



Chapter 1

Socialisation and the creation of social identity

2

Learning objectives

By the end of this chapter you will understand:

- The process of learning and socialisation
- Social control, social conformity and resistance
- Social identity and change

Before you start

This chapter starts with questions about how it is that we become members of human groups. These include:

- How do we learn to get on with others?
- Are the ways we behave shaped more by nature or by the way we are brought up?
- How do we learn to judge what others think of us and how they will react to what we do and say?
- Are we able to affect the social reality around us?
- Think about each of these questions in relation to your own life, then share your ideas with a partner.

Reflection: How much control have you had over things that have happened in your life so far? How much has been decided for you by others?

1.1 The process of learning and socialisation

Culture, roles, norms, values, beliefs, customs, ideology, power and status as elements in the social construction of reality

Defining society

While 'a society' is a simple concept – we all probably understand what is meant by Indian, Mauritian, Nigerian or British society – it is more difficult to define. One key feature, however, is that people see themselves as having something in common with others in their society and, by extension, they consider themselves to be different from people in other societies. In this respect, different societies involve 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 non-physical border – perhaps a made up line that marks where one society ends and another begins.
- 2 Mental space, which separates people based on the beliefs they have about the similarities they share with people in 'their' society and the differences from people in other societies.

It seems straightforward to define a society in terms of physical space – Mauritius occupies a certain geographic area, Nigeria another and India yet another. Yet in itself this space is a *mental* construction; we are simply giving a particular meaning and importance to what is effectively a line on a map.

Anderson (1983) describes societies as 'imagined communities' – things that exist only in the mind. He points out that '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'. Societies are mentally constructed by:

- geographic borders that set physical boundaries – we might, for example, consider that everyone born within these borders belongs to a particular society
- a system of government, which may involve, for example, a royal family (monarchy), parliament and civil service
- common language, **customs** and traditions that people share

- a sense of belonging and identification that involves developing the view that 'our' society is different from other societies; Indians, for example, may see themselves as different from Pakistanis or Bangladeshis.

The social construction of reality

Societies are mental constructions, therefore their reality is socially constructed. To understand how this occurs, we need to explore the concept of **culture**. Culture refers to a 'way of life' that has to be taught and learnt through primary and secondary **socialisation**. We can develop this concept to understand how culture contributes to the **social construction** of reality. Cultures are 'dynamic' and constantly changing. All cultures have two basic parts:

- 1 Material culture involves the physical objects ('artefacts'), such as cars, phones and books that a society produces and that reflect cultural knowledge, skills and interests.
- 2 Non-material culture consists of the knowledge and beliefs valued by a particular culture. This includes religious and scientific beliefs, as well as the meanings people give to material objects. Merton (1957) suggested that objects such as cars, houses and clothes can function in two ways. Their manifest function refers to the purpose for which they exist; clothes, for example, function to keep you warm. Their latent function, however, may be hidden. For example, material objects may function as status symbols – owning something a culture feels is desirable says something about you to others.



KEY TERMS

Customs: established and accepted cultural practices and behaviours.

Culture: the way of life of a particular group of people, taught and learnt through socialisation.

Socialisation: the process through which people learn the various forms of behaviour that go with membership of a particular culture. Young children, for example, must learn the roles, norms and values they will need to become full members of their society; these are things children do not acquire 'naturally'.

Social construction: the idea that our perception of what is real is created through a variety of historical and cultural processes, rather than something that is fixed and naturally occurring. Different societies, for example, construct male and female identities differently.

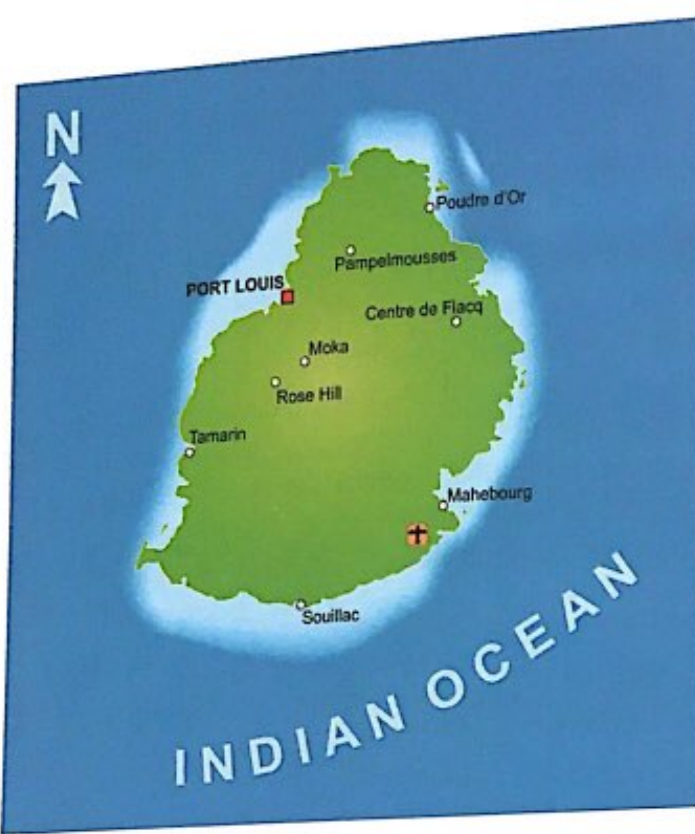


Figure 1.1: A map of Mauritius, an island in the Indian Ocean, which has an ethnically diverse population: about 68% are Indo-Mauritian, 25% are Creole (African descent or mixed race) with smaller numbers of Franco-Mauritian and Sino-Mauritians. How are societies 'imagined communities'?

Reflection: Compare your examples of objects with a partner. Discuss to what extent your examples are the same and how you have identified other objects. Revisit your list and see whether there is anything you would change.

The idea that cultural objects can have different meanings suggests that cultural interaction, especially in contemporary societies, is both sophisticated and complex. The more sophisticated the interaction in any society, the more open it is to misunderstanding.

In order to make sense of cultural interaction, therefore, we need to create common meanings and establish a structure within which behaviour can happen in predictable ways. For a society to function it must have order and stability, and for these to exist people's behaviour must display patterns and regularities. While cultures may develop differently, they are all constructed from the same basic materials: **roles**, **values** and **norms**.

KEY TERMS

Roles: expected patterns of behaviour expected with each position that we hold, such as being a friend, student or teacher.

Values: beliefs or ideas that are important to the people who hold them. A value always expresses a belief about how something *should be*.

Norms: socially acceptable ways of behaving in different roles.

ACTIVITY 1.1



Figure 1.2: This phone is at the same time an example both of material and non-material culture.

- 1 Explain how the phone can at the same time be an example both of material and non-material culture.
- 2 Identify other objects to which this also applies.

Roles

Roles are a building block of culture for two reasons:

- 1 They are always played in relation to other roles. For someone to play the role of teacher, for example, others must play the role of student. Roles contribute to the creation of culture because they demand both social interactions – people have to cooperate to successfully perform certain tasks – and that people are aware of others. In this respect, roles help individuals develop the ability to form groups and communities. This is particularly the case when they involve role-sets; that is, when the role involves a set of different relationships with different types of people, such as a doctor's relationship with patients, nurses, other doctors, patient's relatives and so on. This adds a further dimension to the cultural framework because it locks people into a range of relationships, each with its own routines and responsibilities.

- 2 Every role has a name (or label). This name identifies a particular role and carries with it a sense of how people are expected to behave in any situation.

Values

These common expectations provide a sense of order and predictability because role play is guided by behavioural rules in two ways:

- 1 All roles have a prescribed aspect based on beliefs about how people should behave. Playing a role is guided (governed) by values that provide general behavioural guidelines – a teacher should teach their students, a parent should care for their child and so on.
- 2 Values provide only broad guidance for role behaviour. For example, it is understood that someone playing the role of teacher should teach, but values do not tell them how to play this role. The specific behavioural guides that tell people how to successfully play a role are known as norms.

Norms

Norms are specific rules showing how people should act in a particular situation (whereas values give only a general idea). Norms, therefore, are rules used to perform roles predictably and acceptably. This is important, according to Merton (1938), because without order and predictability, behaviour becomes risky and confusing. He used the term **anomie** to describe a condition where people who fail to understand the norms operating in a particular situation react in a range of ways – from confusion, through anger to fear.



KEY TERM

Anomie: a situation in which people are unable to predict the behaviour of others because the system of norms and values is not being followed.

Goffman (1959) argues that norms are more open to interpretation and negotiation than either roles or values. This means that they can quickly adapt to changes in the social environment. There are many ways to perform a teaching role, depending on a range of personal and cultural factors, including the behaviour of those in the teacher's role-set. Some teachers interpret their role as meaning that they need to be strict; others adopt a more friendly approach. However, these interpretations can change; even the strictest teacher may relax their approach at certain times.



Figure 1.3: How do different teachers interpret their roles differently?

Beliefs

Roles, values and norms provide an important framework within which relationships can be ordered and made mainly predictable. A further layer of cultural structuring involves beliefs. These are the important, deep-rooted ideas that shape our values and are, in some respects, shaped by them. While all values express a belief, beliefs do not necessarily express a value. They are more general behavioural guidelines that include ideas, opinions, views and attitudes. These may, or may not, be true; what matters is that they are *believed* to be true. Beliefs in contemporary societies are many and varied, but they perform a significant structuring role when combined with ideologies, which are discussed later in the chapter.

The importance of socialisation in influencing human behaviour, including the nurture versus nature debate

Socialisation is a process that describes how we are taught the behavioural rules we need to become both a member of a particular society/culture and an able social actor.

Biology, rather than culture, may influence some of the ways people behave. Like all animal species, humans seem to be programmed by their genes to some extent, for example, there seem to be 'drives' for procreation and for self-preservation. Genetics suggests that behaviour may be guided by instincts based on biological instructions that can be seen as part of 'human nature'.

Instincts are fixed human features. These are things we are born knowing and our cultural environment plays little or no role in the development of these instincts, for example many females have a 'mothering instinct'.

A weaker expression of this idea is that people are born with certain capabilities that are then put into practice through environmental experiences. 'Nature' gives us strong hints about behavioural rules, but people are free to ignore those hints. If women have greater child-caring capabilities than men, then it makes genetic sense for them to take on a caring role within a family. However, this is not something their genes force them to do. One way to test whether nature, in the form of instincts, or nurture, in the form of socialisation, is the more important factor is to take advantage of a naturally occurring form of experimentation – the study of unsocialised or feral children.

