kind seen in the Grammar / Secondary Modern debate (would those perceived as being of "lower ability", for example, have their education tailored to these lower teacher expectations?).

Schools: The aim is to expand "good schools" and close "failing schools" (replacing them with Academies). Greater control over attendance and behaviour has been introduced, part of which involves the expectation every school will have a uniform and code of conduct. The "extended schools" experiment will itself be extended and Specialist schools will be allowed to develop a second "specialism".

1. Ten Year Strategy

Looking further into the future, the:

Tomlinson Report (2004) was initially intended to form the basis for wide-ranging reform of the 14 - 19 curriculum and, as such, it's worth outlining the Report's main recommendations (even though these have not been implemented by the government – or, at least, not implemented as part of the overall educational strategy developed by **Tomlinson**). The basic recommendations were a:

Diploma framework - "…to replace existing 14-19 qualifications including A levels, AS levels, AVCEs, BTECs and GCSEs". There will be 4 levels of attainment:

- **Entry.**
- **Foundation.**
- **Intermediate.**
- **Advanced**.

Achievement at each level is recorded as a *pass, merit* or *distinction* and "Detailed performance records would be available to teachers, employers, universities and colleges, recording the grades achieved in particular components of the diploma".
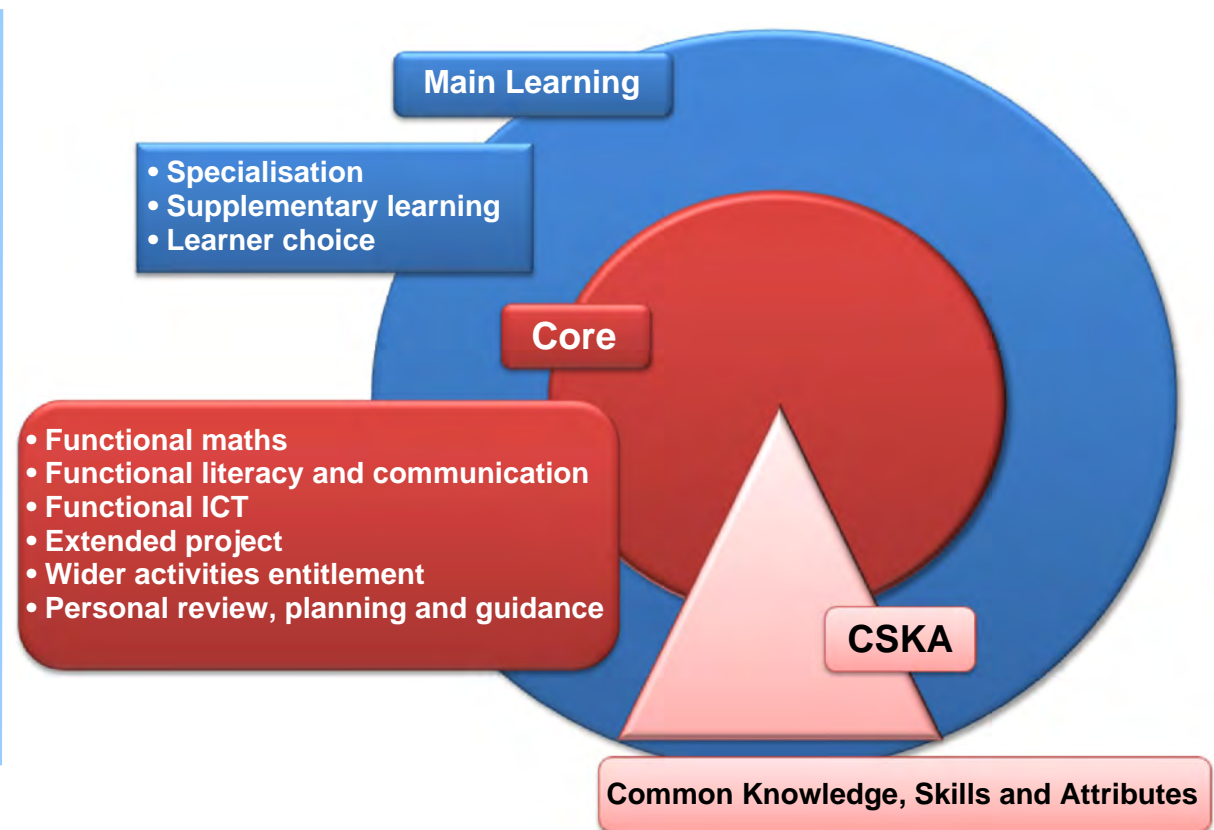
As the following chart demonstrates , the diploma is built around three areas:

1. Main Learning: Most time would be spent on these subjects (whatever they would eventually turn out to be).

2. Core Learning: The focus here is on students gaining "a minimum standard in functional *communication*, *mathematics* and *ICT* for each diploma". An extended project (to replace "most externally assessed coursework") would be part of all core learning, as would participation in "sports, arts, work experience and community service…participation would be recorded on the diploma, but would not be compulsory". Personal reviews and evaluations of learning would also feature here.

3. CKSA: The focus here is the development of skills (problem solving, teamwork and study skills, for example), rights and responsibilities, active citizenship, ethics and diversity.

Diploma Framework suggested by the **Tomlinson Report (2004)**

- **Main Learning**
  - **Specialisation**
  - **Supplementary learning**
  - **Learner choice**
- **Core**
  - **Functional maths**
  - **Functional literacy and communication**
  - **Functional ICT**
  - **Extended project**
  - **Wider activities entitlement**
  - **Personal review, planning and guidance**
- **CSKA**
- **Common Knowledge, Skills and Attributes**

National Curriculum (14 -16) subjects would be retained as options within the diploma. However, the Report proposed "…up to 20 subject mixes. Young people could choose an 'open' diploma with a subject mix similar to GCSEs and A level combinations. Alternatively they could choose a diploma specialising in an employment sector or academic discipline".

Vocational education and training can be either integrated into "open diplomas" (mixed with academic subjects, for example) or followed as distinct "vocational pathways" (routes through the various options and qualifications). In theory, "schools and colleges, working with training providers, could tailor programmes to each young person's needs and abilities" which, in turn, is seen by **Tomlinson** as a way of tackling social exclusion (in the form of "disengagement and poor behaviour").

Assessment: An interesting notion here is that "students sit too many external exams". The proposal, therefore, is for fewer external tests and more teacher assessment, although formal exams would be retained and "External exams would also remain in the advanced diploma as well as for communication, mathematics and ICT in each diploma". Potential problems of *teacher labelling* and *stereotyping* impacting on their assessments of pupils would be resolved using a system of external moderators who would sample teacher assessments.

Although the **Tomlinson Report** provoked a great deal of political discussion (and criticism - for some the Diploma Framework was simply a restatement of the already existing International Baccalaureate) its recommendations were never, as such, implemented. However, it's probably fair to say that aspects of the Report have started to resurface on the educational agenda in a couple of ways:

1. 14 – 19 curriculum: The reorganisation of the school curriculum has been mooted for a number of years and the government has begun to take steps to make this a reality in a couple of ways:

2. School leaving age: The current (2008) suggestion is that *compulsory schooling* should be extended to 18, partly to try to resolve the problem of "NEETs" we noted earlier and partly to accommodate:

3. Diplomas: Perhaps the most radical recent development is that of Diploma qualifications designed as a 14 – 19 pathway to a particular qualification (that is, students taking the Diploma route effectively by-pass GCSE and A-level because the Diploma qualification, at different levels, is equivalent to these qualifications).
The more astute will notice the uncanny resemblance of the new Diplomas to the proposals laid-out in the

What Is A Diploma?
Source: **Department for Children, Schools and Families** (2007)

Components	Characteristics
Principal learning	• Gives the industry title of the Diploma • Learning that is related to the sector of the economy • Learning that is designed and endorsed by industry
Core content	• Includes the assessment of Functional Skills in English, mathematics and ICT • Develops a student's employability skills of teamwork and self management • Gives the student the opportunity to produce an extended project • Requires at least 10 days' compulsory work experience
Additional and / or specialist learning	• Allows for the student to specialise • Allows for the student to choose more qualifications • Allows for flexibility and choice of learning

Tomlinson Report. A major – and crucial – difference however is that Diplomas are intended to sit *alongside*, rather than *replace* (as **Tomlinson** suggested), all other post-14 qualifications. They are effectively in *competition* with GCSE and A-level qualifications (both academic and vocational). and arguably help to maintain, rather than reduce, the academic – vocational divide.

Opinion relating to the likely effectiveness of the new Diplomas is, as you might expect, divided. On the one hand they're seen as just another reshuffling of the vocational pack (they are, in effect, just GNVQs by another name); on the other they're seen as representing a Trojan Horse that can be gradually introduced into the education system as a way of loosening the grip GCSE and GCE have on exam market and, in effect, undermining the "academic" / "vocational" divide in schools and colleges. In this scenario Diplomas will gradually replace GCSE / GCE and they represent the "implementation of Tomlinson by the back door", so to speak.
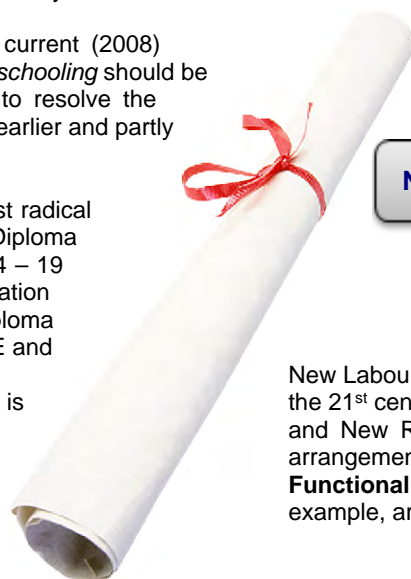
New Labour: Explanations

Role

New Labour policies shaping the role of education in the 21st century reflect a range and mix of Functionalist and New Right perspectives and ideas (an arrangement sometimes characterised as a **Neo-Functionalist** perspective). **Functionalist** ideas, for example, are reflected in areas like:

Social solidarity: One of New Labour's major concerns has been with *social exclusion* (a form of *Underclass* theory linking educational underachievement, crime, delinquency and poverty). Education policy, therefore, has focused on things like: measures to combat truancy, the introduction of Extended schools as a way of involving all sections of the community in the educational process and the development of different types of schools (Specialist, Foundation, Academies and so forth) as a way to raise achievement among the worst performing (academically) sections of society. Vocational forms of education have also been developed as a means of raising achievement through social inclusion.

Are social policies that promote competition within and between schools compatible with policies designed to promote social inclusion?

Social Integration: Measures such as school uniforms, codes of conduct and home - school agreements are classic *integrating mechanisms*, designed to promote social solidarity. The development of Extended schools also reflects the idea that involving parents in the education of their children helps to control behaviour and increase achievement.

New Right perspectives, on the other hand, are increasingly reflected in ideas like:

Marketisation strategies - the way to improve educational performance is to "open schools up" to commercial influences. This involves a range of initiatives, from commercial funding of school building (the **Building Schools for the Future** programme (2005) for example, involves capital spending by both the government and private industry, whereas the **Seed Challenge** initiative involves capital spending by government on a school if the school can attract "matching funds" from non-government sources) to commercial firms actually owning and running schools. Critics of such involvement - such as **Davies and Adnett** (1999) - point to a couple of potential problems:

Curriculum innovation decreases because of uncertainty about its success or failure (and, in particular, the consequences of getting it wrong). In a commercial (and commercialised) world education companies opt for the "safe option" when it comes to curriculum development; in other words, they generally follow the National Curriculum.

Burden of change: This falls disproportionately on those schools with the *least* resources to innovate successfully. In situations where schools are effectively in competition with each other for pupils it's much harder for poorer resourced schools to compete with their newer and better resourced competitors.

In addition, we can also note:

Long-term planning is inhibited by the need to produce "instant improvements".

Competition between schools for pupils may actually decrease innovation and improvement because schools simply develop ways of attracting a limited pool of "high ability, high motivation" pupils.

Informed Consumers: One problem with the idea of *consumers* (parents to you and me) being able to pick-and-choose schools is that equality of opportunity is more apparent than real. For example, if a school is over-subscribed with applications (more parents want their children to go to that school than it has places available) and it cannot expand, the provider (a school), rather than the consumer, may end up choosing which pupils it accepts.

The experience of school performance (League) tables is a good example of how consumer choice may be limited. The rationale for the *hierarchical ranking* of schools (one on top of the other) is to allow consumers to judge the effectiveness of their local schools. However, such tables may lack **validity** for several reasons:

• **Special Educational Needs**: Schools with high numbers of SEN pupils have a lower average academic performance.

• **Resources** are not distributed equally across all schools (inner city Comprehensives, for example, fare worse in this respect than rural / suburban Public or grammar schools).

Competition between schools: Is the playing field level?

• **Social class** factors, rather than what happens within a school, may have more influence on exam results. Schools with large numbers of working class children, for example, achieve less on average than schools with a largely middle class intake.

• **Exam values**: Schools develop ways of "improving performance" by manipulating exam entry. They may, for example, be reluctant to accept lower class pupils (who, historically, perform least well educationally); greater time, effort and teaching resources may be given to "marginal students" (those who, with extra help can achieve 5 A-C GCSE grades) at the expense of pupils considered unlikely to reach this target.

• **Self-fulfilling Prophecies**: High ranking schools attract more middle-class pupils who, historically, achieve most educationally and, therefore, attract the next cohort of middle-class pupils…

The general trend towards the marketisation of education has, **Rutherford** (2003) argues, altered the historic role of the education system on the basis that "Education and training is changed from the social provision of a public good, into a services market involving private transactions between customers and providers".

Impact

Changes to educational provision have impacted on both providers and consumers in a number of ways:

Commercial input into school building and ownership.

Centralised direction of the school curriculum, teaching methods, what pupils should wear to school and so forth.

Failing schools and the consequences of not meeting (centralised) government performance targets.

Competition between schools for pupils (especially those pupils with the "right" attitudes and motivations).

Experience

While it's difficult to evaluate the experience of schooling, we can note a number of developments:

Social inclusion has involved attempts to both increase levels of achievement and to ensure pupils from social groups who have, historically, been largely excluded from schooling are reintegrated into the system.

Training: Greater emphasis, in recent years, has been placed on the relationship between education and work. While this has positive aspects (allowing students to follow vocational courses closely integrated to their

Institute for Research in Integrated Strategies (2005):

League tables encourage parents to "shop around" for primary and secondary schools.

Church primary schools in England admit fewer children from poorer homes.

needs and preferences) it also has rather less positive consequences in terms of:

Selecting students for "vocational training" in ways that perpetuate class, gender and ethnic inequalities (boys and girls funneled into traditionally male / female forms of vocational employment).

Specialisation at a too early age: With vocational education and training it's difficult for pupils to decide to change part-way through a course since they are effectively committed to a particular type of occupation.

Training that doesn't particularly match the changed economic situation (for example, vocational training that doesn't include high levels of ICT).

Academic / vocational class divides in our educational system are perpetuated (in crude terms, middle class pupils receive a high status academic education and the rest don't).

Curriculum changes: Some changes can, once again, be viewed in a generally positive light. **Fielding** (2001), for example, has noted opportunities for student involvement in the teaching and learning process through a variety of curriculum initiatives (including, perhaps, the requirement on schools to teach Citizenship). Attempts to simplify the school curriculum by offering different routes through the school (in terms of academic / vocational subjects, Foundation, Intermediate and Higher levels and so forth) may help to clarify pupil choices and the introduction of the school Diploma may also broaden pupil experience by widening their choice of subjects. Conversely, however, **Fielding** also notes a conflicting tendency within schools; the over-emphasis on exam performance and education as a series of "measurable outcomes", serves to limit both choice and channel pupils into an increasingly narrow set of educational experiences.

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by the term the "marketisation of education" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest **three** ways that schools have become marketised over the past 10 years (6 marks).

(c) Outline some of the reasons for the marketisation of education over the past 25 years (12 marks).

(d) Assess the extent to which the role, impact and experience of schooling has been changed by marketisation polices (20 marks).

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4. Relationships and processes within schools, with particular reference to teacher/pupil relationships, pupil subcultures, the hidden curriculum, and the organisation of teaching and learning.

Relationships and Processes: Observations

Although we've touched, in previous sections, on some of these ideas we need to develop them in more detail to arrive at a rounded picture of education in our society – hence the need to look more specifically at the relationships and processes involved within the school. A further point to note, in this respect, is that until this point we've largely focused on the institutional aspects of education (the general role of education and training, government policies designed to shape education systems and the like); this section redresses the balance in this respect by looking more closely at what goes on "inside school walls"…

The Organisation of Teaching and Learning

We can categorise these processes in terms of two main ideas:

1. Social organisation refers to how education is organised in terms of things like the educational policies we examined in the previous section. For example, one aspect of the UK education system is that it is based around a series of public examinations (both academic and vocational) that students are expected to have achieved by a certain age. The social organisation of education, therefore, sets the basic context for the:

2. Sociological organisation of teaching and learning, which involves examining areas like:

School and classroom organisation: how is teaching and learning physically organised?

Exams...Practice exams...practicing Practice Exams...

**Curriculum organisation**: for example, what must be taught in schools (something we've previously touched on).

Socialisation and **social control**: How is it established and exercised?

Teaching styles: Are there different theories and styles of teaching?

Learning styles: Are there different theories and styles of learning?

When we start to look at the various ways teaching and learning is organised within schools in the contemporary UK one thing that initially strikes us as interesting is that, for all the undoubted changes in our society over the past 100 or so years, there are a range of similarities and continuities between the organisation of teaching and learning at the start of the *20th century* and the start of the *21st century*. For example, a few we could night might be:

- Education takes place in designated buildings (schools and classrooms) at designated times.

- Children are taught by teachers (adults).

- Teaching takes place in age-defined groups.

- Pupils are periodically tested on the things they are supposed to have learned.

- Pupils generally wear some kind of uniform.
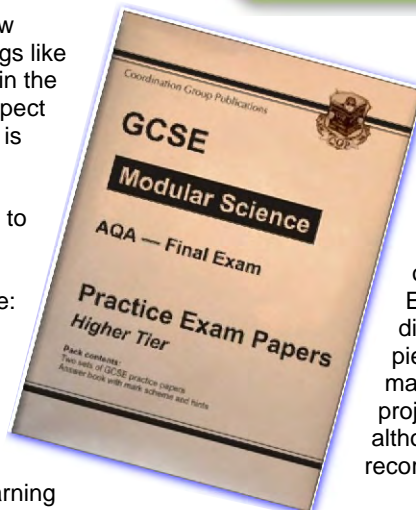
There are, of course, some obvious differences between Then and Now: relationships with teachers may be friendlier and their style of teaching different; discipline is very different - corporal punishment (physical beating) is no longer allowed - and, of course, the technology of the Edwardian classroom was very different - writing with chalk on a piece of slate probably doesn't quite match today's computers, data projectors and electronic whiteboards - although most students probably still record their work in ink, on paper.

These continuities and differences tell us something about the nature of teaching and learning in our society (in particular, perhaps, the relationship between social structures and social actions) something we can start to develop by thinking about how the teaching and learning process is generally organised – starting with the idea of:

Social Structures: By and large, schools are *hierarchical structures*, not only in terms of the power / authority relationship between adults (teachers, administrative and support staff) and pupils (who, by-and-large, have very little power within schools and are consequently unable to officially influence the teaching

The organisation
of schooling
(**Sizer**,1984)

and learning process), but also in terms of the general authority structure within the school.

Bureaucratic Organisation:
Schools are, in some ways, bureaucracies organised, for teaching and learning purposes, around basic principles designed to maximise their efficiency as *people processors*. In other words, schools are:
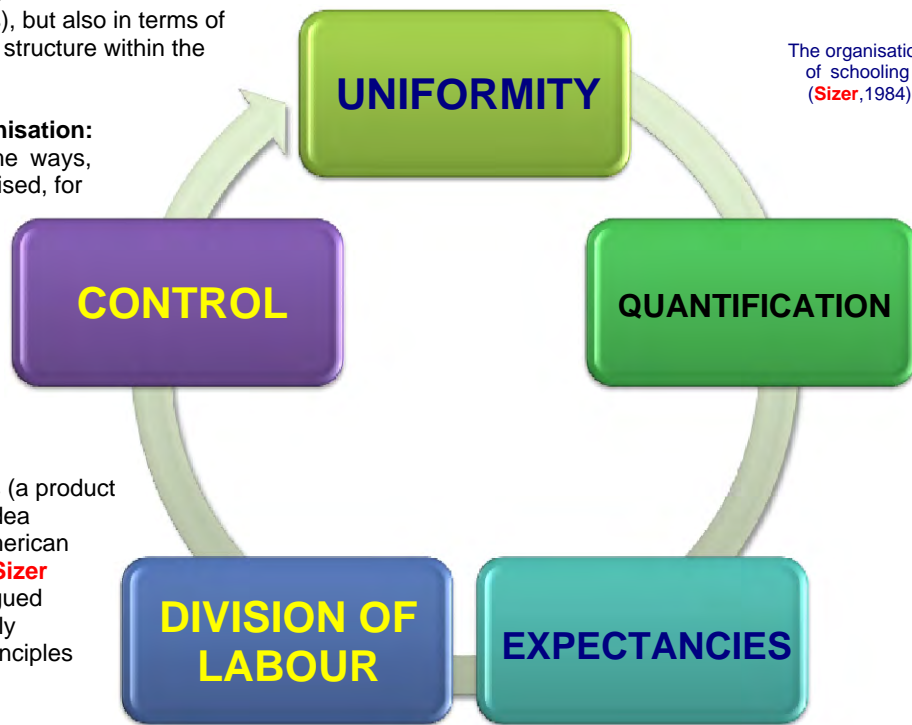
Modern institutions (a product of **modernity**) an idea expressed by the American educationalist Ted **Sizer** (1984) when he argued schools are generally organised around principles of:

UNIFORMITY

CONTROL

QUANTIFICATION

DIVISION OF LABOUR

EXPECTANCIES

a. Uniformity: They operate, in other words, with little concern for the needs of individuals (teachers or learners) and emphasise a narrow definition of achievement (how many tests are successfully passed) rather than the quality of student understanding.

b. Quantification is the main way the *value* of a school, its teachers and its students is expressed. "Success" is measured in exam passes and League Table position.

c. Expectancies: Schools (and by extension teachers and students) are set targets, determined at a national, government, level, for student learning (all 16 year olds, for example, should have achieved 5 A*- C grades at GCSE).

d. Division of Labour: This is highly *fragmented* (split into small parts) and tightly *controlled*. The school day, for example, is divided into rigid lessons and what is taught is not open to negotiation.

e. Control: Individual responsibility is limited, learning is controlled (by the needs of the curriculum (see below) and testing regimes, for example) and there's little scope for individual development or expression. Students are generally expected to learn similar things, at similar times, in similar ways.

Whether or not your experience of schooling fits exactly (or even inexactly) with the ideas we've just noted, have a look at the following examples of two different educational philosophies about how teaching and learning should be organised:

Summerhill School
(founded by A.S. Neill in 1921)

Schooling Norms	**Schooling Values**
Children can follow their own interests	Provide an environment so children can define who they are and what they want to be.
No compulsory assessments or lessons	No pressure to conform to artificial standards of success based on predominant theories of child learning and achievement.
Free to play when and how they like	Spontaneous, natural play not undermined or redirected by adults into a learning experience for children.
All school rules and decisions made democratically by children and adults	Create values based on the community. Problems are discussed and resolved openly and democratically.

Day-attendance fees range from £3,000 – £7,000
Boarding fees range from £6,700 to £11,700 depending on the age of the student.
http://www.summerhillschool.co.uk

"The school curriculum is designed to meet the needs of the child at each stage of their development. Children enter classes according to their age rather than academic ability and the teacher is free to present subject material in an individual way that aims to awaken and enthuse the children, encouraging them to discover and learn for themselves. In this way the child is not educated solely in the '3 Rs' but also in the '3 Hs' - Hand, Heart, Head - the practical, feeling and thinking capacities".

Curriculum: The teaching and learning process in schools is constrained by the nature of the school curriculum, in terms of what can or can't be taught. Two things are useful to note here. Firstly, how little the school curriculum has actually changed over the past 100 or so years. Compare, for example, the National Curriculum subjects noted in the previous section with:

The Board of Education Curriculum
1904

English
Maths
Science
History
Drawing

Manual Work (boys)
Domestic subjects (girls)
Physical Exercise
Foreign Language
Geography
Music added shortly afterwards

A competence-based curriculum teaches students how to learn and apply their knowledge to create new forms of understanding. A knowledge-based curriculum encourages pupils to learn and repeat things that are already known...

Secondly, the *relevance* of the curriculum - in terms of the usefulness or otherwise of what is taught - is rarely questioned, although, having said that, **White** (2003) has argued: "Many subjects are bogged down in values held over 100 years ago. They need to be freed from the dead weight of custom and from the shackle of the assessment system before they can focus on what is really important". He argues, for example:

• **History** contains little of relevance to the 21st century.

• **Science** is laboratory-based, employing techniques no scientist currently uses (the Bunsen burner!)

• **Music** - one of the most important aspects of pupil culture - is reduced to the study of dead, white, European classical composers.

Continuing in this questioning vein, the **Royal Society for the Arts** (1998) has argued a curriculum for the 21st century should be based around five "competencies":
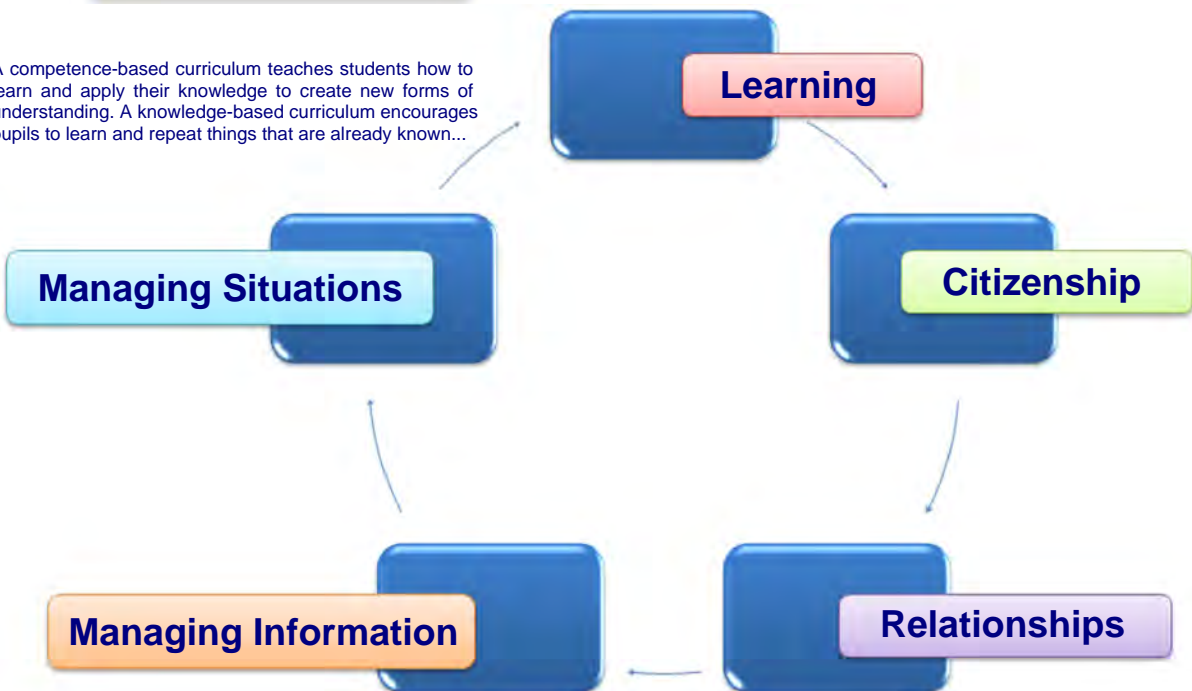
1. Learning
Being taught how to learn, think
and critically reflect.

2. Citizenship
Focusing on behaviour, rights and responsibilities.

3. Relationships
Understanding how to relate to others.

4. Managing Situations
Dealing with change and so forth.

5. Managing Information
How to access and judge the value
of different sources.

Learning

Managing Situations

Citizenship

Managing Information

Relationships

The main implication we can draw from the above is the argument that the contemporary school curriculum is bound up in practices and values that belong to another era; that is, the type of subject-based curriculum developed at the beginning of the 20th century is no-longer relevant or useful to the changing needs and requirements of the 21st century.

Contemporary British society has changed beyond all recognition from the British society of a century ago – there is no area of social life (family, work, politics, religion, media and so forth) where the two are remotely comparable - except perhaps one: the education system that insists on organising the teaching and learning process in a way, so the argument goes, more appropriate to the needs of the Britain of the nineteenth century than to the globalised, technologically sophisticated, world in which we increasingly live, work and play.

There are, of course, many reasons for this state of affairs – but a primary reason relates to the organisation of the curriculum into subjects that have their own particular body of knowledge that must be learned before it can be applied. This subject-based organisation leads, in turn, to a general *resistance to change* amongst those who have the most to lose from such change – the teachers and academics whose power-base resides in their control of particular forms of knowledge. This observation, therefore, leads us towards thinking about different possible styles of teaching and learning.

Teaching and Learning Styles

Although we've just suggested schools are bureaucratic institutions that don't seem to have changed much over the past century in terms of how they organise knowledge and information, in recent years a great deal of work has gone into thinking about how teachers teach and students learn.

Technology: The impact of new technologies (the Internet, interactive white boards, video conferencing. CD and DVD-Rom's and so forth) on teaching styles should not be underestimated since, although it may be much the same old curriculum, technology opens up new ways to teach and learn (although we are, of course, only at the beginning of any exploration of how such technology impacts on the organisation of

teaching and learning).

Neuroscience: A range of initiatives have appeared in schools in recent years, mainly focused around ideas about how the brain functions (**Asthana** (2007), for example, reports on research purporting to claim that "Girls at single-sex schools out-perform those at mixed ones because teachers tailor their lessons to suit the female brain"). These include developments in **learning styles** (differences in the way students process information - visually, verbally and the like) and how this might be applied to improve attainment. Similarly, questions about the nature of intelligence are being asked through something like **Gardner's** (2003) concept of **multiple intelligences** that argues students possess a range of "intelligences" (Interpersonal, emotional, musical and so forth) as well as the ones (language, mathematical and spatial) traditionally recognised and tested in schools. Thought has also been given to how students understand and process information – with use at various levels of schooling being made of concepts like **De Bono's** (1985) "Six Thinking Hats" – different "hats" represent different ways of looking at a problem.

Although, as **Howard-Jones et al** (2007) note, "Current teacher training programmes generally omit the science of how we learn, an overwhelming number of the teachers surveyed felt neuroscience could make an important contribution in key educational areas" their research found that much of what passed for an understanding of "brain-based learning programmes" in schools (teaching and learning styles, "brain gyms" and the like) was actually based on supporting evidence "whose science is now seriously contested". In other words, these innovative ways of teaching and learning are generally supported only by impressionistic evidence (the teachers who use them believe they work), not by solid scientific research. This raises at least two important questions:

The Red Hat
"Feelings, hunches and intuitions".

The White Hat
Information known or needed ("the facts").

The Black Hat
Judgments, weaknesses, limitations - why something may not work.

"Six Thinking Hats"
Edward **De Bono** (1985).

The Yellow Hat
Exploring the positives, the advantages and uses.

The Green Hat
Creativity. Exploring possibilities, alternatives and new ideas.

The Blue Hat
Control of the thinking process.

Firstly, to what extent do innovative styles of teaching and learning actually *improve* student attainment (outside of what is known, methodologically, as the "**expectancy effect**" - the idea that because we believe something works we see it working when it's applied – the results reported by **Asthana** (2007), for example, strongly suggest just such an effect at work here)?

Secondly, if the research on which some innovations are based is, at best, untested and, at worst, highly questionable (**Coffield et al** (2004), for example, examined 13 learning styles tests and found that "…only two of them could be recommended in higher education and none that were immediately relevant for post-16.") it follows there is the possibility such innovation could do more harm than good. For example, on the basis of learning styles tests children are frequently categorised as a "particular type of learner" (visual or aural, for example), a practice that clearly runs the danger of **negative labelling** and **stereotyping**.

Learning styles - just another attempt to categorise children and file them away in neat little boxes or a genuinely-innovative attempt to understand how children learn?

Tried and Tested: Research Methods

Assess the strengths and limitations of **one** of the following methods for the study of how teaching and learning is organised within a school.

(i) Overt Participant Observation.
(ii) Focused Interviews (20 marks).

This question requires you to **apply** *your knowledge and understanding of sociological research methods to the study of this* **particular** *issue in education.*

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by the term the "teaching and learning styles" (2 marks).

(b) Identify and explain two ways that new technology has impacted on teaching and learning in British schools (6 marks).

(c) Outline some of the curriculum changes and continuities in British education over the past century (12 marks).

(d) "The organisation of schooling in Britain reflects the needs and wishes of the powerful, rather than the needs of children". Assess the extent to which this is an accurate representation of the British educational system (20 marks).

The Hidden Curriculum

Jackson (1968) argued the hidden curriculum involves the things we learn from the experience of attending school. It is, therefore, a form of socialisation process, involving a mix of formal and informal techniques. **Meighan** (1981) suggests: "The hidden curriculum is taught by the school, not by any teacher...[it involves] an approach to living and an attitude to learning", while **Skelton** (1997) suggests it involves: "That set of implicit messages relating to knowledge, values, norms of behaviour and attitudes that learners experience in and through educational processes. These messages may be contradictory…and each learner mediates the message in her/his own way". In other words, the hidden curriculum involves schools as institutions transmitting certain value-laden messages to their pupils and, in this respect, **Paechter** (1999) suggests the hidden curriculum has two basic dimensions:

1. **Intended** aspects are the things teachers "actively and consciously pursue as learning goals". These include, fostering certain values (politeness, the importance of order, deference to authority and so forth) and discouraging others (bullying and sexism, for example). It is "hidden" in the sense these things are not part of the formal curriculum, but teachers and students are probably aware of many of the processes going on in the school (some of which may actually be explicit, in terms of things like anti-racism or anti-sexism policies).

2. **Unintended** aspects might include the messages teachers give to students in the course of their teaching - things like status messages (whether boys appear to be more valued than girls - or vice versa), messages relating to beliefs about ability (whether teachers believe it is "natural" or the product of "hard work") and so forth.

Having established what we mean by this concept (and how the interpretation of its meaning reflects **Skelton's** argument), we can identify some aspects of its *content* in the following terms:

Status messages covers a number of areas related to ideas we develop about our "worth" in the eyes of others. This includes, for example:

Type of school: State or private, grammar or secondary modern, "good school" or "bad school" (considered in terms of its general reputation, exam results and so forth).

Streaming / **banding** / **setting** and how membership of "high" or "low" academic groups impacts on pupil perceptions of themselves and others.

Academic and **Vocational** courses and subjects have different statuses in our educational system. The introduction of "Vocational GCSE's" for example, reflects the implicit assumption academic GCSE's are not suited to the abilities of some students (and it probably doesn't take too much imagination to guess the social class of students who will be encouraged to take these new qualifications).

School class position - how ranking in terms of academic success or failure affects children's self-perception and value.

Classroom organisation - in terms, for example, of authority within the classroom (teacher at the front, directing operations or a situation in which there is no clear authority ranking).

Socialisation / **Social Control** messages relate to ideas about what is required from pupils if they are to succeed educationally. Some of these ideas refer explicitly to the way pupils are encouraged to behave within schools (for example, the various classroom processes that involve order and regularity - attendance, punctuality and so forth) whereas others are less explicit and relate to the things pupils must *demonstrate* in order to "learn how to learn". That is, learning to conform not just to the formal rules of the school but also to the informal rules, beliefs and attitudes perpetuated through the socialisation process. These include things like pupils recognising:

• **Authority**, in terms of the powerful role played by the teacher within

the classroom - not simply in terms of organisational rules (when to speak, where to sit and so forth) - but also in relation to:

Learning to live with Authority...

"The teacher will assess you now".

Actually, get used to assessment because it's a fact of school life...

• **Learning**, which may involve ideas like *individualism* (learning is a process that should not, ultimately, be shared) and *competition* (the objective is to demonstrate you are better than your peers). Learning also involves ideas about what is to be learned in terms of:

Knowledge: Teachers, for example, select and present certain ideas as valid. To pass exams (and thereby succeed in educational terms), the pupil has to learn to conform to what the teacher presents as *valid knowledge*. One argument here is that educational "success" and "achievement" is not so much a matter of what a student knows but rather the ability to, firstly, provide teachers (and examiners) with answers that fit their already existing body of valid knowledge and, secondly, to do so in ways that fit existing ideas about how valid knowledge is to be realised and tested (through written examinations, in the main, although some forms of vocational training require valid knowledge to be realised through practical demonstrations).

As **Pringle** (2004) suggests "The issue here is the extent to which individual interpretations need to correspond to a generally accepted view in order to be considered valid knowledge" and **Whitehead** (2007) takes this idea a step further when he suggests that "what counts as valid and legitimate educational knowledge" is always subject to

hidden power relationships (within the classroom(between teachers and their pupils), the examination room (between examiners and candidates) the school (in terms of what is to be taught) and society itself (in terms of wider issues about "what is worthy of being known").

Module Link   **Education**

A contemporary example here can be related to the work we did in the previous section on educational policies. Some Academy schools (most notably Emmanuel City Technology College in Gateshead) teach "creationism" (the idea that biblical accounts of creation are *as valid* a *theory* as the more conventional explanations of human development found in theories of evolution). The question here, of course, is the extent to which each theory counts as "valid knowledge" in different social contexts?