Feral children

Feral children have missed out on primary socialisation by humans. Examples attract a lot of media attention, but in most cases the evidence is very unclear (for example, it is usually uncertain how long the child was away from people) and some, often noted, cases have been proved fake. Feral children can be raised by animals or survive on their own.

Evidence of human infants raised by animals is rare and not always reliable. One recent example is Saturday Mthiyane, who was discovered in 1987, aged five, living with a pack of monkeys in South Africa and who years later still behaved in ways associated with monkeys rather than humans. However, evidence of children raised with little, or no, human contact is more common. A well-documented example is 'Genie', a 13-year-old Californian girl discovered in 1970. Pines (1997) notes that Genie had been 'isolated in a small room and had not been spoken

to by her parents since infancy. She was malnourished, abused, unloved, bereft of any toys or companionship'. When Genie was found, 'she could not stand erect ... she was unable to speak: she could only whimper'.

Feral children are sociologically significant for two main reasons. First, when children are raised without human contact they fail to show the social and physical development we would expect from an ordinary raised child – for example, walking upright, talking, using a knife and fork. Children raised by animals behave as the animals do, suggesting that they learn by imitation. Second, if human behaviour is instinctive it is not clear why children such as Genie should develop so differently from children raised with human contact. We would also expect that, once returned to human society, feral children would quickly pick up normal human behaviours. This, however, is not the case, suggesting that if children miss out on socialisation by humans at an early stage in their life this cannot be corrected later.

Further evidence for the significance of socialisation is the fact that different cultures develop different ways of doing things. If human behaviours were governed by instinct, we would expect there to be few, if any, differences between societies. In fact, of course, there are huge variations between cultures. Sometimes, these cultural differences are relatively trivial. Billikopf (1999) discovered through his own experience that 'in Russia, when a man peels a banana for a lady it means he has a romantic interest in her'. At other times, cultural differences are more fundamental. Wojtczak (2009) argues that in Victorian Britain most women 'lived in a state little better than slavery'. As she notes: 'women's sole purpose was to marry and reproduce.' This is not a situation we would recognise in British society today. If human behaviour was instinctive, it would be much the same, in any place or time.

ACTIVITY 1.2

Suggest ways in which feral children can be used to test the influence of nature or nurture on human behaviour.

Reflection: Consider the 'Think like a sociologist' box on page 7 and then come back to this activity. Looking at it again, would you define the problems in the same way, or is there anything you would do differently?



Figure 1.4: Dani (above), often described as a feral child because she was severely neglected for years. How do feral children demonstrate the importance of socialisation?

THINK LIKE A SOCIOLOGIST

Thinking about what you have learnt about feral children and the importance of primary socialisation, how would this knowledge and understanding be useful to people working with children, such as nannies and nursery teachers?

The 'I' and the 'Me'

Basic human skills have to be taught and learnt. The symbolic interactionist George Herbert Mead (1934) argued that the same was true of more advanced social skills. He claimed that the social context in which behaviour occurs conditions how people behave. While self-awareness – the ability to see ourselves as others see us and react accordingly – is often seen as an instinctive human skill, Mead argued that it is in fact learnt. It involves developing a concept of Self and this is what sets humans apart from animals. For Mead, 'the Self' (an awareness of who we are) has two related aspects:

- an 'I' aspect based around our opinion of ourselves as a whole. We each respond to the behaviour of others as an 'I'. Mead called this the 'unsocialised self'.
- a 'Me' aspect that consists of an awareness of how others expect us to behave in a given situation. Mead called this the 'social self' because it develops through socialisation.

We can illustrate these ideas in the following way. If you accidentally put your hand in a fire, the 'I' is expressed by how you react to the pain. The 'Me', however, specifically conditions how you choose to express that pain; your reaction will be conditioned by factors such as:

- who you are – whether you are adult or child, male or female and so on
- where you are – alone at home or in a public place
- who you are with – such as family, friends or strangers.

If you are a young child, for example, your reaction to being burnt may be to cry. If you are a young man, you may feel that crying is not a socially acceptable reaction – so you may swear loudly instead. Swearing loudly may be acceptable if you are at home by yourself, but may not be acceptable if you are fixing a stranger's fire as part of your job. Similarly, if you had been messing around with friends when you burnt your hand, their reaction may be to laugh and make fun of your pain. Laughter would though not be an appropriate reaction if it was your child who had burnt their hand.

The presentation of self

If the social context of an act changes both its meaning and how people react, it follows that an awareness of self is constructed and developed socially. Goffman (1959) argues that who we believe ourselves to be – our sense of identity – is also constructed socially through how we present ourselves to others.

Goffman proposed a model of self and identity in which he described social life as a series of dramatic episodes. People are *actors*. Sometimes, they write and speak their own lines – this is their personal identity. Sometimes, they follow lines that are written for them – the external influences that inform how people behave in particular situations and roles. For example, because we understand how our society defines masculinity and femininity, we know how we are expected to behave if we are male or female. We can also work out how others will react to our behaviour; we can see ourselves as others do and adjust our behaviour so as to try to make the impression on them that we want to achieve.

The idea of creating an impression is also significant in relation to how we present ourselves in different situations. Goffman suggests that when we adopt a particular identity, we 'perform' to others in order to 'manage' the impression they have of us. Identity performance, therefore, is about achieving a desired result: when you want to create a favourable impression on someone, you 'act' in ways you believe they will like. For example, if you want to be seen as a good Sociology student, you could carry around a textbook and a full folder of notes.

Fifty years before Goffman, Cooley (1909) suggested that in the majority of social encounters other people are used as a looking-glass self. They are like mirrors reflecting our self as others see us; when we 'look into the mirror' of how others behave towards us, we see reflected an image of the person *they* think we are.

The presentation of self always involves:

- The importance of interpretation: identities are broad social categories whose meaning differs both historically and across different cultures.
- The significance of negotiation. Identities are always open to discussion; what it means to be male, female, young, old and so on, is constantly changing as people 'push the negotiated boundaries' of these identities.

KEY SOCIOLOGIST

Erving Goffman (1922–82)

The Canadian-American social psychologist, Erving Goffman, built on the earlier work of Mead, Cooley and others, developing theories of social interaction. He developed the dramaturgical approach to studying interaction, exploring the ways in which individuals perform actions in a similar way to performers in a play. He was interested in everyday life and, as well as his theoretical work, he carried out ethnographic research,

most notably participant observation as an assistant in a mental institution, published as *Asylums: Essays on the Condition of the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. His other best-known books are *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*, *Stigma* and *Gender Advertisements*. His daughter Alice is also a sociologist, known for her ethnographic work *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*, about low-income African-American communities.

THINK LIKE A SOCIOLOGIST

Try to extend Goffman's ideas about social life being like acting in a play. Think about stage and backstage areas, being off stage, other members of the cast, who the audience is and so on.

ACTIVITY 1.3

With a partner, suggest ways that you try to manage the impression people have of you. How can this impression be negotiated?

Reflection: Think about who you have talked to this week – have you modified your behaviour with them? If you had done something differently would it have changed your interaction with them?

Alternatives

Not all scientific disciplines place the same emphasis on socialisation as sociology does when explaining how individuals become competent social actors. For example, biological ideas about evolution have sometimes been used to explain social development. These ideas range from relatively simple forms of 'social Darwinism', based on the idea that social life simply involves 'the survival of the fittest', to the more sophisticated arguments of sociobiology. In these, biological principles of natural selection and evolution are applied to the 'human animal' to produce what Wilson (1979) argued is a 'biological basis' for all human behaviour. He claimed that although human behaviour is not genetically determined, it is strongly influenced by 'biological programming' or 'biogrammars'.

Wilson believed that these 'biogrammars' suggest that humans are likely to behave in particular ways.

For example, he believed that men and women are biologically programmed with different traits that lead them to perform different cultural roles:

- Women are passive, nurturing and caring, which makes them best suited to child-rearing.
- Male traits of aggression best suit them to a 'providing role' that translates into paid work in contemporary societies.

These arguments influenced sociology in, for example, the work of functionalist sociologists such as Parsons (1959a). He argued that in most societies, family roles are organised to reflect the belief that women play an expressive role – that of caring for others. Men, however, play an instrumental role – with a focus on providing for the family. Both of these roles are based, in part, on evolutionary biological principles.

While males and females can choose not to take these roles, Parsons believed, over-riding the biogrammar, behaviour that opposes this biological instinct is seen as a less efficient way of organising human cultural relationships. So, for example, men can take on the expressive role and women the instrumental role, but this is likely to cause social problems because it is not making the best use of the different capabilities of males and females.

Evolutionary psychology explains contemporary psychological and social traits in terms of the general principles of natural selection: those behaviours that are evolutionarily successful are selected and reproduced. In this way, various forms of social behaviour, such as family development and gender roles, can be explained as evolutionary adaptations occurring over many centuries. They represent successful adaptations to problems common to all human societies, such as how to raise children while also providing the things family members need for survival.

Psychology is, however, a diverse field and there are many different explanations for human development.

These range from those focused on genetics (such as evolutionary psychology), through disciplines such as neuropsychology, to social psychological approaches broadly similar to the interactionist theories found in the works of Mead and Goffman.

Social psychology places greater stress on how environmental factors, such as family and work relationships, affect the development of genetic or psychological predispositions. Meins *et al.* (2002) noted that although there exists a genetic instinct for babies to become attached to their primary care-giver, this can be affected by environmental factors. The most important of these is the ability of the care-giver to recognise and understand the needs of the child.

ACTIVITY 1.4

Make a list of anything you think might be instinctive human behaviour (such as eating, sleeping, crime, childcare and so on). Remove an item from the list if people have a choice about whether or not to do it (such as crime) or how and when we do it (such as eating). What do the remaining items on your list tell you about the influence of instincts and culture on human behaviour?



Reflection: Compare your list with a partner's to see whether you have the same remaining items. Looking at your list, do you think your own personal experience or unconscious bias has affected your judgement?

Agencies of socialisation and social control, including family, education, peer-group, media and religion

The socialisation process takes two main forms:

- 1 Primary socialisation occurs mainly within the family and is the first stage of socialisation. This type of socialisation is essential to the development of behaviours we recognise as fundamentally human, such as learning language. The first primary relationship we form is usually with our parents. This is followed by primary attachments to other family members, people of our own age (friends) and, subsequently, to other adults such as work colleagues. Primary socialisation is necessary because human infants need other people in order to develop both as human beings and as members of a particular

culture. We do not just need to learn general human behaviours, we must also learn about social relationships, how to play roles and so on.

- 2 Secondary socialisation involves secondary groups and is characterised, according to Berger and Luckmann (1967), by 'a sense of detachment from the ones teaching socialisation'. Secondary socialisations are situations in which we do not necessarily have close, personal contacts with those doing the socialising. Parsons (1959a) argued that one of the main purposes of secondary socialisation is to 'liberate the individual from a dependence on the primary attachments and relationships formed within the family group'. In contemporary societies, where the majority of people we meet are strangers, it would be impossible and undesirable to treat them in the same way that we treat people we love or know well. This is why we develop instrumental relationships – those based on what people can do for us, or what we can do for them, in particular situations. Berger and Luckmann suggest that while primary socialisation involves 'emotionally charged identification' with people such as our parents, secondary socialisation is characterised by 'formality and anonymity'. You do not, for example, treat a stranger who asks you for directions as your closest friend.

ACTIVITY 1.5

Identify differences between primary and secondary socialisation. Why does primary socialisation have to take place before secondary socialisation?



Figure 1.5: How does requiring people to dress identically contribute to their socialisation?

Social control

The process of socialisation brings *order, stability* and *predictability* to people's behaviour. If a child is socialised into a perceived 'right' way of doing something, such as eating with a knife and fork, there must also be a perceived 'wrong' or deviant way (in this example perhaps eating with their fingers), which should be discouraged. Socialisation, therefore, is also a form of **social control** – it involves limiting the range of behaviours open to individuals. Social control is linked to the idea that human behaviour involves a life-long process of rule-learning, built on **sanctions** – the things we do to make people conform. The **agencies of socialisation** described below are also agencies of social control.

Agencies of socialisation

We can look at selected agencies of socialisation in terms of the roles, values and norms they try to teach and the sanctions they set/impose.

Primary socialisation

Family: Although there are only a small number of family roles, these tend to be played out over long periods and involve complex forms of role development, especially in societies that allow divorce and remarriage. Adults may have to learn roles ranging from husband/wife to parent/step-parent. Child development also involves a range of roles: baby, infant, child, teenager and, eventually perhaps, an adult with children of their own.

The ability to develop roles within the context of a group mainly governed by relationships based on love, responsibility and duty, means that we can make mistakes and learn lessons as we go without causing too much harm. Mead refers to parents as significant others. They shape both our basic values, such as how to address adults, and our *moral values*, for example our understanding of the difference between right and wrong. Basic norms, such as how to address family members (for example, 'Mum', 'Dad'), when, where and how to eat

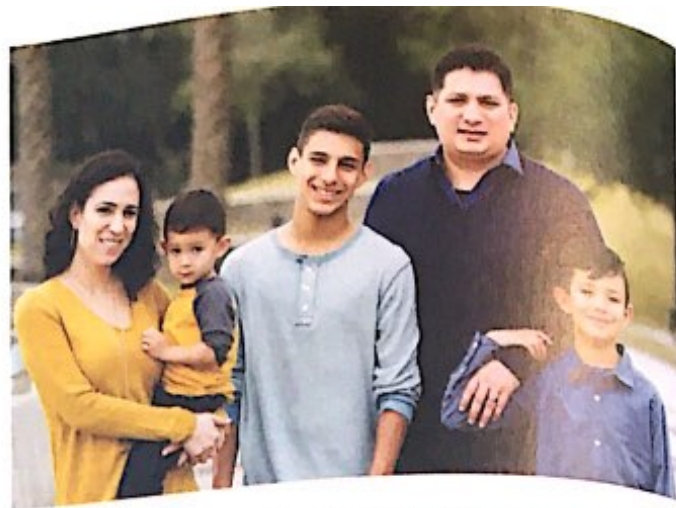


Figure 1.6: Within a family, how do children play their roles differently from adults?

and sleep, and definitions of acceptable behaviour are normally taught within the family. Sanctions are mainly *informal*, with positive sanctions involving things such as:

- facial expressions (for example, smiling)
- verbal approval/reinforcement ('good boy/girl')
- physical rewards (such as gifts).

Negative sanctions are similarly wide-ranging – from showing disapproval through language (such as shouting) to physical punishment.



KEY TERMS

Social control: ways in which members of society are made to conform to norms and values.

Sanctions: ways of rewarding or punishing acceptable or unacceptable behaviour; usually used in the sense of punishments (negative sanctions).

Agencies of socialisation/social control: The social institutions and groups, such as family and the media, which influence behaviour by providing guidance, examples and sanctions.

Family: a social institution comprising a group of people linked by kinship ties.

KEY SOCIOLOGIST

George Herbert Mead (1863–1931)

Mead can be seen as the 'forgotten' father of sociology; he developed the symbolic interactionist approach which became the alternative tradition within sociology to the structural approaches of functionalism and **Marxism**. He did not publish any books. His ideas were spread after his death when some of his students at the University of Chicago in the USA put together several volumes made up

of notes from his lectures, records of courses he taught and unpublished papers. He was interested in social action and the micro scale, with his work often was seen as social psychology rather than sociology. He developed the idea of the self as made up of the 'me', based on how the individual understands they are seen by the 'generalised other' and the 'I', based on the individual's impulses.

Functionalists often see primary socialisation as a one-way process that passes from adults to children. However, socialisation involves more than an unquestioning acceptance of the behaviours we learn within the family group. Although children are socialised by being encouraged to *copy* behaviour, they are also actively involved in negotiating their socialisation. For example, children do not always obey their parents; they may even choose not to obey as part of a test of the limits of social control. Children may also receive different socialisation messages: a relative may reward behaviour that a parent would punish. Children have to learn that the same behaviour may receive different reactions from different people in different situations. Faced with a new situation, they need to be able to judge what the reactions are likely to be.

Peers: Peer-groups are made up of people of a similar age, for example, teenagers. They can be considered primary agencies of socialisation because we usually choose friends of a similar age, and personal interaction with them influences our behaviour – from how we dress and talk to the things we love or hate. Peer-groups can also be secondary agencies because they may be used as a reference group – what Hughes et al. (2002) call ‘the models we use for appraising and shaping our attitudes, feelings and actions’. In the recent past, this has included youth **subcultures** such as hippies and punks. Although most people do not interact with groups as specific as this, we all have reference groups of people we identify with and whose appearance and behaviour we model our own on. Our behaviour may be influenced by things such as the fashions and the general behaviour of people our own age or status. This is an example of peer pressure as a form of social control.

KEY TERMS

Marxism: political, sociological and economic school of thought based on the work of Karl Marx.

Peers: people of similar status, and usually age, with whom a person has frequent contact.

Subcultures: a culture within a larger culture. Subcultures take many forms, such as religious groups, fans of a particular singer or actor, school gangs and so on. Subcultures usually develop their own norms and values, although these do not necessarily conflict with those of the wider culture within which they exist.



Figure 1.7: How do your friends influence your behaviour?

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 people we don’t know very well (acquaintances). In the workplace, too, we are likely to play the role of colleague to at least some of our peers. Similarly, the values we are taught within a friendship or peer-group vary with age and circumstances. However, we will probably carry the value of friendship with us throughout our lives.

Peer-group norms often relate to ideas about age-appropriate behaviour. Young children, for example, are usually not permitted by law to smoke cigarettes or to buy alcohol. Also, it is generally not considered age-appropriate for the elderly to take part in extreme sports or wear clothes designed for younger people. Peer-group sanctions, or social sanctions, are generally informal and include things such as disapproving looks and negative comments. This is mainly because peer-group norms vary considerably, and the same behaviour may result in different responses depending on the situation. Swearing at a grandparent will probably be met with disapproval; swearing among friends may be perfectly acceptable. Approving gestures and language, laughing at your jokes and seeking out your company may represent positive sanctions. Refusing to speak to someone, rejecting friendship or engaging in physical violence are negative sanctions associated with peer-group.

Secondary socialisation

Agencies of secondary socialisation include schools, religious organisations and the media. In some cases, such as education, we are in daily contact with other

members of the group without ever developing a primary attachment to them. In other examples, such as admiring a particular actor or musician, we may never meet the rest of the group, yet we might be influenced by their behaviour in several ways.

Education: Education involves two kinds of curriculum:

- the formal curriculum that specifies the subjects, knowledge and skills that children are explicitly taught in school
- a hidden curriculum: the things we learn from the experience of attending school, such as how to deal with strangers, listen to adult authority and have respect for the system.

School is also a place where we 'learn to limit our individual desires' – to think about the needs of others rather than our own. School may be one of the first times that children are separated from their parent(s) for any length of time. It provides both *opportunities* (to demonstrate talents to a wider, non-family, audience) and *challenges* – the need to learn, for example, how to deal with people who are not family and with *authority figures* such as teachers.

Parsons (1959a) argued that school plays a particularly significant role in secondary socialisation for two reasons:

- 1 It 'emancipates the child from primary attachment' to their family. It moves children away from the affective relationships found in the family and introduces them to the instrumental relationships they will meet in adult life. It is in effect a bridge between the family home and the wider social world.
- 2 It allows children to 'internalise a level of society's values and norms that is a step higher than those learnt within families'. Through interaction with 'strangers' in the educational system, a child begins to adopt wider social values into their personal value system. This process loosens the hold of primary groups and allows children to gradually mix into adult society, something that also promotes social solidarity and value **consensus**.

KEY TERM

Consensus: general agreement across a society on a set of values; seen by functionalists as essential for society to be stable.

Like any institution, schools involve a range of roles, such as teacher and student, which are themselves linked to a range of related roles called a role-set. This further extends the idea of cultural relationships because we become fixed into a range of *expected behaviours*. A student, for example, plays this role in relation to the roles that others are playing in the school environment:

- other students in their class
- students of different ages
- their subject teachers
- teachers of other subjects
- school buildings' staff such as caretakers
- administration staff
- parent(s)/guardian(s).

Schools teach a range of values. These range from the idea that students should work hard to achieve qualifications, to ideas about individual competition for academic rewards, teamwork, conformity to authority (not questioning what is being learnt and why it is necessary to learn it) and achievement on the basis of merit. Sometimes values are openly taught (for example, an assembly may be all about the importance of helping others, or why bullying is wrong), but more often they are present in the way that schools and education are organised.

In many education systems, for example, one hidden value is that academic ability, such as a talent for writing essays, is more highly valued than work-related ability, such as bricklaying. Another value is individual achievement; working with others may be valued in the workplace but in school may be seen as 'copying' and wrong. Many of these values relate not just to education but also to the wider social world.