Assessment is an integral part of the hidden curriculum because it involves the idea learning can be *quantified* (through tests and exams) and that, consequently, only quantifiable knowledge is valid knowledge. Assessment is, of course, crucial to various forms of *teacher labelling and stereotyping* that go on within schools and classrooms and contributes to pupil (and indeed teacher):

Identities: These are a significant aspect of the hidden curriculum, not just in terms of the things we've already noted (different senses of identity related to types of school, how pupils are perceived, categorised and treated and the like), but also in terms of ideas like **class**, **age**, **gender** and **ethnicity**. **Hill and Cole** (2001), for example, argue the hidden curriculum functions to *exclude* particular groups (especially working class children, but also such groups as the mentally and physically disabled).

Burn (2001) argues current government preoccupations with initiatives relating to boys' achievement (male role models, after-school learning clubs, boy-friendly curricula, single-sex classroom groups…) sends messages about achievement to both males and females - that boys have "a problem", for example and the achievement of girls is both devalued and (perhaps) part of the problem. Similarly, **Smith** (2003) questions the idea of framing debates about underachievement in terms of "failing boys". Questions of identity are also related to:

Subject choice in terms of what students choose to study and why they make these choices. Although this mainly relates to post-16 choices under the conditions originally set by the National Curriculum, some forms of choice at Key Stage 3 -

decisions about vocational or academic GCSE's for example - are gradually being introduced.

A wide range of evidence suggests males and females make different subject choices when given the opportunity. These choices are not just influenced by the people around us (**Cooper and McDonald** (2001), for example, found both parents and teachers influential in a student's choice of degree courses) but also by perceptions relating to masculine and feminine identities. **Bamford** (1989) noted the research evidence suggested more boys take subjects like science, geography, technical drawing and computing, whereas more girls take Secretarial studies, Biology, French, Home Economics and History. **Abbot and Wallace** (1996) also point out feminist research has shown how concepts of masculinity and femininity are influenced by factors such as:

Academic hierarchies - how the school is *vertically stratified* in occupation terms (men at the top being the norm).

Textbooks and **gender stereotyping:** Males appear more frequently and are more likely to be shown in active ("doing and demonstrating"), rather than passive, roles. **Best** (1992), for example, used **Content Analysis** to demonstrate how pre-school texts designed to develop reading skills remain populated by sexist assumptions and stereotypes. **Gillborn** (1992) also notes how the hidden curriculum impacts on ethnic (as well as gender and class) identities through Citizenship teaching, where the content of the subject teaching (democracy, racial equality, etc.) frequently clashes with the "learned experiences" of black pupils.

Formal Curriculum: Decisions about what subjects should be studied, how they should be studied and the particular content of each subject are also significant aspects of the hidden curriculum. **Paechter** (1999), for example, argues:

Subject learning - as opposed to *process learning* - is generally considered more important in our education

Concepts like **Class**, **Age**, **Gender** and **Ethnicity** can always be applied to an understanding of educational differences (just as they can be applied to an understanding of social inequalities generally). An easy way to remember them is to use the **mnemonic** "CAGE" - a memorable word made-up from their first letters.

system. For example *critical thinking* is a *process* where we learn how to assess and evaluate knowledge. However, somewhat ironically, its value is only realised in our education system when it's turned into a *subject* to be studied.

Specialisms: Each subject has its own special skills and knowledge and the curriculum becomes increasingly specialised as students progress through the system.

Who decides which subjects are "worthy of being known" and hence included on the school curriculum?

Subject hierarchy: Both teachers and pupils quickly come to appreciate that some subjects are more important than others – both *within* the school curriculum (subjects like English, Maths, Science and, most recently, ICT have a *special status* in terms of the amount of time and testing given over to them) and *outside* the curriculum, in the sense of subjects that are *not* considered worthy of inclusion and hence *knowing*; subjects like sociology, psychology, politics and media studies, for example, barely get a look-in until Further Education, where they prove to be popular subject areas.
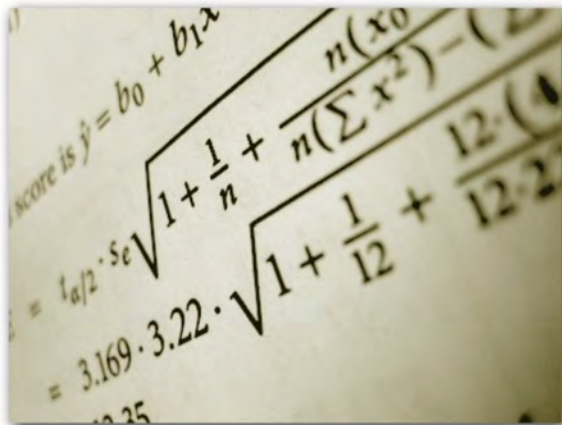
I don't know about you but I've used the algebra I learnt at school all of ..erm...well...exactly zero times in the past 30 years.

Subject hierarchies are, in this respect, important for a couple of reasons: firstly they specify the relative merits of subject areas in terms of "what pupils are allowed to study / know" and, secondly, in order to justify their special position they involve a depth and detail that is out of proportion to their actual usefulness to the majority of the population.

White and Bramall (2000), for example, implicitly question this hierarchy when they argue against forcing children to learn high levels of maths: "The maths we need for everyday life and work is mostly learnt by the end of primary school".

Reiss (2001) similarly questions the value of science as a National Curriculum subject when its teaching is "…putting pupils off further study of science by limiting the subject to tedious experiments that have little connection to everyday life".

This type of criticism objects to the kind of "taken for granted" acceptance of the domination of the school curriculum by subjects that, while arguably necessary (a useful function of schools is that of ensuring that children are literate and numerate) are effectively "over taught"; in other words, because subjects like Maths and English are effectively taught to levels that go way beyond what the vast majority of pupils will ever need two problems occur:

Firstly, the time allocated to other subjects and activities is reduced because "core curriculum subjects" take up more time than is really needed and, secondly, large numbers of pupils "switch off" (**Barrett**, 1999) from these subjects (see below) because of their (unnecessary) depth and detail.

The argument here is that by pursuing an agenda that gives certain subjects an undeserved (and perhaps unjustified) status in the curriculum, educational policy effectively contributes to the problem (a lack of numeracy and literacy) it is nominally trying to prevent because pupils fail to understand the relevance of such in-depth teaching and learning.

Teaching within schools assumes teachers, as the "organisers of learning for others", are a *necessary* aspect of schooling. This raises a range of interesting questions (for example, are teachers actually needed?) about the nature of knowledge and learning. Even the development of electronic learning (delivered via the Internet, for example), assumes the presence of teachers to organise and direct learning.

Tried and Tested: Research Methods

Assess the strengths and limitations of **one** of the following methods for the study of the hidden curriculum.

(i) Covert Participant Observation.
(ii) Postal questionnaires (20 marks).

*This question requires you to **apply** your knowledge and understanding of sociological research methods to the study of this **particular** issue in education.*

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by the term the "hidden curriculum" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest **three** ways that the hidden curriculum manifests itself within schools (6 marks).

(c) Outline some of the ways the hidden curriculum might impact on educational achievement (12 marks).

Teacher / Pupil Relationships

We've considered aspects of this relationship at various points (in terms of *labelling*, *stereotyping, self-fulfilling prophecies* and *differential achievement*, for example) and so, you'll be relieved to know, we don't propose to go over this ground again. However, there are further aspects of this relationship that can be usefully explored here:

Switching-On: **Cano-Garcia and Hughes** (2000) argue the teacher / pupil relationship is significant in terms of how successful (or unsuccessful) pupils are in switching-on / conforming to teaching styles. They argue, for example, the most academically successful students are those who can work independently of the teacher within a fairly rigid set of teacher-controlled guidelines and procedures. In other words, successful pupils understand what the teacher wants and develop "teacher-pleasing behaviours" designed to provide it.

Switching-Off: The other side of this idea, of course, is what **Barrett** (1999) has termed "switching-off" - the idea that where pupils fail to see what they're supposed to be learning as "useful now, as well as in the future" it turns a large number off the idea of learning. Switching-off also seems to occur when pupils feel they lack the power to influence the scope, extent and purpose of their studies.

Hidden curriculum: A further aspect of the hidden curriculum – something that links directly into teacher / pupil relationships – is one identified by **Seaton** (2002) when he suggests that these two basic pupil orientations represent:

1. Learned dependence – pupils who are successful within the education system are those who quickly learn to work in accordance with whatever the teacher demands. In other words, "successful pupils" are generally those who quickly learn to acquiesce to the authority and expertise of teachers.

Mr. Wackford was incredulous at the suggestion any of his pupils could be anything other than ecstatic at the thought of attending his Citizenship classes...

2. Experienced alienation –pupils who come to see, for whatever reason, the school, teachers and even the concept of "education" itself as something alien and strange – something that is simultaneously both irrelevant and threatening.

Although for **Seaton** (2004) the hidden curriculum has its origins *outside* the school and education system (in the sense that it involves the idea of pupils being orientated towards a particular set of ideas and behaviours that, taken together, constitute "learning"), it is operationalised and expressed *inside* the school
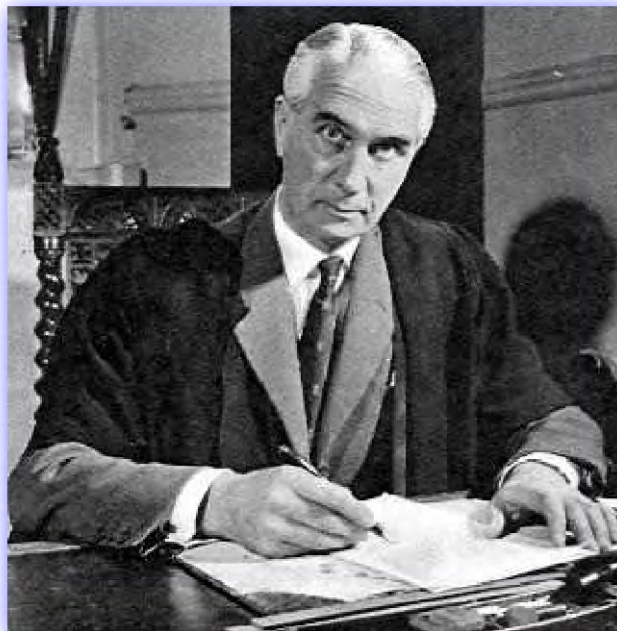
through teacher / pupil relationships. As he argues "…a large number of studies show that, through their experiences of schooling, many students 'learn' to see their role not as thinking, but 'doing what is expected and working hard'".

Examples of what **Seaton** considers some consequences of the hidden curriculum include "learning":

- Good grades go to students who follow rules.
- To allow others to make decisions for them.
- Dependence on authority.
- Obedience to duty.

Tacit Agreements: The ideas of switching-on and switching-off capture, in a small way, one of the problems teacher's face in the teaching and learning process - *contradictory demands* made by a fragmented student body (which is a posh way of saying some students like some things and others don't). This is not particularly a problem when teacher and pupils are acting in *tacit agreement* about the purpose of education. It's probable middle class children gain no more and no less satisfaction from their schooling than working class children; **Barrett** (1999), however, suggests the former are more likely to *tacitly agree* with teachers about the purpose of education - the accumulation of credentials (qualifications) - and be more inclined, therefore, to participate in teacher-pleasing behaviour.

One important aspect of the *breakdown* of teacher-pupil relationships we need to note, in this context, is of course *pupil violence* towards teachers and other pupils. **DfES** figures for 2004 show nearly 300 pupils were expelled for assaults on adults, in addition to nearly 4,000 fixed period suspensions. There were also 300-plus expulsions and 12,800 suspensions for attacks on fellow pupils.

Teaching Styles: In terms of the different ways teachers interpret their role (and hence their particular teaching relationship with their pupils), we could note four basic categories of teaching style:

• **Teacher-centred,** where the teacher directs and informs the class.

• **Demonstrator**, where although the class is teacher-centred and controlled, the emphasis is on demonstrating ideas and encouraging students to experiment.

• **Student-centred**, where the role of the teacher is defined as helping (or *facilitating*) the student to learn by giving them responsibility for their own learning.

• **Delegation** styles involve the requirement for students to work independently on teacher-designed tasks, at their own pace.

Tell Us What To Do...

Pupil Subcultures

This final section brings together, in a variety of ways, the general ideas we've just examined in terms of how teaching and learning is organised, the formal and hidden curricula and how teacher-pupil relationships develop and impact on pupil orientations towards school and education (not necessarily the same things - you can hate school but value education and, of course, vice versa). Traditionally, the sociology of pupil subcultures has focused on the identification of two basic subcultural types:

1. Reactive subcultures develop, as the term implies, as a *reaction* to what someone is doing - in this instance, the school or teachers. In other words, this body of theory argues school subcultures develop out of the dissatisfaction of some groups of pupils with their treatment within the school.

2. Independent subcultures are similar but involve the idea particular subcultural groups already exist within the school (they have developed *independently* of any adult input) and are subsequently *labelled*, in some way (positively or negatively) by those in authority.

Module Link   Crime and Deviance

The concept of **subculture** (and, in particular, **youth subcultures**) has frequently been applied by Functionalists and Marxists (in particular and in slightly different ways) to explain some forms of age-related crime and deviance. In addition, something like **Cohen's** (1955) concept of **Status Frustration** can be directly applied to explanations of underachievement amongst working class and ethnic minority boys.

In addition, these two basic subcultural types have traditionally been further subdivided into:

Pro-school subcultures - groups of pupils who, for whatever reasons, see schooling in a generally positive light.

Anti-school subcultures: This general category, as you might expect, has been used to describe pupils who, not to put too fine a point on things, aren't too keen on school or what it has to offer (which, to be frank, isn't very much when considered from their point of view).

Module Link   Crime and Deviance

The literature in this area is heavy with studies examining the nature, extent and general impact of anti-school subcultures. **Hargreaves** (1967) and **Woods** (1979), for example, have classically shown significant links between ant-school orientations and wider forms of deviance as, more-recently, has **Johnson** (1999) in relation to schools in Northern Ireland.

The "problem" of "boys behaving badly" is periodically addressed through the media - with popular s"solutions" being a return to the National Service of the 1950's.

Much of the research in this particular area, (including **Willis'** (1977) study highlighting the relationship between different types of pro-and-anti school subcultures) has focused on the idea of:

Counter-school subcultures - how pupils (usually, but not exclusively, young, white, working-class boys) developed subcultural groups as an *alternative* to the mainstream culture of schools. **Woods** (1979), for example, adapted **Merton's** (1938) *Strain Theory* of deviance to argue for a range of different subcultural responses (*adaptations*) to school culture - from *Ingratiators* (pupils who try to earn the favour of teachers - the most *positive* adaptation) at one extreme to *Rebels* (who explicitly *rejected* the culture of the school) at the other.

While most traditional (i.e. before you or your parents were born) subcultural theory focused on the behaviour of "lads" (and, by-and-large, the bad behaviour of "bad lads") to explain how and why this general group is complicit in its own educational failure, some (mainly Feminist) research also included girl's behaviour. **Lees** (1993), for example, noted how **female subcultures** developed around two main orientations:

1. Pro-school girls, which included those who **intrinsically** valued education (seeing school as enjoyable and worthwhile) and those who took a more **extrinsic** or **instrumental** approach to their studies (they saw qualifications, for example, as a necessary means towards a desired end and didn't particularly value school "for its own sake"). In addition, some girls saw school as an enjoyable place for *socialising* with friends, without necessarily seeing qualifications as being particularly important.

2. Anti-school girls included some groups who saw school as a pointless waste of time, a disagreeable and uncomfortable period in their life they have to get through before being able to escape into the adult world of work and family.

In addition, writers such as **McRobbie and Garber** (1975) and **Griffin** (1986) have used subcultural theory to explain how and why girls develop different kinds of response to their treatment and experiences within school and society.

In general, the majority of "traditional" subcultural analysis focuses on the idea of pupils and teachers *reacting*, in some way, to each other's behaviour (in terms of *status-giving* or *status denial*, the acceptance or rejection of authority, labelling processes and so forth). However, more-recently, writers such as **Mac an Ghaill** (1994) have changed the focus to that of *masculinity* and *femininity*, as well as developing a *class* and *ethnic* approach to understanding pupil subcultures. **Mac an Ghaill**, for example, identifies working class subcultural groups such as:

• *New Enterprisers* - boys who want to be self-employed - and

• *Real Englishmen'* - middle class boys disaffected with their school experience.


Tried and Tested: Research Methods

Assess the strengths and limitations of **one** of the following methods for the study of the pupil subcultures:

(i) Participant Observation.
(ii) Official statistics (20 marks).

*This question requires you to **apply** your knowledge and understanding of sociological research methods to the study of this **particular** issue in education.*

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by the term the "learned dependence" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest **three** reasons for pupils conforming to school authority (6 marks).

(c) Outline some of the orientations to schooling identified by subcultural theories of teacher - pupil relationships (12 marks).
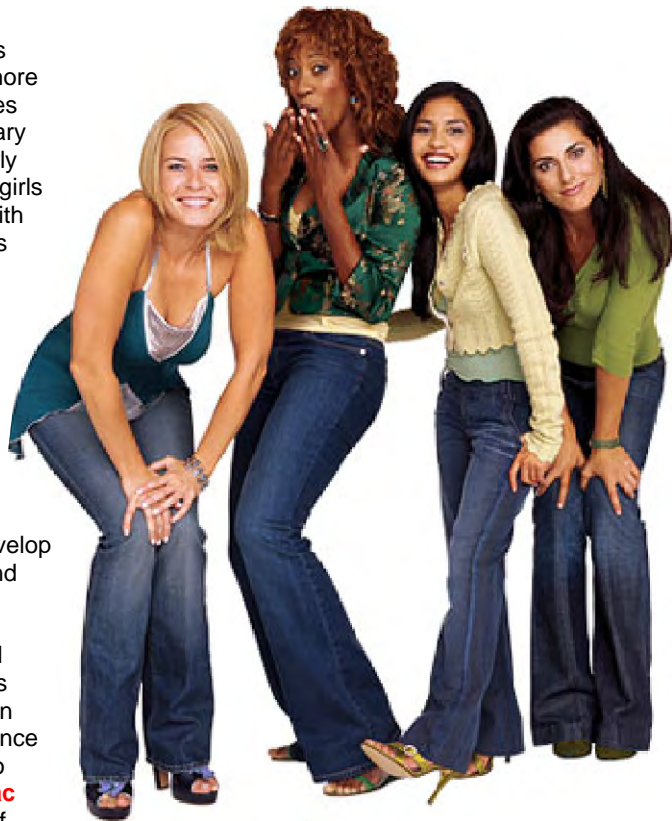
Girls thinking about behaving badly. Possibly. Maybe.

Relationships and Processes: Explanations

Recent developments in subcultural theorising have led in two main directions:

1. Subcultural theory has been questioned, not so much in terms of the behaviour it seeks to explain, but more in terms of the idea of *subculture* itself. For example, we need to ask if pupil subcultures really exist, since there seems little evidence these groups develop any real forms of *cultural production and reproduction* within the school setting (that is, there's not much evidence of *cultural identities* nor any coherent and consistent way of recruiting and socialising new members). In addition, the concept of subculture suggests some sort of permanence and rigidity within groups, whereas recent types of research (see below) suggest this is not the case.

Identity, rather than "subculture", has become the new focus for explaining pupil behaviour. **Shields** (1992), for example, argues "**post-subcultural theorising**" thinks about identity in terms of its *fragmentation* (lots of different identities co-existing within schools, for example), rooted in "fleeting gatherings" rather than rigid groups and focused on *consumption* (the things people buy and use - which can be real, in the sense of actually buying stuff, or metaphorical, in the sense of buying into a particular *lifestyle*).

Lifestyle Shopping: **Delamont** (1999), for example, has linked achievement and underachievement in her concept of female *lifestyle shopping* - the general rejection of "failing working boys" who were not seen as having either the educational / work prospects or

attitudes that make them particularly attractive future partners. In this particular instance girls were more likely to focus on their own educational achievement rather than be "distracted" by possible relationships with boys who had few, if any, educational and career prospects. The basic idea here, therefore, is that whereas in the (not too distant) past female lives were intimately and dependently bound-up in the behaviour of boys, this has changed quite dramatically as opportunities for girls – both educational and in the workplace – have opened-up.

In terms of the above, therefore, *subcultural theory* (as a distinctive body of knowledge that seeks to explain various types of behaviour) has been questioned – not in the sense of denying that "something" is happening in social spaces like schools (some pupils, as they have probably always done, still hang-around together in groups that can be more-or-less rigorously defined and labelled in some way) but rather in terms of how we explain this behaviour. In this respect we can note a more-recent idea that is increasingly used in place of subculture, namely:

2. Neo-tribes: The concept, originally suggested by **Maffesoli** (1996), has been developed by writers such as **Bennett** (1999) to point towards a different way of conceptualising the idea of *pupil subcultures*; neo-tribes can be broadly conceptualised as dynamic, loosely-bound, groups that involve a range of different - and fleeting - identities and relationships centring around *lifestyles* rather than a "way of life". In other words, this concept questions the idea of subcultural groups (something relatively permanent and tangible) and replaces it with the idea of loose-knit associations and interactions that chop-and-change over time (in a postmodernist sort of way). Neo-tribes, therefore, fluid social groupings that are inherently unstable – distinctive groups, for example, come together and disband at various times (they are *temporal* – the product of a particular time, place and set of circumstances – rather than permanent).

As **Maffesoli** (1996) puts it, a neo-tribe is "…without the rigidity of the forms of organization with which we are familiar [subcultures] and refers more to a certain ambience, a state of mind, and is preferably to be expressed through lifestyles that favour appearance and form".

Thus, whereas concepts of subculture are rooted in (modernist) ideas about *class*, *gender*, *age* and *ethnicity* (see, for example, something like **Hall and Jefferson's** (1976) classic exploration and analysis of youth subcultures in post-war Britain), the concept of neo-tribe involves, as **Hetherington** (1998) argues, "new forms of collective behaviour based on shifting and arbitrary forms of

Sisters doing it for themselves?

association". Thus, in the context of teacher / pupil relationships within a school, neo-tribal behaviour becomes a "performance of identity recognizable to others who share a particular identification" – in other words, ritualistic behaviour of some description that is adopted, adapted, applied and discarded by different groups at different times.

As we've suggested, therefore, school relationships and processes are both complex and inter-connected (for example, the hidden curriculum links into teacher-pupil relationships which, in turn, influences the development of pupil subcultures / styles). In this final section, therefore, we need to establish a general framework within which we can interpret these ideas. This framework can be developed around two school processes identified earlier, the *formal and informal* (or hidden) curricula. In this respect, we're interested in examining the formal curriculum in a little more depth since this aspect of school organisation arguably sets the tone for the informal curriculum.

Neo-tribes

An ambiance?

A state of mind?

A lifestyle?

Not, in any way, shape or form, a subculture?

One of the first sociologists to question the *ideological* nature of the formal curriculum was **Young** (1971) when he argued the way knowledge is:

• **Categorised,**

• **Presented** and

• **Studied**

is significant for any understanding of school organisation and processes. If people believe it's possible to identify the "most important" areas of knowledge in society, then some form of *consensus* is manufactured - and on this consensus can be built a system of testing and evaluation whereby individuals can be assessed against their knowledge and understanding in a way that appears:

Objective: Since there is agreement about what constitutes knowledge, testing can be measured against known standards of competence.

Fair: Pupils can be evaluated in terms of the extent to which they *reach* certain standards (as, for example, with things like Key Stages, GCSEs and A-levels).

Meritocratic: Success or failure in reaching "agreed standards" can be expressed in terms of i*ndividual characteristics*. If standards exist and children have an *equal opportunity* to achieve them then success or failure is down to individual levels of effort, motivation and so forth.
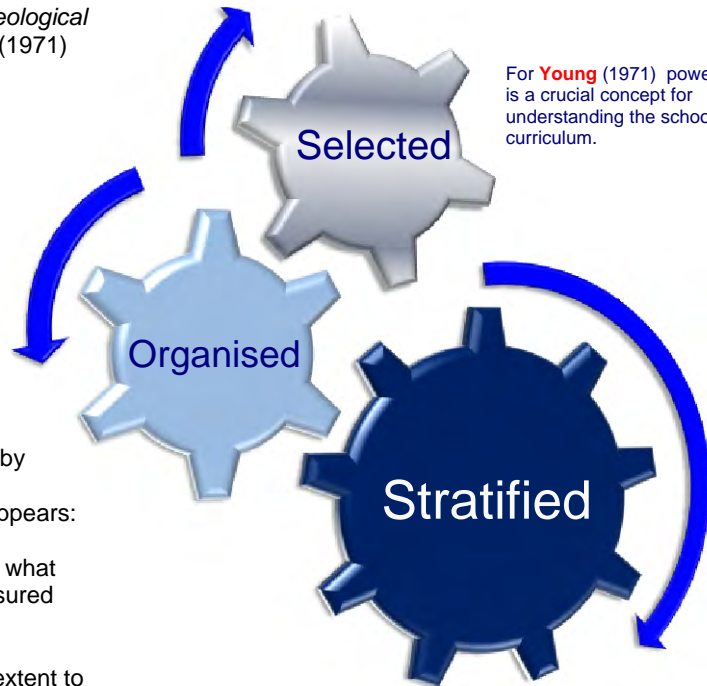
> **Module Link**   **Education**
>
> In the Section on **Educational Policy** we've seen evidence of the ways both Conservative and Labour educational policies have focused on developing a rigid and extensive "testing regime" in schools over the past 25 years.

Young (from a **Marxist** perspective) argued the *formal* curriculum reflected the interests of powerful social groups in terms of the way knowledge was:

Selected - involving decisions about which subjects appear on the curriculum, the content of each subject and so forth.

Organised - involving decisions about how teachers teach (alone or in groups, for example), how pupils should work (competitively or co-operatively, etc.),

For **Young** (1971) power is a crucial concept for understanding the school curriculum.

Selected

Organised

Stratified

classroom organisation (who is in control) and the like.

Stratified within the classroom, the school and society. This involves thinking about why theoretical knowledge is considered superior to practical knowledge, the division between vocational and academic subjects, how subjects are *compartmentalised* (taught separately) rather than *integrated* (related to each other), teaching children different levels of knowledge, based upon assessments of their ability and so forth.

In a similar way, (a different) Michael **Young** (1999) argues the formal curriculum is changing, in various ways, as our society changes (under the influence of global economic and cultural factors, for example). These changes, he argues, are reflected in two types of curriculum:

1. "Of the Past" - something that is broadly characteristic of the way the school curriculum is currently organised (if that's not a contradiction in terms).

2. "Of the Future" - the broad way in which the school curriculum will need to change if it is to keep pace with changes happening in both wider society (the national dimension) and the world generally (the global dimension).

Michael Young (1999) "Knowledge, learning and the curriculum of the future"

Curriculum of the Past	Curriculum of the Future
Knowledge and learning 'for its own sake'	Knowledge and learning 'for a purpose'
Concerned with transmitting existing knowledge	Focus on creation of new knowledge
Little value on relationships between subjects	The interdependence of knowledge areas
Boundary between school and everyday knowledge	Link between school and everyday knowledge

Finally, we can complete this Section by developing these basic ideas a little further, using **Bernstein's** (1971) argument that the way knowledge is organised (in his terms "classified and framed") has consequences for the kinds of messages children receive about the nature and purpose of education.

Bernstein (1971) "On the Classification and Framing of Educational Knowledge"

Characteristics of Strongly Classified and Strongly Framed knowledge.	**Characteristics of Weakly Classified and Weakly Framed knowledge.**
There are right answers and these are already known.	There are no right answers. Education is a process of explanation and argument.
Pupil's personal experience is largely irrelevant (unless specifically requested as an example and then it will be right or wrong).	The personal experiences of pupils are always important.
Knowledge is divided into subjects. When one is being studied, other subjects are irrelevant.	Subject boundaries are artificial. Pupils should link various forms of knowledge.
"Education" is what goes on within the school	"Education" never stops. It occurs everywhere.
Teachers determine the time and pace of lessons.	The pace of learning is determined by the pupil and their interests.
Education involves matching the individual performance of pupils against fixed standards.	Education is seen as a process of personal development.

Tried and Tested: Research Methods

Assess the strengths and limitations of **one** of the following methods for the study of pupil identities.

(i) Visual (Creative) Methods.
(ii) Structured Interviews (20 marks).

*This question requires you to **apply** your knowledge and understanding of sociological research methods to the study of this **particular** issue in education.*

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by the term the "lifestyle shopping" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest **two examples** for each of the following: the selection, organisation and stratification of knowledge (6 marks).

(c) Outline some of the ways the school curriculum can be said to be "ideologically orientated"(12 marks).

(d) Critically examine some of the relationships and processes at work in secondary schools (20 marks).

School's out for summer...

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Unit 2:
Sociological Methods

Contents

Sociological Research: Introduction

The idea we floated in the Introductory Chapter (and which is implicit throughout the whole textbook) is that the knowledge produced by sociologists is both *different* to - and has greater *validity* than - "common sense" or "everyday" knowledge. This claim is based on the idea that sociological knowledge is not just the expression of someone's *opinion*; rather it represents data that has been *systematically* collected, analysed and interpreted through a research process. The key difference between sociological and common-sense knowledge, therefore, is that with the former some attempt has been made to verify(or check) its accuracy. If this is a crucial difference between the two types of knowledge it follows that we need to explore the sociological research process in more detail and, in this respect, we can initially note that it has two main components:

1. Research Methods: These are the various ways sociologists collect data – some you may be familiar with (such as questionnaires) and others you may never have heard of before (such as Creative Visual methods).

2. Methodology: The ability to collect data systematically, although a *necessary* part of the research process, isn't the full story. The decision to use certain methods (but not others) or collect certain types of data (but not others) is surrounded by **beliefs** – and these involve, for example, ideas about the nature of the social world, the ability of different research methods to study that world and the capacity for different types of data to capture and accurately reflect that world. In other words, sociological research and data collection is *always* surrounded by

methodological questions that have to be posed and answered by the researcher.

Although the distinction between **methods** (*what* you do) and **methodology** (*why* you do it) is in some ways a forced or artificial one – collecting data (using a research method) would be a fairly pointless exercise if the reasons for such collection (methodology) weren't clear to us - it is nonetheless a useful one for our current purpose, for a couple of reasons:

Firstly, it allows us to ease our way into the study of the sociological research process by looking. Initially, at some basic concepts (such as the distinction between *primary* and *secondary* data) and then by outlining and evaluating a range of possible data sources and research methods.

Secondly, once we've familiarised ourselves with these ideas we can move up a gear to consider a range of *methodological questions* (such as outlining two different types of research methodology – **Positivism** and **Interpretivism**) and looking at the research process more systematically (in terms of different explanations about the organisation of sociological research). In the final section of this Chapter we can examine a range of *practical*, *theoretical* and *ethical* considerations that surround the research process as a whole – from choosing a topic, through choice of method to the overall conduct of the research process.

Sociological Methods: Observations

In this Section we can introduce and examine some "basic research concepts", the general understanding of which will help you come to terms with the various aspects of the research process introduced and examined throughout the remainder of the Chapter. In this respect we can begin to think about the information sociologists collect as belonging to one of two basic types:

1. Primary data involves information collected *personally* by a sociologist - who, therefore, knows exactly how the data was collected, by whom and for what purpose (you don't, for example, have to trust other people collected their data accurately). As we will see, sociologists use a range of research methods (such as questionnaires, interviews and observational studies) as *sources* of primary data.

2. Secondary data involves information *not* personally collected by the researcher, but used by them in their

research. Sources of secondary data include newspaper articles, books, magazines, personal documents (such as letters and diaries), official documents (such as government reports and statistics) and even the research of other sociologists. In turn, each of the above can be further subdivided into either of two types:

1. Quantitative data represents an attempt to *quantify behaviour* - to express it *statistically* or *numerically*. For example, we could count the number of people in the UK who wear glasses (which is probably not that useful unless you happen to manufacture spectacles) or the number of people who commit crimes each year (which is probably a little more useful, in the general scheme of things). Quantitative data is usually expressed in one of three main ways. As a:

An example of some Very Complicated Statistics. Be Afraid. Be Very Afraid...

• **Number**: For example, the number of people who live in poverty.

• **Percentage** (the number of people **per 100** in a population). For example, 30% of voters in Britain regularly vote Conservative.

• **Rate** (sociologically, this is defined as the number of people **per 1000** in a population). For example, if the birth rate in Britain is 1 (it's not, by the way) this means for every 1000 people in a population, one baby is born each year.

Although "raw numbers" can be useful (for example, knowing the number of children who will be starting school in 10 years time allows the government to plan for the number of people who will need to be trained to teach them), data is often expressed as a **rate** or **percentage** because it allows:

Comparisons *between* and *within* groups and societies. For example, when comparing levels of unemployment between Britain and America, expressing unemployment as a simple or *raw* number wouldn't tell us very much, since the population of America is roughly 5 times that of Britain. Expressing unemployment as a *percentage* or *rate* allows us to compare "**like with like**", in the sense we're taking into account the fact one society has substantially more people than the other (so we might expect the larger society to, *numerically*, have more people unemployed - even though their unemployment *rates* might be broadly similar).


Module Link   **Education**

Statistical data about a range of things – from gender differences in the choice of A-level subjects / degrees, through educational achievement to the ethnic backgrounds of those excluded from school – are routinely collected and produced by the government.

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2. Qualitative data, on the other hand, tries to capture something of the *quality* of people's behaviour (what they *feel*, for example, about a sociologist asking them if they wear glasses). Such data, therefore, says

something about how people *experience* the social world; it's also used to understand the:

Meanings people give to their own behaviour and that of others. **Boyle** (1977), for example, studied a juvenile gang from the viewpoint of its members while **Goffman** (1961) tried to understand the experiences of patients in an American mental institution. Both, in their different ways, were trying to capture and express the *quality* of people's behaviour, albeit in different situations.
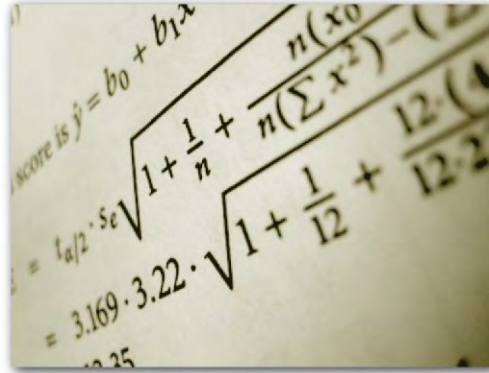
Although these distinctions are important – and necessary to understand - research methods, as we've suggested don't simply involve thinking about **data types** (qualitative and quantitative) and **sources** (primary and secondary); we also need to think about our **reasons** for choosing particular types and sources in our research - something that involves considering sociological **methodology.**

Methodological Concepts

For the moment there are *four* main methodological concepts we need to initially outline:

1. Data Reliability relates to the "nuts-and-bolts" of actually doing research; in other words, it mainly refers to the methods of data collection we use (such as interviews) and, more specifically, to the *consistency* of the data we collect. Data reliability is important because it suggests we can *check* the data we get from our research by **repeating** that research to see if we get the same, or very similar results (we may have to allow for possible individual changes over time). If a researcher, for example, needs to know someone's age this is something that will change over time, depending on the gap between two surveys. In general, therefore, we can say data is *reliable* if similar results are gained by different researchers (or the same researcher at different times) asking the same questions to similar people.

The ability to replicate research results is a good indication of data reliability.

A simple (in the sense of not being particularly realistic – it's just for explanatory purposes) example here might be a researcher trying to *cross-check* the reliability of a response within a questionnaire by asking the same question in a different way:

• How old are you?
• When were you born?

If they get two different answers, it's likely the data is *unreliable*.

2. Data Validity refers to the extent to which data gives an accurate measurement or description of whatever it is the researcher is trying to measure or describe. Data, it could be argued, is only useful if it actually *measures* or *describes* what it claims to be measuring or describing. For example, if we were interested in the extent of crime in our society, we could use *official crime statistics* (a *secondary* data source published by the government). We would need to be aware, however, that the validity of these statistics may be limited since they only record *reported* crimes - and people may not report the fact they have been a victim (for many possible reasons - such as a fear of reprisal from the criminal or the belief the police will not be able to trace the perpetrator, to name but two).

> **Module Link**   **Crime and Deviance**
>
> Notwithstanding the fact that we have to be careful about the validity of official crime statistics they still represent an important source of data about crime in our society. We should also note that note all crimes are underreported in our society, Car theft statistics, for example, have a high level of validity because insurance companies insist on the theft being reported to the police. Murder statistics – for rather different reasons (it's actually quite difficult, so we've been told, to dispose completely of a human body) also tend towards high validity.

This example also raises questions relating to:

3. Representativeness: Whatever type of data we use (primary or secondary, quantitative or qualitative), an important question to always consider is the extent to which the data accurately *represents* what it claims to represent - something we can think about in two basic ways:

Data representativeness refers to the idea that any information we collect through our research is sufficiently comprehensive to accurately represent whatever the research claims to represent. Using the crime statistics example introduced above it can be argued these statistics are *unrepresentative* of *all* crimes committed in our society; anything we say, therefore, about "crime" in our society on the basis of this data source needs to be *qualified* by saying that some types of criminal behaviour may not be fully represented in the statistics.

Group representativeness refers to the use of **samples** (explained in more detail in Section 4 of this Chapter) in our research. In basic terms, if we're researching a small group (of students, for example) and, on the basis

of this research, want to be able to say something about *all students*, we need to ensure that the characteristics of the group we study (our *sample*) **exactly match** those of the larger group. For example, if the gender distribution of *all students* is in the ratio 1:1 (for every male student there is 1 female student – this isn't the case, but it does illustrate the basic point) then the *same* must be true of our sample if it is to be representative. In other words, we can use one, small, group to *represent* a much larger group - an idea that leads to the related concept of:

4. Generalisation: If data can be *generalised* it means information we collect about a relatively small group (the *sample group*) can be applied to larger groups who share the same general characteristics as the sample. In other words, if the sample group is representative of the larger group anything we discover about the former can be generalised to the latter. The usefulness of these two concepts - representativeness and generalisation - will become clearer when we consider them in more detail in the context of *sampling techniques* (Section 4).