From a Marxist perspective, Bowles and Gintis (2002) argue that there is a *correspondence* between school norms and workplace norms: Schools prepare students for adult work by socialising them into values and norms that will make them uncomplaining workers. This correspondence theory is shown through school norms such as:

- the daily need for attendance
- always being in the place you are supposed to be at certain times
- the right of those in authority to give orders that must be obeyed.

These ideas are backed up by positive sanctions that include the gaining of grades, qualifications and prizes, as well as more personal things such as praise and encouragement. On the negative side, schools use punishments: detentions, suspensions and exclusions. Failure to achieve qualifications or gaining a reputation for being unintelligent also function as negative sanctions. These sanctions prepare children for sanctions at work – from bonuses for good work to the threat of being sacked.

ACTIVITY 1.6

Suggest two further examples of the connection between school and work.

Are there any ways in which school may not help prepare people for the world of work?

Mass media: The media are slightly unusual secondary agencies because our relationship with it is *impersonal*; we are unlikely to meet those doing the socialising. While there is little evidence that the media have a direct, long-term effect on behaviour, there is stronger evidence of short-term effects. Advertising, for example, aims to make short-term changes in behaviour by encouraging people to try different consumer products. Potter (2003) suggests that short-term effects include:

- imitation, such as copying behaviour seen on television
- desensitisation – the idea that constant and repeated experience of something, such as violence or poverty, gradually lowers our emotional reaction
- learning, in which we are introduced to new ideas and places.



Figure 1.8: Does repeated experience of images of violence, poverty or racism reduce our reaction to such issues?

There is also some evidence for *indirect* long-term effects, in that people come to accept as 'natural' values or other aspects of social life that are socially constructed:

- **consumerism** – advertising, and much other media content, takes as natural the active and ever-increasing pursuit of goods and services that define lifestyles and identities in contemporary capitalist societies
- fear – experience of negative and violent media leads some people to overestimate things such as the extent of crime or their chances of being a victim of terrorism or of a disaster
- agenda setting – Philo et al. (1982) argue that the media determine how something will be debated; in the UK, for example, immigration is discussed in the media mainly in terms of numbers of immigrants, with an assumption that high numbers are bad. This gets in the way of consideration of the qualitative effects of immigration on British society.



KEY TERM

Consumerism: repeated experience of wealthy lifestyles and desirable consumer goods that suggests that 'happiness' is something that can be bought.

The extent to which the media can enforce values is uncertain. However, the media are undoubtedly influential in supporting or weakening certain values. It has a loud voice in debates over nationality (for example, what it means to be 'Peruvian' or 'Chinese'). It also promotes certain values over others – for example, many English newspapers take an 'anti-European Union' stance. Potter suggests that media influence comes about through a process of habituation: the more people experience certain images and ideas, the more likely it is that they will add them to their personal value systems. In relation to norms, the media have what Durkheim (1912) called a 'boundary-marking function'. It promotes acceptable and unacceptable forms of behaviour to strengthen perceptions of expected behaviours. The media may try to preserve particular ways of behaving, through campaigns to 'save the family', for example, but they may also promote changes in behaviour, such as campaigns against racism. To strengthen (reinforce) their message, the media use a range of sanctions. Positive sanctions involve the use of praise, positive pictures and uncritical features. Negative sanctions might include being pictured in a negative pose, critical articles or behaviour being publicly criticised.

THINK LIKE A SOCIOLOGIST

Young people increasingly use social media apps. In what ways can social media be an agency of socialisation, or of social control?

Religion: Whether or not we see ourselves as 'religious', religion plays a significant role in the general socialisation process in many societies, particularly in relation to ceremonial functions, such as marriages and funerals. It can also be argued that important moral values – very strong beliefs about how people should behave – are influenced by religious values. For example, several of the Ten Commandments in the Christian religion are reflected in legal systems around the world. The unacceptability of some crimes, such as theft and murder, is emphasised in world religions.

Religious values are powerful forces for those who believe. Religion can be regarded as a 'design for living' – a force that provides help and guidance to live a life as God wishes, but religious beliefs and values can also be a source of conflict:

- between religions, such as the history of conflict between Christians and Muslims dating back to the 11th century
- within the same religion: Northern Ireland, for example, has experienced major conflicts between Protestant and Catholic Christians over the past 50 years.

Religious values are frequently displayed through styles of dress, such as the Muslim hijab or Sikh turban, something that indicates both religiosity (a measure of people's commitment to religion) and ethnic identity.

Many of the world's major religions, from Christianity to Islam, have been said to promote **patriarchy** through both their general organisation (many religions have an entirely male leadership) and the gender roles and values they encourage. However, they also promote concepts of love and care that can be attractive to people, and can be seen as providing women with a sense of shelter and safety in a threatening world and belonging. Swatos (1998) argues that religions are going through important changes that are making them more 'female friendly'. For example, God is increasingly shown as loving and consoling rather than as authoritarian and judgemental, and clergy are seen as 'helping professionals' rather than as 'representatives of God's justice'.

KEY TERM

Patriarchy: male-dominated unit or society.

Religions apply positive sanctions on their followers in different ways:

- Hinduism involves a belief in reincarnation (when 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 rebirth into a higher social position.
- Ideas of sin in Christian religions can also be significant features of religious control, because the believer is encouraged to live a life free of sin in the hope of rewards in heaven.

Negative sanctions are also many and varied. Catholicism, for example, has the sanction of excommunication (exclusion from the church), whereas some forms of Islam specify a range of punishments for those who break Shari'ah law. Such punishments may also be applied to 'non-believers' in theocratic societies, such as Iran, where government is dominated by religious authorities.

ACTIVITY 1.7

Draw a spider diagram that describes any role you play. Try to illustrate its role-set.

What does this diagram tell you about how you present yourself to society or a particular social group? What types of influence are making you take on the role, and why? See an example below.

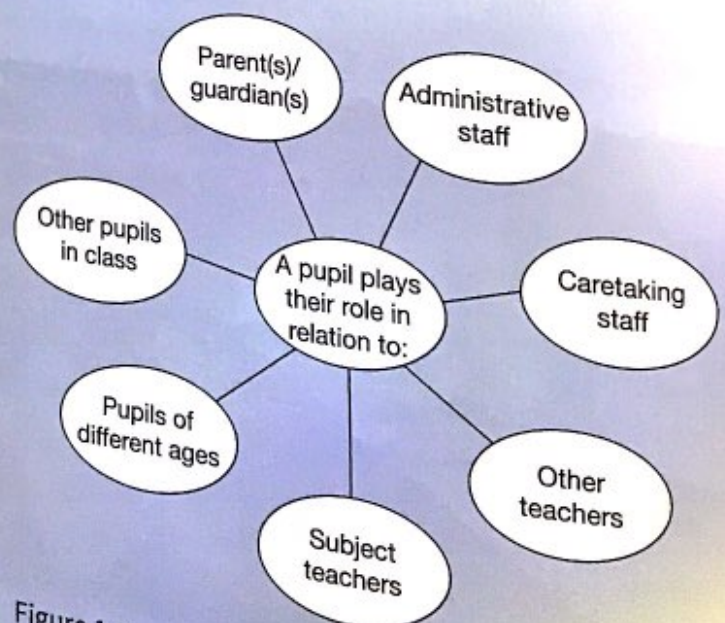


Figure 1.9

How do the norms and values learned through socialisation vary between societies?

1.2 Social control, conformity and resistance

The role of structure and agency in shaping the relationship between the individual and society, including an awareness of the differences between structuralist and interactionist views

The two main theories in sociology, functionalist theory and Marxist theory, provide different interpretations of how order and control are created and maintained. Both perspectives are **structuralist** (or **macrosociological**); they argue that how societies are organised at the level of families, governments and economies (the institutional or system level), determines how individuals view their world and behave within it (structural **determinism**). This perspective presents society as a powerful force that controls and shapes how people think and behave. This makes them fundamentally different to another approach that has always been present in sociology, the **interactionist** view, which focuses on the microsociological and how individuals can shape the social world. Human lives are not seen as decided by social forces; rather, people have **agency**.

KEY TERMS

Structuralist: a form of sociology, such as functionalism and Marxism, that focuses on analysing society in terms of its institutional relationships and their effect on individual beliefs and behaviours.

Determinism: the claim that human behaviour is shaped by forces beyond the immediate control of individuals, such as social structures or 'society'.

Interactionist: an approach focused on the behaviour of individuals that refers to three related perspectives (phenomenology, ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism – see page 20), based on the concept of social action.

Agency: when people have some control over their lives and can make choices and decisions, rather than their behaviour being determined by forces beyond their control.

Structuralist theories originated in the work of Durkheim and Marx. From a structuralist perspective, social action

is the product of deep, underlying forces in society that reach beyond the level of individual consciousness and control. These structural forces shape our behaviour and have a major influence on our thought processes. Marx claimed that the capitalist relations of production were the main structural force in modern industrial societies. The way in which capitalist production of goods and services is organised, with the workers separated from ownership of land and factories, can be seen as an invisible system that controls the way in which all other aspects of a society operate. By contrast, the functionalist perspective sees the structure of society more in terms of the institutional arrangements required to ensure the smooth running of society. So, for example, institutions such as the family, education and government are associated with established patterns of behaviour that together create an order and structure in society.

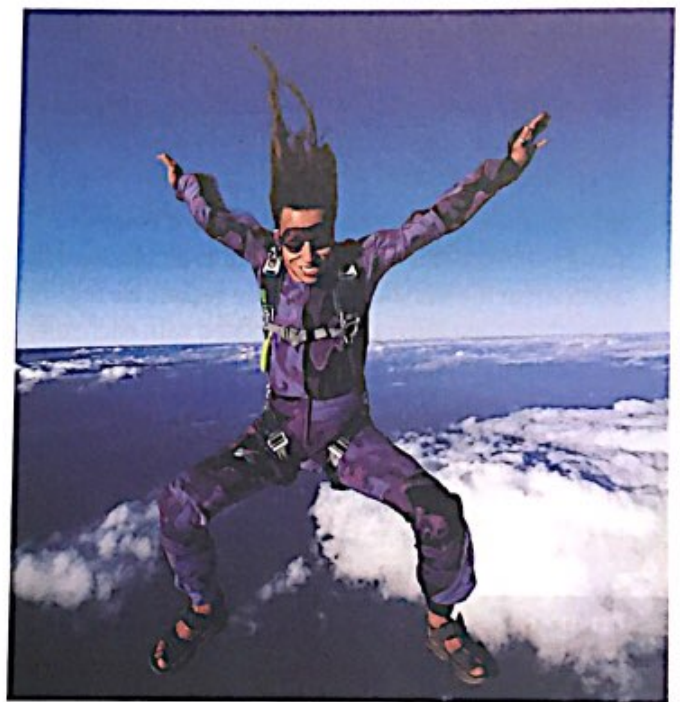


Figure 1.10: Is society, like gravity, an invisible force acting on us all?

For structuralists, the established social order represents a powerful force that the individual has little or no freedom to oppose. For various reasons, people accept the established institutional patterns of behaviour as if they were a hidden force controlling their actions. By following social rules in this way, each person's actions reflect the strong influence of the social structure.

For structuralists, therefore, sociology should be the study of the effects of the structure of society on social life. In other words, sociologists should adopt a macro or large-scale view. The actions of the individual should be explained in terms of the influences of the overall structure or organisational arrangements of a society. For example, a structural explanation might identify poverty (which can be seen as part of the structure of society) as the cause of an increase in the crime rate. Likewise, differences in suicide rates might be explained in terms of differences in beliefs and practices between religious groups (religious institutions being part of the structure of society).

The idea of social structure becomes a little clearer if we think about the different ways in which behaviour is governed by informal rules or norms that define expected behaviours in any given situation:

- Every relationship we form, such as making a new friend, becoming a parent or getting a new boss, involves playing a role – an idea that refers to people 'playing a part' in society. Just as an actor performs a role in a play, people take on and perform various roles (such as student, sister, brother, friend and employee) in their day-to-day life.
- Each role has certain associated values or beliefs about how something should be. For example, we may believe that friends should keep the secrets we tell them. There are also norms associated with each role, such as friends helping us if we are in trouble.

Every time we play a role, therefore, we experience the *effect* of social structures – rules that shape our behavioural choices. This suggests that social structures apply a significant influence on how we behave.

ACTIVITY 1.8

Identify two values associated with any two roles that you play.

Is one of these values a stronger influence than the other? Justify your choice.

Consensus structuralism

Functionalism is a consensus structuralist approach. For functionalists, any explanation of how order and stability are created and maintained involves looking at how societies are organised at the level of the social system. This involves the idea that the various parts of a society

(family, education, work and so on) work in harmony. Each part is dependent on the others. Just as the different parts of the body – such as the heart, lungs and brain – work together to form something more complex than the sum of their individual parts (a living body), the different parts of a society work together to form a social system. Parsons (1937) argued that every social system consists of four 'functional sub-systems' – political, economic, cultural and family. Each of these sub-systems performs a different but related function that addresses certain 'problems' faced by every society.

The connections between the various parts of the social system – family, culture, work and government – are created by institutional purposes and needs. While order is created at the institutional level through these relationships, Parsons (1959a) explained how *individuals* fit into the overall structure of society on the basis of functional prerequisites – things that *must* happen if society is to function properly. For individuals to survive and do well, they need to be part of larger cooperative groups – they must *combine* to solve important problems. Every social institution, from families to schools to workplaces, must develop ways to ensure that individuals conform to the needs of both the institution and society as a whole. For Parsons, institutions do this by developing ways to solve 'four problems of their existence'. We can show this using the example of education.

- 1 Goal maintenance: institutions must provide people with goals to achieve, such as academic qualifications.
- 2 Adaptation: to achieve institutional goals, people need a cooperative environment, such as a classroom and teachers, within which people can work.
- 3 Integration: people must be motivated to achieve (educational) goals, and one way to do this is to encourage a 'sense of belonging', to both the wider society, where educational qualifications are used to sort (differentiate) adults in the workplace, and to the education system itself. A school, for example, makes people feel they 'belong' to the institution and that they have things in common with other students and teachers.
- 4 Latency: conflicts within an institution must be managed and rules created to encourage desirable behaviour and punish rule-breaking (**deviance**). In schools, these rules cover things such as attendance, behaviour and dress. They are designed to maintain a particular way of life in the institution.

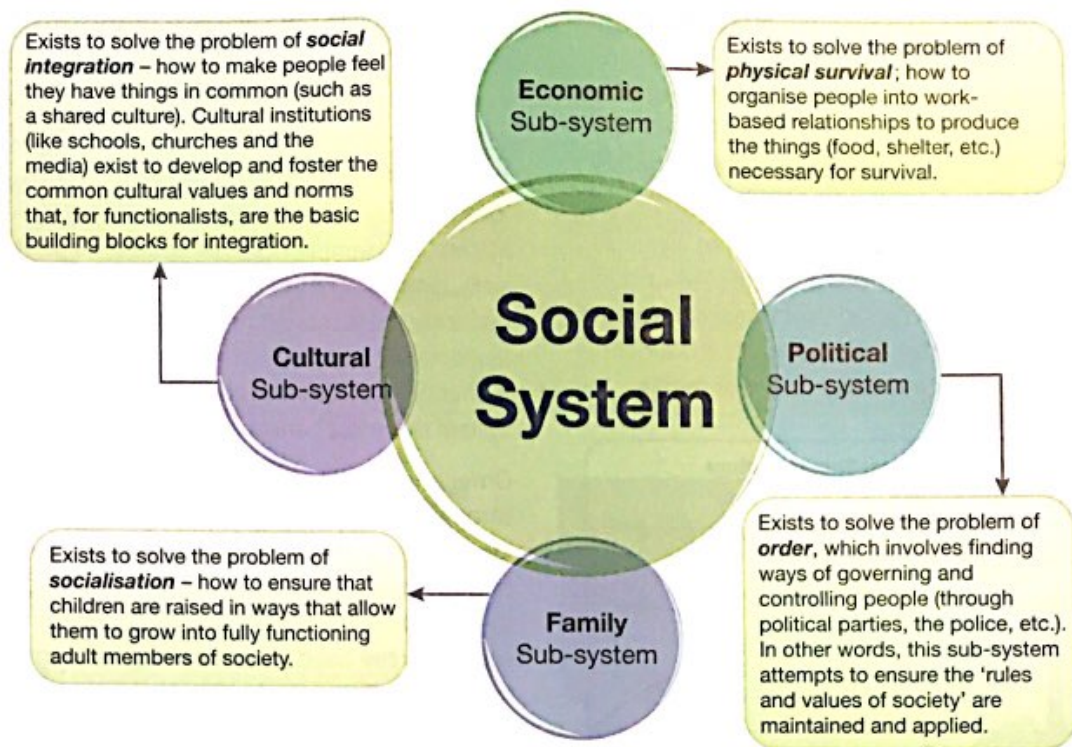


Figure 1.11: Functional sub-systems Source: Parsons, 1937

Societies and their institutions can only function if people feel they are part of a much larger community. This requires the members of a society to be socialised into a shared value system, creating consensus. Behaviour will then be the same (consistent) and broadly predictable so that social order is maintained for the benefit of everyone. Agencies of socialisation and social control are therefore essential in creating a stable society based on shared values. People can be encouraged to conform willingly by convincing them that following certain rules is in their best interests. If that fails, however, institutions might use agents of control. These could be 'soft' (for example, teachers) or hard (the police or armed forces).

KEY TERM

Deviance: behaviour that breaks the norms or values of a group.

Conflict structuralism

Whereas the consensus approach concentrates on how society determines our lives for the benefit of all, conflict structuralism shows how this works to divide society so that powerful groups can control society at the cost of relatively powerless groups. Societies may appear stable,

but are based on conflicts of interest between groups. The leading conflict structuralist approach, Marxism, sees this in *economic* terms with different **social classes** fighting against each other. Feminism expresses this conflict in *gender* terms with men as more powerful than women in most, or all, societies.

KEY TERM

Social class: The division of society into socio-economic groups, with different levels of power and wealth.

Marxism

For Marxists, work is the most important activity in any society because no other social activity (politics, family or culture) can exist without people first having found a way to survive. Thus, how work is socially organised (who does it, what they do and who benefits from it) is the key to understanding how all other social relationships are organised. Marxists refer to a relationship between 'base and superstructure'. By this, they mean the relationship between economic, political and ideological institutions, which they claim is the basis for social order and control:

- The economic base is the basis or foundation on which society is built. It is the world of work and involves

particular types of *relationships* (the **relations of production**), such as owner, manager, wage labourer and *organisation*. The capitalist workplace is organised in order, one group above another. Those further up in the order (hierarchy) have more power and control than those lower down.

- The political and ideological superstructure 'rests' on the economic base and involves political institutions, such as *government* and agencies of social control (the police, judges and courts) and *ideological institutions* including religion, education and the mass media.

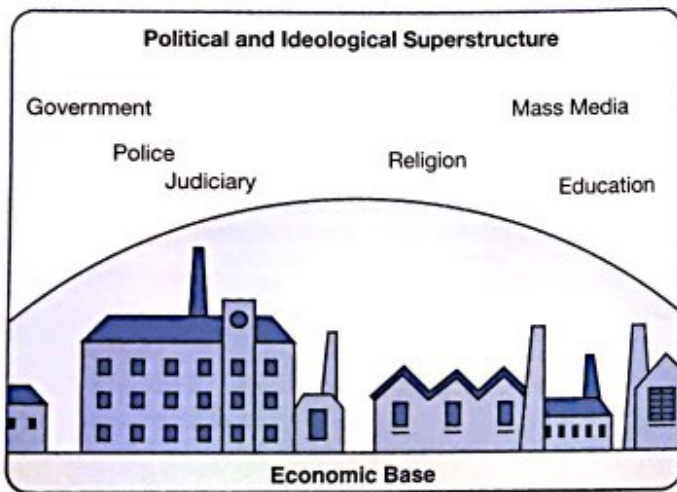


Figure 1.12: The relationship between base and superstructure in capitalist society

The workplace is a key area of conflict because of its organisational structure. In capitalist society, the 'means of economic production' – the tools, factories and machines that are used to create wealth – are owned by one class (the bourgeoisie, or ruling class). The majority owns little or nothing and so are forced to sell their ability to work. This ability is known as their labour power. It is part of what Marxists call the **forces of production**: how labour power is organised to produce wealth by attaching it to various forms of technology – from simple tools to advanced machinery.