> **Sociological Methods: Explanations**

The different data types we've just identified each have their different **advantages** and **disadvantages**.

> **Primary Data**

The ability to generate this type of data has some clear **advantages** for the sociologist:

Data Control: Because the researcher is responsible for collecting data they have complete control over such areas as how much data is collected, how and from whom it's collected and so forth.

Reliability, **validity** and **representativeness**: Simply because you can exercise some measure of control over how data is collected doesn't, of course, guarantee its reliability, validity or representativeness - a badly designed piece of research can be unreliable, invalid and unrepresentative. However, it's much easier for the researcher to consider and control these concepts when they design and carry out the research themselves.

This type of data also has a few potential **disadvantages:**

Resources: Primary data collection can be:

• **Time-consuming** - to design, construct and carry-out. If the group being studied is large and involves something like interviewing each group member individually this is going to take a great deal of time and resources.

• **Expensive** - as in the above example, the cost of a researcher's time (amongst other things) may be a factor in the design of the research.

Access: Having designed a piece of primary research, you need access to the people you want to study – and your plan to interview the 10 richest people in the UK, for example, may come to nothing if they refuse to be interviewed.

Availability: Sometimes it's just *impossible* to collect primary data. In the above instance, for example, it's impossible because the people you want to research do not make themselves available to you. In another (admittedly more extreme) example, if you wanted to research why people commit suicide this would be difficult because your potential subjects refuse to answer your questions because they're *dead*. In this case, one way around the problem of availability is to use *secondary data*. **Durkheim** (1897), for example, used **official statistics** to test whether suicide rates varied within and between societies. By so doing, he argued social factors, such as religious belief, were significant in the explanation of why people took their own life. This leads us neatly to consider:

Surprising as it may seem, not everyone welcomes being studied by sociologists...

definition of achievement (grades A* - C). This isn't to say, of course, that definitions do not change over time; at A-level, for example, the current (2007) pass grades (A - E) will change in 2008 to A* - E pass grades. However, if the researcher is made aware of a definitional change (as is normally the case with official statistics) it is possible to adjust the research to take account of this potential threat to reliability.

Validity: Again, while it's not always easy to make generalisations, some forms of secondary data (*biographies* and *personal documents* such as *diaries* for example) provide highly valid data because they give detailed insights into people's thoughts and behaviour – something that may be especially important and / or useful in circumstances where individuals are dead or have written contemporary accounts of historical events. Although it may, in some circumstances, be possible to generate primary data from such people (presupposing they are still alive…) validity may be lowered if the researcher is asking people to remember events that happened many years previous to the interview.

Representativeness: Where data is produced on a national level, by the government for example, there is normally a high level of representativeness because the level of **resources** (such as funding, number of researchers and so forth) available to governments means that large samples can be constructed. The **Census** (a **questionnaire** distributed to every household in the UK every 10 years), for example, is a *highly representative* sample of the UK population (its *reliability* is also high because it must, by law, be completed by every recipient).

Secondary Data

In terms of **advantages** we can note the following:

Resources: Because secondary data already exists (someone else has done the work of collecting it) there are advantages in terms of *time* and *money* – collecting primary data on national crime or unemployment statistics, for example, would be a potentially daunting task. In some instances, *access* to data is much easier, although the researcher does, of course, have to rely on the availability / existence of such data.

Module Link   **Education**

Secondary data – in the form of official statistics - are useful for tracking a range of educational issues on a national (and international) basis, from levels of absence, through examination results to class sizes at primary and secondary level. A useful source of secondary data here is something like **Social Trends**, a digest of official government statistics published annually on a wide range of topics (family life, work, education and so forth).

Reliability: Some (but not all) forms of secondary data can be highly reliable – *official statistics* (those produced by the UK government, for example) are a good case in point – for a couple of reasons:

1. They are collected regularly and consistently in the same way form the same sources. Educational statistics, for example, are regularly collated by the **Office for National Statistic**s from a variety of government sources and surveys.

2, They generally measure the same things each time they are collected so that any **comparisons** made between different years are comparing "like with like". For example, official statistics measuring educational achievement at GCSE consistently use the same

In terms of some **disadvantages** of secondary data, however, we can suggest:

Data Control: This may be difficult because secondary data is not always produced with the needs of sociologists in mind. The data's creator will have their own reasons for producing it and these may not coincide with sociological concerns, interests and agendas. The way governments, for example, measure **social class** may be different to sociological ways of measuring class.

Reliability: The range and variety of secondary data available to the researcher makes generalisations about reliability difficult – some sources, such as official statistics, may be reliable whereas others, such as a diary or newspaper article may be potentially unreliable. In this instance to access the reliability of secondary data we always need to keep in mind questions like
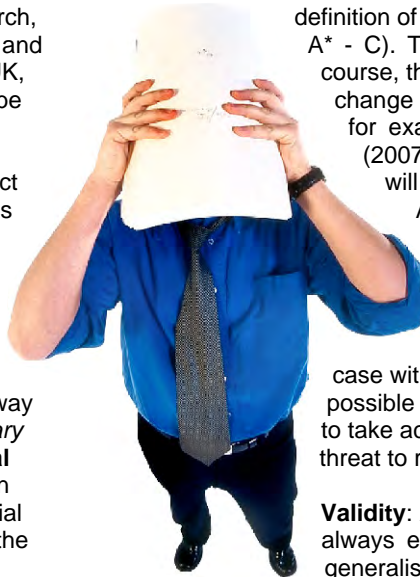
who produced it, how it was produced and the reasons for its production.

Validity and Representativeness: An important consideration with secondary data is the extent to which it simply represents the viewpoint of one individual or a much wider range of views. Newspaper articles, for example, can be the personal, unsupported and unrepresentative view of a single journalist. Similarly, historical documents may reflect the views of particular social classes (because it was generally the upper classes in Britain who, until quite recently perhaps, recorded their particular view of the world). Conversely, the only surviving record of something may provide a valid insight into that event, but without supporting evidence (a question of *reliability*) we can't be certain of either its validity or *representativeness*. In addition, the *authenticity* (has the data been faked?) and *credibility* (who produced it and for what reasons?) of secondary data may be difficult to check.

As with *reliability*, the range and scope of secondary data makes it difficult to generalise about its validity – some forms (such as eyewitness descriptions of an event) may have greater validity than official statistics that simply focus on quantifying something.

Quantitative Data

This type of data has a number of distinct **advantages** for sociological researchers:

Quantification: The ability to express relationships *statistically* can be advantageous if the researcher doesn't particularly need or want to explore the *reasons* for people's behaviour. For example, if you simply need to know the *number* of murders committed each year or the *number* of students absent from the classroom in any given month then quantitative data satisfies this purpose more than adequately.

Social changes: Following from the above, quantitative data gives us an easy, manageable, way of tracking *social changes* over time. For example, statistics on

educational achievement over the past 25 years can show us changes in relative levels of achievement between different genders, ethnic groups and social classes.

> **Module Link**   **Education**
>
> Changes in the relative levels of educational achievement are explored in the Section "**Differential educational achievement of social groups**"

Comparisons: Similarly, if we want to compare differences between two or more things, (such as middle-class and working-class family size within our society), quantitative data makes this relatively easy. Alternatively, *cross-cultural* comparisons (crime rates in different countries, for example) are similarly made possible through the use of quantitative data. In addition:

"**Before**" and "**after**" studies are a further type of comparison we can make using quantitative data. For example, we could examine, using statistical data, the effect changes in the law have had on patterns of divorce in our society by quantifying the number of divorces *before* and *after* a change in the divorce law.

> **Module Link**   **Families and Households**
>
> The relationship between divorce and legal change is explored in more-detail in the Section "**Changing patterns of marriage, cohabitation, separation, divorce, child-bearing and the life-course**".

Reliability: As a general rule, quantitative data tends to be more reliable than qualitative data because it's easier to *replicate* (repeat) the collection of such data. This is because *standardised questions* (questions that don't change) can be asked to different groups (or the same group at different times).

Enabling studies: Although we have, for the sake of clarity, discussed quantitative and qualitative data

The diaries of Jack the Ripper and Adolf Hitler, the love letters of US President Lincoln and a "lost" Shakespeare play. All valuable historical documents. And all fakes...
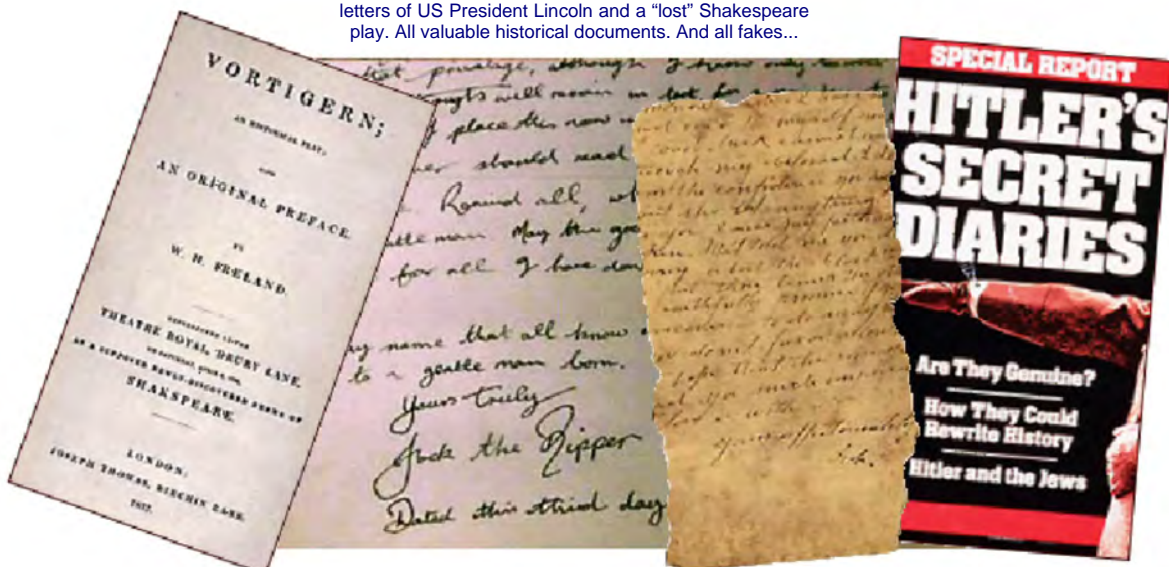
separately (as if the two are mutually exclusive) there are occasions when a researcher may want to combine the two types of data. This may, for example, involve collecting statistics about educational achievement or the number of people who visit their doctor each year alongside qualitative data that seeks to explore the satisfaction levels of pupils or patients.

Alternatively, quantitative data is sometimes collected as a *prelude* to qualitative research. For example, a researcher looking at reasons for school truancy in their locality may firstly carry-out a quantitative analysis to discover whether or not pupils are actually absent from the classroom. In this respect a quantitative *enabling study* can be used to establish whether or not there is anything for the researcher to qualitatively investigate…

Quantitative data does, of course, have **disadvantages**, a couple of which involve:

Validity: This type of data can't be easily used to explore issues in any great *depth*; as we've suggested, knowing the number of thefts in our society doesn't tell us anything about *why* people commit steal. Similarly, the knowledge that working class boys have lower levels of educational achievement than middle class girls doesn't tell us anything about the possible reasons for this situation (although it may, as we've suggested, **enable** the sociologist to identify a sociological problem to research).

Meanings: Related to the above, quantitative data isn't designed to tell sociologists much - if anything - about how people *interpret* and *understand* social behaviour. For example while it might be possible to quantify "the *fear of crime*" (counting the percentage of people who fear being a victim, for example), quantitative data tells us nothing about *why* people may be fearful of victimisation.

Qualitative Data

In terms of **advantages** we can note:

Validity: Because this type of data encourages *depth* and *detail* (in an interview, for example, people may be encouraged to talk at great length about themselves and their beliefs) we are more likely to gain a *complete picture* of whatever we are researching or measuring.

Meanings: Qualitative data allows sociologists to explore the meanings people give to events and behaviour. While we can represent divorce statistically, for example, qualitative data allows us to explore how people feel and react to this situation. The same, of course, is true for areas like education and health.

In sign language this gesture means "I can smell something disgusting on my fingers". Possibly.

Imposition: If your research objective is to *understand* the *meaning* of people's behaviour, it follows you must allow people the scope to talk freely about that behaviour. If a researcher *imposes* their interpretation on a situation (by asking direct, quantifiable, questions for example) then data *validity* will be affected because you are restricting people's ability to talk at length and in depth about what they believe. Qualitative data may avoid this type of problem (although it may create a different kind of *imposition problem* which we'll examine in more detail when we consider different research methods).

Some **disadvantages** of qualitative data we can note are:

Reliability: Qualitative research is, by its very nature, difficult (if not impossible) to **replicate** (think, for example, about how difficult it would it be to exactly repeat even a very recent conversation you've had with somebody). In addition, with something like *historical* data we may have no reliable way of knowing if our data source is *representative* of anything more than the views of a single individual.

Data Overload: Qualitative research tends to produce masses of data, much of which will be largely *irrelevant* in terms of achieving the research objective. With something like an interview, the problem of how to *interpret* or represent the data may also occur. Do you as a researcher report *everything* someone says or do you edit the data (and risk *imposing* your interpretation on the information)? A similar, if slightly different, problem is presented by observational forms of research – these too produce masses of data, the relevance of which has to be interpreted by the researcher (and may involve making difficult decisions about what to include or exclude as part of the research analysis).

Comparisons: Qualitative data makes *measuring* and comparing behaviour very difficult, mainly because the data can't be easily *standardised*. It's very difficult, for example, to ensure that you're comparing "like with like"; if you were interviewing people about their attitudes to something like fear or crime how difficult would it be to ensure that everyone in your sample thinks about (interprets) "fear" in the same way?

Reliability

Data Reliability is an important research consideration since, if data is *unreliable*, any conclusions we draw from it are going to be fairly limited (if not useless). For example, if I attempt to draw conclusions about the state of education in Britain on the basis of a couple of interviews I conducted "down the pub" with whoever happened to be present at the time, it's probable such data will not be very reliable as a guide to what is actually happening in the educational system. In

general terms, therefore, data reliability is affected by such things as:

Bias: Are there opportunities for the researcher (consciously or unconsciously) to distort the data collection process?

Standardisation: Is everyone in the group you are researching asked the same questions in the same way? If they're not, how easy would it be to check data reliability by repeating this research?

Consistency: Will, for example, the same question asked of the same person in similar circumstances, produce the same answer?

Replication: If another sociologist attempted to repeat my "down the pub" research would similar results be achieved? If not, then my research would not be very reliable…

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by the term "primary data" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest two reasons why sociologists might want to collect quantitative rather qualitative data (4 marks).

(c) Suggest two reasons why sociologists might use quantitative data (4 marks).

(d) Examine the problems sociologists may find when considering the reliability and validity of their research. (20 marks).

Validity

Data Validity is a useful concept because it reminds us to think about the *accuracy* – or otherwise – of different data types (primary, secondary, qualitative and quantitative). While some forms of data (such as official statistics) may be reliable, their validity may be questionable for two reasons:

Representativeness: They may not apply to everyone in a particular group. In the UK, for example, "unemployment statistics" only represent those who are registered for unemployment benefit with the government - not everyone who doesn't have a job.

Depth: They may lack the depth and detail required to accurately represent the views of a particular individual or group (and so measure what they aim – or claim - to measure).

In both these respects, therefore, when evaluating the validity of a particular research method, data type or data source we need to always keep in mind the question of whether these actually measure what they claim to be measuring; if they do (however, limited their scope may be), then they are valid. If they don't then validity is likely to be both compromised and low.

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Sources of Data: Introduction

Having outlined some basic methodological concepts we can begin our examination of the research process in earnest by relating these ideas to the various ways sociologists go about collecting data. Specifically we can outline and examine the different **primary and secondary**, **quantitative and qualitative** research methods and data sources used by sociologists.

1. Primary Quantitative Research Methods

In this particular category we can identify a range of different research methods and sources of data:

Social Surveys: Observations

A *survey*, according to **Lawson and Garrod** (2003) is: "The systematic collection of information about a given population" which could, of course, involve using any number of different research methods. However, for our purposes, we can think about surveys as involving the large-scale collection of data using a **questionnaire** (or some variation thereof, such as a **structured interview** – see below) . This, in basic terms, is a list of written questions normally completed in one of two ways:

• **Privately** (with the researcher not present): This is normally called a **postal questionnaire** (even though it may not necessarily be posted - how confusing is that?). In this instance, **respondents** (the *subjects* of the research or people who *respond* to the researcher's questions) give their answers to the questionnaire without any verbal guidance from the researcher.

• **Publicly** (in the presence of the researcher): This is normally called a **structured interview** and respondents usually answer a researcher's questions verbally.

In this respect, the same set of questions could serve equally as a *postal questionnaire* or a *structured interview* - the main difference between the two techniques, therefore, is how they are *administered*. This being the case, we can look at some of the *shared* aspects of this method before considering some different *strengths* and *limitations*.

Questionnaires are generally used to ask two types of question:

1. Closed (sometimes called *closed-ended* or *pre-coded questions*). This type involves the researcher providing a set of answers from which the respondent can choose one (or sometimes more) that best represents their situation, feelings, beliefs and so forth (hence the idea of questions being *pre-coded* - the researcher limits the responses that can be given). A (very) simple example of a closed question is one that asks the respondent to choose between two options:

Do you attend a secondary school?

		Code
Yes	☐	1
No	☐	2

(When using this type of question it's useful to add a third option - "*Don't Know*" - just to catch those respondents who have no opinion either way). **Variations** on this basic theme can be a bit more adventurous. For example, the respondent could be allowed the (limited) opportunity to fill-in an answer.

Which subject do you like to study the most?

		Code
English	☐	4
History	☐	5
Other [please specify]	- - - - - - - - - -	6

The inclusion of an "Other" option is often useful because it avoids the need for very long lists (in this instance, a list of curriculum subjects) - and it also means the respondent can add something the researcher may not have considered.

Alternatively, a researcher could measure *attitudes* towards something, as in the following example:

Please indicate the extent to which you agree / disagree with the following statement:

"Sociology is the best subject I have ever studied".

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

Agree strongly   Agree   Neither agree nor disagree   Disagree   Disagree strongly

There are further variations on the *closed question* theme (but you probably get the picture) but their defining characteristic is that they allow respondents little, if any, scope to develop an answer beyond the categories (pre)selected by the researcher. This, as you might expect, means that answers are relatively easy to express **statistically** – hence such questions are used extensively to collect **quantitative data**.

2. Open (or *open-ended*) questions are different in that the researcher doesn't provide a set answer from which to choose. Rather, the respondent is given the scope to answer "in their own words". A simple example of an *open question* might be something like: "What do you like about sociology that you don't like about psychology?".

This type of question can probe a little deeper into a respondent's opinions and produces a (limited) form of **qualitative data** (although the main objective with open questions in a questionnaire is usually to *quantify* responses in some way). Questionnaires can, of course, happily contain a mix of open and closed questions.

General Characteristics

We can think about some of the general characteristics of **questionnaires** / **structured interviews** in terms of things like:

Coding and Quantification: The use of *pre-coded questions* makes it much easier to quantify data, since the options available are already known, limited in number and (relatively) easy to count. However, although *closed questions* are relatively easy to codify, this is not necessarily the case with *open questions*. The researcher may receive a variety of responses, each of which has to be *categorised*, *coded* and *quantified*. In the previous "sociology / psychology" example, answers mentioning things like "interesting" and "thought-provoking" might be categorised and coded in one way, whereas answers mentioning "easy to understand", "simple to follow" and the like, might be categorised and coded differently. In this way, similar types of answer can be coded appropriately and quantified accordingly ("32%

Closed questions make quantification easier - making it possible to put people's responses into nice, neat and separate little boxes...
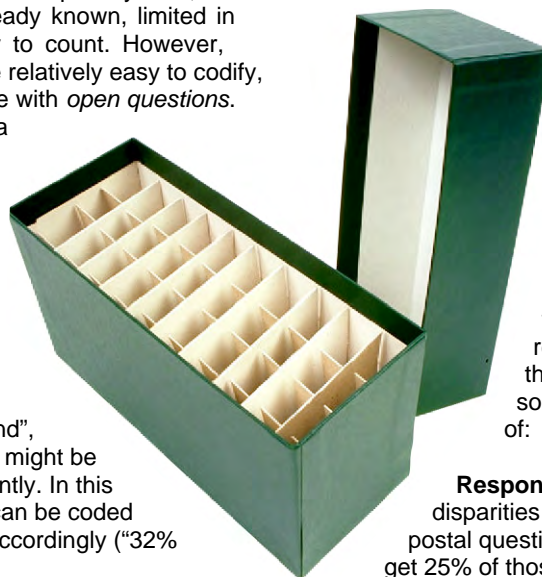
of respondents prefer sociology because it involves less work than psychology", for example).

Depth and Scope: One problem with closed questions, as we've suggested, is that they limit the detail, depth and type of answers a respondent can give - it would sometimes be useful to know *why* people believe one thing as opposed to another. Open questions go some way to solving this problem, although questionnaires / structured interviews rarely, if ever, go into as much depth as other types of survey method (such as *participant observation* - a method we'll consider in more detail in a moment).

Ease of Completion: A closed questionnaire is relatively quick and easy to complete. Open-ended questionnaires take more time and there's the danger (from the researcher's viewpoint) respondents will:

Closed questions: All the depth of a puddle?
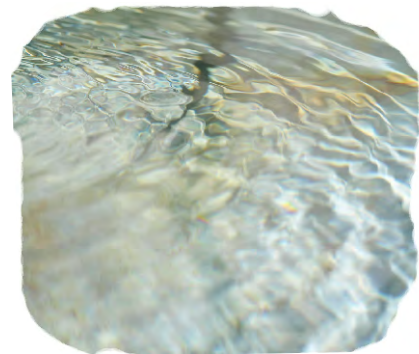
• Write-down the first thing that comes into their head in order to complete the questionnaire quickly (something that affects the **validity** of the research because, in such cases, it's unlikely the research will actually measure what it claims to measure)

• Not bother to complete the questionnaire at all, because it takes too much time and effort.

Structured interviews, unlike postal questionnaires, avoid this particular problem because the researcher rather than the respondent actually writes down the answers to the questions – something related to the concept of:

Response Rate: There are wide disparities between the response rate of postal questionnaires (you may be lucky to get 25% of those you send-out returned) and structured interviews (where the response will always be around 100%). A researcher, therefore,

needs to be aware of the extent to which a poor response rate may affect the **representativeness** of their sample (by creating, in some way, a biased response).

Questionnaires: Explanations

Focusing on the idea of a (postal) questionnaire for the moment, we can note the following **strengths** of this particular research method:

Sampling: Postal questionnaires are a useful survey method when the researcher needs to contact large numbers of people quickly, easily and efficiently. The respondents also do most of the *time-consuming work* by actually completing the questionnaire before returning it (or not, as the case may be…) to the researcher.

Analysis: Postal questionnaires are relatively quick and easy to code and interpret (in some instances, "interpretation" simply involves counting responses).

Reliability: A questionnaire is easy to **standardise**, which increases potential reliability because everyone answers exactly the same questions.

Interview / interviewer effect: This type of effect occurs when, for various reasons (discussed in more detail below in relation to *structured interviews*), the relationship between the researcher and the respondent creates a situation that **biases** the responses the researcher receives. Postal questionnaires - because they involve no personal (face-to-face) contacts or social interaction between researcher and respondent - may avoid this potential source of bias.

Validity: Although questionnaires rarely have much depth, one area in which they may have greater

A postal questionnaire may increase the chances of getting more thoughtful, considered, responses.

validity than some alternative methods is in terms of *anonymity*. Because respondents may never meet the researcher, questionnaires can explore potentially embarrassing areas (such as sexuality or criminality) more easily than other methods. If people can anonymously admit to crimes they've committed, for example, they may be encouraged to answer questions more honestly than they would have done in the presence of a researcher; this, in turn, may lead to higher levels of validity as the respondent reveals more about themselves then they might have done if their identity was known to the researcher.

This research method, as you might expect, does have a number of potential **limitations**:

Anonymity: This feature of questionnaires can work both ways - it may encourage honesty, but if someone other than the intended respondent completes the questionnaire then research *validity* and *representativeness* will be affected (although this will depend on the size of the sample to some extent - the smaller the sample, the more significant these factors may be).

Reliability: Because the researcher is not present it's impossible to know if a respondent has understood a question properly. The researcher also has to trust the questions asked *mean* the same thing to all respondents - if they don't, reliability will be affected. This problem can - to some extent - be avoided by conducting a **Pilot Study** - this involves *trialling* questions to eliminate possible sources of bias (for example, the questionnaire may be completed by a selection of respondents to check for misunderstood questions and so forth. The data collected from a Pilot Study would not normally be included in the full survey).

Response Rates: These, as we've noted, are notoriously **low** for postal questionnaires, which may mean a carefully designed sample becomes *unrepresentative* of a target population. Research validity may also be affected by a low response rate because it increases the chances of a **self-selected sample** (a sample that effectively chooses itself).

Validity: The questionnaire format makes it difficult to examine *complex* issues and opinions - even when open questions are used, the depth of answers tends to be more limited than with almost any other method. This may mean the researcher doesn't collect potentially significant and informative data about the people they're researching.

Structured Interviews: Explanations

Keeping in mind that the main difference between a postal questionnaire and a structured interview is how they are *administered* we can note a couple of ways structured interviews differ in terms of their **strengths**:

Reliability: Because structured interviews involve face-to-face contact any issues surrounding the research can be identified and discussed between respondent and researcher. The interviewer can, for example, explain the objectives of the research and resolve any problems with understanding / answering questions. If a respondent is unable or unwilling to provide an answer, the researcher will be aware of the reasons for this and may be able to resolve them.

Representativeness: Structured interviews potentially avoid unrepresentative research caused by low response rates or self-selected samples.

This method has a few additional **limitations** not shared by postal questionnaires:

Interview effect: This relates to the idea that the *validity* of a respondent's answers may be lowered if they misinterpret (consciously or unconsciously) their *role*; for example, the respondent may view their role as one of trying to *please* or *encourage* the researcher – in effect, to provide the kind of answers they think the researcher "wants to hear" rather than answering questions honestly or accurately. This may not be done deliberately by the respondent (although with this type of research method *dishonesty* and *inaccuracy* are ever-present possibilities); rather, it may involve something like the:

• **Halo effect** - a situation **Draper** (2006) describes as: "…uncontrolled novelty". In other words, the novelty of being interviewed - and a desire to reward the interviewer for giving the respondent the chance to experience it - may result in unintentionally dishonest answers.

Not quite the Halo Effect Draper describes. Probably

Interviewer effect: This idea is related to the **interview effect** (and a slightly-different type of *halo effect* may operate here, whereby the respondent feels they want to personally please the interviewer), but is subtly different in that it refers to how the *relationship* between researcher and respondent may bias responses and lead to invalid data. An aggressive interviewer, for example, may intimidate a respondent into giving answers that don't really reflect their beliefs. On another level, *status* considerations (based on factors such as gender, age, class and ethnicity) may come into play - such as a situation where a female respondent may feel embarrassed about answering questions about her sexuality if these questions are asked by a male researcher.

Imposition: This limitation is common to both postal questionnaires and structured interviews and reflects the idea that by designing a "list of questions" a researcher has effectively decided (before collecting any data) what they consider important (and, of course, unimportant). The researcher, therefore, has *imposed* their definition of these things in advance of the interview and has effectively *pre-judged* what is and is not significant. For example, for
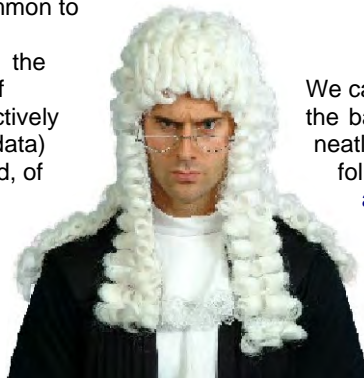
someone researching "Attitudes to Education", the questions they *fail to ask* may be as (if not more) important to a respondent than the questions they *actually ask* - such as failing to ask if the respondent is "pro" or "anti" school. This type of "imposition effect" may affect research **validity** by placing *artificial limits* on the answers given by respondents.

Experiments: Observations

Experimentation is another example of a *primary research method* – although not one that's particularly widely used in Sociology for reasons that will become clear. However, we can begin by noting experiments can be categorised in terms of two basic types:

1. Laboratory: This is a general name for an experiment where the researcher **controls the environment** in which the research takes place. The ability to do this is a feature of what are called **closed systems** - situations, such as in a science laboratory, where the research conditions can be *exactly* and *precisely* monitored and controlled.

2. Natural (or **Field**) **–** an experiment that *isn't* carried out under tightly-controlled conditions (sometimes called *opportunity experimentation* since the researcher takes advantage of a *naturally-occurring opportunity* to conduct the experiment). Such experiments are normally used in **open systems** (such as the social world) where the environment *cannot* be closely monitored or precisely controlled.

Having said this, it is possible for a researcher to deliberately construct a natural experiment and one of the most famous of these is probably **Zimbardo's** Stanford Prison Experiment (1971) that involved respondents acting-out the respective roles of prisoners and guards – with explosive and lasting results (**Zimbardo**, 1973).

Module Link   **Research Methods**

The **Stanford Prison Experiment** can probably be considered one of the most interesting pieces of social scientific research ever carried-out – and if you want to check-out the full story in all it gory detail have a look at: http://www.prisonexp.org/

Back To Basics

We can build on the above by identifying some of the basic features of the experimental method, neatly encapsulated by **Giddens'** (2006) in the following terms: "An experiment can...be defined as an attempt, within artificial conditions established by an investigator, to test the influence of one or more variables upon others". In this respect, therefore, experimentation involves two key ideas:

The sociologist as judge, jury and executioner?

Control: The research takes place in an environment that the researcher has the ability to control. In a **laboratory** setting, control of conditions is, of course, much easier than in a **natural / field** setting, but it's still possible, up to a point, to control the general conditions under which such experiments take place

Variables: These, in basic terms, represent something that may change (or *vary*) under different conditions.

We can bring these ideas together in the following example: In an imaginary (and oversimplified for the purpose of illustration) experiment we have two *variables*. The first we call "Variable C" and the second we call "Variable E". All we want to test is: if we change Variable C in some way, what change (if any) will we see in Variable E? If this is a bit confusing, consider this:

In our laboratory we have a plant and a means of controlling the heat. The plant is Variable E and the heat control is Variable C. What we want to know, by experimenting with changes in the level of heating (Variable C – the *cause*), is how will the plant (Variable E – the *effect*) change? For example, if we deprive the plant of heat what will happen?

This example highlights the importance of a *controlled environment* within a closed system. If we record changes in plant behaviour we need to be certain they were **caused** by changing the heating level. If we allow some *other variable* into the equation (such as changing the amount of *light* the plant receives) we can't be sure any recorded changes were due to changes in heat level. In a roundabout way, therefore, we've encountered some important ideas relating to experimentation that we need to briefly clarify. Firstly, in the above we've identified two types of **variable**:

1. Dependent variables, in any experiment, are the **effect** we want to measure. Changes in the behaviour of Variable E (otherwise known as a plant) were what we wanted to measure; hence, plant behaviour would, in this instance, be the *dependent variable* because any changes in behaviour depend on (or are **caused** by) something else – the:

2. Independent variables - the things a researcher **changes** in various ways in order to measure their possible *effect* on the dependent variable.

Causality: This can be expressed in terms of the idea two or more things (for example, heat and plant growth) are so closely related that when *one* changes the other also changes. If this happens *every time* we repeat our experiment we can claim to have established a *causal relationship* - a very powerful statement, mainly because it allows us to make **predictions** about future behaviour. As an aside, a causal relationship is, by definition, highly *reliable* (because every time we repeat the experimental process we get exactly the same result).

Correlation: This is an observation two or more things occur at the same time (for example, if we deprive a plant of heat it dies). This is a *weaker statement* than a causal statement because we can't be certain one thing *caused* another to happen - they may have happened at the same time by *accident* or through *chance*. We can illustrate the difference between **causality** and **correlation** using the following example: In 1989, the First-Class Cricket Averages for batting and bowling in England were as follows:

> The **top ten batsmen** all had last names that were no longer than one syllable (Smith, Lamb, Jones…).

> The **top ten bowlers**, on the other hand, all had last names that were two or more syllables long (Ambrose, Dilley, Foster…).

This is an example of a *correlation* for two reasons:

Firstly, there's no *logical relationship* between the ability to bat or bowl successfully and a person's name (would changing your name, for example, make you a better or worse batsman or bowler)?

Secondly, since it's not always easy or possible to prove or disprove something *logically* a better way would be to use some kind of *test* - in this instance, we could carry out a **comparative analysis** by examining the averages for previous years. If the relationship is *not* repeated (or *replicated*) we would know it was the product of *chance* (a **correlation** in other words). If it *was* repeated every year, this would suggest a **causal** relationship (and in case you're wondering, it was a *correlation* – there is not a causal relationship between a person's name and their ability to play cricket…).

The classic lab experiment - how will the liquid respond to being started at by a bunch of geeks and then threatened with a sharp, pointy, thing?

Although laboratory experiments are a powerful method used extensively in the *natural sciences* they're not, as we've noted, used much in sociological research (for reasons we'll examine in a moment). However:

Natural experiments are used occasionally and, for convenience, we can sub-divide this category into two types:

1. Field experiments are conducted outside the confines of a closed, controlled, environment. They take place, therefore, "in the field" (not literally, of course, because it would be a bit chilly in winter – and probably very muddy too) where people are studied in their *natural environment* (or as close to it as possible). The basic principles of field experiments are very similar to lab-type experiments - the objective being, as you will recall, to identify **dependent** and **independent** behavioural variables and manipulate (or change) them in some way to measure possible effects.

2. Comparative experiments involve comparing two or more *naturally occurring* situations to examine their similarities and differences. For example, two identical twins separated at birth and raised in different families (or perhaps, if you're very lucky, different societies) would provide an opportunity for a comparative experiment to test whether people's behaviour is the result of "nature" (their genetic inheritance which, in identical twins, would be the same) or "nurture" (the cultural environment in which they are raised).

true of each of the individual workers as well as of the group [as a whole]. Clearly the variables the experimenters manipulated were not the only…causes of productivity. One interpretation…was that the important effect here was the feeling of being studied". This possible change in people's behaviour as the result of "a feeling of being studied" leads us to note the possible effect of an:

Artificial Environment: A controlled experiment is, by definition, an *unusual* situation for people - does this mean they behave differently inside a laboratory to how they behave in society generally?

> ## Experiments: Explanations

As we've suggested experimentation isn't widely used as a research method by sociologists because it suffers (especially the laboratory type) from a range of **limitations** when applied to the study of human behaviour.

Experimental Control: A major *methodological* problem with both laboratory and field experiments is the difficulty involved in identifying and controlling all the possible influences (*variables*) that potentially affect people's behaviour.

Awareness: Because people are *conscious* of what is happening around them, this introduces an *uncontrolled independent variable* into any experiment; the fact of *knowing* they are part of an experiment, for example, may change someone's behaviour. This is frequently referred to as the:

• **Hawthorne Effect**, named after the studies by **Mayo** (1935) at the Hawthorne factory in Chicago. **Draper** (2006) describes this possible effect as being noted when: "A series of studies on the productivity of workers manipulated various conditions (pay, light levels, rest breaks etc.), but each change resulted, on average and over time, in productivity rising…This was

Now, if you could just pretend you haven't got this vacuum pump attached to your head sucking out your innermost thoughts and act naturally...

In addition, we can note a couple of further considerations:

Ethical: Do sociologists have the right to experiment on people, who may be unwitting (and unwilling) victims, in the name of "research"?

Practical: It's often the case that the kind of experiments sociologists would like to conduct (such as separating identical twins at birth, placing them in different social environments and observing their development) are *impractical* (and probably *unethical*, come to that).

Despite such problems, experiments do have certain **strengths** that can make them potentially valuable research tools. These include, by way of illustration:

Reliability: Laboratory experiments can be highly reliable; if the experimental conditions can be controlled and standardised the experiment can be easily replicated.

Validity: Experiments can be used to create powerful, highly valid, statements about people's behaviour *under certain conditions*. Through experimental methods, for example, it may be possible to establish **cause-and-effect** relationships in people's behaviour that make it possible to broadly predict how they will behave in the future.

Assumptions: Field experiments can be used to manipulate situations "in the real world" to understand the *assumptions* (norms and values for example) on which people base their everyday behaviour – as **Zimbardo's** Stanford Prison Experiment (1971) graphically demonstrated.

2. Primary Qualitative Research Methods.

This *general type* of data collection is sometimes called **ethnography** - the detailed study of any small group. Ethnographic forms of research try to understand the world from the point of view of the subject or participant in that world and we can outline a range of different *primary qualitative methods* used by this type of research.

Focused Interviews: Observations

This involves the researcher setting up a situation (the interview) that allows the respondent to talk at length and in depth about a particular subject. The **focus** (or general topic) of the interview is decided by the researcher and there may also be particular areas they're interested in exploring - which is why this type of interview is sometimes called a **semi-structured interview**. It has a "structure" (in the sense of things the interviewer wants the respondent to focus on), but one that's not as rigid or tightly-controlled as a *questionnaire* or *structured interview* - there is, for example, no list of questions that *must* be asked and answered in a certain order or sequence - and different

respondents may be asked different questions on the same topic, depending on how the interview develops.

The objective here, as we've suggested, is to *understand* things from the respondent's viewpoint, rather than make generalisations about people's behaviour (although this may be possible in certain circumstances). *Open-ended questions* are frequently (if sparingly) used, some of which are created in advance of the interview and some of which arise naturally from whatever the respondent wants or decides to talk about. In this respect we can note a number of factors that can affect the conduct (and *validity*) of focused interviews:

Personal demeanour: A focused interview requires certain *skills* of the researcher – such as when to prompt for an answer and when to simply listen. Although such interviews are similar to conversations, they are *not* arguments - people are unlikely to open-up to a rude and aggressive interviewer. Similarly, how researchers present themselves (how they dress, how they talk, whether they appear interested, disinterested or - worse still - bored) can be

The **Stanford Prison Experiment** (**Zimbardo**, 1971). For the full story, go to http://www.prisonexp.org/. Now. I said go Now! Move your motherfreakin' ass when I tell you!

significant factors in the interview process; if a respondent starts to believe that the researcher isn't particularly interested in what they have to say this will impact on the overall *validity* of the research (as respondents try, for example, to shape their observations to (re)gain the researcher's interest or even restrict their answers in the belief that there's little point in developing extended observations)..

Setting: To get people to talk openly and at length it's important to build a *rapport* with the respondent - they should feel comfortable with the researcher, the interview and their surroundings; unlike a structured interview which can be conducted almost anywhere, focused interviews can't be easily conducted on street corners or in a noisy classroom.

Trust: Interviews may deal with matters of personal importance to respondents - one reason for using this technique is, after all, to explore "what people really believe" - and it's important respondents feel they are being taken seriously (whatever they may say or do). It's also important that the information should be considered *confidential* since people may be revealing highly personal information about themselves. Building trust between the researcher and the respondent may help to increase data validity on the basis that the researcher is more likely to gain a detailed and well-rounded picture of whatever they are researching.

Interview schedule: A "schedule" is a plan, developed by the researcher, that is used to specify and track the progress of the interview and although each interview schedule will be personal to the researcher they generally have the same basic structure:

• **Introduction**: Focused interview schedules often start with the *major topic* (or *focus*) and an initial, *open-ended*, question (for example, "Can you tell me about…") designed to get the respondent talking about the general topic.

• **Subsidiary questions:** The schedule may also include questions or topics the researcher wants to explore and these may or may not be asked, depending on how the interview develops. If these questions are used they may not be asked in the order they originally appeared on the schedule (unlike a structured interview, for example, which has a clear and rigid running order for questions).

• **Exploratory questions**: One interesting aspect of focused interviews is the fact that the schedule can be updated with questions that arose during the interview – some of which may have been suggested by the respondent and some of which may have occurred to the researcher during the course of the interview. These questions may or may not be used in subsequent focused interviews with different respondents - a development that will lower the *reliability* of the research (because it will be difficult to replicate) but potentially increase its validity.

One further thing we can note in this context is a general development around the basic theme of the focused interview, namely:

Hierarchical Focusing - a technique advocated by **Tomlinson** (1989), whereby the researcher constructs an interview schedule that starts with the *most general question* and

The researcher may prepare a schedule to help them control the overall scope, direction and focus of the in interview.

develops with *more specific questions* being gradually introduced, if necessary, as the interview progresses. General questions are used to encourage respondents to talk and specific questions are used as-and-when required to refocus the interview.

The development of trust between researcher and respondent can be a crucial component of focused interviews.

Focused Interviews: Explanations

We can look at some **strengths** of focused interviews in the following terms:

Pre-Judgment: The problem of the researcher *pre-determining* what will or will not be discussed is largely (although not totally) avoided, since there are few, pre-set questions or topics.

Prior Knowledge: Since the interview allows the respondent to talk about the things that interest or concern them, it's possible for the interviewer to pick up ideas and information that had either not occurred to them or of which they had *no prior knowledge* or understanding. This new knowledge can, of course, be used to inform subsequent interviews with different respondents.

Validity: By allowing respondents to develop their ideas and opinions the researcher may be able to get at what someone "really means, thinks or believes". The focus on the things a respondent sees as important and interesting produces a much greater depth of information and this, in turn, potentially increases validity by making it more-likely that the research actually achieves what it set out to achieve.

Help and Guidance: Within limits the face-to-face interaction of a focused interview allows the researcher to help and guide respondents – to explain, rephrase or clarify a question, for example – which may improve the overall validity of the responses.

Focused interviews, for all their undoubted uses, also have certain **limitations**:

Information Overload: Large amounts of data are produced (which needs to be interpreted by the researcher – always an important consideration in this type of research), much of which may not be directly relevant to the research hypothesis or question.

Time-consuming: Focused interviews are not only more time-consuming than questionnaires or structured interviews but, related to the above, the large amounts of information they produce has to be analysed and interpreted once the interview is complete. Given that this data will not necessarily be tightly-focused on a particular topic or question it may involve the researcher spending large amounts of time sifting through data that has little or no actual use for their research.

Focus: Because the respondent largely dictates the direction of the interview they may go in directions that are of little or no relevance to the research (although the researcher may not know - or be aware during the interview - whether the information being given is relevant or irrelevant in the greater scheme of their research). The researcher usually, however, has to make (skilled) decisions about when to ask questions that refocus the interview if it drifts away from the main research objectives.

Generalisations: The lack of *standardisation* in two main areas (the same questions are not necessarily put to different respondents and broadly similar questions may be phrased differently to different respondents) makes it difficult to generalise the results from a set of focused interviews.

Skills: This relates to both the skills required of a *researcher* (the ability to ask the right questions, to put respondents at ease and to think quickly about relevant question-opportunities as they arise during the interview) and a *respondent* – an *inarticulate* individual, for example, will lack the skills to talk openly and n detail about the research topic.

Validity: Although research validity may be **high** because of the depth and detail involved, any interview is, essentially, a *reconstruction*. Respondents are required to *remember* and *recount* events that happened in the past and this creates validity problems for both researcher and respondent. A researcher, for example, has no way of knowing if a respondent is lying – although a more likely problem is *imperfect recall*.

If you were asked to remember things that happened days, weeks or months ago, it's possible you would recall very little about what actually happened – and the things you *do* remember are likely to be the unusual, the exotic or the just plain memorable. In other words we tend to recall those things that were out of the ordinary which can, of course, defeat the research object somewhat.

An interview can also be a "second chance" to do something; in other words, given the time to *reflect*, the respondent "makes sense" of their behaviour by *rationalising* their actions. They are not consciously lying, but their explanation for their behaviour, with the benefit of hindsight, may be very different from what they actually felt or did at the time.

Recording Information: This is not necessarily a limitation (unless the researcher is trying to manually record everything - which may disrupt the flow of the interview) but *electronic recording* (such as a tape or video recorder) needs to be *unobtrusive*; if the respondent is too aware of being recorded it may make them nervous, uncooperative or self-conscious. Alternatively, of course, the knowledge of being filmed may make some respondents "play to the camera".

Colin hadn't quite mastered the skills needed to put respondent's at their ease...

Unstructured Interviews: Observations

Unstructured (or **non-focused**) interviews involve the researcher entering the interview with only a general idea or topic they want the respondent to "talk about"; the main objective, as with focused interviews, is to record a people's views about a particular topic by encouraging them to talk freely and openly about the things they feel are important. Unlike other types of interview, however, the researcher's contribution is deliberately *minimal*; they may provide *non-verbal cues* (nodding, smiling and so forth) to encourage people to talk, but the researcher's role is mainly to *observe* and *record* rather than to contribute.

The *non-participation* of the researcher is part of the technique, not just because they want to avoid influencing what's said, but also because *conversation norms* in our culture rarely tolerate silence (think about how embarrassing it is when you're having a conversation and neither of you can think of anything to say). The *silence of the researcher* encourages – in theory at least – the respondent to talk.

Conversation norms in our society tell us silence is embarrassing.

Unstructured Interviews: Explanations

Unstructured interviews, although similar to their focused counterparts, have a couple of distinct **strengths**:

Validity: The minimal intervention of the researcher - the respondent leads and the researcher follows - means the data collected reflects the interests of the respondent and, consequently, is more likely to be an accurate – and detailed - expression of their beliefs (at least in theory – this isn't necessarily always the case).

No pre-judgements: The main objective of this method is to *describe* reality as the respondent sees it so they, rather than the researcher, decides what is and what is not significant information.

The drawbacks of this technique are again similar to those for focused interviews but we can note some additional **limitations**:

Skills: Unfocused interviews require researcher patience and skill since the temptation may be to try to converse with the respondent when the objective is simply to listen and record. The respondent must, as we've suggested, be articulate (able to express themselves clearly and understandably) and

forthcoming since, if they aren't, it's difficult to use this method to produce data.

Focus: By intention the researcher has no control over the direction of the interview and the respondent may choose to talk about things of little or no immediate interest to the researcher; they may, for example, wander into areas of no relevance to the research topic (although the researcher would not necessarily know this at the time). In addition, large amounts of information are generated and this will involve some form of selection and interpretation process on the part of the researcher when the data is finally analysed – something that, like the interview process itself, is likely to be time-consuming.

Reliability: This tends, as you might expect, to be relatively **low**. The *unstandardised* format makes it impossible to exactly repeat the interview (even with the same respondent). Unintentional bias can occur if a respondent is inarticulate or unwilling to open up; there may be a temptation to "lead the respondent" ("So what you mean is…"). In addition, the respondent may feel pressurised into "talking for the sake of talking" when the interviewer fails to respond. In this situation it may come to pass that respondents say things they don't particularly believe, simply to "fill the silence".

Interview Bias

Before we leave interviews (in all their different shapes and sizes) and as a prelude to discussing *observational methods*, we can identify and examine a couple of general problems of bias:

Unintentional Bias involves a variety of things a careful researcher can *avoid* doing. Focused and unstructured interviews, for example, place demands on the skills and expertise of the researcher and an unskilled interviewer can easily bias the interview process (thereby generating *invalid data*). Unintentional bias can range from things like tone of voice and general demeanour (does the interviewer appear interested?) to the ability (or otherwise) to organise the interview - to ensure recording devices are not intrusive and distracting, for example.

Inherent Bias, on the other hand, involves things critics say *cannot* be avoided. Thus, the potential problems of bias we've noted so far have been basically *technical* (problems the researcher can resolve), but an idea that suggests interviews are *fundamentally flawed* is the:

Interview effect: Any process of interaction (such as the relationship between doctor and patient or teacher and student) represents a situation in which **status**

considerations. When, for example, a teacher interacts with their students certain unstated *status rules* exist between them (such as when the teacher takes the register students are expect to respond in a particular way). These rules involve people knowing and accepting their *relative status positions* and interviews, as an interaction process, are subject to such rules. **Cohen and Taylor** (1977), for example, have argued one form of **interview effect** happens when, through the act of question ing people, a series of subtle and not-so-subtle *status manipulations* come into play, the outcome of which is that respondents effectively tell the researcher what they believe the latter would like to hear. Status differences come into play because the respondent considers the researcher to be "in charge" (just as a patient expects the same of their doctor) and, consequently, is looking to both *defer* to the researcher and, in some senses, *please* them through their co-operation.
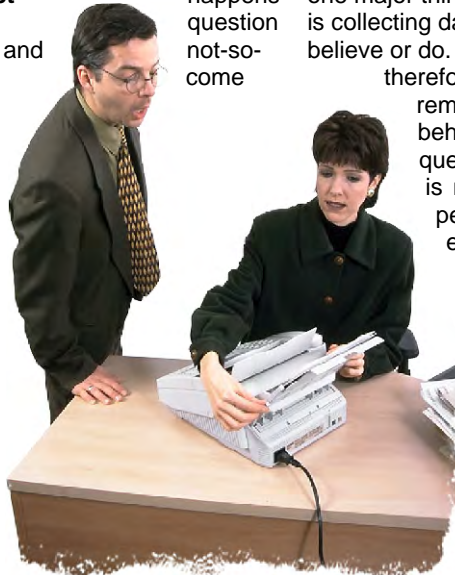
Interviews, according to this argument, cannot get at "the truth"

Status differences in everyday life are significant and important to us - but does this mean interviews are inherently biased?

because, like any social interaction, they involve what **Goffman** (1959) has argued is a three-point process:

Negotiation – both researcher and respondent make decisions about how much or how little to reveal in the interview. In the case of the latter, of course, these decisions can be crucial in terms of research *validity*.

Impression Management - the way each participant in the interview attempts to manage the impression they give of themselves to each other. In the case of the researcher, for example, this might involve a range of demeanours (friendly, curt, efficient and so forth) designed to give the respondents certain impressions about the research and their role in it. In the respondent's case impression management may involve things like trying to appear "helpful" or, in the opposite case, trying not to give anything away.

Manipulation: This may, for example, involve the interviewer attempting to push the respondent into a position where they feel able to reveal "the truth" about themselves (or at least as close to "the truth" as it's possible to get). On the other hand, as **Read** (1979) discovered, it's possible for respondents to manipulate the researcher for their own ends – in this instance members of the gangs who took part in the **Great Train Robbery** (1963) together concocted a story about their involvement and subsequent behaviour that they claimed was "the true story" behind the robbery.

If we agree with the logic of the interview effect, we must seek another method that allows sociologists to

collect data in as *natural* a way as possible - we need, therefore, to *observe* people and their behaviour.

<div style="text-align:center">**Observation: Observations**</div>

The research methods we've considered so far all have one major thing in common, namely that the researcher is collecting data on the basis of what people *say* they believe or do. These methods, in their different ways therefore, all rely on people revealing or remembering accurate details about their behaviour - which does, of course, raise questions about their general validity. What is missing here is the ability to observe people as they actually go about their everyday lives - watching them in their "natural setting", as it were. This section, therefore, focuses on a couple of different types of observational method:

1. Non-participant observation involves observing behaviour *from a distance*. The researcher doesn't become personally involved in what they're studying since, if they are not involved, their presence can't influence the behaviour of those being watched. The technical term for this "social distance" is *objectivity* - the ability to remain detached, aloof or personally separate from the people you're researching. There are a couple of important dimensions to objectivity (*personal* and *methodological*) but for now we can view it as *not interacting* with the people being studied.

An experiment can be an example of *non-participant observation* since researcher involvement is limited to setting-up a situation (the experiment) and then observing people's behaviour. Alternatively, a sociologist interested in the social psychology of crowd behaviour might simply observe and record behaviour witnessed at a football match or a pop concert. The theoretical rationale for this technique is the idea that by observing people without their necessarily knowing we get an insight into the way they "actually behave" as they go about their everyday lives. **Yule** (1986), for example, successfully used this technique when she wanted to discover how mothers treated their children in public places.

Most people's first impression of Simon was that he was a little young to be running his own multinational corporation...

2. Participant Observation: This type of research stresses the need for the researcher to involve themselves in the behaviour they're observing and we normally identify two main types of participant observation:

Covert observation: Although, like non-participant observation, this research method involves observing people's behaviour a further dimension is added by the fact that the researcher actually *participates* in the behaviour they're studying (rather than just observing "from a distance"). The *covert* aspect, therefore, is that the people being observed are unaware they're being observed and so will, in theory, behave much as they normally behave. An example here might be a researcher joining and studying a group without informing them they're being studied and, as far as the group are aware, the researcher has simply joined (or been admitted) to participate in the usual activities of that group. This method, as you might expect, demands certain skills of the researcher since they must balance the roles of researcher and participant while keeping

Donald's covert participant observation of his local police force raised immediate suspicions when he turned up for work on his first day.

the former role secret from other group members. In addition, by participating fully in a group, the sociologist may potentially become involved in various forms of *unethical*, personally distasteful or criminal behaviour.

Overt observation, on the other hand, involves participating in and observing the behaviour of people who *know* they are being studied. The researcher joins the group *openly*, telling its members about the research being undertaken (its purpose, scope and so forth) and they carry out research with the *permission* and *co-operation* of the group.

Subjective Sociology

Participant observation is sometimes called *subjective sociology* because the researcher aims to understand the social world from the subject's viewpoint - it involves "getting to know" the people being studied by entering and participating in their world. The researcher, therefore, puts themselves "in the shoes" of the respondent in an attempt to experience events in a way they are experienced by the people being studied. The technical term for this - suggested by **Weber** (1922) - is *verstehen* (literally, "to understand"). Another way of expressing this is to use **Mead's** (1934) contention that the researcher should exploit their ability to *take the part of the other* in order to understand how people experience the social world. To put this another way if a researcher can "put themselves in someone else's shoes" they can experience the world from the viewpoint of the people

they are studying. **Parker** (1974), for example, argues that the reason for doing this is that: "...by visiting the deviants in prison, borstal and other 'human zoos' or by cornering them in classrooms to answer questionnaires, the sociologist misses meeting them as people in their normal society".

Observation: Explanations

Considered as a *general research method* (we'll look at the specific strengths and limitations of covert and overt participant observation in a moment) participant observation has a number of **strengths**:

Flexibility: The researcher, because they're not pre-judging issues (in terms of what they consider to be important / unimportant) can react to events, follow leads, and develop research avenues that may not have occurred to them before becoming involved with a group.

Validity: This method, because of the depth of involvement with people's behaviour, has the potential to produce highly valid data that tells us a great deal about the lives of the people being studied.

Understanding (**empathy**): By their participation and experience in the group, the researcher can understand, *first-hand*, the influences on people's behaviour, something that has two distinct – and possibly unique – advantages. Firstly, this general method provides a depth of understanding and insight that can't be achieved by any other research method. Secondly, it means that by "taking the part of the other" the researcher can bring their sociological knowledge and understanding to bear on the analysis of the behaviour they are actually *experiencing*.

In terms of **limitations**, however, we can note things like:

Skills and **commitment** are required from the researcher – such as the ability to fit-into the group or communicate with members on their level and in their terms. Since this research is also likely to be **time-consuming** - not simply in terms of setting-up the observation and participating in the behaviour (which may take weeks or months) but also in analysing and interpreting the data produced by the research – participant observation requires massive *personal* and *organisational* commitments on the part of the researcher.

Generalisation: Participant observation is normally restricted to small-scale, intensive, studies carried out over a long period and the group being studied is unlikely to be *representative* of any other group. It would be difficult, in this respect, for a researcher to *generalise* their findings from one group to the next.

Reliability: Two general reliability issues are raised by this type of research. Firstly, the research can never be *replicated*. Although it might be possible to revisit a group, the research could never be exactly repeated. Secondly, we have to take it on *trust* that the researcher saw and did the things they claimed to see and do. This isn't to say a researcher would deliberately lie or falsify their research (something that could potentially occur with any piece of research); rather it's to note that it may be difficult for a researcher to accurately capture every single aspect of the behaviour going on around them in which they may – or may not – be directly involved.

Although these are strengths and limitations relating to the general method, its two basic forms are sufficiently different to warrant separate consideration.

Overt Participant Observation

We can note some distinctive **strengths** of the ability to enter a group with the knowledge and co-operation of its members:

Recording data is relatively easy because the group knows and understands the role of the researcher and they can ask questions, take notes, etc. with the permission of the people involved.

Access to all levels is important if research is being done on a group that has a *hierarchical structure* (a large company, for example, where the researcher would have access to both the "shop floor" and the boardroom or a school where there would be access to all classrooms).

Going Native: Overt participant observation makes it easier to *separate* the roles of participant and observer and reduces the chances of the researcher becoming so involved in a group they stop observing and simply become a participant (in other words, they "go native").

A couple of significant **limitations** to this method need, however, to be noted:

The Observer Effect: A major criticism here is that the observer's presence changes the way the group – and individuals within that group - behaves in some unknown way. The question here, therefore, is that of the extent to which people who *know* they're being studied change (consciously or subconsciously) the way they normally behave.

> **Module Link**   **Research Methods**
>
> The "**Hawthorne Effect**" we identified earlier in relation to experiments is another form of observer effect.

Under involvement: If the researcher doesn't fully participate in the group, their "involvement" may not be deep enough to experience the world from the

Overt participant observation not only makes it easier to record data "in the field" (or...err...office) but it's also possible to ask questions, seek clarifications and so forth without arousing suspicion.

viewpoint of the people being studied. Depth of involvement may also, of course, be limited by *ethical* considerations - not participating in the crimes committed by a criminal gang, for example – that may affect the extent to which the researcher is truly capturing how people "normally behave".

Covert Participant Observation

This research method also has its own particular **strengths**:

Access: Covert observation may be the only way to study people who would not normally allow themselves to be studied, for a range of reasons – from their behaviour being illegal or deviant, through "secretive organisations" who want to preserve their anonymity to groups and organisations (such as religious or environmentalist groups) who may distrust the motives of sociological researchers. **Ray** (1987), for example, in his study of groups of Australian environmentalists, argued: "The study was covert to minimize defensiveness on the part of those studied and to avoid breakdowns in co-operation". Similarly, **Lofland and Stark** (1965) used a covert approach to study the behaviour of a secretive religious sect since this was the only way to gain access to the group.

Level of Participation is, of course, very high - the researcher may live with the people they are (secretly) studying and, in consequence, this method produces massively detailed and insightful data (observed and personally experienced) about people's behaviour.

Validity: Personal experience means the researcher gains valuable insights into the meanings, motivations and relationships within a group that explain *why* people behave in certain ways. The ability to "experience things from the point-of-view of those involved", coupled with the sociological insights a researcher beings to the role of "participant observer" means the researcher may be able to make sense of certain forms of behaviour even in situations   where other group members may not fully understand - or be able

Dean's covert participation was giving him amazing new insights into why people committed crimes...

to articulate - the reasons for their behaviour. In addition, when a researcher analyses behaviour "from the outside, looking in" it can be difficult to explain why people would want to behave in ways we may find distasteful, disgusting or perverse - covert observation goes some way to resolving this problem by allowing the researcher to understand the meaning behind people's actions.

The Observer Effect problem is avoided because people are unaware they are being observed - their behaviour is, consequently, unaffected by the researcher's presence.

Having noted these undoubted strengths, the potential **limitations** of covert observation should not be overlooked. **Goffman** (1961), for example, in his classic covert study of an American mental institution identified *three major problems* for the covert participant observer:

1. Getting In to a group may involve problems of **entry** and **access** to all areas of the group:

Entry: Gaining covert entry to any group can be a potential problem, but some groups are more difficult to enter than others. By way of illustration we can note, for example, three areas of potential difficulty for the researcher:

• Characteristics: If the characteristics of the researcher (things like their age, gender, ethnicity and so forth) don't *match* those of the group they want to covertly study they won't be able to gain access the group. A man, for example, would find it difficult to secretly study a group of nuns.

• Invitation: Entry to some groups (such as *Freemasons*) is by invite only – the researcher can't just "turn up and participate"…

• Qualifications: Similarly, some groups have entry qualifications that would have to be met. To covertly study accountants or doctors, for example, the researcher would need to hold the qualifications required to practice these professions.

Access: Once inside the group a further potential problem can be encountered with groups that have a strong *hierarchical structure*; that is, a group divided into different levels – a school, for example, has a hierarchical structure in terms of students and teachers. A covert researcher posing as a student would not have access to places (such as a staffroom) that are reserved for teachers.

2. Staying In: Once inside, potential problems that may occur relate to:

Level of Participation: A researcher has to quickly learn the culture and dynamics of a group if they are to participate fully. This may require a range of skills – from the ability to mix easily with "strangers", through creating and maintaining a plausible and convincing "back story" (the covert observer must, in effect, "invent a past" for themselves that probably won't include telling the group they're a sociological researcher). to the ability to think quickly on their feet as and when required.

Module Link   **Research Methods**

Parker (1974), for example, had to make decisions about whether or not to participate in the criminal activities of the gang of youths he was secretly studying. To choose not to participate would have aroused suspicions that he wasn't who he claimed to be, while participation would raise certain ethical issues of the kind discussed in **Section 5**.

Going Native: It can be difficult to separate the roles of participant and observer, especially in situations where the researcher becomes well-integrated into the group they're studying. *Going native*, in this respect, refers to a range of behaviours that, in one way or another, may *compromise the integrity* of the research process. At one extreme, for example, there may occasionally be

1 •Getting In

2 •Staying In

3 •Getting Out
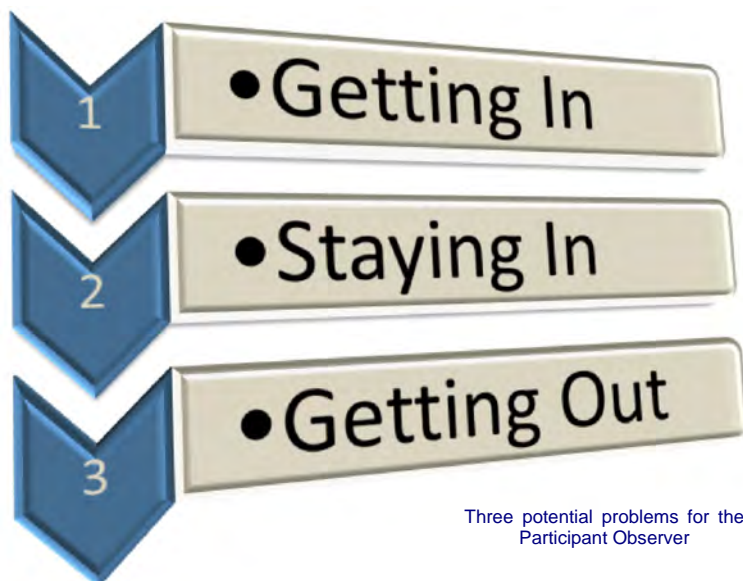
Three potential problems for the Participant Observer

times when the researcher has to make a choice between being a participant, rather than an observer (participating in criminal activities, for example, if that's what the group decide to do). At the other, much more serious, extreme, there may be a situation in which the researcher becomes so well integrated into the group they *cease* to be an observer and effectively become a full participant. Such a situation, if and when it occurs, would raise serious doubts about the *reliability* and *validity* of the research.

Exposure: Pretending to be someone you're not carries with it the ever-present risk of being exposed as a "spy". The specific consequences of exposure will, of course, vary from group-to-group (the Women's Institute might write a letter of protest, for example, whereas a criminal gang may take things a little bit further…) but the general consequence is the *end* of any research.

Participating in a group raises a further methodological problem in the shape of:

Being exposed as a spy isn't a good thing (unless you fancy having to blast your way out of the Women's Institute Spring Fete).

Reliability: Issues in this particular area abound with covert research - it can't be replicated, we have to trust the researcher's observations (there's nothing to back them up) and recording data is frequently difficult (the researcher can't take notes or record conversations openly, because to do so would risk exposure). **Goffman** (1961) tried to solve this problem by using a **field dairy** to write up his observations at the end of every working day - although this does, of course, mean the researcher must remember things accurately and make decisions about what events were significant. Having said this, it's possible to use modern technology (miniature cameras and voice recorders etc.) to ensure data is accurately captured and recorded, but these not only risk exposure (how would a group respond if they discovered everything they did or said was being videoed or recorded?) but also raise **ethical** and **legal questions** about the extent to which it is permissible to secretly record people's behaviour in this way.

3. Getting Out:
Potential problems here relate to the completion of the participant observation phase of the research and these range from possible difficulties in "suddenly" leaving a group – in some groups it may not, for example, be particularly easy to simply "stop participating" – to questions of:

Ethics: Problems here range from the effect of leaving a group who may have grown to trust and depend on the researcher, to questions about whether covert observation as a research method exploits people; does, for example, a researcher have the right to secretly spy on people (as **Parker** (1974) puts it, do we have the right to "pretend to be one of them") or effectively use people for their own particular ends?

Visual (Creative) Methods: Observations
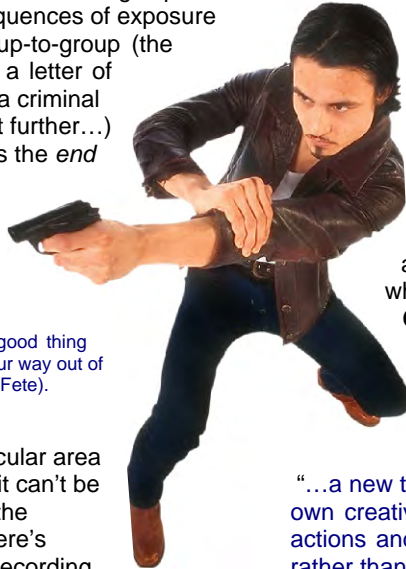
All of the methods we've looked at so far rely, to varying degrees, on spoken language – either in terms of people recounting their thoughts and experiences in words or through descriptive observational analyses by sociologists. However, a different approach to data generation and collection is one that focuses on visual *methods,* pioneered by academics such as **Gauntlett** (examples of whose research you can find on-line at the **Centre for Creative Media Research's** *Artlab* project: http://www.artlab.org.uk) who describes the general rationale for "creative visual research methodology" in terms of it being:

"…a new type of research in which media consumers' own creativity, reflexivity [ability to reflect on one's actions and ideas] and knowingness is harnessed, rather than ignored. In these studies, individuals are asked to produce media or visual material themselves, as a way of exploring their relationship with particular issues or dimensions of media. Examples…include research where children made videos to consider their relationship with the environment; where young men designed covers for imaginary men's magazines, enabling an exploration of contemporary masculinities; and where people drew pictures of celebrities as part of an examination of their aspirations and identifications with stars".

Module Link   Mass Media

Although much of Artlab's research has focused on how people use and relate to the mass media the general techniques are applicable to a range of further applications (in terms of areas like **culture and identity**, for example) and how people understand and interact with their general environment (both physical and social).

The basic technique here is deceptively simple; respondents are required to visualise behaviour, through the use of drawings, videos and the like; instead of asking people questions or observing them, the researcher asks the respondent to "do or create something", the analysis of which (by both the researcher *and* the respondent) gives an insight into people's ideas, interests, perspectives and concerns. The rationale for this method, according to **Gauntlett**, is

On occasions the level of participation may be so intense it will be difficult to simply leave the group...

that putting feelings, emotions and beliefs into *words* is often difficult for people; **visualisations**, on the other hand, make it easier for both respondent and researcher because a drawing, serious of photographs or a video is something concrete on which to base further analysis (which may involve using more traditional research techniques such as questionnaires or interviews).

Visual (Creative) Methods: Explanations

We can identify some of the **strengths** of this research method in the following terms:

Involvement: The respondent is an *active participant* (rather than just a *passive audience*) in the research process. This method - unlike many others - involves the researcher and the researched working (creatively) together to produce data.

Agenda-setting: Visual methods, whether they be drawing, creating videos or whatever, allow respondents to *set their own agenda*, in the sense they can create whatever they want to create - whatever they believe best represents their ideas or beliefs.

Process: Creating data in this way gives researchers first-hand experience of the process by which people make sense of their lives - in terms, for example, of how they see themselves (their **identity**) and their relationship to others.

Reflective: These methods encourage (and arguably demand) that respondents *reflect* on the "questions" they're being asked. In other words, they avoid the problem - prevalent in methods like questionnaires or interviews - of respondents having to *reconstruct* answers to questions.

All good things, however, have their **limitations**:

Organisation: Visual methods require a great deal of organisation - and time - on the part of the researcher and the researched. The creation of a video record / presentation, for example, is a **time-intensive** process that also requires **access** to hardware (cameras…), software (editing suites…) and **skills** (how do you splice two images into a static background?).

Interpretation: The *meaning* of data may be difficult to interpret. Although respondents can be asked to explain their work a sociological context is still required from the researcher and this may mean reading things into the data that were never considered by the respondent. Where researcher and respondent work very closely, for example, there is always the problem of a form of "*interviewer effect*" whereby what is being

captured is less a representation of the respondent's beliefs and more a reflection of what the respondent believes the researcher would like…

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by the term "observer effect" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest **two** factors that might influence the sociologist's choice of primary research method (4 marks).

(c) Suggest **two** reasons why sociologists might use structured interviews (4 marks).

(d) Examine the problems sociologists may find when using participant observation in their research (20 marks).

Secondary Sources: Introduction

This type of source - using data that already exists - is extensively used by sociologists for a couple of reasons:

Practical: Secondary sources represent a substantial saving of time, money and effort for the researcher. It may be *unnecessary* or *impractical* to create some forms of data (using primary methods) when such data already exists. In Britain, for example, the government collects and freely distributes a huge amount of **statistical** data each year. For the price of a book, a visit to a public library or an Internet connection, the researcher has immediate access to data that would cost an enormous amount of **money**, **time** and **effort** to collect personally.

Methodological: Secondary source data may be a necessity if **historical** and / or **comparative** research is being carried out. **Aries** (1962), for example, used data (such as paintings and documents) going back hundreds of years to support his idea that *childhood* was a relatively recent invention. **Durkheim** (1897) on the other hand used *comparative* data (*suicide statistics* from different countries) to test his theory that suicide had social, as opposed to psychological or biological, causes.

Having duly noted these general reasons, in this section we're going to outline and evaluate secondary sources under two broad categories, namely:

1. Content Analysis as a way of analysing secondary data sources (such as historical and contemporary documents).

2. Official statistics as a secondary data source.

Content Analysis

Content analysis is a popular method for analysing, in particular, the *mass media* (the technique involves using *statistical* analysis to do things like categorise and count the frequency of people's behaviour) but its status as a secondary method / source of data is a somewhat ambiguous one in the sense that we could equally have categorised it as a *primary* research method (mainly because it involves the researcher personally collecting data). However, we've chosen to categorise it as a *secondary source of data* because, as with official statistics, the researcher is effectively categorising and analysing data that already exists, albeit in a form that is subtly different to other types of secondary data. Whether or not you agree with this classification is, of course, up to you, but it does perhaps serve to illustrate a general problem with classification systems in that not everything in the social world is likely to fit neatly into our predefined categories.

Be that as it may, content analysis involves the study of *texts* (which for our purpose refers to data sources such as television, written documents and the like - a *text* is just a general term referring to data and is not restricted to written material) and in this respect we can examine, in turn, examples of both **quantitative** and **qualitative** content analysis.

Quantitative Analysis: Observations

We can illustrate the idea of quantitative forms of content analysis through two broad examples:

Television programmes: Analysing a programme such as *EastEnders* might involve the researcher creating two basic *categories* (men and women) and then counting the number of minutes each gender appears on screen. A more complex analysis might involve the use of categories like *location* (where each character is seen - for example, in the pub as a customer or an employee; in their own home, etc.) or *activity* (what each character does - are they always portrayed "at work" or "at home", a combination of both and so forth?). Such analyses build up a picture of the **patterns of behaviour** that underlie (and are usually

hidden from view) the social interaction portrayed on screen.

Newspapers: This might involve counting the number of column inches given to activities that focus, for example, on men as opposed to women - or counting the number of times men and women are pictured. A more complex analysis might involve analysing data in terms of the *prominence* given to different stories featuring men and women.

As we've suggested, therefore, quantitative content analysis is mainly concerned with the statistical categorisation of behaviour and its main "tool of the trade" is a:

Content analysis grid - a chart developed and used to collect statistical data systematically when an analysis is being carried out. A very simple content analysis grid designed to analyse the behaviour of characters in a television programme might look something like:

Character	Gender	Age	Place and Purpose	On Screen (seconds)
Jo Banks	F	37	Pub (employee)	15
Tom Ward	M	56	Pub (customer)	43
Jo Banks	F	37	Home (playing with children)	84

An analysis of this type can tell us something about the behaviour of a character (Jo Banks, for example, has two main roles - mother and employee). Although this is a simple example, content analysis can be complex and wide-ranging. **Meehan's** (1983) study of American television for example, used this method to identify and analyse the stereotypical roles played by female characters in soap-operas (she discovered, for example, that women in soaps played a maximum of ten different types of role - "the Good Wife", "the Bitch" and so forth). More recently, **Harwood** (1997) used content analysis to demonstrate that television viewers generally prefer to watch characters of their own age.

As these examples demonstrate, questions about whether content analysis is a *primary* or *secondary* method are perfectly valid but, as we've argued, it's included here as a **secondary source** for the same sort of reasons that something like a newspaper, book or film is a secondary source; the data we analyse through content analysis already exists - it has been produced by something other than the activities of the researcher and would, therefore, exist without the intervention of the researcher.

Whether or not you accept this rationale is, perhaps, a reflection of your methodological preconceptions and beliefs (but since we're writing this textbook it's staying in the secondary sources section…).

Quantitative Analysis: Explanations

This type of content analysis has a number of **strengths**:

Themes and **patterns** to behaviour that may not be apparent to a reader, viewer or general consumer can be uncovered through relatively simple quantification. *Recurrent themes* (such as women being associated with housework) in complex forms of social interaction can also be identified using this method. **Hogenraad** (2003), for example, developed a computer-based content analysis program to search historical accounts of war to identify key recurring themes that signify the lead up to conflict (something that, if nothing else, suggests that political leaders down the generations have been nothing if not entirely predictable – formerly in deeds but now, it seems, in words also).

Similarly, **Miller and Riechert** (1994) developed the idea of **concept mapping**, which involves using computer technology to identify and describe "themes or categories of content in large bodies of text". In this respect **Page** (2005) characterises concept mapping as an application in which "…a number of keywords are grouped into phrases that can indicate the subjectivity of the media item". in other words computer technology can be used to analyse a vast number of different texts (such as newspaper articles going back over many decades or large numbers of contemporary articles from around the world) to search for key words or phrases that indicate the use of similar ideas.

Reliability: The use of a *standardised framework* (the *grid*) means data can be *replicated* and checked fairly easily (although there are limits - see below - to the reliability of this technique).