In capitalist societies, members of a small bourgeois class become very rich because they keep the profits made from goods and services and most people own nothing but their ability to work for wages. The emphasis on conflict suggests that capitalist societies are naturally weak or unstable. However, this is not the case – Marxists argue that the ruling class is not only economically powerful but also politically powerful. It controls what Althusser (1972) called 'repressive state apparatuses' (RSAs) or ways of getting people to conform by force. This can range from hard policing (the police and armed forces as agents of

social control) to soft policing (social workers and welfare agencies 'policing' the behaviour of the lower classes). Ownership and control of institutions such as the media also allow the ruling class to influence how others see the world. Althusser called these institutions that deal in ideas 'ideological state apparatuses' (ISAs). The education system, for example, does not just teach knowledge and skills, it also teaches the values of competition, individualism ('educational success' is measured by how successfully students compete against each other) and respect for authority. All these ideas fit neatly into a capitalist economic system that most benefits the bourgeoisie.

Order and stability are maintained at a system level through the institutions that make up the political and ideological superstructure. These, in turn, are controlled by a ruling class whose power comes from ownership of the economic base. Most people are fixed in to capitalist society by the need to earn a living for themselves and their family. They are also fixed in by a range of ideas that support the current system, which are spread by the media, education, religion and other institutions.

Socialisation, therefore, is an effective form of control – a type of ideological control that seeks either to convince people that the interests of the ruling class are really the interests of everyone or to present society as impossible for the individual to influence or change. Socialisation may be more effective in the long term because people include the basic **ideology of capitalism** in their personal value system. However, this involves making economic and political agreements with the lower classes to ensure their cooperation.

KEY TERMS

Relations of production: The relationships between the people involved in production, such as between the owners and the workers.

Forces of production: The ways in which capital can be transformed through technology and people's labour into goods for sale.

Ideology: a set of ideas and ideals which explains how society works or should work.

Capitalism: an economic system based on the private ownership of property and the pursuit of profit.

Earlier types of society had different types of stratification system that can be compared with class systems. For example, India had the caste system, where social position was ascribed at birth. People tended to accept the level

KEY SOCIOLOGIST

Karl Marx 1818–83



Marx was a philosopher, economist, historian, political theorist and activist and a sociologist. He is considered to be one of the founding fathers of sociology, alongside Durkheim and Weber, but was writing before both of them. Marxism, named after him, is a structural conflict approach which

emphasises the centrality of class conflict in any analysis of society. Marx's work has provided a starting point for much theory in sociology and other disciplines, and became the foundation of the global socialist movement that sought to create an equal society in which class had been abolished. Marx wrote a lot throughout his life. His most important works are *Das Kapital* and, with Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*.

of society they were born into, doing the same work and marrying someone from the same background. This allows very little social mobility; the class system is more open, with some mobility up and down the system.

Feminist theory

Although there are many forms of feminist theory, they all share the belief that contemporary societies are patriarchal to some degree; the interests of men are always considered more important than those of women. In basic terms, therefore, order and control are based on male power expressed in two ways. *Interpersonal power* refers to things like physical violence or the various ways that female labour is exploited within the family group. *Cultural power* focuses on how male-dominated societies are structured to oppress and exploit women. In such societies, men dominate the highest levels of economic, political and cultural institutions.

Different types of feminism emphasise different forms of control as the way to understand a male-dominated social order. For **liberal feminism**, the key form of control is sexual discrimination, while for **Marxist feminism**, class inequality provides the context in which female oppression, exploitation and discrimination occur. In a competitive, capitalist society, men are encouraged to exploit any 'weaknesses' in women's market position (the fact that women may be out of the workforce during and after pregnancy, for example) to their own advantage.

For **radical feminism**, patriarchy is the source of female oppression. Radical feminists believe that patriarchy is a feature of all known human societies and results in men dominating the social order in two areas: the *public* – such as 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.

ACTIVITY 1.9

Suggest two differences between consensus and conflict approaches to explaining social change.

Identify one strength and one limitation of each approach.

Interactionism

This general **microsociological** approach, also called the social action approach, claims that order and control are created 'from the bottom up'. It is based on the idea that people create and re-create 'society' on a daily basis through their daily routines. People constantly, if not always knowingly, produce and reproduce social order through their individual and combined behaviour. From this viewpoint, 'society' is merely a term people use to explain the limits they place on behaviour. Although society does not exist *physically*, it does exist *mentally*. People act as though society is a real force having an effect on them, limiting and controlling their behaviour. This creates order and stability.



KEY TERMS

Liberal feminism: a feminist approach which seeks to bring about equal opportunities for men and women without changing the system.

Marxist feminism: a feminist approach which combines feminism with Marxism to argue that women are exploited by both capitalism and patriarchy.

Radical feminism: a feminist approach which focuses on patriarchy as the cause of women's oppression.

Microsociology: a type of sociology focused on the study of individuals and small groups.

To understand how order is maintained, therefore, we must examine the *socio-psychological* processes through which social groups and a sense of society are constructed. From this perspective, social life involves a series of *encounters* – separate but linked episodes that give the appearance of order and stability; they exist for as long as we *act* in ways that maintain them. Garfinkel (1967) demonstrated the weak nature of our beliefs about social order by disrupting people's daily routines and observing how upset, confused and angry people became.

Order is more psychologically desirable than disorder, and people try to impose order through the meanings given to behaviour in two ways:

- 1 To interact, people must develop shared definitions of a situation. In a school classroom, if a teacher defines the situation as a period of time for teaching, but her students define it as a time for messing around and having fun, this will almost certainly result in disorder.
- 2 Where meanings are negotiated, they can easily change. For example, the identities associated with masculinity and femininity have changed dramatically over the past 30 years in many countries.

Interactionists argue that to explain human behaviour we need to study people's interactions at the micro level – that is, as they go about their daily lives – because, as Schutz (1962) argues, 'subjective meanings give rise to an apparently objective social world'. Societies are constructed through social interaction and this, in turn, is based on meanings. We live in a complex, symbolic world in which the meaning of our actions, our choice of clothes or the language we use is always open to interpretation. The meaning of something, whether a physical object such as a mobile phone or a symbolic system such as language, is never completely clear and its meaning can be changed by the social context in which it appears and can be negotiated through interaction.

ACTIVITY 1.10

How can a mobile phone be a status symbol? With a partner, think of a list of ideas about why different types of people might want different phones.



Reflection: What other objects are status symbols? Which are the most important to your age group? Discuss your ideas with other students and consider how your views differ and why.

To understand how social context can determine or change the meaning of something, consider two people fighting:

- If the fight occurs in the street, we might interpret this as unacceptable and call the police.
- If the two people were fighting in a boxing ring, rather than disapproving we might cheer and encourage our favoured fighter.

While this example demonstrates that meanings must always be interpreted, it also suggests that interaction is based on shared definitions of a situation, which themselves may be the product of negotiation. Social interaction, therefore, does not simply involve obeying rules without question, because the meaning of behaviour can change depending on its social context. Wrong (1961) criticised what he calls an '**over-socialised conception of man**'. He rejects the idea that human behaviour is governed entirely by the effects of socialisations. For Wrong, people are able to exercise a degree of freedom from the influences of their social environment.



KEY TERM

Over-socialised conception of man: criticism of the claim that human beings are simply the product of their socialisation and that behaviour can be understood as merely a response to external influence.



Figure 1.13: Could 'society' be just a label we give to social interaction?

The idea of labelling demonstrates how interactionists view society as the product of social interaction. Labelling theory argues that when we name something, such as categorising people as 'male' or 'female', we associate the name with a set of characteristics that are then used to guide our behaviour. These characteristics influence our behaviour and attitude to the named person, object or situation. If the meaning of something is only developed through interaction, then meanings can change. For example, male and female social identities have changed over the past 50 years. In Western societies, female identity has changed dramatically. Previously, a woman was defined almost exclusively in terms of marriage, motherhood and caring for others. Today, there is a wider range of definitions, such as the single career woman, which reflects changing ideas about equality and perceptions of women.

Structuration

Concepts of structure and action are both important in helping us understand the relationship between society and the individual. Although we are all individuals, our behavioural choices are influenced, limited and improved by the framework of rules and responsibilities (social structures) that surround us. Just as we cannot imagine a society without individuals, it is impossible to think about people without referring to the ways in which their behaviour is structured. Giddens (1984) developed a perspective called **structuration**, which outlined the importance of both structure and action in considering the relationship between society and the individual.

Structuration is the idea that as people develop relationships, the rules they use to guide their behaviours are *formalised* into routine ways of behaving towards each other (*practices*). Through the huge range of practices in our lives, a sense of structure develops in our social world – and this involves rules. This idea is important because it indicates the way our actions create behavioural rules and demonstrates how such rules become *externalised* (they seem to take on a life of their own, separate from our individual behaviours). Thus, although we may show rule-making behaviour, these rules 'reflect back' (*reflexivity*) on our behaviour in ways that suggest or demand **conformity**.



KEY TERMS

Structuration: theory, developed by Giddens, which argues that structure and action are equally significant in terms of our ability to understand the relationship between the individual and society.

Conformity: behaving in a socially acceptable way.

In explaining why some rules are created and accepted while others are rejected, Giddens uses the idea of social resources and power relationships. Some rules are *negotiated*; friendship, for example, is based on a series of unwritten and unspoken rules that develop over time. Other rules, such as laws governing punishments for murder, cannot be negotiated; they are simply forced on individuals by powerful groups.



KEY CONCEPT - STRUCTURE AND HUMAN AGENCY

Is behaviour shaped by wider social forces or is the social world shaped by the actions of individuals?

ACTIVITY 1.11

Think about the groups to which you belong (such as family, school or college, work, friends and peers) and about these questions:

- 1 How do these groups shape your behaviour?
- 2 How does your behaviour shape the behaviour of other people in these groups?

Which groups have the most influence on your behaviour? Give reasons for your answer.

Factors explaining why individuals conform to social expectations, including sanctions, social pressure, self-interest and social exchange

Most of the time, most people conform to social expectations; social life would not be possible if they did not. The agencies of socialisation – family, peers, education, media and religion – also act as agencies of social control. There are also some specialised agencies of social control, such as the police and the legal system. Agencies are able to apply pressure to make people act

in some ways and not others. One way they do this is through the use of positive or negative sanctions:

- Positive sanctions (rewards) are the pleasant things we do to make people behave in routine, predictable, ways. These range from smiling, through praise and encouragement, to gifts.
- Negative sanctions (punishments) are the reverse. They include not talking to people if they annoy us, frowns or words of disapproval, fines, taking away liberty, putting people in prison and the ultimate negative sanction – killing someone.

Social controls take two basic forms:

- 1 Formal controls involve written rules, such as laws, that apply equally to everyone in a society. They also include non-legal rules that apply to everyone playing a particular role in an organisation (such as a school or factory). Sanctions are enforced by agencies of social control – for example, the police and the legal system. Formal controls tell everyone within a group exactly what is and is not acceptable behaviour. Breaking these rules (deviance) may result in formal sanctions – such as a fine or imprisonment for breaking the law, or being sacked for breaking a company's organisational rules.
- 2 Informal controls reward or punish acceptable/unacceptable behaviour in everyday, settings (such as the family). These controls do not normally involve written rules and procedures. Rather, they operate through informal enforcement mechanisms that might include ridicule, sarcasm, disapproving looks or personal violence. Such controls mainly apply to the regulation of primary relationships and groups. However, there are exceptions because primary relationships can occur within secondary groups – a teacher, for example, may also be a friend or even a relative. Informal controls also relate to the 'unofficial rules' we create in casual groups. A few of these rules might be applied generally – for example, unless you are in a boxing ring, punching someone in the face is generally regarded as unacceptable. However, the majority of unofficial rules are specific to a particular group. Swearing among friends, for example, may not invite sanction, but swearing at your mother or father might.

Belonging to a group – and wanting to continue to belong to it, with the approval of the other group members – is itself a strong form of social pressure. Ostracism is the

exclusion of someone from a group, a very strong negative sanction that is a strong reason to conform to the group.

Another factor which influences people to conform most of the time is self-interest. In order to survive and live as a member of society, it is necessary to get on with others. We all need to cooperate with others, and we know that other people are less likely to support those who act in ways they disapprove of. Individuals therefore conform because they can see that it is in their own interests to do so. This can be extended to the idea of social exchange. This is the view that people give to others (either material goods, or status or approval) because this creates a relationship with joint obligations, so that the giver is likely to receive in return. When individuals are choosing a course of action, they weigh up the likely consequences, and so are likely to choose one which will result in a benefit to themselves. This means that they are likely to conform to social expectations, and to follow the socially approved norms and values.

The mechanisms through which order is maintained, including power, ideology, force and consensus

This section looks further at some of the ways in which order is maintained in society. We have already considered formal and informal social control, and the ways in which socialisation and nature shape people's behaviour.

Ideology

Ideologies are sets of beliefs whose ultimate purpose is to explain something. This might be:

- the meaning of life (scientific and religious ideologies)
- the nature of family organisation (familial ideologies)
- the superiority/inferiority of selected social groups (sexist or racist ideologies)
- how societies should be organised and governed (political ideologies).

The word 'ideology' is now often used to describe a set of ideas that is not true, or rather that the person using the word 'ideology' believes is not true. Ideologies involve a partial or biased account. Ideologies can be used to explain and approve the social structure and culture, justifying particular attitudes and behaviours. The term 'dominant ideology' refers to the set of ideas which is most widely accepted in a society, usually imposed by a powerful group.

KEY SOCIOLOGIST

Louis Althusser (1918–90)



The French philosopher Louis Althusser revived Marxist thought in the mid twentieth century, developing ideas about ideology and other Marxist concepts to apply them to political and economic changes of the time. He is known for the concepts of repressive and ideological state apparatuses and how the latter interpellate individuals,

turning them into subjects by getting them to internalise ideology and see it as natural and obvious. His best-known works are *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*. He suffered from depression and a feeling of intellectual failure. He killed his wife, the sociologist H el ene Rytman, in 1980 while in a fit of depression, was committed to a psychiatric hospital and did very little further writing.

Marxists argue that ideologies have a controlling or manipulative element: for example, a capitalist-controlled media directly attempts to influence its audience by constructing and presenting a version of reality favourable to the ruling class. The ruling class control the state, and use state institutions to impose the dominant ideology. Althusser (1971) referred to these institutions as ideological state apparatuses; they include the education system, the family, media and religion. Adorno and Horkheimer (1944), part of the Marxist Frankfurt School, argued that ruling-class ideology is passed on through a culture industry that creates forms of popular culture – film, magazines, comics, newspapers and so on – which are consumed uncritically and passively by the people. By controlling the culture industry, a ruling class controls the means of mental production – how people see and think about the social world. The working class, absorbing this ideology, is prevented from realising what it is really going on; they have what Marxists call ‘false class consciousness’, believing, because they are repeatedly told this, that the system they live under is fair and honest, and that their own low position is the result of their own failure or lack of ability. The reality of exploitation and oppression is hidden by the ideology. If the working class becomes able to see their real situation and protest, the ruling class can then call on what Althusser calls the repressive state apparatus – the police, armed forces and so on – who can control the working class by **force**.

Ideologies are important in the social construction of reality because they play an overall structural role in any society. They represent complete systems of belief enabling events to be located within wider contexts and related to similar events. In this sense, ideologies are mental maps that tell us not only where we have

been – our cultural history – but also where a society wants to go in terms of economic, political and cultural development. Ideologies are powerful structuring agencies because they pull together and make sense of the various strands of our individual and cultural existence and give the social world meaning, stability and order.

ACTIVITY 1.12

Suggest an example of an ideology in your society and identify some of its related beliefs.

Assess the extent to which this ideology influences behaviour in your society.

Power

Power is an important, but often difficult, concept. Dugan (2003) defines power *actively*, suggesting that it involves ‘the capacity to bring about change’. Lukes (1990), however, defines power *passively*, arguing that one definition involves the power to ‘do nothing’ by making others believe nothing has to change. Power also has many sources. Weber (1922) distinguishes between two types:

- 1 Force or coercive power, where people are forced to obey under threat of punishment.
- 2 Consensual power (authority), where people obey because they believe it right to do so.



KEY TERMS

Force: also referred to as coercion – using intimidation and threats to persuade someone to do something they do not want to do.

Power: the ability to make others do what you want, even against their will.

The second type, authority, can be further broken up:

- Charismatic power involves people obeying because they trust the person issuing a command.
- Traditional power is based on custom and practice – the way things have always been done.
- Rational/legal power expresses the idea that people expect commands to be obeyed because their position in an authority structure gives them the right to demand control.

Power also has a number of dimensions. We can define power in terms of decision-making. It involves:

- the ability to make decisions – teachers, for example, can decide what their students do in the classroom
- preventing others making decisions – a teacher can stop their students doing things they might like to do (such as gazing out of the window)
- removing decision-making from the agenda – the ability to 'do nothing' because others are convinced that no decision has to be made.

Those with power can impose their interests and their definition of reality on others. In doing so, they can bring about order and stability.

However, Foucault (1983) argued that power in modern societies is different from power in past societies because it is opaque, or 'difficult to see'. People are unaware of the power that other individuals or groups such as governments have over them. This has occurred because the way people think about and experience power in everyday life has changed. In the past, social control was mainly based on coercive power in a range of ways, from a king or queen exercising supreme power to prison systems that maintained total control over the body. In modern societies, Foucault claimed, power is exercised in increasingly subtle modes ways, such as technological **surveillance** – both 'from above', such as closed circuit television (CCTV) being used to film people, and 'from below' – for example, how someone's use of a smartphone can be used to gather information about them.

KEY TERM

Surveillance: when people or places are watched over carefully; a way of controlling behaviour.

Foucault further argues that knowledge about the social world and the language we use to express such knowledge are both aspects of belief systems that control behaviour by influencing how people *think* about the world. If, for example, we believe in ideas like 'male' and 'female', this controls how we behave both *as* males and females and *towards* other males and females.

Although reality is socially constructed, the construction process itself involves a complex relationship between beliefs, ideologies and power on one side (the broad structural elements of culture) and everyday ideas about roles, values and norms on the other.

ACTIVITY 1.13

To illustrate how the social construction of reality takes place on an everyday basis, take a walk around your school or college and record the different ways you classify the people you meet. For example, you will probably meet some or all of the following classes of people: strangers, acquaintances (people you recognise but don't really know very well), friends, close friends, best friends. There will, of course, be other categories to discover.

Reflection: How does this classification affect your behaviour towards the people you encounter?

Consensus

The functionalist view is that order is maintained through a consensus, a general agreement on a set of values. This is not seen as being imposed from above by a ruling class, as in Marxist theory, but rather the outcome of the majority accepting it. Those in authority have the power to punish those who break the consensus (for example, by committing a crime) but they will have the support of society in doing this. The punishing of criminals reinforces the boundaries of the value system; it actually strengthens it, by reminding everyone of which behaviours are not tolerated. The consensus is also reinforced by collective rituals, when the members of the society join together to confirm their acceptance of the consensus; this may be through religious ceremonies, or the use of symbols such as flags or singing a national anthem. The consensus can change over time. If opinion

changes within a society, then rules and laws will change to reflect this. In this way, the society is able to remain stable despite change.

THINK LIKE A SOCIOLOGIST

Most of the time, most school students conform to most of the school rules. Make a list of reasons why they do this. Then imagine you are a head teacher and want to have even greater conformity – what would you do?

How sociologists explain deviance and non-conformity, including reference to subcultures, under-socialisation, marginalisation, cultural deprivation and social resistance

Subcultures

Within complex societies, there will be more than one single value system. There will be groups which have different values – subcultures. In Western societies, some sociologists have argued that working-class subcultures are very different from the wider culture. Some of the features of working-class subcultures have been seen as being (Miller 1962):

- trouble: willingness to accept that life involves conflict, and to get involved in fights
- toughness: demonstrating 'maleness' through physical strength, drinking, etc.
- smartness: status among peers involves dressing as well as possible
- excitement: as work is repetitive, fun and enjoyment are highly valued
- fate: believing there is little that can be done to influence their lives
- autonomy: dislike of authority – of anyone trying to tell them what to do.

Miller (1962) suggested that these are normal features of working-class subculture that bring young working class males into conflict with wider society. Their choices of leisure activities lead to involvement in gangs and conflict with authority in the form of the police, so the behaviours of these young men seems to be an example of **non-conformity**. But the working-class youths are in fact

conforming at their subcultural values – in that sense, they are not deviant.

Other groups of young people have formed distinctive subcultures based on particular styles. These are considered in the section on resistance.

Under-socialisation

Another explanation for deviance is that socialisation has been partial or unsuccessful (**under-socialisation**). During primary socialisation, individuals internalise the norms and values of their family and then of the wider society. There will not always be complete agreement between the family's values and those of wider society; an individual may be socialised in a family where some deviance is tolerated or approved (even criminals have families). Alternatively, the family may fail to socialise a child adequately, perhaps through lack of care or inability to devote time. The child may not completely internalise moral values (learning the difference between right and wrong), or may not develop the ability to judge what behaviour is appropriate in different situations.