> **Module Link**   **Mass Media**
>
> **Page** (2005), for example, was interested in understanding how the media portrayed the concept of global warming – as something that was naturally occurring (the result of climate variability) or as something created by human behaviour – and suggested that by identifying and tracking the way these different ideas (and their variations) were used it would be possible to create a **concept map** that demonstrated the ideological thinking of media both in different countries and on a worldwide basis (in other words whether "the media" described global warming as having "natural" or "social" causes). This, in turn, would tell us a great deal about how people generally understood the concept and causes of something like global warming in terms of the information they received through media sources.

Quantitative content analysis has a couple of **limitations** we can note:

Reasons: Although content analysis can uncover themes it doesn't tell us much about *how* audiences receive, understand, accept or ignore such themes (in technical terms, media *decoding*- how people make sense of (*decode*) the messages pushed by the media). Assuming the patterns identified through content analysis aren't just a product of the classification system used, we need some other way of making sense of their significance, both in terms of academic research and their possible effects on an audience.

Reliability: Content analysis involves making *judgements* about the categorisation of behaviour - the researcher decides the categories that will - and will not - be used for their analysis. In addition, the researcher must *judge* which behaviours fit which categories - can all observed behaviour be put neatly into a particular category (or does behaviour that cuts across different categories merit its own category)? In other words, would different researchers, studying the same behaviour, categorise it in the same way?

Computer technology is increasingly used by sociologists for large-scale data analysis.

Qualitative Analysis: Observations

One of the interesting features of content analysis is that it can also be used in a more *qualitative* way:

Conceptual (or **Thematic**) analysis focuses on the *concepts* or *themes* that underlie television programmes, news reports, magazine and newspaper articles and the like. In this respect such analysis can be considered an *extension* of the quantitative form of content analysis**. Philo and Berry** (2004), for example, identified a number of recurring themes in news reports of the Israeli - Palestinian conflict, such as language differences when referring to similar forms of behaviour (Palestinians were frequently classed as "terrorists" while Israeli settlers were called "extremists" or "vigilantes").

> **Module Link**   **Mass Media**
>
> As with the idea of **concept mapping** one objective of this type of analysis is to identify the ways *language* is used to make *ideological* points through the media. If it can be shown, for example, that a particular concept or theme repeatedly occurs in the media this knowledge can be used to explore the possible effects this repeated characterisation has on people's beliefs.

Relational (or **Textual**) analysis examines the way texts encourage the reader to see something in a particular way by relating one idea to something different. **Hall** (1980) refers to this as a **preferred reading** of a text - the way text is constructed (how language, pictures and illustrations are used, for example) "tells" the audience how to interpret the information presented (without appearing to do so). An example here might be the way sport is presented in British popular newspapers. A brief glance through the sports pages, for example, might lead you to think sport is mainly a male activity.

Probably not the sociologist's first port of call for reliable and valid documentary data...

contemporary documentary data. Some newspapers (not *The Daily Star* or *Sunday Sport,* obviously) carry reports, analysis and comment on relatively up-to-date social research.

Documentary Sources

Keeping the above in mind, therefore, we can move on to outline and examine:

The *Internet* is also an increasingly useful source of secondary data, through the development of search engines such as *Google (www.google.com)*

Documents as sources of secondary data. In our society there are a large number of such sources available to sociologists and classifying them in any meaningful way is difficult. However, for our purposes, we can think about different types and sources of documentary evidence in the following way:

Cost: The researcher gets access to data that could cost an enormous amount of **money**, **time** and **effort** to collect personally.

Type	Official	Organisational	Individual
Possible Sources	Government agencies and departments.	Private companies, political Think Tanks.	Personal documents created by individuals.
Historical And Current	Official Reports. Court reports. Academic studies.	Newspapers (local / national); film; magazines; books; Church records. Academic studies; Company Reports.	Letters; Autobiographies; diaries; Biographies; oral histories.

In the above table we've identified a number of different documentary *types* and *sources* and also suggested documents can be both *historical* and *current* (*contemporary*) – although this is more for our organisational convenience, in terms of outlining different document *strengths* and limitations, than any hard, fast and meaningful categorisation.

Qualitative Analysis: Explanations

Documentary sources have a number of distinct **strengths**:

Comparison: *Historical* documents can be used for comparative purposes - contrasting how people lived in the past with how we live now is useful, for example, in terms of tracking and understanding *social change*. Historical analysis is also useful for demonstrating the *diversity* of people's behaviour - things we now take-for-granted may have been seen differently in the past (and vice versa).

Availability: Documents can provide secondary data in situations where it's not possible to collect primary data (about things that happened in the past, for example). Documents about family life, education, crime and so forth may be the only available source of evidence. The media, on the other hand, can be a useful source of

Validity: There are two aspects we can note here:

Firstly, documentary evidence may provide qualitative data of great depth and detail. Diaries, for example, (such as those of Samuel **Pepys** - who recorded life in England during the mid 1700s - or Anne **Frank**, who recorded her life in hiding from the Nazi's during World War 2) provide extensive, valuable and possibly unique details and insights about people and their daily lives.

Secondly, we can sometimes *compare* accounts *across time* to test the validity of current accounts of social behaviour. We can, for example, compare accounts of family and working lives between the past and the present to understand the continuities and changes in social behaviour.

Module Link   Crime and Deviance

Pearson (1983) used media accounts going back over 100 years to demonstrate that "hooligan" or "yobbish" behaviour is neither a unique nor recent phenomenon in our society. **Pearson's** documentary insights can also be used to cast a sociological light on areas such as **moral panics** and **deviancy amplification**.

Meaning: Documents can, for our purpose, have two levels of meaning - a **literal** meaning (what they *actually say*) and a **metaphorical** meaning (what they

tell us about the hopes, fears, beliefs etc. of whoever produced them). Newspaper articles, for example, may frequently tell us more about the *writers* of such articles and how they see social problems (the *metaphorical* dimension) than for what they actually say about whatever is being written about (the *literal* dimension).

To illustrate this idea, have a look at the following extracts and think about the kind of picture of *family life* we get from reading these accounts:

> 1. "**Save our Children from the Collapse of Family Life**": M. **Benns.**
>
> "Family life is collapsing and responsible parents can no longer afford children…And lack of parental control and guidance lies behind many of today's pressing social problems, said…Sir Keith Joseph. Part of the background to crime, to drug addiction, to low motivation at school, to poor job prospects and to the transmission of all these problems to the next generation comes from inadequate parenting…the way to destroy a society is to destroy its children".

> 2. "**An Inquiry into the Extent and Causes of Juvenile Depravity**": T. **Beggs**.
>
> "The withdrawal of women from the care of her offspring and domestic duties is an unnatural arrangement and a stain on society. Young children are left at home with inadequate parental control - to play at will and to commit all kinds of criminal act. Ignorant of cooking and sewing, unacquainted with the things needed to promote the comfort and welfare of a home... sexually promiscuous and ignorant…social evils are aggravated by the independence of the young of both sexes".

The first extract was written in **1990** and the second (which has been edited slightly to bring the language a little more up-to-date) in **1849**. Although both describe "family life", as seen through the eyes of their respective authors, both cannot logical be valid accounts; **Benns**, for example, implicitly contrasts a "disorganised present" with an "organised past" – yet the family life "in the past" to which he refers is characterised by **Beggs** as being full of "social evils"…

Despite their uses, documents have **limitations** we need to understand:

Reliability: Aside from the usual points about our ability to replicate qualitative data, documents have reliability problems in that they may be *incomplete*, *inaccurate* or *partial* (biased towards one viewpoint - as we've just seen in the two extracts describing family life as the writers saw it).

Representativeness: When using documentary sources we need to know, for example, if they are simply one individual's view (such as a diary or a newspaper article) or whether they are representative

of a range of views. Even in the latter case (such as an official government report) it is rare for documents to have high levels of representativeness – something that makes them difficult (if not impossible) to use as the basis for **generalisations**. Returning to the extracts on family life once more (they took a long time to find so we're determined to get our money's worth from them) it's doubtful that these articles (and many like them that appear in the media each day) are representative of anything more than the individual writers or relatively small groups of people with a particular ideological axe to grind…

Authenticity: With secondary documentary data there may be uncertainty over its source. Paper documents can be *forged* and we need to know whether they are originals or copies (which may have been changed by other authors). With electronic documents from the Internet, similar considerations apply.

Credibility: We don't always know who created a document or why they created it. In other words, we can't always be sure if the document is a credible source; for example, did the author have first-hand experience of the things they describe or are they simply repeating something "second or third hand"?

Data Control: Finally, we need to consider how each of the above ideas connects to (and affects) the others when evaluating secondary sources. When considering data *authenticity* we would have to consider its *credibility* as a source, how *representative* it is and the *purpose* for which it was originally produced. With primary sources the researcher has control over these things. When dealing with secondary sources, however, it is not always so easy to ensure the data is reliable, authentic and / or representative.

> **Official Statistics: Observations**

We can complete this section by looking at this major source of secondary *quantitative* data. It's useful to note, by the way, that the ideas relating to *official* statistics in this section can also be applied to other forms of statistical data. In Britain, the two main sources of official statistical data are:

• **Government departments** (such as the Department for Children, Schools and Families**)** and

• **Government agencies** (such as the police).

Governments produce *demographic data* (information about the behaviour of individuals and groups) for a

couple of reasons: to **inform policy-making** (how many teachers will be needed in 10 years time, for example) and for **information / accountability purposes** (for example, how much is spent on defence or schooling each year). In Britain, major sources of official statistical data are "*Social Trends*", "*Regional Trends*" and "*The Annual Abstract of Statistics*" - all published by **HMSO** and available on the Internet through the **Office for National Statistics** (www.statistics.gov.uk).

Official Statistics: Explanations

Statistics have a number of significant **strengths** in terms of their usefulness for sociological analysis:

Availability: They may be the only available source in a particular sociological area. This is especially true where the researcher is carrying-out *historical* or *cross-cultural* analyses (such as **Durkheim's** (1897) class study of suicide). **Bakewell** (1999) also outlines the significance of official statistics as a data source (both on a national and international level) in his discussion of refugee statistics. As he argues: "Statistics matter as they are a fundamental determinant of the allocation of resources. In any refugee crisis, estimating the number of people involved is one of the first steps in determining the nature and size of any external intervention. Not only are they concerned with the allocation of humanitarian aid but the size of the refugee crisis will also determine the level of political and possibly military resources applied to cope with the situation.".

Cost: The researcher does not have to spend **money**, **time** and **effort** collecting data because it already exists.

Trends: Using statistical data drawn from different years it's possible to see how something has changed over time. For example, statistics on educational achievement can show changes in relative levels of achievement between boys and girls. Similarly, statistics can be used in "Before and After" studies, to track possible changes in behaviour. A recent example here might be the "Year 2000 problem" relating to fears computers would not be able to cope with date changes associated with the new millennium (see, for example, **Mueller**, 1999). In this instance it was possible to statistically track "computer problems" before and after the

turn of the millennium and conclusively demonstrate that the "Year 2000 problem" wasn't actually, after all the hype, a problem…

Comparisons: Statistics can be used for **inter-group comparisons** (for example, the examination of differences in middle-class and working-class family size), as well as *cross-cultural* comparisons (for example, a study of crime rates in different countries). Again, this kind of information may be too expensive and time-consuming for the sociologist to personally collect using primary research methods.

Despite their undoubted uses, the *uncritical* use of official statistics may involve a number of **limitations**:

Definitions: We've noted how definitions used by the creators of official statistics may not be the same as those used by the sociologist, but it's also important to note governments may *change the definition* of something over time (what counts as "car crime", for example, or in **Bakewell's** (1999) analysis, how different governments define the concept of a "refugee" differently). These are not isolated examples (government definitions of unemployment, for example, have changed around 30 times over the past 25 years) and they all contribute to the creation of a potential **reliability** problem - to make reliable statistical comparisons the researcher must ensure they are comparing "like with like" – that the definition of "unemployment" 25 years ago, for example, is the same as the definition used today.

Validity: Official statistics, apart from not providing any great depth or detail, may have validity problems associated with what governments include (or exclude) from their published data. *Crime statistics* are an obvious case in point (many crimes go *unreported* and *unrecorded*) but official unemployment statistics also illustrate this point.

Statistical data can be used to track trends over time.
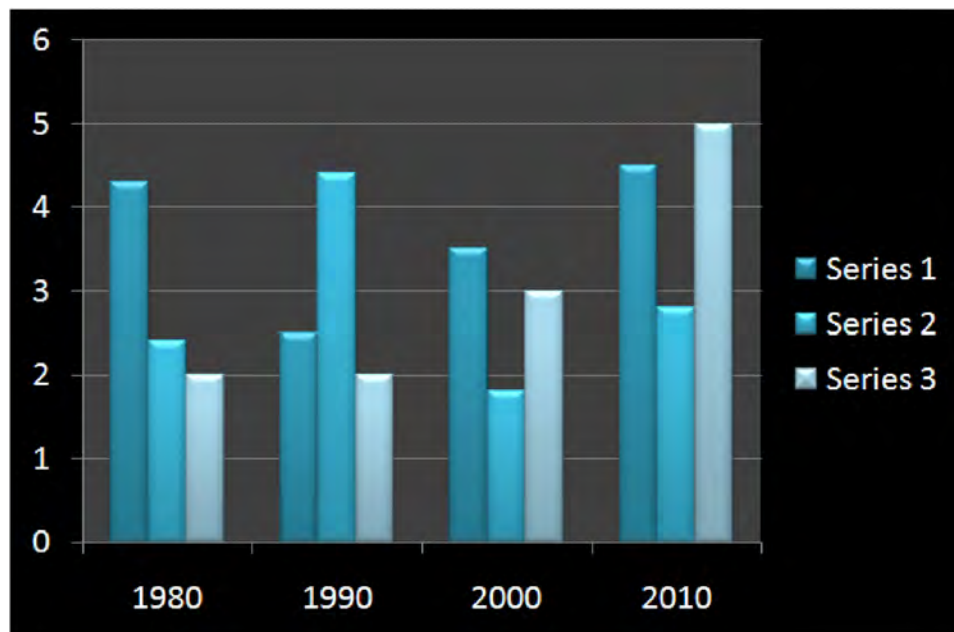
According to the **Office for National Statistics**, in 1992 there were 2.6 million people unemployed. In 2007, unemployment stood at 808,000. However, we can't simply conclude from this that around 1.8 million people have now found employment. Some, for example, will have died or reached retirement age, while a substantial number will have moved on to claim different benefits (such as incapacity benefit) . In this respect, a validity problem is that official statistics may only give us a *partial picture of reality* - the researcher may have to work hard to complete the whole picture.

Interpretation: Although quantitative data is normally seen as more *objective* than qualitative data, as we've just seen the *significance* of any data has to be *interpreted* by the researcher - they have to decide what the data *means*. A statistical rise in levels of crime, for example, may be the result of a real rise, the outcome of a different way of defining and counting crime or it might result from the police targeting certain types of crime (and hence arresting more people than

Module Link   **Crime and Deviance**

Official statistics are widely used in the study of crime because they can, if used with an awareness of associated **validity** problems, tell us a great deal about such things as the **class**, **age**, **gender**, **ethnic** and **regional** distribution of crime. They can also give us a benchmark against which to evaluate things like the risk of **victimisation** in different areas.

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by the term "content analysis grid" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest **two reasons** why sociologists might use official statistics in their research (4 marks).

(c) Suggest **two** reasons why sociologists might use documentary sources (4 marks).

(d) Examine the problems some sociologists may find when using secondary data in their research. (20 marks).

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Research Methodology: Introduction

One of the major themes we've noted and promoted at various points throughout the Modules covered in this text is the idea that the social world is something that can be viewed from a range of different vantage points and perspectives (from, in broad terms, *Structuralism* through to *Postmodernism* and all points in between). Where we stand, as sociologists, in terms of studying

While some sociologists prefer to take a broad, detached, view of social behaviour...

social behaviour is sociologically significant since the position we adopt when looking at social behaviour will affect what we look for, what we see and, of course, what we don't see. Put crudely for the sake of clarity, "Structuralist" sociologists aren't particularly interested in the micro-behaviour of individuals (they much prefer to focus their attention on large-scale features of human behaviour) while "Interactionists" see things the other way around – they are intensely interested in social-psychological analysis of small-scale bouts of human interaction and are rather indifferent to the kinds of "institutional level" analysis favoured by their Structuralist peers.

Although this is a very crude generalisation it illustrates the basic idea that "How you look at something affects what you see"; if you focus on the behaviour of individual human beings you lose sight of the "bigger picture" of large-scale human behaviour (and *vice versa* of course). This is not just true in terms of general sociological perspectives but also in terms of sociological research; beliefs about the nature of the social world impact on beliefs about how behaviour could - and perhaps more importantly *should* –

be studied. This being the case, our outline and analysis of "sociological research" can be divided into two *inseparable* - you can't have one without the other - parts:

1. Sociological Methodology: The first part, as it were, relates to two main ideas:

Firstly, it refers to the idea that sociological research involves **systematic** ways of collecting and analysing data which, in turn, guarantees the idea that **sociological knowledge** is *different* from (and, perhaps, *superior to* in some ways) "everyday" or **common sense knowledge**. Although this general sociological principle is sound – research involves the systematic collection and analysis of data in a way that "common sense" does not – this doesn't necessarily mean that all sociologists collect data in the same way or for the same reason. On the contrary, in this section we can, for the sake of demonstration, outline *two basic types* of sociological **methodology**:

Positivism involves the idea that sociologists try to **test** their explanations (or "**theories**") about people's behaviour using a variety of research methods to collect data. The main objective from this position is the production of **objective knowledge** about human behaviour – in other words, knowledge that is **true** regardless of whether or not people believe it to be true.

Interpretivism, on the other hand, focuses on the idea of trying to describe and understand social behaviour from the perspective of *those involved*. The aim here is not to "test theories", "prove / disprove" something or demonstrate some wider truth about human behaviour; rather it is to provide accounts of people's behaviour that focus on the **meanings** they give to the social world and their behaviour in that world.

Others prefer to get up-close and personal...

Secondly, in a more specific sense methodology relates to the particular ways different groups of sociologists justify their use of different research methods and types of data and two crucial concepts we will encounter at various points in this particular area are those of **reliability** and **validity**.

2. Sociological Methods: The second part relates specifically to the various ways sociologists collect data (rather than, as with *methodology*, their *reasons* for collecting particular types of data in particular ways). As you will recall, we examined a range of research methods in the previous Section and these can be associated with the different sociological methodologies we're going to examine here.

Speaking of which, we're going to outline and examine two types of methodology, namely **Positivism** and **Interpretivism** (sometimes called "*social constructionism*" because it generally focuses on the various ways individuals create (*construct*) the social world through their behaviour); there are other methodologies we could examine (**Realist**, **Feminist** and **Postmodernist**, for example) but since the main purpose here is to **illustrate debates** within Sociology over the general direction and purpose of social research an examination of these two methodologies should suffice for our purposes. In general terms, therefore, this Section examines at a *standard debate* within (*A-level*) Sociology over how knowledge about the social world can be *reliably* and *validly* generated.

Positivism: Observations

"Positivism" literally means "*scientific*" – an observation that tells us something about the kinds of basic ideas found within this general methodology; **positivists**, for example, argue it's *possible* (and *desirable*) to study *social behaviour* in ways similar to those used by **natural scientists** (such as *Chemists* or *Physicists*) to study behaviour in the natural world. We can initially identify some elements of **positivist** thinking in the following way:

Social Systems: For positivists, a basic principle is that these consist of **structures** (which, as we have seen, can be considered in terms of *rules*). These structures exist *independently* of individuals because they represent behaviour at the *institutional* (or very large group) level of society. As individuals, we *experience* social structures as *forces* bearing down on us, pushing us to behave in certain ways and, in effect, shaping our individual behavioural choices.

An example of how an **institutional structure** works is to think about communication - in order to be part of our society we need to communicate with others and we do this using *language*, both verbal (words) and non-verbal (gestures). Thus, if we want to communicate
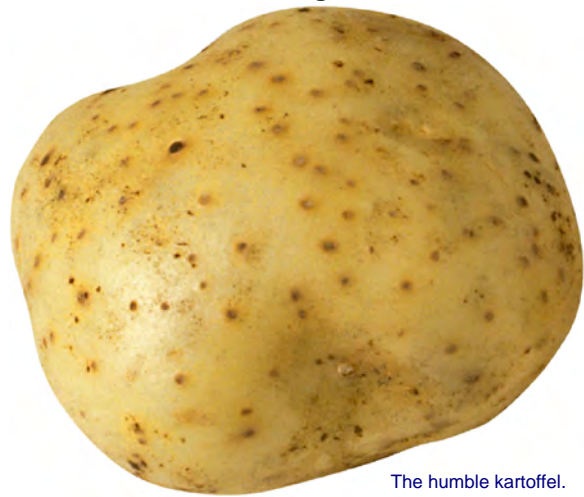
The humble kartoffel.

we are *forced* to use language (in the case of this textbook, English - although, admittedly, it might not always seem like it). As conscious, thinking, individuals we do have some measure of *choice* in this matter - I could, if I wanted, speak German to people (in theory at least. In reality my knowledge of this language extends to the word for "potato" - very useful in the context of buying vegetables, less than useful when trying to fill a car with petrol). However, our "freedom of choice" here is actually limited for two main reasons:

Tastes good in any language...

Firstly, if I want to "fit in" to social groups (such as those involving family members or work colleagues) there would be little point in my speaking German to them - they barely understand when I speak English, so using another language would be a recipe for total confusion.

Secondly, even if I do choose to speak German, this is still a *language* - it has a structure of rules (*grammar*) that have to be obeyed if people are to understand each other. In other words, although we do clearly have *some measure of choice* in our daily lives this choice is actually *constrained* by *social structures* (in this example the structure of –albeit different – languages).

It can't be out of juice - I put 5lbs worth in...

Thus, although we can choose which language to learn and speak two points are important here. Firstly, the *social context* in which language, for example, is used *determines* the

effectiveness of the social interaction process (if we choose, for example, to write this text in French it probably wouldn't sell many copies to English-speaking students). Secondly, as we've suggested, our "choices" here relate to exchanging one kind of structural context (the English language) for another (the French language).

Actions: If people's behaviour (*social action*) is shaped by *structural* forces, it makes sense to study these *causes* rather than their *effects* (in this case, the different choices people make) - which is what positivists aim to do. If you accept social systems work in this way, it follows structures are *real* and *objective*; that is, they act on us whether or not we want them to – an idea we can illustrate with a couple of examples: if you want to communicate with people you have to use language and if you want to be understood you have to speak "the same kind of language". Similarly, if people (and societies) are to survive, they have to work in some way to produce the things that are needed – such as food and shelter on a basic level and cars and computers on a more abstract level – by people for survival.

STRUCTURE

Social structures, from this perspective, are considered to be **forces** and although these particular forces can't be seen, we can observe their *effect* on people – an idea similar to the "unseen forces" studied by Natural scientists (gravity, for example, is an unseen force whose *effect* we can observe) ; positivist sociologists argue we can study **social forces** in much the same sort of way natural scientists study *natural forces*.

Reality: If the forces shaping social behaviour really exist, it follows they can be *discovered* (in the same way natural scientists have gradually discovered the forces shaping physical behaviour). This can be done using similar methods to those used so successfully in sciences such as Physics - *systematic observations* that create highly *reliable* knowledge, organised and tested using a particular model of scientific research.

> **Module Link**   **Research Methods**
>
> An example of this is **Popper's Hypothetico-Deductive** model of research that is outlined and examined in relation to the process of research design (*Section 4* of this Chapter).

Facts: For positivists, knowledge consists of identifying facts about how and why people behave as they do and, eventually, making *connections* between different facts to produce **theories** that explain our behaviour. This is an important idea to note because it suggests that the purpose of scientific research (both social and natural) is two-fold:

• **Explanation**: Firstly is must *explain* something – such as why some children achieve more in our education

system than others – rather than simply *describe* a situation. In this example scientific research involves both identifying (*observing)* the fact of differences in educational achievement and, more importantly, *explaining* why these differences exist.

• **Hierarchy**: Secondly, it suggests knowledge is *exclusive*; if we can, for example, explain the reason for a particular type of behaviour (such as differential educational achievement being explained by differences in family incomes, social class background or whatever) we also, by definition, *exclude* a range of *alternative explanations*. In this respect, differential achievement is not, for example, caused by genetic differences in intelligence nor by the observation that boys called Wayne are less likely to achieve educational success than boys called Tarquin. Scientific research, therefore, implicitly involves the idea that some forms of knowledge (that which is factual, objective and so forth) are more important, significant and worthwhile than other forms of knowledge (such as those based on opinions, faith and so forth).

Methods: Quantitative methods are generally favoured, mainly because they allow for the collection of factual data in objective, personally detached, ways. As we've suggested, due prominence here is given to:

• **Personal Objectivity:** The researcher tries to avoid influencing the behaviour they are researching. In other words, the researcher "stands apart" from the behaviour they are recording and, in consequence, doesn't try to participate in that behaviour.

The researcher should have no emotional involvement with the people and behaviour they are researching.

• **Reliability**: Quantitative methods such as **questionnaires** / **structured interviews**, **experiments** or **comparative** and **observational studies** are perfectly acceptable methods for positivists because they offer higher levels of *reliability* than *qualitative* methods.

<div align="center">

Positivism: Explanations

</div>

If we examine positivist ideas a little more closely, we can identify and develop a number of significant features of this methodology:

Society: For positivism, the social world is *similar* to the natural world in terms of the way it can be studied. This is because human behaviour is, in a sense, *determined* by *rules* developed within social groups. For example, the need to survive leads people to develop work groups and the need to socialise children leads people to develop family groups. As rules (*norms*) of behaviour are developed around these activities the behaviour of the individuals involved is subjected to certain types of *social pressure* – the pressure to behave in accordance with the dictates of group rules (*norms*).

Structure: Because societies are viewed as *social systems* - the requirements of which push people to behave in certain ways - it follows that people *experience* the social world as a **force** that exists over-and-above their individual ability to change or influence it. Just as we cannot, for example, escape the fact of gravity (even while flying in a plane, gravity still exerts a force),

Our membership of social groups - and the behavioural rules they develop - is a significant source of social pressure.

positivists argue we cannot escape social forces (such as those created by the development of roles, values and norms). While we may of course ignore them (choose to behave in ways that break norms) we can't ignore their *effects* – if we break norms we lay ourselves open to the possibility of **social sanctions**. In other words, when we break the rules (deliberately or accidentally) that others perceive to be right, just and normal we generally find that people try to do something to change our behaviour (to make us "obey the rules").

Science: The task of (social) science from this particular methodological viewpoint is to isolate, analyse and explain the **causes**

of human behaviour - and to understand how social forces shape behaviour we need to (*systematically*) study social groups rather than individuals. This follows for two main reasons:

Firstly, social pressures originate within and between social groups. It is only through the fact of group behaviour and membership that social forces are created.

Secondly it makes methodological sense to study the nature and origins of the forces that shape individual behaviours.

If these ideas are a little unclear, consider the following examples:

In the natural sciences, to explain why an apple, when it becomes detached from a tree, *always* falls to the ground (rather than floating away into the sky) the researcher doesn't look at the individual properties and attributes of the apple; rather this phenomenon is explained by the properties of gravity (the physical **law** that a larger body – in this instance the Earth – always attracts a smaller body). Similarly, to explain why people go to school, live in family groups or commit crimes we do not look at the properties of individuals; rather we look at the forces surrounding them that influence such behaviour. Thus, children "go to school" because they are propelled into that behaviour (by the actions of a government that creates and enforces this general rule). **Harris** (2005) sums-up this general positivist position quite neatly when he argues: ""Early social sciences…suggested that human behaviour could be understood as having been caused by a variety of external events, just as, say, the trajectory of a billiard ball is the result of complex combinations of forces".

Evidence: To *reliably* and *validly* study behaviour sociologists should use *empirical* methods; that is, methods involving the use of our *senses* (sight, for example). Evidence about social behaviour, in other words, can only be considered reliable and valid if it is capable of being *observed* and *tested*. Anything not directly observable (such as people's thoughts) cannot be considered valid knowledge (since we can never, of course, objectively know what someone is thinking. The best we can do is make *deductions* about people's thoughts on the basis of their actions).
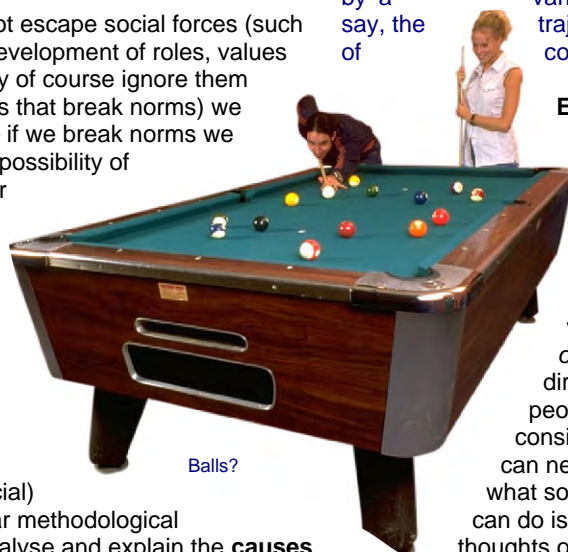
Balls?

Objectivity: Since this version of science is concerned only with what *is* - rather than what we might want something to be - scientists must be *personally objective* in their work (that is, they don't involve themselves in the behaviour being studied; this avoids biasing or influencing the data collection process). This in turn suggests that the kinds of research methods employed will be those where the researcher can "observe without participating"; in this respect the methods used should *not* depend on the *subjective interpretations* of a researcher and research should be capable of exact *replication*. If the social world has an *objective existence* - over and above human beliefs about it - reliable and valid knowledge can be discovered in the same way natural scientists discover knowledge (through such things as systematic observation, critical questioning and experimentation).

Before we move on to examine an alternative methodology (*Interpretivism*), we can summarise **positivist methodology** in terms of the following ideas:

1. The primary goal of social research is to **explain**, not *describe*, social phenomena.

2. "Science" involves the ability to discover the "general rules" (or **laws** if you prefer) that underpin all human behaviour. An example of a general rule might be something like the idea that all people require some kind of socialisation if they are to develop as "human individuals".

3. In order to discover these general behavioural rules the social scientist, like their natural scientific counterparts, must be both **personally objective** (their research must not be influenced by their values, beliefs, opinions and prejudices) and **systemically objective** (for example, the research methods used must be capable of producing objective data).

If, his respect, we can discover general behavioural rules it follows that the social world and the behaviour it involves have some form of **predictability**; that is, if our behaviour is based around certain identifiable rules it should, in principle, be possible to predict the various ways people will behave in particular situations.

4. Scientific research revolves around the ability to **quantify** and **measure** social behaviour. If something cannot be tested and measured it belongs to the realm of opinions, not facts.

The illusionist Derron Brown uses his knowledge and understanding of social rules and conventions to both influence and predict how people will behave in certain situations.

5. Factual data should be capable of replication; the greater our ability to replicate data the higher the level of research reliability that can be achieved.

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by the term "objectivity" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest two reasons for the association between Positivism and quantitative research methods (4 marks).

(c) Suggest two reasons why sociologists might use a Positivist methodology in their research (4 marks).

Interpretivism: Observations

As we've suggested, positivist methodology represents one (albeit idealised) way of looking at the general research process and, for illustrative purposes at least, we can think about **Interpretivist methodology** as being the *mirror image* of Positivism – a notion that should help us come to terms with some of its basic ideas, beginning with the fundamental one of:

Social Actions: For Interpretivists, a basic principle that underpins the way they seek to examine and understand social behaviour is the observation that human beings have:

• **Consciousness** - we are aware of both ourselves (as unique individuals) and our relationship to others. This gives us the ability to:

• **Act** - to make, in other words, *conscious*, deliberate, **choices** about how to behave in different situations. This idea is crucial for Interpretivists because it makes us - and the world in which we live:

• **Unpredictable** - and if people are unpredictable it means we can't study behaviour in the way Positivists want to study it (for the deceptively simple reason that a fundamental assumption of Positivist methodology is that the social world – and by extension social behaviour – is broadly predictable).

We can understand these ideas a little more clearly in the following way:

If you slap me in the face, you have no way of knowing, in advance, how I'm going to react: I might cry (because you hurt me), but then again I might not (because my friends are watching and crying doesn't fit with my carefully-cultivated hard-man image); I may laugh at you (ha-ha); I might run away; I might tell my

dad who will go round your house and beat your dad up (for no better reason than the fact he can - my dad's a bit unpredictable); I might slap you back - in short, I might do any one of hundreds of different things. But the point here, of course, is that precisely *how* I react will depend on a potentially massive range of factors.

Social Systems: Part of the reason for believing that the social world is largely unpredictable (at least in the way Positivists conceive of predictability) is that for Interpretivists the social world consists of **meanings**. "Society", from this perspective, doesn't exist in an *objective*, observable, form; rather, it is *experienced* **subjectively** because we give it meaning by the ways we behave. In other words, we create and recreate a "sense of the social system" on a daily basis, minute-by-minute, piece-by-piece. For example, every time children go to school, they help to recreate the structure of education through the regularity of their behaviour, just as every time someone says "mum" or "dad" they help to recreate a sense of family. Similarly, every time you pinch something from Woolworths you help to recreate the criminal justice system (and you thought you were just showing off to your friends).

Reality: The *social* world is very different to the *natural* world, just as people (some people anyway) are very different to rocks. One might struggle, scream and beg if you try to throw it over a cliff while the other won't (we'll leave you to decide which is which). When we talk or think about society as *real* - as something *forcing* us to do things like go to school, work or live in family groups - what we are actually doing, according to Interpretivist thinking, is creating a convenient (*fictional*) scapegoat for our own behaviour - "society" doesn't make anyone do anything; only people can do that.

Facts: For Interpretivists, "facts" about behaviour can be established but these "facts" are always *context-bound*; that is, they will not apply to all people, at all times, in all situations. For example, if I steal something from Woolworths and get caught, it's a fact I will be labelled "a criminal"; if I don't get caught then it's a fact I'm seen as just another law-abiding citizen. The only difference here is not what I did, but how others *react* to what I did – and since, as we've suggested above, these reactions are themselves *context-dependent* it follows that in the greater scheme of things they will be largely unpredictable.

Spot The Difference

Rock band...

Band of rock...

> **Module Link   Crime and Deviance**
>
> This example links into the Interactionist theory of Labelling.

Methods: These ideas have interesting consequences in terms of how we can study social behaviour since Interpretivist methodology argues that the best we can do is observe, **describe** and in some ways explain behaviour from the viewpoint of those involved (in terms of the meaning they give to such behaviour). In this respect there is no "*hierarchy of knowledge*" in the way positivist methodology suggests since, logically, one account of behaviour is just as reliable and valid as any other account (as Interpretivists might say, knowledge is always *relative* to the context in which it is produced).

Thus, whereas Positivist methodology is based on the *assumption* that the researcher has a *privileged position* in terms of what does or does not count as "knowledge", Interpretivist methodology suggests the reverse is true - the role of the researcher is to provide a platform from which those being observed can express their ideas, beliefs, feelings and so forth.

The researcher provides a platform from which people can express their view of the social world. Not this kind of platform. Obviously.

This methodological difference is, for example, evidenced in terms of methods and data types; positivist research frequently uses quantitative methods like questionnaires that involve questions decided by the researcher whereas Interpretivist research leans towards the collection of **qualitative** data and uses methods (such as **unstructured interviews** and **participant observation**) that allow for the collection of this type of data.

> **Interpretivism: Explanations**

We can identify and develop a number of significant ideas about this methodology. These include the following:

Society: The social world is produced and reproduced on a daily basis by people going about their lives. Things that hold true for now (this minute, today, next week...) in our society may not hold true in the future or in another society. In this respect, the social world has no objective features (or social structures) in the way these ideas are understood by Positivists. "Society" is simply experienced "as if" our behaviour were constrained by forces external to us - in effect social structures are considered to be little more than *elaborate fictions* we use to explain and justify our behaviour to both ourselves and others.

Action: On the basis of the above, the fact people actively (if not always deliberately) create their world means any attempt to establish *cause and effect* relationships is misguided (both in theory and in practice). If people's behaviour is conditioned by the way they personally interpret their world (and no two interpretations can ever be exactly the same), it follows logically that "simple" causal relationships cannot be *empirically* established - there are just too many possible variables involved in the social construction of behaviour.

Meanings: The social world is understood ("interpreted") by different people in different situations in different ways (something you interpret as a "problem", for example, may not be a problem to someone else). Everything in the social world, therefore, is **relative** to everything else; nothing can ever be wholly true and nothing can ever be wholly false; the best we can do is *describe reality* from the viewpoint of those who define it – the people involved in particular types of behaviour, whether that behaviour be asylum, school classroom, prison or whatever.

Understanding social behaviour, therefore, involves understanding how people (individually and collectively) experience and interpret their situation (the meanings people give to things, the beliefs they hold and so forth). Thus, the methods employed by a researcher (observation and interpretation) have to reflect the fact people consciously and unconsciously construct their own sense of social reality. The objective of Interpretivist research, therefore, can be summarised in the evocative phrase "The recovery of subjective meaning"; what the researcher is trying to do is understand *why* people chose to behave in a certain way in a certain situation by exploring their accounts of that behaviour.

Producing and reproducing "education" by our everyday behaviour...

Our behaviour can have many different meanings and interpretations - what, for example, is the meaning of this behaviour?

**Harris** (2005) captures these ideas when he notes that the Positivist use of "…terms like 'cause', 'law' or 'fact' could only be metaphors at best. Human beings were not like billiard balls because they had a level of consciousness that made them aware of the world in a unique way. They interpreted events impinging on them, and were able to define them linguistically in ways which permitted communication and discussion among themselves".

On the basis of the above, we can summarise **Interpretivist methodology** in terms of the following ideas:

1. The primary goal of social research is to *describe* social behaviour in terms of the *meanings* and *interpretations* of those involved. While this does, in a sense, involve some sort of explanation for people's behaviour, such explanations are "developed from within" - in terms of the perceptions of those involved - rather than "imposed from without" (in the sense of the researcher "weighing all the evidence" and deciding which particular explanation among many is "true").

2. Although behavioural rules exist in any culture / society they are invariably context-bound; that is, they shift and change in many subtle ways, depending on the particular situation. Uncovering and describing these rules, therefore, involves delving deeply into people's behaviour; it also involves the
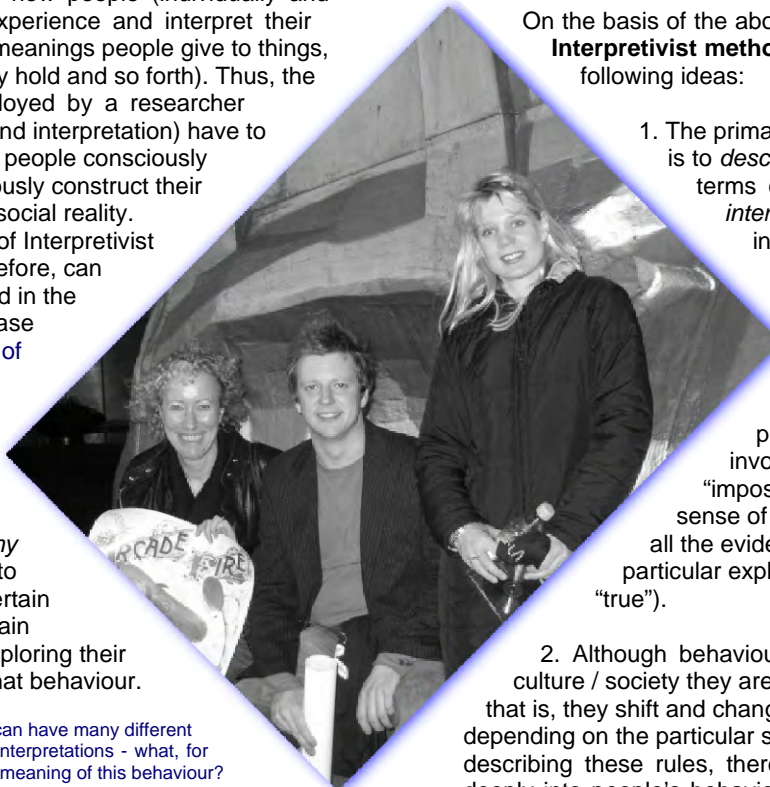
researcher gaining an intimate understanding of the context within such rules are created – hence participant observation (a research method that involves the researcher becoming one of the group they are studying) is a method frequently associated with this methodology.

3. If participation is permissible (or even, as researchers such as **Humphries** (1970) have argued, *desirable* - the researcher gets a deeper insight into people's behaviour because they may, for a time, actually *become* the people they are studying) then it follows that the kind of "objective detachment" valued by Positivist sociologists is explicitly rejected by Interpretivists.

4. *Scientific research* revolves around the ability to capture and express the qualities of people's behaviour and while behaviour can certainly be quantified this is not the main – nor even a necessary - objective of sociological research.

5. While data reliability is, up to a point, important Interpretivists tend to place greater emphasis on data *validity* – partly because human behaviour is impossible to exactly replicate (so perfect reliability is impossible).

> **Module Link**   **Crime and Deviance**
>
> For a deeper understanding of Interpretivist methodology – and its application – see the Section on the "**Sociological Issues Arising from the Study of Suicide**".

> **Tried and Tested**
>
> (a) Explain what is meant by the term "subjectivity" (2 marks).
>
> (b) Suggest two reasons for the association between Interpretivism and qualitative methods (4 marks).
>
> (c) Suggest two reasons why sociologists might use an Interpretivist methodology in their research (4 marks).
>
> (d) Outline and explain the difference between Positivist and Interpretivist methodologies. (20 marks).

Before we move on to look at how these two methodologies relate specifically to the process of "doing sociological research" we can take the opportunity to firm-up a couple of the ideas we previously touched-upon about how it's possible to both see and study the social world in ways that are as **reliable** and **valid** as possible.

> **The Nature of Social Facts: Observations**

Thus far we've looked at a couple of different ways that sociologists look at and try to study the social world and in subsequent sections we'll outline and examine in greater detail the implications and actual mechanics of the research process (in terms research design). However, aside from the general idea that sociologists study "human" or "social" behaviour we haven't specifically addressed the question of what sociologists *actually* study in any systematic way – and this, of course (as you probably, deep down, have guessed) is what we need to do next. If we say, for the sake of argument, that what sociologists study is "human behaviour" this begs a couple of important questions:

Firstly, what is it about human behaviour that sociologists actually study?

Secondly, other academic disciplines (such as **psychology** and **biology**) study the exact same thing – so what is it about "sociological study and analysis" that is both unique and particularly different to psychological or biological analyses?

To answer these questions and, by extension, demonstrate something of the unique theoretical and practical insights offered by sociologists about the aforementioned human behaviour, we can turn to a very influential idea developed at the turn of the 20th century by the French sociologist Emile **Durkheim** (1895) when he argued that Sociology should concern itself with the study of **social facts** – an idea we can develop in a couple of ways:

> **Just the Facts...**

1. The Individual and Society: The differences between the **Positivist** and **Interpretivist** methodologies we've just examined reflect a general tension within Sociology (one that we've also touched upon when we outlined the difference between **Structuralist** and **Social Action** perspectives in the Introductory chapter) that revolve around the relationship between "the individual" and "society"; while some sociologists like to emphasise the significance of the former (in terms of human consciousness and the ability to make choices between competing behavioural options) and others emphasise the latter (in terms of the various ways our individual behaviours are pushed and shaped by social structures) both refer to the same **paradox:**

Although we are all unique biological individuals we can only actually "become individuals" when we are with others, living in social groups.

In other words, for people to "be individuals" they need to be involved with "other individuals". It is only through *social interaction* that the individual can both recognise and express their individuality; people, in other words, can only be "individuals" when they are in *a crowd* (which, we trust you'll agree, is an interesting *contradiction in terms*).

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2. Social forces: One way of thinking about the relationship between the individual and society is to see society in terms of a **social force**; as something that acts on the individual to shape them in ways that both emphasise their individuality (through devices like family names, for example) and compel them to act in accordance with the wishes of others (such as through the learning of roles and norms). Just as we can't conceive of a society without individuals the reverse is also true – it is impossible for "the individual" to exist without some sense of their living "in society" – and this is where the concept of **social facts** comes into its own, in terms of **Durkheim's** argument that people don't just live *in society*; on the contrary, they are invariably a product *of society* for two main reasons:

Does the force of our social relationships compel us to act in accord with the wishes of others?

Firstly every individual is born into an existing society and, by definition, a set of *cultural relationships* that involve ideas like laws, traditions, customs, values, behavioural norms and so forth.

Secondly "society" must exist *prior to* "the individual" in that, logically, people have to be **socialised** before they can take their place in society; as we have seen, for example, "unsocialised children" do not develop the kinds of behaviours (such as the norms appropriate to their age, gender and culture) that we associate with "being human".

The Force is Strong...

From this particular perspective, therefore, *social facts* are the **cultural forces** that mould and shape our individual behaviours and, as you might expect, they take a variety of forms, but an illustrative example in our society might be *the law* since we are all - whether we want to be or not and regardless of our ability to resist – subject to legal norms. "The Law", for example, shapes our behaviour in at least two significant ways:

Explicitly in that if we break the law we lay ourselves open to a range of punishments, depending on the nature and persistence of our law-breaking.

Implicitly in the sense that even if we have *never* broken the law our behaviour is still being shaped and constrained by the fact of legal norms. We don't, for example, steal from others because we may believe such behaviour to be morally

wrong or we may fear the consequences of being caught and so forth.

The law / legal system is a good example of two fundamental qualities possessed by social facts:

1. Exteriority: Social facts are **external** to, or *outside of*, the individual. That is, they exist over and above the ability of individual actors to change or influence their effect. A law against theft will remain in place and effect regardless of whether you believe there should be such a law.

2. Constraint: A further quality of social facts is that they act on the individual, controlling and constraining both how we think about - and act in - the social world (both *explicitly* and *implicitly*, as we've just suggested). **Enfield** (2007) captures this idea quite neatly in the observation that through the influence of social facts "We become constrained in our freedom to act, even in the most casual, everyday settings".

When **Durkheim** (1895) argued that we should "treat social facts as things" (as something substantial and powerful) he didn't mean they *were* things (like doors or cars) with a *physical substance*; only that we should study and observe them "as if" they were real things. When, for example, someone is "hit by the full force of the law" they are not literally struck by something, although they may, of course, suffer physical consequences (such as imprisonment) for breaking the law. There is, in this respect, no such *thing* as "the law" – but people nevertheless *act* in ways that give this *idea* (that some forms of behaviour are wrong and need to be punished) a physical effect. Whether or not I believe in the legitimacy of the law, if I steal a car I run the risk of suffering the consequences of my transgression. This tells us something further about the nature of social facts in that they are necessarily:

358

Mental constructs: That is, they exist as ideas that people obey (and at times disobey). As such, in order for social facts (such as traditions in the shape of celebrations of religious holidays) to affect our behaviour they must be based, according to (Functionalist) writers like **Durkheim** on:

Shared values: The power of social facts is maintained through the fact that enough people believe in something (or, at worst, even if they don't believe in it are powerless to prevent others believing it). This shared aspect of social facts is something that gives them existence over and above the individual since they represent an example of the:

Collective will: That is, the idea that if enough people believe in something it takes on a life of its own over and beyond the wills of individuals (even those who may initially have been responsible for its creation). One way the collective will is established, as we've suggested, is through:

Socialisation – both primary and secondary: Although socialisation is itself a social fact it is also the main *mechanism* every human society develops in order to propagate collective ideas about, for example, the individual and their role / place in society.

One final aspect of social facts we can note is that they have a nature that is invariably:

Moral: Social facts act on people in ways that define things like "good" and "bad" or "moral" and "immoral" behaviour; they are, in this respect, forces that define *appropriate* and *inappropriate behaviour*.

Module Link　　　　　　　**Introduction**

In this Chapter there are a number of examples of **social facts**; these include the aforementioned **socialisation** as well as **roles**, **norms**, **values** and so forth.

The Nature of Social Facts: Explanations

Although few, if any, sociologists would have a problem with the idea that human behaviour is *shaped* in some way by the relationships that individuals enter into as part of their daily social interaction, the concept of a **social fact** involves something more than just thinking about *social forces* – and if this idea is a little unclear two points should help to clarify it:

Firstly, for sociologists (of whatever perspective or persuasion), whenever people enter into a relationship with others social forces are created that impact on the

way they behave. A simple example here might be the way we use **norms** to control both our own behaviour and that of others; when we "make friends" with someone, for example, we confer on them a special, slightly different, **status** to that of, say, people we call "acquaintances" or "strangers". In so doing we observe a range of norms that are part-and-parcel of the "friendship **role**" and whatever these may actually turn out to be (in different cultures and subcultures) if we want to "be friends" with someone we need to observe these norms.

Helping to celebrate someone's birthday is an expected part of the friendship role in our society...

Secondly, for some (Positivist) sociologists social facts are something more than simple forces – they are "things" that take on a life of their own and are, in this respect, *external* to the individual in that we are individually powerless in the face of these facts. **Durkheim** (1895), for example, expressed what we might term this *harder-edged approach* when he argued "I am not obliged to speak French with my fellow-countrymen nor to use the legal currency, but I cannot possibly do otherwise ...". However, other (Interpretivist) sociologists take a *softer-edged approach* by arguing that although social forces clearly "exist" they are *not* social facts in the way **Durkheim** has argued. While, for example, it would be *difficult* to live in a country and neither speak the language nor use the legal currency it would not be impossible – and the fact this possibility exists suggests, for Interactionists in particular, that we need to avoid applying the concept of social facts "as if" they somehow determine how people behave.

We have, in this respect, two basic positions on the "nature of social facts" that we can explore in the remainder of this Section – although as we do this it's important to keep two things in mind. Firstly that "Positivism" and "Interpretivism" are examples of sociological

...but just because it's expected doesn't mean we have to do it...

methodologies we've used in this particular context mainly for illustrative purposes – they represent, as we've outlined them here, idealised (and simplified) versions of the way some sociologists look at and study the social world. Secondly, although Positivism is frequently contrasted (especially in A-level textbooks and exams) with the "Ant-positivism" of Interpretivist methodology we need to keep in mind that there are both alternative methodologies available to sociologists and that differences of interpretation exist *within* both Positivism and Interpretivism.

Anti-Positivism   **Positivism**

It's important to avoid the trap of seeing methodology in black-and-white terms ("Positivism Bad" / "Anti-positivism Good")

Facts?

The concept of social facts fits neatly with Positivist methodology for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it represents a means of studying people in terms of their group – rather than individual – characteristics (since group memberships in effect determine individual behaviours) and, secondly, it gives the researcher the opportunity to study certain **objective features** of social behaviour. This follows for three main reasons:

1. Independence: Social facts exist independently of the individual and are, therefore, objective factors that stand apart from the subjective wants, desires and wishes of individuals.

2. Causality: Social facts represent causal factors in individual behaviour because they make people behave in certain ways.

3. Predictability: Under the influence of social facts human behaviour becomes broadly predictable – on both an *institutional level* (all human societies will necessarily develop certain institutions such as work and family groups) and an *individual level*; if we know and understand the circumstances in which people live we can broadly predict their behaviour.

In this respect the research focus must be on group behaviour since it is through this that social facts arise. We can, therefore, study the effects of social facts in ways that make the study of individuals redundant – if social facts are the cause

Samantha had the sneaking suspicion that her work was starting to dominate her life...

of individual behaviour then it makes sense to study **causes** rather than **effects**.

Harris (2005) summarises this general position quite neatly when he observes: "It is clear that a number of implications spin off from this basic argument, certainly for methods. If human beings are responding to external events without necessarily being aware of them, social science becomes a matter of trying to uncover social events and social processes and measure their effects. The classic way to do this to study social patterns: if the rate of suicide rises in particular urban conditions…then there is something about those urban conditions which is predisposing people to suicide irrespective of their will…In modern social science, a whole range of research techniques has developed to try to indicate social patterns and then to explain them, classically using social surveys and statistical analysis.".

Or Fictions?

An Interpretivist methodological perspective, as you might expect, takes a very different view of both the concept of social facts and their relationship to the individual.

Social constructions: Like everything else in the social world "social facts" are the product of social interactions between conscious beings – people, in other words, who make choices about how to behave in certain situations. In some contexts the pressure to conform to certain norms may appear overwhelming (such as in the admittedly extreme context of someone pointing a gun at your head and threatening to shoot you unless you obey them) while in others the pressure is far less intense (you may apologise if you accidentally bump into someone in the street but you're under no great social pressure to do so). When we (deliberately or accidentally) break a norm there are *usually* consequences for our behaviour, some of which are extremely serious (driving a car on the wrong side of the road may lead to arrest and imprisonment) while others may be trivial – forgetting to send a friend a birthday card may mean, at worst, you have to apologise to them for your memory lapse.

The important point here is that while there are undoubtedly social forces acting on our behaviour the

pressures they create merely *influence*, rather than *determine*, our behavioural choices.

As **Giddens** (2006) puts it: "Although what Durkheim calls 'social facts' might constrain what we do, they do not *determine* what we do. I could choose to live without using money, should I be firmly resolved to do so, even if it might prove very difficult to eke out an existence from day to day. As human beings, we do make choices, and we do not simply passively respond to events around us.". This "active quality" of human behaviour, therefore, leads Interpretivist methodology to stress three main ideas:

1. Dependence: The things Positivists refer to as "social facts" (laws, customs, norms, vales, traditions, fashions and so forth) *do not* exist "independently" of the people who both create - and by their continued observance propagate – them. What on the face of things *appear* to be *objective* features of human behaviour are, on closer and more-detailed inspection, the outcomes of the *subjective* choices and behaviours of individual social actors going about their daily lives in a multitude of different ways.

2. Causality: If social facts are *not* objective features of human society it follows that it isn't possible to study them in terms of their ability to *cause* people to behave in certain ways. Although we could, for example, argue that something like laws or norms are *necessary* features of social life it doesn't follow that we can identify any particular legal or informal norm that actually determines individual behaviour. Questions of "causality" are interesting here because they capture something of the difference between Positivist and Interpretivist thinking. For Positivism human behaviour is seen in terms of it being an:

Is deviance a quality of what someone *does* (an attribute of the Object)?

• Attribute of the Object: That is, individual behaviour is explained by identifying the particular properties of the people being studied that make them different to other individuals. For example, if we were interested in explaining levels of differential achievement one way of doing this would be to identify the specific social characteristics (such as class or gender) possessed by "the academically successful" but not by the "academically unsuccessful".

For Interpretivism, on the other hand, human behaviour is seen in terms of it being an:

• Attribute of Perception: That is, the way behaviour is interpreted by others represents the "cause" of that behaviour - individual behaviour, therefore, is not a property of the

Or a quality of how people *react* to what someone does (an attribute of Perception)?

people involved but rather of how others **react** to that behaviour. In the differential educational achievement example above, therefore, research from this perspective might focus on how children are "made to be different" in the educational system through the activities of teachers, politicians, employers and so forth.

3. Unpredictability: Human beings – because they have the capacity for independent thought – also have the capacity for unpredictability (at least at the individual level). If we cannot predict, with any great degree of precision or certainty how someone will behave in a particular social situation then it follows that social research should not be directed towards the pursuit of the impossible.

Harris (2005) suggests that using Interpretivist methodology "There is a need to somehow study human consciousness and how it works in particular individuals or groups…I say 'somehow' because studying human consciousness is almost by definition deeply difficult and paradoxical. It cannot be observed directly, for example, and must be studied through external manifestations such as words or actions. Similarly, if human consciousness is central to understanding, then the researcher must also be centrally engaged in interpretation and cannot pretend to be objectively describing events from the outside".

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by the term "social fact" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest **two** attributes of social facts (4 marks).

(c) Identify and explain **two** reasons why some sociologists might reject the concept of a "social fact" (4 marks).

(d) Examine arguments for and against the idea that Sociology should be "the study of social facts" (20 marks).

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4. Quantitative and qualitative methods of research; their strengths and limitations; research design.

Research Design: Introduction

In this Section we're going to focus on the idea of sociological research as a *systematic process* - as something carefully *planned* and *organised* by the researcher – because this idea reflects a couple of significant observations:

Firstly, sociological research involves a range of factors – from what to study, through collecting data to analysing and drawing conclusions from such data – that have to be addressed in a particular order. It would, for example, be extremely time consuming (and probably pointless) to start "collecting data" if we haven't initially decided on the subject of such activity. In other words we generally start to collect data once we've decided on what we want to study and how we want to study it – which gives a kind of logical flow and structure to the research process (and design).

Secondly, although any research process will have a basic design structure, this doesn't mean that important choices don't have to be made by the researcher – choices that will not only reflect their particular values and beliefs but will also produce very different forms of sociological research. A researcher, for example, must decide things like:

Just as we use a map to plan the stages of our journey, a systematic design helps the sociologist plan the various stages of their research (Caption courtesy Tenuous Caption Corp.).

• What they are going to research (a potentially vast area).

• Their objectives for the research (are they trying to test a theory, describe a situation or whatever?).

• Who to study (whether this involves everyone in a particular group or just a selection (sample) of these people)?

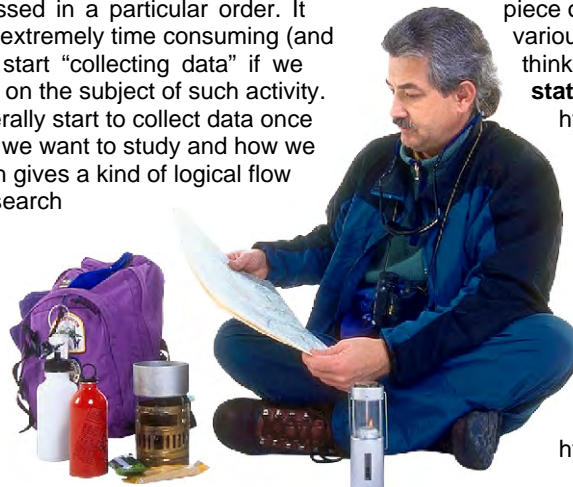• How to study them (what method or methods will be used in the research, for example)?

These questions / choices are an important and integral part of "doing sociological research" since how a researcher answers them will, as we've suggested, determine the direction and scope of their research – pushing it in one particular direction based on one set

of choices and a completely different direction if different choices are made…

The Research Process: Observations

Before we look at the general design structure of sociological research we need to familiarise ourselves with three basic research ideas:

1. Hypothesis: For many (but not necessarily all) sociologists this is the starting-point for any piece of research and although there are various types we could use it's easiest to think of a hypothesis as a **question** or **statement** we want to answer. A hypothesis, therefore, has one very important characteristic; we should be able to **test** it (to discover if it's true or false) and, in the light of our previous work on methodology, it shouldn't be too surprising to learn that *Positivist* forms of research tend to make more use of hypotheses than their Interpretivist counterparts (although this isn't, of course, to say the later don't or can't use hypothesis testing as part of the research process).

A hypothesis involves *testing* a possible relationship between two or more things. For example, imagine we're interested in researching "why do people steal?". As it stands, this question would be difficult to answer because it doesn't specify a relationship between "people" and "stealing" that can be tested. What we need to do, therefore, is create a hypothesis - along the lines of something like "Poverty makes people steal" - that can be tested.

2. Research Question: Not all sociologists, as we've just suggested, want to test their ideas using a hypothesis. Some begin with a research question that the sociologist wants to answer / discover something about by collecting evidence. Although not directly tested, a research question can be supported (or not as the case may be) through research. In this respect an example of a (not very useful) research question might be: "What are people's attitudes to stealing?". All we are trying to do, using this type of research question, is gather evidence on the views of people about a particular form of behaviour.

Although the use of a hypothesis / research question isn't mutually exclusive when doing sociological research (it's perfectly possible to test a hypothesis while, at the same time, answering certain research questions) it's often the case that the decision – as part of the research process – about which to use reflects different methodological preoccupations and approaches and, in consequence, leads the researcher into different *types* of research design (as we demonstrate below).

3. Operationalisation: Whether starting with a hypothesis or a research question the researcher will have to *define, test* or *measure* the various elements involved in their hypothesis / question - and this is where the concept of *operationalisation* comes into the equation. If you think about the "poverty" hypothesis we've just used, to test it the researcher would have to be clear about such questions as:

• How is "poverty" defined?
• How is "stealing" defined?
• How are "people" defined (not literally, in this case, but in terms of different groups, perhaps)?
• How can we test or measure the relationship between poverty and stealing (in other words, what *indicators* can we use to test this relationship)?

Our answers to these - and similar - questions will determine how we plan and organise our actual research and, in this respect, sociological research, at least for our current purposes, generally follows an overall design blueprint, such as the one set-out by **Oberg** (1999), that involves **four** distinct, but interconnected, stages:

1. Planning – the initial decision-making stage where the researcher decides the basic format of the research (what to research, how to research it and so forth).

2. Information Gathering: The data-collection stage where people are questioned, observed and so forth.

3. Information Processing: Once data has been successfully gathered its *meaning* has to be analysed and interpreted.

4. Evaluation: This normally involves both an:

• **Internal** analysis of the research process (was, for example, the hypothesis, addressed and tested properly? Was the data collection method appropriate? and so forth).

• **External** analysis whereby the researcher presents their conclusions to a wider public audience for their analysis and criticism.

Process

The above is a fairly general outline of the **research process** – one that only provides a very basic

indication about how research could / should be carried out. We can, however, develop this outline fairly easily to show a more-detailed representation of the research process – one that edges us nearer to developing a standardised **research design** that might look something like the following:

The research process involves thinking about how we can define, measure or test significant concepts.

1. Identify the research problem: This is the initial stage at which the sociologist decides things like:

• What topic to study (education? health? and so forth).
• What aspect to study (having decided on, for example, education, decisions have to be made about what exactly will be researched – "attitudes to education" or "differential achievement", for example)

2. Review past research: This may serve of number of purposes, depending on what the researcher wants to do:

• Generating ideas about what to study (or not to study)
• Replicating previous research.
• Avoiding errors made in previous research.
• Becoming more familiar with research on a topic.

• **G**enerate ideas
• **R**eplicate research
• **A**void errors
• **B**ecome familiar

Mnemonics (such as GRAB) can help you remember important ideas.

3. Decide on research **hypothesis / question**: This will set the basic theme for the research. For example, if a hypothesis is used it will have to be tested which, in turn, will involve research methods capable of being used for this purpose.

4. Develop a Research Framework: This will mean deciding on things like:

• Who or what will be studied.
• How they will be studied (in terms of research method or methods).
• Access issues, problems, solutions.
• Time frames and scales – will the research involve one-off observation, interviews, etc. or is it part of a long-term (**longitudinal**) study that will involve repeating the research at different times?
• Sample technique, size and frame (if necessary).

5. Collect data: The physical process of gathering information. This will be guided by the kind of issues we've just noted, but additional considerations here include thinking about the *choice of research methods* in terms of their:

• **Reliability**: How important is this in terms of the general objectives of the research?

• **Validity**: Is the research intended to be an in-depth study of behaviour or simply a quantitative analysis of a particular issue?

• **Representativeness**: Is the research a single study of a specific group (a case study) or:

• **Generalisation**: Are the research findings from the sample studied intended to be applied to a much wider general population?

6. Analyse data: Data, as **Foucault** (1970) argues, "can never speak for itself". In this respect information not only has to be *analysed* (bringing together and

categorising related ideas, for example) but also *interpreted* – what, in short, does the data and the overall research mean?

7. Present the completed research in terms of things like:

• **Findings** – what was actually discovered?
• **Conclusions** – about, for example, the hypothesis (has it been disproven, for example?).
• **Limitations** – which might include discussion of various research problems that may have impacted on the study.
• **Suggestions** for further research.

The Research Process: Explanations

So far we've outlined some important ideas and questions relating to sociological research design and we can develop these observations by looking a little more closely at two major forms of research design – one based around the development and testing of **hypotheses** (in general terms a **Positivist** type of research design) and the other based around the use of **research questions** (in broad terms an **Interactionist** research design).

1. Positivism: Hypothesis-based research

A classic example of how to organise this type of social research is one suggested by **Popper** (1934) which he called the:

Hypothetico-Deductive Model of scientific research, the basis of which we can generally outline in the following terms:
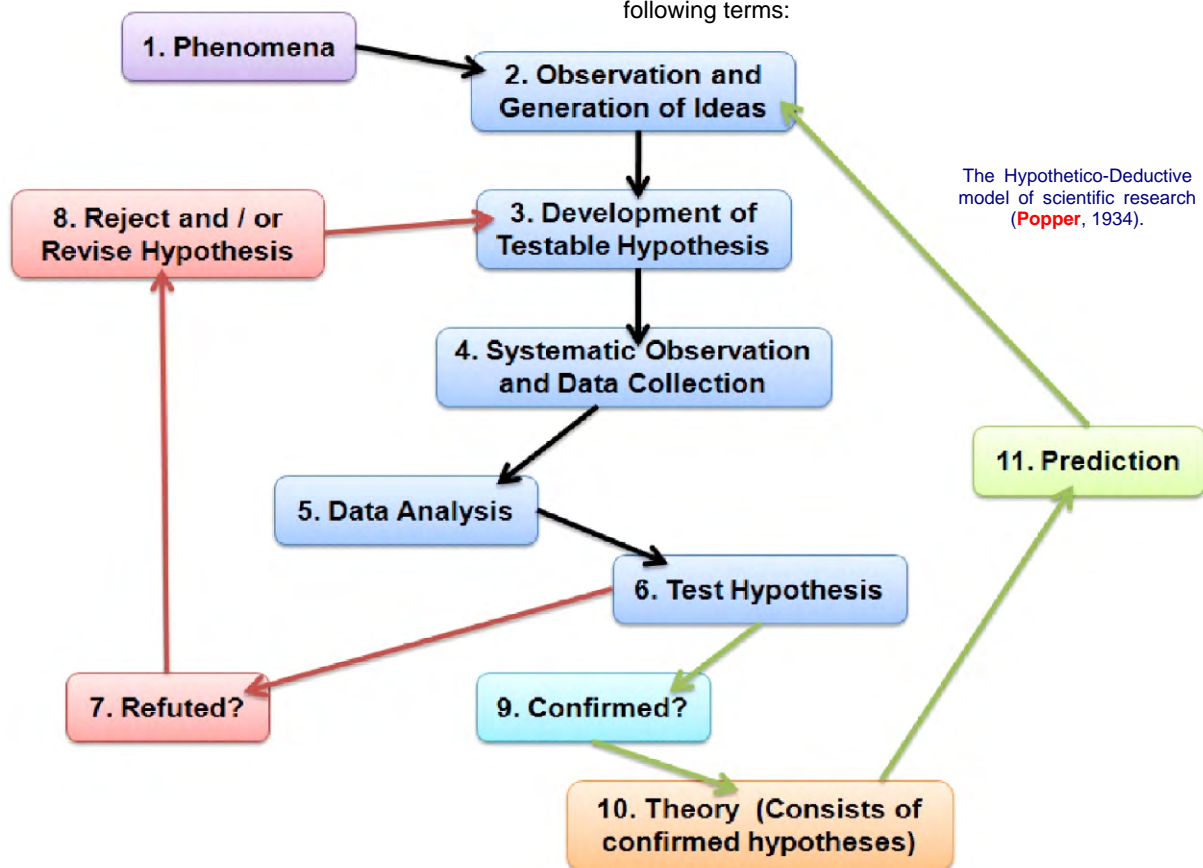
The Hypothetico-Deductive model of scientific research (**Popper**, 1934).

"**Hypothetico**" means "starting with a hypothesis" and for **Popper** the defining feature of a scientific research process is the ability to develop and clearly state **testable** hypotheses.

Deduction (or to give it its proper name, *deductive logic*) is a way of making authoritative statements (*proofs*) about what is *not known* by a thorough analysis of what *is known*. The ability to make *deductive statements* is a powerful tool because it's the basis for drawing logical conclusions about *specific events* from *general events*.

To simplify this idea, think about a fictional detective such as Inspector Morse. He solved crimes by *systematically* investigating a case, collecting and analysing facts and, on the basis of these facts, identifying the guilty party. This is an example of *deduction* because he proves something specific that was not initially known (the identity of a murderer) on the basis of general observations about things that were initially known (the facts of the case, the clues identified and so forth).

A **model** is a small-scale *representation* of something that helps clarify the relationship between the various elements involved by describing them in simplified or idealised terms. In this case, **Popper's** model suggests the various steps to follow in order to "do scientific research" and, as such, helps us to design the actual process itself.

"A model" is a small-scale representation of something (like, in this instance, a house).

We can briefly explain each of these "steps in the research process" in the following way:

1. Phenomena: With this particular design the research starts with the choice of something to study and we can use "education" for illustrative purposes. However, in order to actually do research we have to narrow our initial ideas down to something more specific.

2. Observation and the generation of ideas: The researcher starts to focus their initial interest in "education" into something manageable. For example, they might find inspiration in previously published research (they might, for example, want to **replicate** it), their own particular academic interests or they may simply pick-up a government contract to do a certain type of research on a particular topic (such as rates of truancy in secondary schools).

3. Development of Testable Hypothesis: This provides both a *focus* for the research and a clearly defined *objective* for data collection - the researcher is now effectively locked-into a *systematic design* for identifying, collecting and processing data. Before they can actually start to collect data, however, the researcher needs to *operationalise* the various concepts in the hypothesis that require definition, testing or measurement. For example, if our hypothesis was something like "Children who are bullied at school are more likely to truant than those who are not bullied" (not the world's greatest hypothesis, admittedly, but one that will serve for our current purpose) the researcher would need to define concepts like "truancy" and "bullying" and measure the concept of "more likely".

This, in a roundabout way, leads us to think about a problem faced by social scientists that is not generally faced by natural scientists, namely that many of the things we want to study and / or measure don't actually have a physical existence – we can't, for example, point to something called "bullying" and directly measure it (since it is simply a concept we use to label certain situations and actions – behaviour seen as "bullying" in one context may be seen differently in another). This problem can, however, be overcome by using *indicators* – things that *can* be measured. In this instance there may be a range of indicators of bullying we can define and subsequently measure.

A clearer example, perhaps, is provided by **Lindauer** (2005). In her review of research examining the educational properties of museums she noted that the question "Did the exhibition effectively communicate the main idea or message?" illustrates the idea of hypothesis testing within this type of research design. As she argues "The question…poses a *cause-and-effect relationship* - attending an exhibit will cause visitors to acquire particular knowledge or information" that can be measured and therefore tested (once the concept of "effectively communicate" has been operationalised and quantified).

4. Systematic Observation and Data Collection: The researcher starts to think about who they are going to

research (their *sample*) and the research *method*(s) they will use.

Just as the overall research design involves making choices at every stage in the process, so too do choices need to be made relating to samples and research methods (we've previously identified a range of research method choices – from questionnaires to covert participant observation – and we'll examine some sampling choices in a moment). The idea of "systematic observation" is important because it clearly reflects the nature of this type of design –everything, in terms of researcher effort, is effectively channelled towards testing the hypothesis; anything that deflects the researcher from this goal is a distraction, of no importance to the research and is to be ignored.

Life is full of choices...

5. Data Analysis: This may take a couple of forms:

a. Technical involves things like:

• Checking to ensure sufficient data have been collected.
• Ensuring the sample used has remained representative.

b. Interpretive involves making decisions about the *meaning* of data collected. This might, for example, involve discarding "irrelevant" data, as well as more straightforward data analysis – something that may be simplified if, as is highly-likely with this type of design, quantitative data has been collected.

6. Testing the Hypothesis: This involves deciding - on the basis of the data analysis - whether or not the tested hypothesis has either been:

7. Falsified: If the hypothesis is false a decision has to be made about whether it should be totally rejected (**8**) or whether it can be revised and **re**-tested (a return to step **3**).

9. Confirmed. If the hypothesis is confirmed it contributes to the final stage in the research process:

10. Theory Development: In everyday language, a *theory* normally means something that

has *not* been tested ("It works in theory, but not in practice", for example). Sociologically, however, a theory consists of *confirmed hypotheses* that can then be used to predict (**11**) the behaviour originally observed (step 1).

In this instance, for example, our research might have shown that those who truant from school have a particular characteristic (or set of characteristics) that allow us to predict how children with those same characteristics will behave when they start secondary school.

2. Interpretivism: Emergent (Exploratory) Research

Although the Hypothetico-deductive model describes an important way of doing research, by way of contrast (since not all sociologists believe the same things or do things in exactly the same way) we can look at an alternative "emergent (exploratory) research" model one, as we've suggested, that can be closely associated with Interpretivist methodology. In general, this type of model follows the same basic flow identified by **Oberg** (1999) – albeit with some significant design modifications - in that it involves:

1. Planning: A research issue is identified and a "research question" or "problem" takes shape. This may flow from background reading on the topic or the researcher may want to "come fresh" to the research to avoid being influenced by what others have said or written.

2a. Information Gathering: Although the general research process here is superficially similar to that proposed in **Popper's** Hypothetico-deductive model, major design differences are apparent in the way information is collected. For example, this type of research design is:

Non-linear – research is not a process that begins with a hypothesis and ends with it being confirmed or refuted. The objective is not to discover definitive answers to a question, issue or problem; rather, it is to explore issues from a variety of angles. Hence, the idea of this design being:
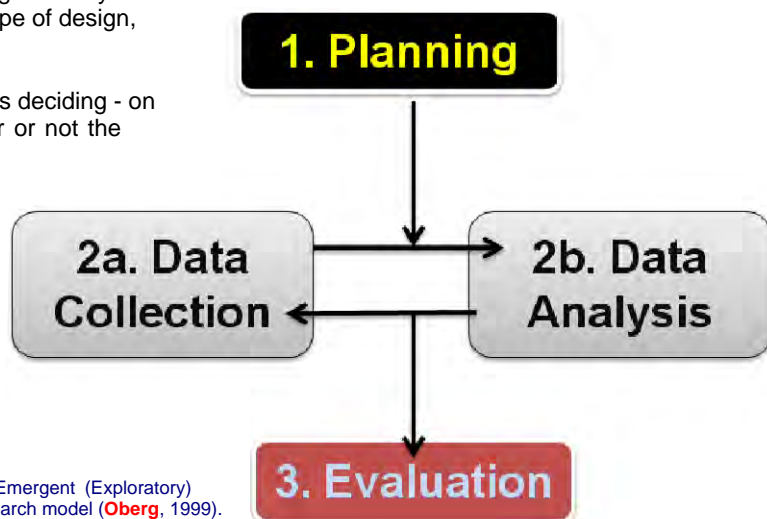
*Emergent (Exploratory) research model (**Oberg**, 1999).*

Exploratory: The objective is to explore whatever is being studied in all its facets - from the perspective and perception of the researcher to those of the people being researched.

Holistic: This approach involves collecting as much information as possible about whatever is being studied, for a couple of reasons. Firstly the researcher doesn't try to prejudge what is or is not significant at this stage in the research. Secondly, by casting the research net far and wide the researcher involves and co-opts those being studied into the research process; they may, for example, suggest ideas and issues to study that may not have originally occurred to the researcher.

Goal-Free: For **Lindauer** (2005) one significant aspect of exploratory research is that "*…research designs are goal-free* as opposed to *goals-based*". The latter is a defining feature of Positivist forms of research where the goal is to confirm or falsify a hypothesis. Interpretivist research design doesn't involve defining in advance what the objective of such research will be; rather, the researcher is free to explore whatever they – or the people they're studying - feel is important or interesting. As **Lindauer** notes these types of research designs are often "**iterative**, meaning that they take shape as data collection and analysis proceed".

Evolutionary: This relates to the two previous ideas in the sense that research is relatively open-ended – the researcher may, for example, simply follow the leads suggested by the people being studied. Rather than following a pre-determined path, therefore, research design is *fluid* – it can expand and develop as and how the research situation demands (digging deeper into some areas while disregarding others, for example). Thus, where the Hypothetico-deductive design framework is rigid, strong and directs the researcher, the reverse is true of exploratory designs – the design framework is flexible, loose and bends to take account of new research developments.

Active: Unlike "passive" research designs where the researcher has to carefully distance themselves from whatever is being researched in order to avoid biasing the research, this design generally encourages the *active participation* of the researcher. Researcher involvement with the people being studied is, consequently, high – they may, for example, live amongst the people being researched for months or even years in some (admittedly quite extreme) instances. **Whyte** (1943), for example, spent years living openly around the adolescent gang members he studied and **Ray** (1987) lived covertly for a time with a group of Australian environmentalists.

2b. Information Processing: Data is analysed, although the researcher is not interested in testing hypotheses. Rather, an attempt may be made to **categorise** the data in various ways or sift and sort it into some form of **descriptive** narrative (*story*). Generally, however, data analysis is, according to **Schultz et al** (1996) something that happens *throughout* the research process, rather than simply

being completed *after* data has been collected. This is significant for a couple of reasons:

Firstly this type of design involves a "*positive feedback loop*" between data collection and data analysis; in other words, when collected data is analysed (and with this type of design there is likely to be mountains of data) such analysis is used to inform further data collection – and further analysis (hence the idea of research "feeding back" into itself in a non-linear way).

Secondly one outcome of this process is that there is no requirement to collect data for the express purpose of proving or disproving something – data analysis, therefore, is both *descriptive* and *multi-faceted* (seen from different viewpoints – both that of the researcher and those of the researched).

3. Evaluation: *Conclusions* may be offered but it's more likely that the reader will be left to draw their own conclusions from the research. This highlights a further difference in research design between emergent

Not a goal in sight...

and Hypothetico-deductive models; the latter, by definition and design, involves the researcher making judgments (about what to research, what data to collect and, ultimately, the status – valid or invalid – of the research hypothesis). The former, however, can be characterised as:

Non-judgemental: The objective of the research is not to decide things like "truth" or "falsity", "validity" or "invalidity"; rather it is to illuminate a particular issue, question or problem by studying it from a multitude of possible viewpoints.

As **Schwandt** (2002) puts it, social research involves not so much a "problem to be solved…as a dilemma or mystery that requires interpretation and self-understanding".

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by the term "operationalisation" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest **two** reasons why a sociologist might choose hypothesis-based research (4 marks).

(c) Identify and explain two differences between hypothesis-based and exploratory research (4 marks).

The Research Process: Sampling

Having outlined examples of both the general research process and different sociological approaches to research design we can look a little more closely at specific examples of the choices available to sociologists when it comes to thinking about, firstly, **sampling** and secondly the strengths and limitations of **quantitative** and **qualitative research methods**.

Sampling: Observations

The first thing can do is identify and explain a few sampling related ideas.

Target (or General) Population: When starting a piece of research we always have in mind a group to study - our *target* or *general population*; in other words, they're everyone in the group we're going to research. Examples of target populations might be:

1. A **Small** Group	2. A **Large** Group
The teachers in a small primary school, for example.	Every secondary school teacher in England.

With the first group their behaviour might be relatively easy to research because the target population is small and exists in a clearly defined (and potentially accessible) area. Whether this research involves observing the group, asking them questions or participating in their behaviour, the *size* of the group makes it relatively easy to manage the research.

With the second group, however, things might be more difficult because its size and geographic distribution is going to make it hard (to say the least) to observe or question everyone personally. This, therefore, is where the concept of *sampling* comes into its own and we need to outline a few basic ideas relating to this concept:

A **sample** is a relatively small proportion of the people who belong to the target population. For example, in the case of secondary school teachers in England the researcher might choose 100 teachers and, by studying their behaviour, try to say something about the characteristics or behaviour of all teachers in the target population.

Sample size: Rather than think in terms of size (is a 90% sample too large or a 10% sample too small?) a more significant question is "how *representative* is the sample?":

Representativeness: This idea is more important than the size of your sample because it relates to the question of whether or not the characteristics of the people selected for the sample accurately reflect the characteristics of the target population. If the sample group is *representative* then anything discovered about them can also be applied to the target population - regardless of how many or how few people are in the sample.

Generalisation relates to the question of whether or not the things we discover about the people in our sample can also be applied to the people in our target population. If our sample is *representative* we can generalise the behaviour of this group to our target population - we can, in other words, make statements about a group we *haven't* studied (our target population) based on the behaviour of a group we *have* studied.

Sampling Frame: To construct a representative sample from which generalisations can be made researchers need some way of identifying everyone in their target population (a sampling frame) – examples of which might include:

• **Electoral Roll**: a list of everyone eligible to vote.

• **School Registers**: lists of children attending school.

• **Professional Membership Lists**: organisations such as the British Medical Association (BMA) keep a register of all doctors in Britain.

• **Company payrolls**: a list of all employees in a company.

Potential sampling frames include school registers, electoral rolls and company records.
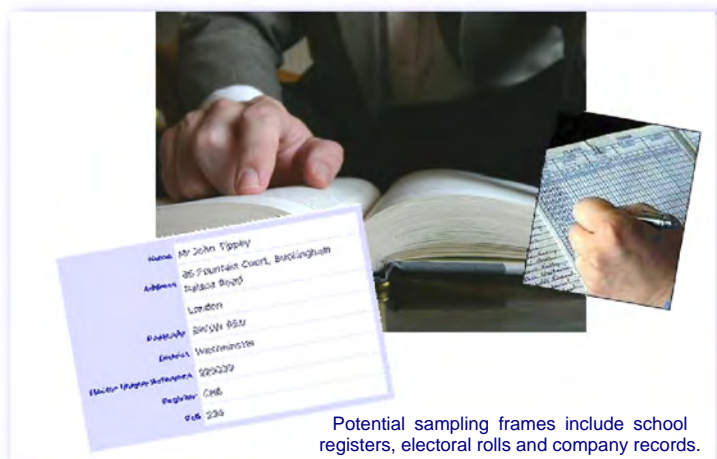
For most types of sampling (there are important exceptions) a sampling frame is required for a couple of reasons:

1. If a researcher can't identify everyone in their target population their sample may not be representative because it will not accurately reflect the characteristics of the target population.

2. For a researcher to contact people in their sample (to interview them, for example) they will need to know who they are…

However, just because a sampling frame exists, it doesn't mean a researcher will automatically have access to it. It's possible access may be *denied* for:

• **Legal reasons**: A school, for example, may not give a researcher access to their registers.

• **Confidentiality**: A business organisation may not give a researcher access to their payroll records.

• **Secrecy**: Some groups (such as religious groups, political parties and criminal gangs) may, for whatever reason, not want to be studied.

Sampling: Explanations

As a general rule of thumb, researchers try to make their sample representative of the target population. However, there are times – for a variety of reasons - when they might choose *not* to draw a representative sample:

Non-Representative

For some types of research the sociologist might *not* want to make generalisations about a very large group based only on a sample of that group. They might, for example, simply be interested in the behaviour of *the group itself*, rather than what they may or may not represent. An example of this type of non-representative sampling is a:

Case study: The objective here is to study, in detail, the characteristics of a particular group (or *case,* as you might not be too surprised to learn). Although a case study is technically an example of a *research method* (see below), we can use it to illustrate how a non-representative sample might work. Thus, a case study might involve joining a gang of young women, living among a group of monks or studying the prescribing practices of doctors in a particular part of the country. The researcher is *not* particularly concerned about whether the group being studied is representative of all other, similar, groups. In effect, therefore, the sample in this type of research *is* the target population. This is a perfectly acceptable form of research - just as long as the researcher doesn't try to generalise their findings.

In other instances of non-representative sampling the researcher may want to create a representative sample but circumstances conspire against them and so they may choose (or be forced) to settle for something like:

Opportunity sampling: This type has two main sub-divisions:

1. "**Best opportunity**" samples involve deliberately choosing a sample to provide the *best possible opportunity* to show whatever you're testing is *true.* If

your research shows the hypothesis you're testing to be *false* for this group, there's a *high probability* it will be false for any other related groups. **Goldthorpe et al's** (1968) classic study used this technique to test the then currently fashionable argument (the "**Embourgeoisement Thesis**") that the working classes in Britain were "becoming middle class". Their **best opportunity sample** consisted of highly paid car assembly workers who they chose to study on the basis that if *any* working class group was likely to show lifestyles indistinguishable from their middle class peers it would be this group of "affluent workers.

2. Snowball samples: So-called because, just as a snowball rolling downhill gets larger and larger as it picks-up more snow, a *snowball sample* picks up more and more people to include in the sample over time. A basic example of the technique for this type of sample might be as follows:

The researcher identifies someone in the target population who's willing to be part of their research. This person then suggests another 2 or 3 people (perhaps more) who they think are also willing to participate in the research. These people, in turn, suggest further possible participants until the researcher has a sample they can use for their research. Although this technique isn't going to produce a representative sample, it may be the best that can be achieved in certain situations. **Wallis** (1977), for example, used this technique to contact (ex-) members of the Church of Scientology when his request to interview current members was rejected by the Church authorities.

Example of a snowball sample network.
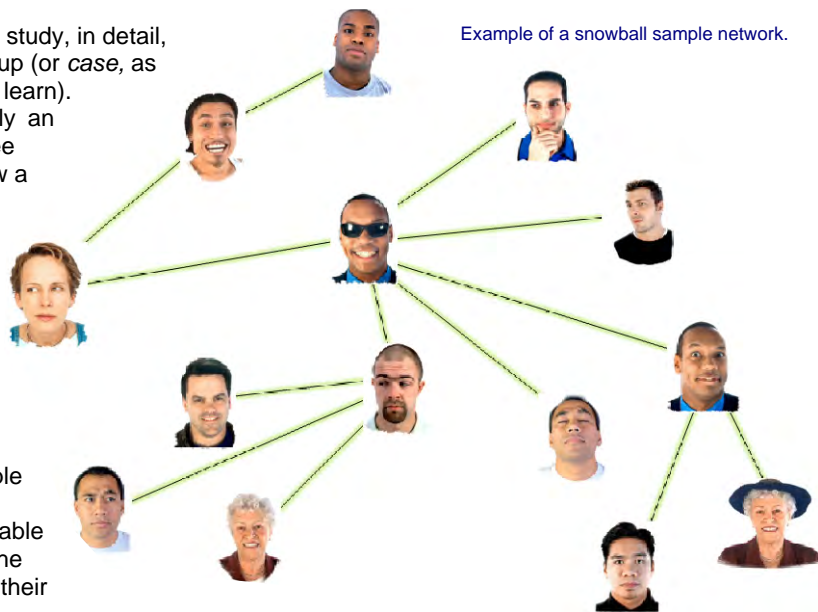
Types of Sampling: Observations

Although non-representative sampling can, as **Wallis** has shown, be a useful technique in some situations, the main focus of this section is on a range of techniques that generally aim to be **representative**:

Simple Random Sampling: One of the most basic (simple) forms of sampling is based on the *probability*

that the random selection of names from a **sampling frame** will produce a sample representative of a target population. One important characteristic here is that for it to be truly random *everyone* in the target population must have an *equal chance* of being chosen for the sample. A simple random sample, therefore, is similar to a *lottery*:

A simple random sample.

• Everyone in the target population is identified on a sampling frame.

• The sample is selected by randomly choosing names from the frame until the sample is complete.

Sample

Target / General Population

For example, a 30% sample of a target population of 100 people would involve the random selection of 30 people.

Systematic Sampling: A *variation* on the above - often used when the target population is very large - is to select names for your sample *systematically* by taking the sample *directly* from a sampling frame. For a *25% sample* of a target population containing 100 names, a systematic sample would involve choosing every *fourth* name from your frame.

Stratified Random Sampling: A potential *problem* with samples created using simple random or systematic techniques arises if the target population is *not homogeneous* (that is, it doesn't consist of people who are roughly the same in terms of the characteristics important to the research). If the target population is *heterogeneous* (it consists, for example, of a range of smaller groups, the views of which are all important to your research) a *biased* sample can easily occur. This follows because these sampling techniques *may* under-represent some groups within the target population and over-represent
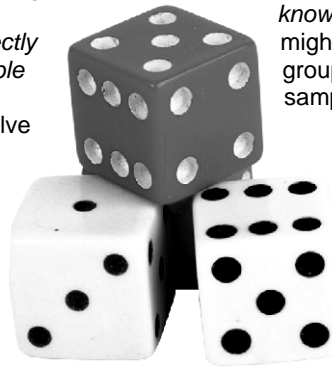
Random samples are based on chance distributions.

others. *Stratified random sampling* is designed to avoid these problems while retaining the idea of selection based on *chance*. The technique here is to divide (or *stratify*) your target population into groups whose characteristics are *known* to the researcher (simple examples might be "males and females" or different age groups) and treat *each* group as a random sample in its own right.

For example, imagine a target population consists of 100 people, 80 females and 20 males and the researcher needs a 10% sample. To *exactly represent* the gender balance of the target population the researcher requires a sample of 8 females and 2 males – something that might be achieved by *chance* (using a simple random sample, for example), but it's easier to give chance a helping hand by splitting the target population into two groups - the 80 females and the 20 males - and then selecting 10% of each (8 females from the "female only group" and 2 males from the "male only group"). If we then *combine* the two samples we get a *final sample* that is representative of the target population in terms of the criteria (gender in this particular instance) the researcher has set for their study. By doing things in this way the researcher can also ensure that sample selection remains random.
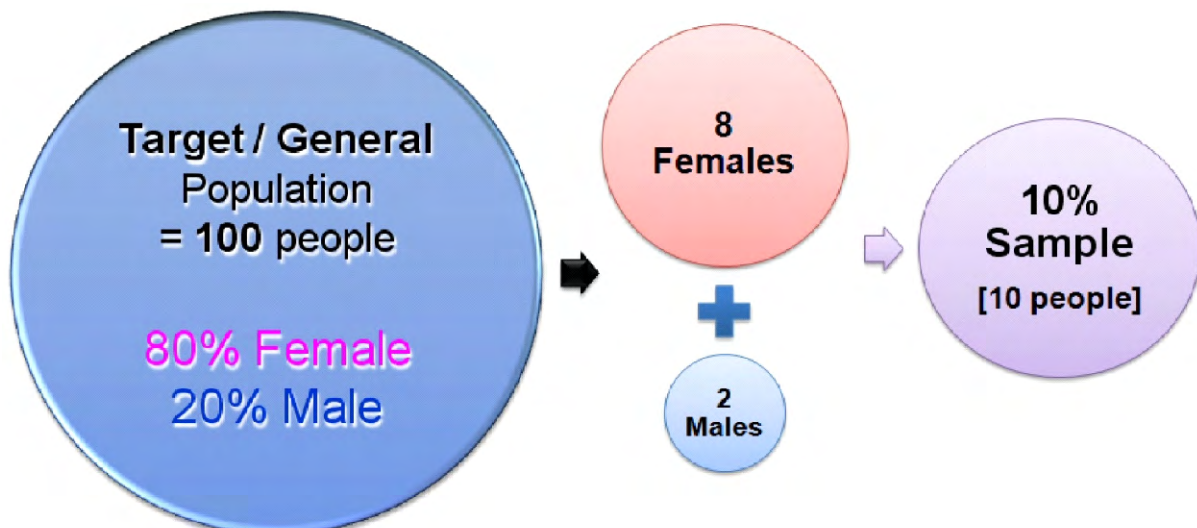
Stratified sampling:
Stratified Random: the selection of the sample is completely random.
Stratified Quota: Sample selection is not truly random.

Target / General Population = 100 people

80% Female
20% Male

8 Females

+

2 Males

10% Sample [10 people]

Stratified Quota Sampling: The basic principles of this type of sampling are the *same* as for **stratified random sampling** (the division of the main sample into smaller samples on the basis of some known characteristics, such as age or gender). The main **difference**, using the previous "gender" example, is that when you select, for example, "8 females from the "female only group" these represent your "**quota**" – and once you've filled your *quota* for each group no further males or females can be selected for the sample. If this sounds a little unclear then an unlikely – but possible – scenario might be that when selecting the above sample the first 8 females and 2 males the researcher asks to be part of their sample agree to this request. This means that the remaining 72 females and 18 males who *weren't asked* could *never* have been chosen. In other words, an important

Once the Quota for a category has been filled no more people can be included in the sample for that category.

difference between *stratified random* and *stratified quota* sampling is that the latter is *not truly random* in its sample selection (although it's arguably "random enough" for most sampling purposes) because *not everyone* in the target population has an *equal chance* of being selected.

Opportunity ("Snowball") **Sampling**: We looked earlier at the idea of *non-representative sampling* and mentioned briefly the idea of opportunity (or snowball) sampling. As we noted, it's not always possible for a researcher to get hold of a *sampling frame* for a target population and they may know nothing about the characteristics of their target population (which rules out stratified sampling). Therefore, the researcher may need to resort to *unrepresentative* means to construct a sample. This technique is not ideal but it may represent the only way a researcher can construct a research sample. As we've seen with the **Wallis** (1977) example "secretive" organisations that refuse to disclose details of their membership to "outsiders" would make it impossible to construct a representative sample. On the other hand, **Charlton et al** (2001) in their study of "mobile telephone ownership and usage among 10- and 11-year-olds" simply used an *opportunity sample* of schoolchildren in the absence of any available sampling frame.

Cluster Sampling: This is usually done when a target population is spread over a wide geographic area. For example, an opinion poll on voting behaviour may involve a sample of 1000 people representing the 35 (or so) million people eligible to vote in a General Election in the UK. If a simple random sample were taken the researcher might have to question 10 people in Newcastle, 15 in Cardiff and so forth – something that would be a *time-consuming,* hugely *expensive* and *organisationally difficult* process to manage (and the

results from the poll would probably be out-of-date before it could be finished). To avoid these problems, a researcher uses **cluster samples** that firstly, divide the country into smaller *sampling units* (in this example, electoral constituencies) and then into small units within constituencies (for example, local boroughs).

Individual local boroughs could then be selected which, based on past research, show a **representative cross-section** of voters and a sample of electors could then be taken from a relatively small number of boroughs across the country. Thus, *sampling units* (electoral constituencies) have the same basic characteristics (population size, for example), but each *cluster* is a small scale version of the target population.

Types of Sampling: Explanations

The first thing we can note, when thinking about both the **advantages** and **disadvantages** of different types of sampling, is to follow **Lindauer** (2005) in suggesting that one significant *evaluative* aspect of sampling is:

External validity – the question of whether or not the people who are actually questioned, observed or experimented on "accurately represent an overall population to which the findings are generalized" (something normally achieved through random / representative sampling). The importance of this type of validity to different sociologists using different research methodologies does, as we've previously suggested, differ in terms of the overall methodological aims of a piece of research. **Positivist** methodology, for example, is more-likely to stress the importance of external validity than **Interpretivist** methodology.

We can identify further evaluative aspects of different types of sampling by noting a selection of their general **advantages** and **disadvantages**.

Simple Random and **Systematic Sampling** have certain **advantages** for the researcher:

Time: Both are relatively quick and easy ways of selecting samples.

Random: They produce random or near-random samples based on chance (the sample cannot be accidentally biased by the researcher).

Expense: Both are reasonably inexpensive to create using a sampling frame accurate for the target population.

Information: Other than some way of identifying people in the target population (a name for example), the researcher doesn't require any other knowledge about this population.

However, a couple of **disadvantages** here might be:

Sampling Frame: These techniques *always* need a sampling frame - and one may not be available.

Unrepresentative: Sampling based on chance may not produce a representative sample.

Stratified Random and **Stratified Quota sampling** have a number of important **advantages**:

Representativeness: Known differences in the target population will be accurately reflected in the sample and we can, therefore, be reasonably sure our sample will be broadly representative.

Generalisation: Where representativeness is assured it is possible to generalise from the sample to the target population, even in instances when the sample is relatively small in relation to the target population. Most commercial opinion polling organisations (such as Gallup or Mori), for example, sample the political views of around 1,000 people to produce a broadly representative (and accurate) picture of voting behaviour in Britain.

Focus: The researcher can focus their sample on relevant distinctions in the target population (age, gender, class, ethnicity, etc.) and ignore irrelevant factors.

Size: Stratified samples can be relatively small, since it's possible to make certain we have accurately reflected our target population. In this respect **Nguyen** (2005) has argued that it is "the *absolute sample size* that matters the most in determining the accuracy of the findings…not the size of the sample in relation to its population". In other words a very small sample (relative to a target population) can still be representative as long as it confirms to certain minimum criteria for its absolute size (which, when you think about it, makes sense – a "sample of one person", for example, is unlikely to be representative of anything other than that person).

Resources: *Quota* samples are usually relatively cheap and quick to construct accurately.

Sampling Frame: Although a sampling frame is always useful it's not strictly necessary for something like *stratified quota sampling*. In some instances it's enough just to know the characteristics - and their associated quotas – of respondents in order to construct a sample.

They can, however, have **disadvantages**:

Accurate information about the target population isn't always available and if a researcher don't have this information then any sample constructed will be unrepresentative.

Out-of-date information: Even in situations where accurate information is available this information may be out of date by the time the research is actually done. This is especially true where the sample is large and complex or where the composition of the target population may change rapidly - age-groups in a large general population, for example, will probably change on a daily basis.

Uncertainty: When using a team of researchers to construct a *quota sample* you can't be certain they have correctly placed everyone in the right quota category. If, for example, your research assistant cannot find "100 men over the age of 65" to fill their quota, there may be a temptation to fill it using men under that age. This affects not just representativeness – it may also affect the *reliability* and *validity* of the research.

Unrepresentative: *Stratified quota sample* selection is *not* truly random and for this reason there is a chance it may not be representative.

Opportunity Sampling has couple of distinct **advantages**:

Availability: It allows a researcher to construct a sample in situations that would be impossible using any other sampling technique.

Resources: It can be a relatively cheap and quick method of sampling (although this will depend on both the size of the sample and the speed at which it's possible for the researcher to contact suggested respondents).

It also has some serious **disadvantages**:

Unrepresentative: It is very, very, unlikely the sample will be representative.

Reliability: There is no way of checking whether or not your sample is representative.

Resources: It can be a relatively expensive and time-consuming sampling method (if the sample is large, widely dispersed across a large area and respondents are reluctant or unable to suggest further potential respondents).

A **self-selected sample** (see below – sampling errors) is a distinct possibility.

Cluster Sampling: Although not very widely used in sociological research, some **advantages** are:

Resources: This type of sample saves the researcher time and money because relatively small samples can represent very large target populations.

Replication: Once a valid sample has been established, the researcher can use the same (or very similar) sample *repeatedly* (as with political opinion polling, for example).

There are, however, important **disadvantages**:

Representativeness: Unless great care is taken, the cluster samples will be unrepresentative of the target population.

Resources: Although it is a relatively cheap form of sampling, this is not necessarily the case. A sample that seeks to represent the whole of Britain, for example, is still going to be too expensive for many researchers.

Sampling Errors

Although sampling is generally a risky business (getting a representative sample is not always as easy as it sounds), we can identify a couple of basic sampling errors that can produce samples which are unrepresentative of a target population:

Self-Selected samples involve creating a sample that effectively "picks itself" rather than being selected by the researcher. For example, the type of *opinion polls* that appear in newspapers and magazines almost invariably involve a self-selected - and hence *unrepresentative* - sample. *Reasons* for this lack of representativeness are not hard to find:

• Only a minority of the population buy the newspaper on the day the poll appears and such people have, unwittingly, selected themselves for the sample.

• An unknown number of readers will not notice the poll (and so don't vote in it). Those who notice the question, therefore, have again potentially selected themselves for the sample.

• Only a proportion of readers will respond to the question. This proportion is made even smaller if the *respondent* has to pay to vote (by calling at their own expense a telephone number set-up to record their vote, for example).

• People who do respond to such polls are likely to be those who have very *strong views* either way on the question - and these are unlikely to be representative of the population of Britain.

A classic *example* of a self-selected sample is "**The Hite Report**" (**Hite**, 1976), an investigation into male and female sexuality in America; although it claimed to uncover a range of *interesting* sexualities and practices "representative of the population of America" the sample used was **self-selected** (people simply responded to advertisements asking them to talk openly about their sexual behaviour to researchers). In this particular context, therefore, the responses of a small number of *unrepresentative* people who wanted the world to know about their sexual behaviour came to (erroneously) represent, in the eyes of the media when the research was published, general public behaviour in America.

Statistically Inadequate Samples: At the start of this section we suggested the question of *sample size* is not as important as that of how *representative* it is. This is true up to a point, but a sample that is *too small* to accurately represent a target population is going to be inadequate for research purposes (asking your mate what they think about the education system is probably not going to be an adequate sample). As a general rule, therefore, the *larger* your sample as a *proportion* of your target population the greater the *probability* it will be statistically adequate. This may improve the chances of your sample being representative of the target population; however, a large sample is no guarantee of a representative sample.

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by the term "snowball sample" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest **two** social factors that could be used in the creation of a stratified sample, *apart from* gender (4 marks).

(c) Suggest **two** reasons why sociologists might use non-random sampling (4 marks).

(d) Examine the strengths and limitations of any type of sampling technique with which you are familiar (20 marks).

Quantitative and Qualitative: Observations

At the start of this Chapter we outlined the concepts of quantitative and qualitative data and we can revisit these concepts to both develop and firm-up our understanding of them. In this respect, therefore, a further area of choice open to the researcher surrounds the methods they will use to actually collect data and this choice, as with so many others, is influenced partly by research methodology (in terms of the broad characterisation we've used throughout this Chapter, a decision between those methods that reflect either a **Positivist** or **Interpretivist** research methodology) and partly by the nature of the research being undertaken; some methods, for example, are better suited to the collection of large-scale quantitative data while others are more suited to the collection of small-scale qualitative data. To complete this Section, therefore, we can initially look at a broad range of **strengths** and **limitations** associated with these methods:

Quantitative Strengths

The ability to quantify relationships in the social world has a number of distinct advantages for sociological researchers and the **strengths** of quantitative methods can be found in areas like:

Comparisons: Statistical data can be **standardised** (the same questions, for example, given to different groups) which allows for comparisons over both **time** (the same society at different points in its development) and **space** (across different societies or cultures). **Longitudinal studies** (where, for example, the same group of respondents may be questioned at different times) are able to exploit this feature of quantitative data to identify and track *social changes*. In this respect **Kruger** (2003) argues that one strength of quantitative methods and data is that they "allow us to summarize vast sources of information and facilitate comparisons across categories and over time".

Convenience: Where social behaviour can be expressed statistically (as in, for example, the numbers of pupils each year who achieve national Key Stage

educational targets) potentially complex forms of behaviour can be simplified and easily analysed.

Reliability: The ability to standardise the collection of quantitative data makes it easier to *replicate* which, in turn, potentially increases its reliability. In addition, a further contribution to the high levels of reliability achieved through quantitative methods is that the meaning of the data is not as open to the **subjective interpretation** of the researcher (as tends to be the case with **qualitative** methods and data). By removing this "layer of interpretation" the researcher effectively distances themselves from any subjective involvement in the production of such data. The data gained from a structured interview, for example, is produced *independently* of the involvement of the researcher (they simply ask standard questions and note the answers), thereby removing a possible source of researcher bias (the latter doesn't have to make decisions about whether the data is significant, insignificant and so forth). **Matveev** (2002) notes that the ability to *control the conditions* under which data is collected (through standardised questionnaires, experiments and the like) also makes quantitative methods more reliable.

Objectivity: Two general advantages are evident here. Firstly, the researcher has no direct, necessary and personal involvement with the generation of data – an idea that can be exampled using the different ways quantitative and qualitative researchers use observation as a research method. For the former data collection might involve a simple counting of something (such as the number of pupils who pass GCSE Maths and English each year) whereas for the latter data collection may involve actually participating in the behaviour from which the data is being generated (as someone participating in the behaviour they are observing – openly or otherwise - in a classroom, for example).

Secondly, the distance maintained between "the researcher and the data" makes it less-likely (but not, of course, impossible) for *personal biases* to intrude into the collection of data – what **Kealey and Protheroe** (1996) refer to as the ability to "…eliminate or minimize subjective judgments".

Dawn was not one to get emotionally involved. She only ever allowed herself to collect and analyse quantitative data.
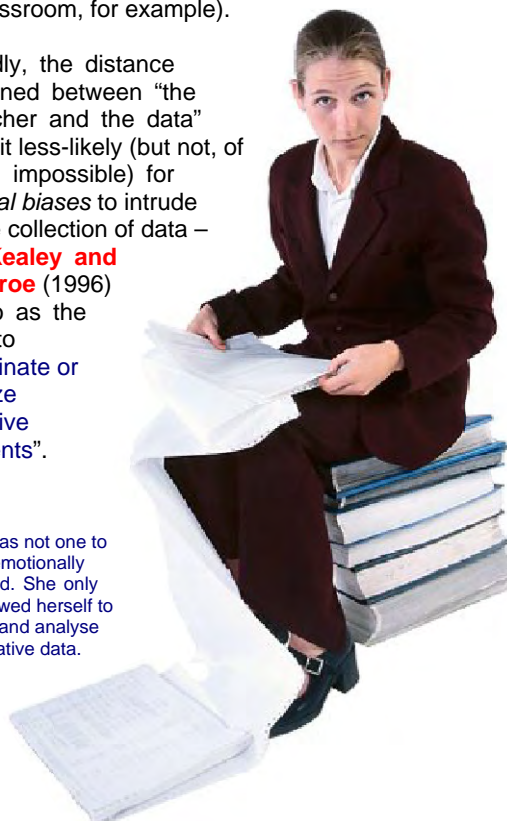
Generalisations: Statistical data can be generated from large numbers of respondents (who may be spread across diverse geographic regions) and this, combined with high levels of **reliability**, **standardised** data collection and the relative **absence of subjective interpretation** makes it far easier to reliably generalise the results from a sample to a target population.

Testing: Where the researcher is interested in testing a specific **hypothesis**, quantitative data has two major advantages. Firstly it allows for relatively simple "True / False" distinctions to be made on the basis of *statistical comparisons* (the hypothesis, for example, will be *either* confirmed *or* falsified) - something that's much harder to achieve with qualitative methods since, almost by definition, the data generated isn't conducive to making these kinds of distinctions. Secondly this attribute of quantitative data makes it easier to structure research in a way that sets objectives (such as testing a particular hypothesis) and provides a clear route to the completion of the research. Qualitative data, by its very nature, makes it more difficult to set clear limitations to a piece of research (participant observation, for example, can be open-ended research that lasts for months or even years).

> **And Limitations...**

Although quantitative research methods have, as we've just suggested, a number of significant strengths this isn't to say they don't have a range of **limitations**:

Control: Although the ability to quantify social behaviour can be a significant plus-factor for a researcher this situation is frequently achieved by placing the respondent in an "artificial social setting". In other words realism is sacrificed for control. In their everyday lives, for example, people rarely – if ever - encounter situations in which they are asked to respond to a set of questions asked by a researcher; similarly, people are rarely placed in a laboratory-setting while their behaviour is observed (secretly or otherwise). The main question here, therefore, is that of the extent to which a researcher can capture people's "normal behaviour" or "real opinions" when they place respondents in a situation that is neither "normal" nor "real".

Validity: The collection of quantitative data raises a couple of validity questions ("does the research actually measure what it claims to measure"). Firstly, as we've just noted, can valid data be collected by placing people in situations that are generally a long way outside their normal behaviour? Secondly, a major criticism of quantitative methods is that they only capture a relatively narrow range of data - what **Day** (1998) has called the "Who, What, When and Where" of people's behaviour – and while these may be important, interesting and informative questions quantitative methods are relatively poor at capturing the *reasons* for such behaviour. This idea is related to the problem of:

Depth: Quantitative methods are not well-suited to providing large amounts of depth and detail, precisely

because the more detailed the data about people's behaviour
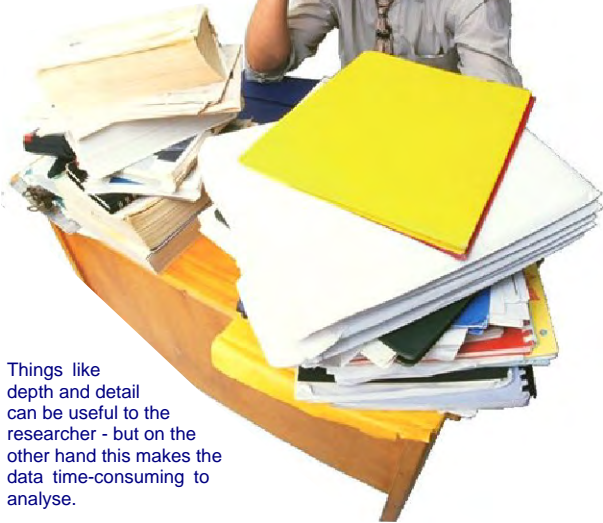
Things like depth and detail can be useful to the researcher - but on the other hand this makes the data time-consuming to analyse.

the more difficult it is to meaningfully quantify. In this respect, therefore, one criticism of quantitative methods is that they focus on relatively **superficial** aspects of behaviour (the "What, When and Where?) while failing to address the complexities involved in even very simple forms of behaviour.

Pre-Judgments: **McCullough** (1988) argues that a significant methodological limitation of quantitative methods is the fact that "…issues are only measured if they are known prior to the beginning of the survey (and, therefore, have been incorporated into the questionnaire)". In other words, in order to quantify behaviour the researcher must decide, in advance of their research, what is and what is not significant in the context of the behaviour being studied. There is, unlike with qualitative methods, little or no scope to develop the research outside of the original parameters decided by the researcher.

Meaning: The general lack of depth and detail leads to a further limitation – one noted by **Kruger** (2003) when he suggests that it is '…difficult to get the real meaning of an issue by looking at numbers'. Although quantitative methods *can* explore questions of meaning (asking people *why* they commit crimes or *why* they truant from school, for example) a general problem here is that these methods are not, by their very nature, very successful at producing data that has depth and detail (and consequently can't easily get at the "richness of meaning" that lies behind even some of the simplest forms of social behaviour).

Reliability: Although, as a general principle, quantitative data is usually considered both "highly reliable" and "more reliable" than qualitative data, this is not necessarily the case (reliability is *not* an *automatic* quality of any one particular research method). As **Harvey** (2002) argues "Many apparently quantitative data depend critically on the way in which they were collected, who collected them, where they were collected, when they were collected and from whom they were collected".

Finally we can note a concept used by **Sorokin** (1956) to describe not so much a weakness of quantitative methods, *per se*, but rather a weakness of those researchers who attempt to reduce all aspects of human behaviour to quantifiable characteristics:

Quantophrenia refers to what **Sorokin** (partly tongue-in-cheek) terms a "psychological compulsion to grasp for the numeric" – a "condition" that leads to the use of quantification for its own sake, regardless of whether or not it tells us anything useful or interesting about the behaviour being quantified. As **Eberstadt** (2006) puts it, the "victims" of this condition "obsess over numbers as descriptors, no matter how dubious their basis or questionable their provenance".

Quantophrenic?
Moi?

Qualitative Strengths

As might be expected, many of the limitations of quantitative research methods we've just outlined are reflected in the **strengths** of qualitative methods – something we can firm-up in terms of the following ideas:

Depth: Qualitative methods provide greater depth and detail about the behaviour being studied since, as **Day** (1998) suggests, they are concerned with discovering "the Why?" about (or *reasons* behind) such behaviour; in other words, because qualitative methods are designed to draw-out the complex reasons for social behaviour it follows they are likely to involve digging more deeply into people's beliefs and behaviours.
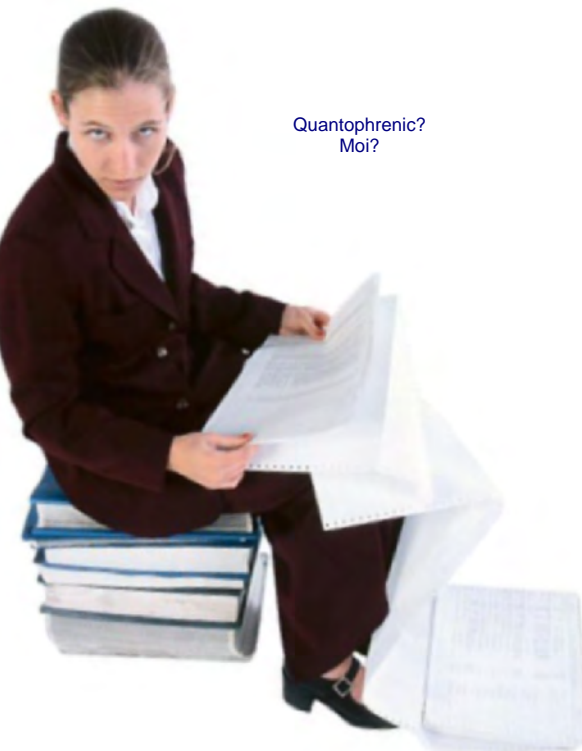
Pre-judgements: Qualitative methods avoid, to some extent, the problem of the researcher pre-judging what is and what is not significant data prior to starting their research. In other words, the research objective is not necessarily to test a particular hypothesis but rather to describe or draw-out people's opinions and reasons for their behaviour – the *respondent*, rather than the *researcher*, is effectively the driving-force behind the research.

Flexibility: When people are encouraged to talk about their behaviour (or

Studying people in their everyday environment has its advantages.

even go about their daily lives without knowing they are the subject of a research study) the researcher is unable to tightly-control the research process. Respondents may, for example, start to talk about things they see as significant and take the research into directions and places the researcher had not originally thought about when the research was being planned. This, in part, can be further related to:

Relationships: Many qualitative methods (such as *covert participant observation*) demand that the researcher establish some sort of *rapport* with the people being researched (which doesn't mean they have to like them, only that they understand the situation of those being studied). This has a couple of specific *advantages*: firstly it means that everyone involved in the research is free to suggest new ideas and directions – the role of the researched isn't limited to answering closed questions. Secondly, where the atmosphere is more-relaxed and less clinical the researcher is more likely to get respondents to open-up about their thoughts and feelings – something that may improve the validity of the research.

Validity: Qualitative methods do not have a monopoly on validity (and nor is it simply the case that quantitative methods "lack" or necessarily have lower validity – any poorly-designed piece of research can lack validity regardless of the methods used) but when we're dealing with the complexities of human behaviour it is much *more likely* that research methods that try to dig into this complexity will score highly in terms of their validity – they will, in other words, measure what they claim to measure.

Naturalism: An important aspect of the "claim to greater validity" is that qualitative methods are better-positioned to capture a wider range of data in a way that doesn't necessarily take respondents out of the social locations in which they live; in other words, qualitative methods allow researchers greater freedom to study people in their "everyday" or "normal" settings – and it follows form this that there is a greater chance

of either observing or revealing what people "really believe" or how they "really behave". If this is a little unclear think about the difference between *asking* people to remember and describe something like "what they did yesterday" with the ability to follow and observe them to discover exactly what they did. **Matveev** (2002) suggests, in this respect, that qualitative methods allow the researcher to gain a "more realistic feel of the world that cannot be experienced in the numerical data and statistical analysis used in quantitative research".

The Bigger Picture: Continuing the general theme of depth, detail and validity, qualitative research frequently takes what **Matveev** (2002) calls an "**holistic approach**" to research. That is, it tries to examine the "bigger picture" by allowing respondents to talk extensively about their lives (**focused** and **unstructured interviews**) or by participating in the behaviour being studied (overt and covert **participant observation**). Unlike quantitative methods where individual respondents have little or no scope to deviate from the research path determined by the researcher the reverse is potentially true – respondents lead researchers.

And Limitations...

Qualitative methods have certain **limitations**, a sample of which we can note in the following terms:

Generalisations: Qualitative research generally focuses on the intensive study of relatively small groups and, in consequence, opportunities to generalise research findings are limited.

Comparisons: For similar reasons it's difficult to compare qualitative research across **time** and **space**; qualitative research also tends to be less systematic in terms of the way data is collected (it's not simply a matter of asking direct questions) and is structured in ways that make the research difficult to replicate – something that impacts on:

Reliability: Qualitative research methods generally produce data with lower levels of reliability than their quantitative counterparts, for a range of possible reasons; **Cassell and Symon** (1994) for example, suggest that where research evolves to take account of the input made by different respondents the original research objectives may change, making it difficult for subsequent researchers to replicate. In addition, where qualitative methods produce a potentially vast amount of data across a wide range of disparate issues the researcher, as the initial interpreter of such data, has a pivotal role to play in determining the meaning of such data – and where it's perfectly possible for different researchers to arrive at different conclusions based on the same (or broadly similar) data reliability will necessarily suffer.

Levy (2006), on the other hand, suggests that *reliability* evidenced through the ability to *replicate* research – something that is perfectly practical and possible using quantitative methods – is *not* a useful test for qualitative

research methods. Rather, she notes, the concept of **trustworthiness** might be a more useful measure of the *internal reliability* of qualitative methods: "In qualitative research, as there are no numerical measures…it is up to the qualitative researcher to provide evidence of reliability by carefully documenting the data collection and analysis process, hence the term "trustworthiness" is used to assess how reliable the results are…can we trust that the results are a 'true' reflection of our subject?".

Skills: Qualitative methods require different personal and interpersonal skills from the researcher (as compared with the skills required for quantitative methods). Interview techniques between the two types, for example, are markedly different and reflect the different emphasis placed on objectivity and subjectivity; the qualitative researcher, for example, may seek to establish a close **rapport** with their respondents while for their quantitative counterparts this is neither necessary nor desirable (since it would lower the objectivity of the research). In something like participant observation the researcher needs to be able to convincingly and consistently "play a role" within the group they are studying – and this requires a very different set of skills to those needed to deliver a questionnaire or structured interview.

Quantitative and Qualitative: Explanations

Quantitative and qualitative research methods are, as we've seen, many and varied and the latter, in particular, have clear and significant differences that make lumping them together as "one type" a little dubious (covert participant observation, for example, doesn't have a great deal in common with a focused interview aside from the fact that both deliver varying amounts of qualitative data). Be that as it may, for our current purpose we can focus on the *broad distinction* between the two data types and briefly outline the way decisions about whether or not to collect each type of data are influenced by a number of practical and theoretical factors.

> **Module Link**   **Research Methods**
>
> The significance of **practical and theoretical research considerations i**s discussed in more detail in the final Section of this Chapter.

Methodology: Perhaps one of the most significant influences on the decision to use quantitative or qualitative research methods is the *methodological beliefs* of the researcher:

• **Positivist** research methodologies, for example, lean towards collecting *quantitative* data, for all the reasons we've previously outlined – not the least being the fundamental belief in and desire for *objectivity (*as **Firestone** (1987) puts it, the assumption here is that "there are social facts with an objective reality apart from the beliefs of individuals"); where such significance is placed on objectivity it's not too surprising that Positivist researchers should chose methods that offer higher levels of objectivity and reliability.

• **Interpretivist r**esearch methodologies on the other hand lean towards collecting *qualitative* data for different – but related – reasons. In a situation where, as **Firestone** (1987) notes "reality is socially-constructed through individual or collective definitions of the situation" it follows that the researcher is likely to use methods that allow them to capture as much as possible of this *fluid, subjective*, situation. In other words, if "social reality" is something constructed by people trying to define and make sense of their social situations – and such a sense of "reality" will differ from individual to individual and group to group (what I define in one way may be defined as something quite different by you) - it follows that the researcher needs to employ (qualitative) research methods that offer greater opportunities to capture this "subjective sense of social reality".

Two ideas are closely related to the above:

1. Objectivity: Where this is important to the researcher they are likely to opt for research methods that reflect this belief. As **Firestone** puts it: "In quantitative research, the emphasis is on collecting data that lead to dependable answers to important questions, reported in sufficient detail that it has meaning to the reader".

2. Subjectivity: Where the reverse is true (the researcher fundamentally believes that what is important is to capture how people make sense of the social world and their situation in that world) then *qualitative methods* are more-likely to be used since, as **Firestone** suggests, the main objective is to "help the reader understand" how people *see* their world and situation. **Reason and Rowan** (1981), in advocating a subjective, qualitative, approach summarise their position in the following terms: "There is too much measurement going on. Some things which are numerically precise are not true; and some things which are not numerical are true. Orthodox research produces results which are statistically significant but humanly insignificant; in human inquiry it is much better to be deeply interesting than accurately boring."

On a more *practical* level we can note that decisions about which research method to use are influenced by things like:

Purpose: The aim of the research (what the researcher hopes to achieve by doing a piece of research) is

Too many numbers?
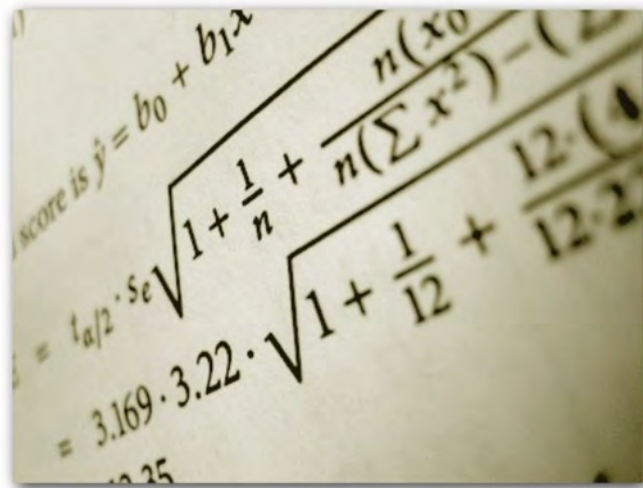
clearly going to influence *how* they go about such research in terms of the research methods used. If, for example, the general aim is to test a particular hypothesis then it's likely quantitative methods will be used; if, on the other hand, the objective is to allow people to "tell their story" then qualitative methods are likely to fit the bill here.

Scale: Some quantitative methods (such as questionnaires) are better suited to large-scale surveys where the aim might, for example, simply be to establish how many people do something (such as commit crimes). On the other hand qualitative methods, such as focused interviews, might prove more useful and productive if the research objective is to create a detailed insight into a relatively small-scale form of social behaviour (such as relationships within a school classroom or why particular people commit crimes).

Anonymity: In situations where the respondent wishes or needs to remain anonymous quantitative methods (such as postal questionnaires) that can be completed in the absence of the researcher may be the only way to collect data.

Access: Finally, in the reverse of the above, there may be situations in which the researcher (for whatever reason) wants or needs to ensure that those being researched are unaware of this fact; in such situations something like covert participant observation is a research option in a way that a questionnaire is not…

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by the term "qualitative data" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest **two** reasons for the sociological use of qualitative research methods (4 marks).

(c) Identify and explain two reasons why sociologists might not want to use qualitative research methods (4 marks).

(d) Examine the strengths and limitations of either quantitative or qualitative sources of data (20 marks).

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5. The theoretical, practical and ethical considerations influencing choice of topic, choice of method(s) and the conduct of research.

Research Considerations: Introduction

Whatever your personal perspective on the prospect of "doing sociological research", it involves something more than simply choosing a topic, selecting a research method and wading into your chosen hypothesis or research question. Sociological research – whether it's a large-scale, government-funded, project lasting many years or a small-scale, personally-funded, piece of sociology coursework – is always surrounded by a range of research considerations. To complete this chapter, therefore, we can examine some of the *practical*, *theoretical* and *ethical* factors that a researcher needs to be aware of when undertaking sociological research.

Practical: Observations

Sociological research involves confronting and resolving a range of *practical factors* (the "nuts-and-bolts" of "doing research", as it were) relating to *choice of topic* and *research method*.

Choice of Topic

Decisions about what to study can be influenced by a range of *personal* and *impersonal* factors. These include:

The Interests of the Researcher: Sociologists, like anyone else, have their interests, concerns and specialisms and these potentially affect their choice of research topic. The **Glasgow Media Group** (1982, 1985), for example, have specialised (for around 25 years) in the study of bias in the media. Similarly, **Townsend** (1979) had an abiding interest in the study of poverty.

Current Debates and **Intellectual Fashions**: Surprising as it may seem, research topics go in and out of fashion and sociologists – being fashionable people with their fingers on the pulse of what's hot and what's not – reflect these trends (although factors like research *funding* (see below) always exert some form of influence here).

The 1960s, for example, produced a range of research into the possible changes in the *class structure*, the most notable of which was probably **Goldthorpe and Lockwood et al's** (1968) research based around the concept of "affluent workers"; this tested the then-fashionable "*Embourgeoisement Thesis*" (advanced by **Zweig** (1959), among others), the basis of which was the argument that most people in Great Britain had become "middle class". More recently *Media sociology* has come into fashion (although, by the time you read this it will probably be considered "last year's thing"), but areas like the s*ociology of food* - see, for example, **Germov and Williams** (2004) or **Beardsworth and Keil** (1996) - and *Identity* (see, for example, **du Gay et al**, 2000) have also attracted a lot of recent sociological interest.

Some sociologists, however, either just ignore the fashions (hard to believe I know) or simply just decide to "do their own thing" and blaze a trail for their own particular interests - see, if you dare, **Southerton et al's** (1998) tremendously exciting: "Research note on Recreational Caravanning".

Funding: Research (especially large-scale research over a lengthy period) costs money and those who commission and pay for it, not unreasonably, usually want some say over choice of topic. In addition, in the UK and USA, where government agencies or departments fund large amounts of social research, the historical trend has been to fund research designed primarily to help policymakers make decisions - so if your research doesn't aid this process then it's probably less likely to be funded by the government.

Time can affect choice of topic in terms of such things as the depth and scope of the research. For example, although a researcher may be interested in studying the behaviour of football supporters at major International tournaments (if anyone's willing to provide the funds, I could probably find the time), money and time considerations may restrict them to studying such behaviour on a much smaller scale.

Access and **Co-operation**: To research a topic, you need access to people and (usually) their co-operation (things closely related to *ethical considerations* – see below). This is one reason why a lot of sociological research has focused on the activities of the *powerless* (who lack the ability to resist) rather than the *powerful* (who most certainly can - and do – resist being studied).

Unless they want to be studied getting access to the rich and the powerful is far harder than getting access to the poor and the powerless.

Choice of Method

In a similar way to choice of topic, choice of research method is affected by a number of factors. These include:

Time: Some methods are more *time-intensive* than others. Participant observation, for example, may involve years of research - **Whyte** (1943) spent around four years on his study of a gang in America. Between 1937 and 1940 he gathered extensive information about the behaviour of one gang in a small area of the country (Boston, in case you were thinking of going there).

Topic: Some topics (or aspects of them) lend themselves more easily to one type of method than another. In general, quantitative methods tend to be used when the researcher wants reliable data to establish statistical relationships (such as **Kessler's** (2000) endlessly-fascinating study of the relationship between sponsorship and small business performance, in which his main objective was to establish whether or not "those who are sponsored are more successful than non-sponsored individuals" - heady and possibly ground-breaking stuff). Alternatively, with studies such as **Diken and Laustsen's** (2004) analysis of tourist behaviour in Ibiza and Faliraki a qualitative approach

is more appropriate, given the descriptive nature of the research.

A mix of methods (*triangulation*) is frequently used to satisfy different types of research question within the same topic . For example, a researcher interested in understanding the possible "Effects of marriage break-up" or "Why people fear crime", will probably use a method that provides in-depth, qualitative data (such as a focused interview). However, before doing any interview-based research the researcher might need to do a small *establishing study* (so-called because it's used to establish some basic information - to identify, for example, people who have experienced divorce or to establish if people actually fear crime) using a simple (quantitative) questionnaire.

Module Link　　　　**Theory and Methods**

The concept of triangulation is developed in more detail in the A2 Section "**The Relationship Between Theory and Methods**".

Youth moves on as Faliraki fades

Source: **BBC News 24**: 10th May 2004:http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/3700153.stm

Drunken exploits in Faliraki hit the headlines last summer

The sun could be setting for Faliraki as a hotbed of loutish holiday action, after travel companies targeting the youth market began making an exit.

"There was a short term car-crash mentality in Faliraki. People went out, hated it and said it was much too much - even 18-year-olds who wanted to drink lots of shots had standards".

Drunken exploits in Faliraki hit the headlines in the summer of 2003.

Funding: In a perfect world money would always be available for social research into any topic, using any method (such as my aforementioned offer to study behaviour at International football matches – it still stands, by the way, if anyone's interested) - but it's not a perfect world (which probably explains why the offers haven't exactly been rolling in) and the amount of money you have to spend will directly influence the methods used; questionnaires are generally cheaper than in-depth interviews, interviews are generally cheaper than participant observation (although this general rule will, of course, depended on the size and scope of the interview-based study). The amount of funding available will also influence the size of any research team.

Who (or what) you're studying**:** The size and composition of the group being studied may be a factor in choice of method(s). Social surveys and questionnaires lend themselves easily to the study of large, widely-dispersed, groups. Participant observation, on the other hand, may be more appropriate for the study of small, geographically-localised, groups.

Practical: Explanations

Practical problems and issues, of the kind we've just identified, are clearly important in terms of the way we conduct sociological research. If we can't , for example, solve "big" practical problems relating to things like **access** to research subjects – to administer questionnaires, organise interviews and experiments or participate in the behaviour of a group – then all other considerations (both *theoretical* and *ethical*) are largely immaterial. Similarly if a researcher has neither the **time** nor **funding** to support themselves through a year-long observational study then, once again, this research avenue is closed. On a smaller scale (once the researcher is actually involved in a piece of research), practical considerations – such as the **safety** of respondents – are also important in terms of the conduct of a particular piece of research (things that start to link into the type of *ethical research considerations* identified below).

Although it's tempting to simply see such practical research considerations in terms of the "nuts-and-bolts" of doing research there are wider ramifications here to consider – ones that link, as luck would have it, into *theoretical research considerations*. Although the two – practical and theoretical – can be separated for the sake of explanatory convenience it's evident that in the context of any real-world research the two are inextricably linked.

Methodology

We can relate practical research considerations to sociological methodology in a general way by suggesting that "doing research" involves something more than searching in the cupboard (or shed – I've no idea where it might be kept) for your "Sociological Toolbox™ (the one containing your collection of research methods) and then selecting the "right tool for the job". If only it was that simple…

Ackroyd and Hughes (1992) argue it is a mistake to view research methods as a set of "theoretical tools" to be picked up and discarded depending on how appropriate they are for the task at hand because, unlike tools in a toolbox, sociological methods do not have a clear, single and straightforward, purpose. For example, if we're faced with fixing a picture to a wall with a nail, we go to our toolbox and select the most appropriate tool for the job (in this instance, a hammer, since you ask). A hammer is specifically designed for just such a purpose and it performs its task well. If we'd selected a screwdriver we would probably find this tool didn't do the job as quite as efficiently (it is, after all, designed for a different task). Unfortunately, no such certainty applies to a method such as a questionnaire.

Not only do we have to consider *practical problems* in adopting particular methods, but also our *theoretical perspective* may lead us to believe questionnaires are not a valid way of studying the social world (regardless of how efficient this method might be in terms of "doing the job" of collecting data). At least two major *methodological considerations* are involved here:

Validity relates to our belief about whether a research method allows us to discover something about human behaviour 'as it really is' (whatever this may actually mean).

Theoretical considerations: When collecting data we have to decide:

• What counts as data (does it have to be quantitative or qualitative)?

• Should the data be statistical or descriptive?

• Do we try to test a hypothesis or simply report what respondents say?

These ideas, therefore, lead us inexorably (not a word you see every day) towards a consideration of theoretical research considerations.

Sociology Toolbox
Keep Out

Theoretical: Observations

Sociological research involves confronting and resolving a range of theoretical questions - which we can express as the *How*? and the *Why*? of *choice of topic* and *research method*.

Choice of Topic

This involves a range of theoretical considerations:

Audiences may influence (and in some cases actually dictate) topic choice in terms of who you're trying to reach with your research. To an *academic audience*, something like **Jessop's** "Governance and meta-governance. On Reflexivity, Requisite Variety, and Requisite Irony" (2003) is a perfectly acceptable topic; to a *non-academic audience*, however, it probably wouldn't prove quite so alluring or indeed accessible (even if we allow for the requisite irony of this statement). We can also note that there are practical dimensions to the idea of having to play to an audience; as we've suggested, those who commission and pay for research will have a large say in the choice of topic and method as well as the overall conduct of the research.

Purpose can be influential in terms of what the researcher is aiming to do – if testing a hypothesis, for example, the topic is likely to be much narrower in scope than if the objective is to provide a descriptive account of something. This idea is included as a theoretical consideration (although it has a practical dimension) because the researcher has a clear choice to make - albeit one influenced by their methodological beliefs and perspectives - about what to study and, indeed, how they study it (an observation that links back to **Ackroyd and Hughes** (1992) argument).

Focus: Research often evolves, in the sense of changing to meet new interests and concerns; while it's rare for a central topic to change during the research (if you begin by researching family life, you're not likely to

end up researching education), aspects of the topic may well change. As research develops changes may be made to quantitative questions or new areas of interest may open up in the light of respondent comments or researcher observations.

Values: In the social world (as in the natural world) there are an immeasurable (not really, but it sounded better than "enormous") number of potential topics that could be studied by the sociologist - and while the choice of what to study may not be as critical in the former as in the latter (a cure for AIDS as against a more-effective missile system?) the general process is the same; what is considered "worthy of being studied" will be influenced by a range of values. These are both **personal** (if studying poverty holds no personal interest or fascination then a researcher is not likely to study it) and, most importantly for real-world research, **institutional**. Given that institutions such as universities and government departments are likely sources of research *funding* the topics *they value* are highly likely to be the ones that are actually researched.

Choice of Method

Choice of method (or methods) to be used in a piece of sociological research is similarly surrounded by theoretical considerations:

Theoretical Perspective: Although this influence is by no means as strong as *some* texts might suggest (no-names, no law-suits), **Interactionist** researchers tend to *avoid* using statistical methods, mainly because their
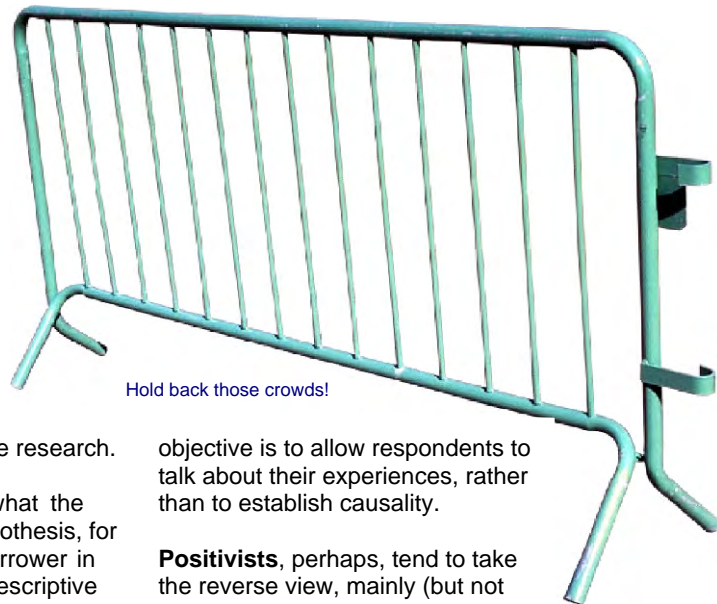
Hold back those crowds!

objective is to allow respondents to talk about their experiences, rather than to establish causality.

Positivists, perhaps, tend to take the reverse view, mainly (but not necessarily) because they're not particularly interested in descriptive accounts of people's behaviour. In this respect (and assuming, for the sake of illustration that this characterisation is valid) there is something of an association between **Interpretivist methodology** and **qualitative research methods** (in-depth interviewing, participant observation, visual methods and the like), just as there is a similar association between **Positivist methodology** and **quantitative methods** (such as questionnaires and laboratory experiments).

Reliability and **Validity** are *always* significant theoretical (or methodological) research concerns since beliefs about the reliability and / or validity of particular methods will affect decisions about whether or not to use them – and these beliefs are related to the types of sociological methodology we've just noted.

Values: Researchers have values too and these are reflected in **ethical beliefs** about how something should (or should not) be studied. If, like **Polsky** (1971) you believe covert participation is unethical and methodologically invalid you're not likely to choose this research method.

Theoretical: Explanations

If we think about the general relationship between theory and method in sociological research we can combine Positivist and Interpretivist approaches outlined in the previous section with the material covered in this section. Questions concerning the relationship between theory and methods, therefore, boil down to **four related ideas**, which we can outline and apply in the following terms:

1. Ontology: This idea poses the question "**What do we believe exists?**". In relation to Sociology, an *ontological question* is one that considers what we believe the subject matter of Sociology to be. Is it, for example:

• The attempt to find solutions to social problems?
• To answer questions such as "why are we here?"?
• To elaborate the fundamental laws of social development?
• To understand the nature of social interaction?
• Something quite different to any of the above?

The significance of *ontological questions* is that our answers will condition how we view the purpose and subject matter of Sociology, how we *conduct research* and, of course, how we see it as appropriate to study social behaviour (especially in terms of our choice of topic and method). In the example we've used here, most sociologists' ontological belief is that social behaviour is learned, not based on instinct.

2. Epistemology: The next question to ask is "**How we know what we claim to know?**" about the social world. This, in short, relates to the kinds of **proof** we will accept to justify our answer to *ontological questions*. For example, we may believe that:

• "Seeing is believing" or
• "Experiencing something is enough to prove it exists",

Alternatively, we may accept something on **trust**, or because we have **faith** (a characteristic, incidentally, of *religious proof*).

Epistemological questions, therefore, relate to the evidence we will accept to justify our belief something is *true*. For example, if I suspect you of stealing my pen,

what sort of proof will I accept in order to convince me you didn't take it?

• Your word?
• The word of someone you were with at the time of the alleged theft (an alibi)?
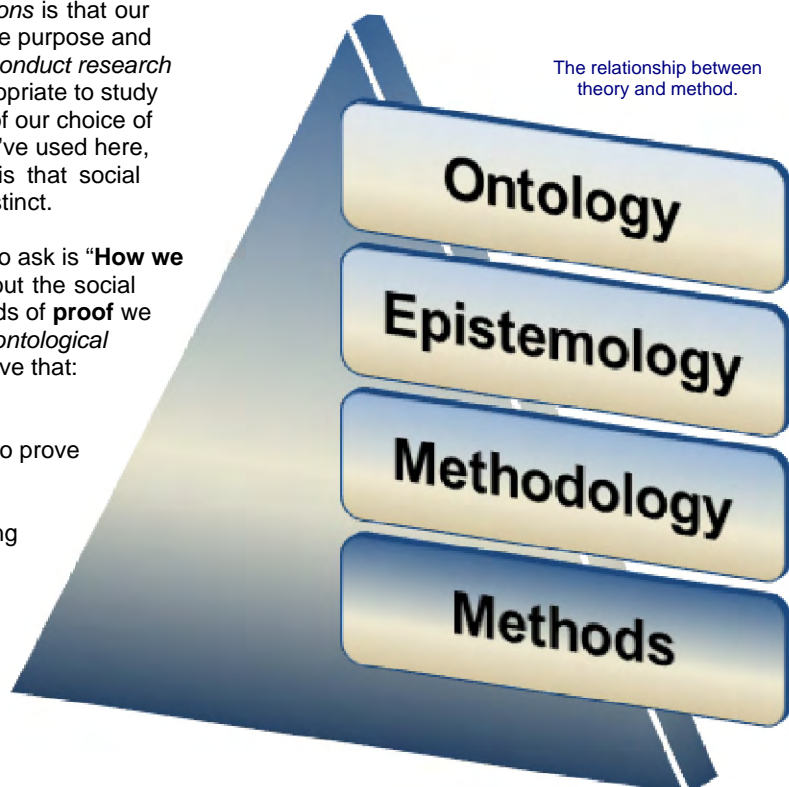• A thorough search of your belongings?

This idea is important, sociologically, because our beliefs about evidence influence our choice of research method - if you don't, for example, believe questionnaires produce valid data, you're not likely to use them in your research.

3. Methodology: This idea is concerned with beliefs about how to produce **reliable** and **valid** knowledge. We have come across this type of question before, in relation to two ideas:

• **The interview effect**: If you believe interviews are a manipulative process whereby the respondent presents a picture to you that accords with the picture they would like you to have, you are unlikely to see interview data as valid.

• **The observer effect:** If you believe a researcher's presence affects the behaviour of those being observed, you would not see overt participant observation as a valid way of collecting data.

4. Methods: This refers to specific techniques of data collection and our ideas about their appropriateness (or otherwise) to our research (ideas which will be conditioned by our *ontological, epistemological* and (deep breath) *methodological* beliefs).

The following table summarises the general relationship between sociological methodology (in this case **Positivism** and **Interpretivism**) and the four types of question we've just outlined.

The relationship between theory and method.

Dimension	Positivism	Interpretivism
Ontological Society exists...	Objectively	Subjectively
Epistemological We know it exists because…	Behaviour is patterned, relatively stable and orderly. Therefore, something about "society" must cause this to occur.	People behave in their day to day lives "as if" society exists (that is, because it is a convenient fiction).
Methodological We can validate what we know using…	Objective and highly reliable methods to collect data.	Subjective and highly valid methods to collect data.
Method The objective is	The collection and analysis of quantitative data and the testing of hypotheses to create objective (factual) knowledge.	The collection and analysis of quantitative data and descriptions of reality from those who construct it to create subjective understanding.

Tried and Tested

(a) Explain what is meant by the term "theoretical research consideration" (2 marks).

(b) Suggest **two** theoretical factors that might influence a researcher's choice of topic (4 marks).

(c) Suggest **two** theoretical factors that might influence a researcher's choice of method (4 marks)

(d) Examine the theoretical problems sociologists may find when deciding their choice of topic and method (20 marks).

Ethical: Observations

Ethics refers to the *morality* of doing something and *ethical questions* relating to sociological research involve beliefs about what a researcher should or should not do *before*, *during* and *after* their research. As a matter of course, this will also include consideration of both *legal* and *safety* issues (for the researcher, those being researched, any subsequent researchers and so forth). In this respect we can identify some general examples of ethical research considerations in terms of:

Rights and **well-being**: The researcher needs to safeguard the interests, rights and general well-being (both physical and psychological) of respondents. Examples here might be respecting respondent privacy or minimising anxiety / distress that may be caused by the research.

Research consequences: Research data can be used in many different ways (and not necessarily in terms of the way the researcher intended - through media reports of the research, for example) and participants should be aware of any possible consequences of their participation. In addition, if respondents feel they have been *mistreated* (physically or verbally, for example) or *misled*, this may have

legal consequences for the researcher and create problems for any subsequent research.

Legal considerations: In the UK the collection, storage and retrieval of data are governed by things such as the Data Protection Act, the Human Rights Act, Copyright laws and the laws of libel. In addition, if research involves criminal or deviant activities, the researcher may have to consider the ethical question of participation in such behaviour or their responsibilities to both the perpetrators and their possible victims.

Involvement: Some types of research involve methods that create high levels of involvement with those being researched. Where close personal and / or intimate relationships between the researcher and respondent(s) exist, care needs to be taken to ensure that, once the research is completed and contact diminishes, distress is not caused to potentially vulnerable people. For example, if your research involves visiting the elderly on a regular basis, it would be unethical to simply stop your visits once the research is completed.

Deborah wasn't totally convinced that Simon's level of personal involvement in his research was entirely ethical...

Power: It would be unethical to bully or blackmail (emotionally or physically) people into participating in your research. In addition - especially when researching people who are relatively *powerless* - relationships need to be based on *trust* and *personal integrity* on the part of the researcher. For example, if the researcher promises anonymity as a way of researching people involved in criminal or deviant activities, disclosing respondent identities to the authorities would be unethical.

Consent: Related to some of the previous categories, where possible, the researcher should always gain the consent of those being researched.

Safety: Care always needs to be taken to ensure the physical and psychological safety of both the researcher and the respondent.

> **Ethical: Explanations**

When we think about the conduct of sociological research its evident that, as we've outlined above, it is surrounded by a range issues that can broadly be characterised by what the **British Sociological Association** (2004) term the:

Professional Integrity of sociologists: That is, the idea that the behaviour of research sociologists is bound by a code of ethical practice that is part-and-parcel of the *professional research role*. Although, in this respect, we have, at various points in the chapter, touched on or hinted at practical, theoretical and, most importantly for our current purpose, ethical considerations in the conduct of sociological research we can complete this chapter by looking at this (sometimes neglected) area of the research process in a more structured way. To help us do this we can use a structure proposed by **Pimple** (2002) when he suggests that "…concerns about the ethics of any particular research product or project can be divided into three categories":

1. Is it true?

This "ethical question" relates to both the research process (how it is generally conducted) and, most importantly, the relationship between research findings and their implications. At its most extreme, perhaps, *unethical behaviour* in this category relates to things like the researcher deliberately *fabricating* ("making up") data or deliberately falsifying their results.

2. Is it fair?

Unethical behaviour in this category relates to the different social relationships created during the course of a research study, something we can illustrate in terms of the relationship between the researcher and:

Other researchers: This, for example, would cover things like the *ownership* of a completed piece of research (who, for example, can ethically claim to be the author of the research?). In situations, such as is currently the case in British universities, where academic employment and titles can rest on

both the *production* of research and its *status* amongst other researchers (how often it is quoted as an authoritative source in subsequent research for example) authorship can be significant in terms of career advancement. In addition, a further aspect of fairness in the conduct of research includes things like *plagiarism* – passing-off the work of others as your own.

I'd like to sing you a little song I wrote called "Stairway To Heaven".

Respondents: The relationship between the researcher and the people they research involves a range of ethical considerations in line with those examples we've just noted (the **rights** and **well-being** of respondents, the possible **consequences** of research considered specifically in terms of the subsequent impact it may have on the lives of those being researched, whether the **consent** of those being studied is required, issues of health and **safety** for all involved and so forth). Although, on the face of things, these considerations may appear "ethically straightforward" (putting the safety of respondents in danger for the purpose of research would probably not be considered ethical by the vast majority of sociological researchers), there are certain "moral grey areas" in relation to these ideas that generally come to light during research that is *covert* in nature (covert participation, for example, or certain types of experiment). We can illustrate this "ethical dilemma" in a range of ways:

Three ethical questions...
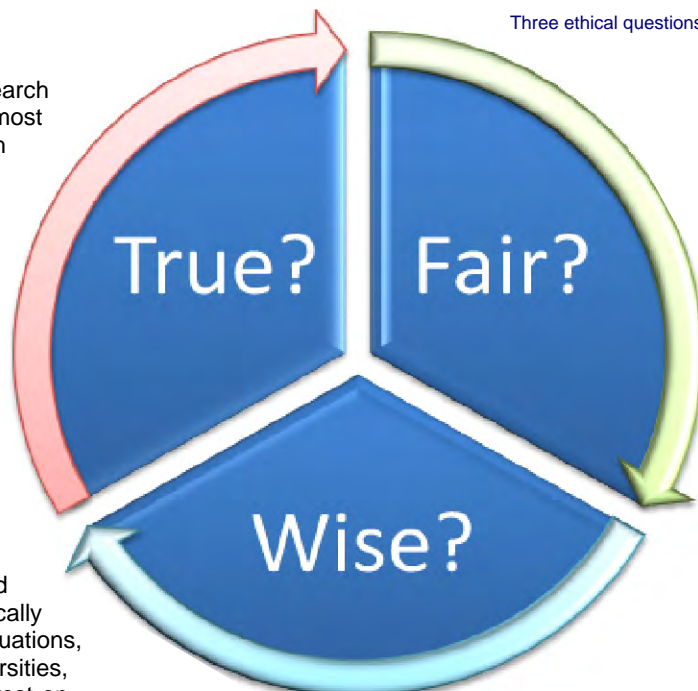
• **Wallis** (1977) wanted to study The Church of Scientology but the Church leaders refused to co-operate with his request to be given access to existing members – so he contacted ex-members instead and based his research around their opinions and experiences. The ethical question here is the extent to which a researcher is justified in studying groups who clearly do not, for whatever reason, want to be studied? In this particular instance no explicit (physical) harm was suffered by the respondents who refused to co-operate – but could the decision to carry-out the research against the Church's wishes be justified by the argument that such research is "in the public interest"?

• **Rosenhan's** (1973) research raised slightly different ethical questions about the relationship between researcher and respondents in that his (covert) research didn't involve direct contact between the two. **Rosenhan** wanted to test if doctors could accurately diagnose schizophrenia and sent students displaying fake symptoms into hospitals to test his hypothesis that they could not – and the experiment discovered that doctors were unable to expose the "pseudo (pretend) patients". The main ethical question here relates to the extent to which a researcher is justified in either deceiving the objects of their study (in this case doctors) or misrepresenting the nature of their research. The ethical question to resolve in this instance might be the extent to which such research is justified if it exposes professional practices that might be detrimental to the public.

• **Millgram's** (1974) classic study relating to the effects of authority on people's behaviour – in this instance whether or not respondents were willing to inflict (or so they thought) extreme levels of pain on innocent strangers on the say-so of an authority figure – raises a rather different set of ethical questions. The respondents were convinced they were administering electric shocks to "learners" whenever the latter made an incorrect answer (in fact no shocks were

A shocking example of unethical research?

administered and the "victims" were under instructions to pretend they were being hurt). The ethical dilemmas here operate on a number of levels – from the question of whether a researcher has the moral right to trick people into co-operating with their research to that of whether research should continue in the face of acute physical and mental distress being experienced by the respondent (some of **Milgram's** respondents argued and protested about the instructions they were being given and some broke down in tears at the pain they believed they were being instructed to inflict).

3. Is it wise?

The third question **Pimple** raises relates to ethical questions over the relationship between "the research agenda and the broader social and physical world, present and future". In other words it asks general questions about the morality of certain types of research along two specific lines. Firstly, can the research itself be morally justified and, secondly, would some other type of research have greater moral justification? As **Pimple** puts it: "Will the research improve the human condition, or damage it? Will it lead to a better world, or a worse one? Or less grandly, which of the many possible lines of research would we be better off pursuing? We have finite time and money for pursuing research, and the wisdom of research programs is a valid question in research ethics. These are the kinds of questions many people have in mind when they debate the ethics of human cloning".

Module Link   **Theory and Methods**

Broader questions relating to ethical issues in scientific research (both the natural and social sciences) have been addressed by **Merton** (1942) and his advocacy of what he termed a "scientific ethos" – a set of normative (ethical) guidelines that relate to the practice of scientific research. The scientific ethos is discussed in more detail in the section "**The Nature of 'Science' and the Extent to which Sociology may be Regarded as Scientific".**

Tried and Tested

(a) Identify **one** legal consideration a sociologist must take into account in the course of their research (2 marks)

(b) Suggest **two** ethical factors, other than legal considerations, that might impact on sociological research (4 marks).

(c) For any one ethical issue, explain how a researcher might minimise its potential impact on their research (4 marks).

(d) "The most important ethical consideration is the safety of researcher and respondent". How far do you agree or disagree with this statement? (20 marks).

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