Marginalisation

Some individuals and groups are pushed to the fringes of society, both economically and politically. In the UK, the term '**marginalisation**' has been applied particularly to working-class youth in inner city areas. These areas lack resources and facilities; the schools may not be good and there are few job opportunities. The concerns of young people have not been taken seriously by the authorities; they have no politicians to speak on their behalf. With high rates of unemployment, they can feel they have no future. This weakens the hold of the dominant value system or ideology over them, because they do not feel that society is doing anything for them. They may develop subcultures that express resistance, or turn to forms of deviance such as drug taking or minor crimes.

KEY TERMS

Non-conformity: when a person acts in ways that go against the norms and values of society.

Under-socialisation: when the process of socialisation is incomplete or inadequate.

Marginalisation: the pushing of an individual or group to the edge of a group or society, denying them an active voice and identity.

Cultural deprivation

A further argument suggests that some groups in society lack the attitudes and values which would allow them to be successful, for example by obtaining qualifications and being upwardly socially mobile; for example, the working class. Having a different set of values from those that are dominant places such groups at a disadvantage. For example, to succeed in education, it helps to be able to take a long term view, working hard and postponing leisure; that is, to defer gratification. Children whose family background has socialised them into thinking and acting like this stand a better chance of success. Children from working-class backgrounds are more likely to have been socialised into preferring immediate gratification and are thus less likely to have such attitudes. They can be said to be culturally deprived as this can lead to under-achievement at school and limitation of their prospects.

Resistance

Resistance is associated with conflict views of society, because it assumes a dominant group within society whose power can be resisted. **Neo-Marxists** have suggested that where relatively powerless groups lack an understanding of the capitalist system but are aware and resentful of their disadvantaged position within it, they can respond with deviant behaviour which expresses their anger. This cannot become a revolution that will bring down the ruling class and capitalism, and is arguably a form of showing anger which can strengthen the system. This is used to explain the deviant behaviour of youth subcultures. Young people are relatively free to resist – they are less likely to have long-term financial commitments, families to support or jobs they might lose. So they are a relatively weak point where resistance to the dominant ideology can be expressed. Young people face problems they can temporarily solve through rejecting the dominant values of society (which may seem to have rejected the young people) through their choice of style, appearance and behaviour. Neo-Marxists have studied various youth subcultures, such as mods and skinheads, and attempted to show that the deviant style and behaviour are in fact forms of resistance. One criticism of this explanation is that it would probably not be accepted by the young people themselves – it assumes that the sociologist knows the underlying reasons for behaviour that the people involved are unaware of. This is an over-deterministic view that undervalues the meanings that people attach to their actions.

KEY CONCEPT - POWER, CONTROL AND RESISTANCE

How do the ideas here illustrate how people may organise to oppose and resist the exercise of power?

KEY TERMS

Cultural deprivation: not having the values and attitudes which are likely to bring success in society.

Resistance: the ways in which people combat and contest the dominant power in a society. Used for a wide variety of activities.

Neo-Marxism: any developments from original Marxism, adapting it to meet changing circumstances.

WHAT'S THE EVIDENCE?

Goth: Identity, Style and Subculture

By Paul Hodkinson

Oxford, Berg (2002)

This is an ethnographic study of a distinctive subculture which emerged from post-punk styles in the 1980s. The Goth style involves the sombre and macabre, with black dominant in clothing but Hodkinson shows that this does not mean a gloomy outlook on life. He was a participant himself in the Goth scene and describes his role as a 'critical insider'. He shows that for many Goths, being a Goth was a very important part of their identity, with some describing it as being like belonging to a tribe. For many of them, taking part in subcultural events (such as specialist Goth club and pub nights, and annual festivals) were major activities that led to them socialising more with Goths than non-Goths. Goths were often geographically dispersed but links with other Goths and with the subculture were strong through use of specialist Goth shops and media. Overall, the research shows how subcultures continue to provide distinctive alternatives to mainstream culture despite the postmodern claim that 'pick 'n' mix' styles with little substance or meaning have replaced subcultures.

Question: What other subcultures do you know of?

1.3 Social identity and change

Social class, gender, ethnicity and age as elements in the construction of social identity

This section examines the ways that people use concepts such as class, gender ethnicity and age to create

social identities that fix them within particular cultures and societies.

KEY TERM

Social identity: collective or group identities applied to important roles. Cultures classify, group and give meaning to broad identities, such as male or female, that define how 'men' and 'women' are generally expected to behave.

Class identities

Social class can be difficult to define, but Crompton (2003) suggests that occupation is a good general measure that can allow us to define simple class groupings, such as working, middle and upper class. Occupation can also suggest ways in which class identities develop out of different work-related experiences.

Working class

Traditional working-class identities are fixed (or centred) around manual work and the manufacturing industry. A further dimension to class identity came from the largely urban and close communities within which the traditional working class lived. Here, people of a similar class, occupation and general social outlook had their cultural beliefs continually reinforced through personal experience and socialisation: the 'working-class Self' could be contrasted with the 'middle-/upper-class Other'. In such circumstances, class identity was built not just around what people were or believed themselves to be, but also around what they were *not*. More recently, however, Crompton has suggested changes to the nature of work:

- a decline in traditional manufacturing industries
- a rise of service industries such as banking, computing and a range of lesser-status service jobs.

This has led to the emergence of a new working class. Goldthorpe et al. (1968) argued that this section of the working class developed new forms of identity:

- privatised or home-centred
- instrumental: work was a means to an end – the creation of a comfortable home and family life – rather than an end in itself.

In terms of general class identity, however, Devine (1992) suggested that there were still important differences

between the new working class and the middle classes. The former, for example, retained a strong sense of 'being working class'.

Middle class

Middle-class identities are constructed around a range of occupational identities. These include:

- professionals such as doctors, whose identity combines high levels of educational achievement with personal autonomy (freedom of action) and decision-making
- managers involved in the day-to-day running of private and public companies – an identity, Brooks (2006) suggests, that combines career progression, decision-making, power and control over others and the organisation of work routines
- intellectuals, such as university lecturers, who reflect an academic identity dealing with knowledge and information services
- consultants focused on selling knowledge, information and skills across both national and global markets
- routine service workers (such as shop assistants), who represent an expanding identity group situated at the bottom of the middle-class hierarchy; they may have lower earnings and levels of skill than some higher working-class occupations, but they qualify as middle class on the basis of their non-manual work and, in the case of occupations such as nursing, higher levels of social status (a significant factor in all types of middle-class identity).

Upper class

Upper-class identities are based on two major groupings:

- The landed aristocracy is a relatively small group whose traditional source of power is its historic ownership of land and its political connections to the monarchy. In the past, this made it the most significant section of society. Over the course of the 20th century, the economic power and influence of the aristocracy may have declined, but there remains a significant upper-class section of society.
- The business elite now represents a major section of the upper class – one characterised by great income and wealth based on ownership of significant national, international and global companies.

Self and Zealey (2007) note that:

- 21% of the UK's total wealth is owned by the wealthiest 1% of its population.
- 7% of the nation's wealth is owned by the least wealthy 50%.

In India, a similar pattern of income equality emerges:

- The top 10% of wage-earners earn 12 times more than the bottom 10%.
- 42% of India's 1.2 billion population live on around \$1.25 a day.

On a global scale, Davies et al. (2008) note that the world's richest 1% own 40% of the total global wealth. Of this 1%, 60% live in just two countries: the USA and Japan.

ACTIVITY 1.14

Describe three cultural practices in your society that are commonly used to identify class distinctions.

Compare these three cultural practices. Which would be the most appropriate for sociological research, and why?

Gender identities

Connell et al. (1987) argued that we are not born a 'man' or a 'woman'; we become 'men' and 'women' through the social construction of gender identities. In other words, while biological sex refers to the physical characteristics that cause people to be labelled male or female, gender refers to the social characteristics given to each sex. Lips (1993) argued that differences in male and female identities do not occur naturally from biological differences. Gender identities differ historically and cross-culturally, which means that they are both learnt and relative. Connell (1995) suggested that there are two forms of dominant gender identities:

- 1 Hegemonic masculinity, where 'traditional' forms of masculinity are based on a variety of physical and mental characteristics. For example, men are encouraged to adopt a particular body shape that, ideally, emphasises physical strength. Mental characteristics include ideas about men as leaders, providers, being unemotional, rational, calm, cool and so on.
- 2 Emphasised femininity relates to the idea that female identities were traditionally defined by how they could accommodate the interests and needs of men. The dominant identity was one that matched and complemented hegemonic masculinity. Women were

Male identities

Although hegemonic masculinity is dominant, alternative masculinities exist. Schauer (2004) suggests the following forms of masculinity:

- Subordinate masculinities are generally seen as 'lesser forms' of masculinity, particularly for men who are unable or unwilling to perform hegemonic masculinity, such as those with physical disabilities.
- Subversive masculinities involve an alternative masculinity that challenges and undermines hegemonic masculinity. An example here might be the 'serious student' who works hard at school rather than being part of a gang that is disruptive in class.
- Complicit masculinities refer to newly feminised masculinities such as the 'new man'; men who combine paid work with their share of unpaid housework and childcare, taking on aspects of the traditional feminine role. This type of masculinity sees women as equals and occurs, Connell (1995) argued, because 'as women have become more powerful, male identities have begun to change'.



Figure 1.14: How does this behaviour challenge notions of hegemonic masculinity?

regarded as essentially passive, emotional beings whose identity was expressed in the service of others. Kitchen (2006) calls this a 'complicit femininity', because it is defined by male needs and desires.

- Marginalised masculinities refer to men who feel they have been 'pushed to the margins' of family life due to long-term unemployment, for example; they no longer feel able to perform what they see as the traditional masculine roles of money earner and family provider. Willott and Griffin (1996) noted this type of masculinity developing among the long-term unemployed working class as traditional beliefs about 'the good family man' providing for wife and kids clashed with an inability to provide for their partner and children as traditional working-class occupations disappeared.

WHAT'S THE EVIDENCE?

Young Masculinities

By Stephen Frosh and Ann Phoenix, Basingstoke, Palgrave (2002)

The researchers used individual and focus group interviews to gain an insight into how boys aged 11 to 14 (younger than in most research of this kind) in schools in London, United Kingdom, negotiated their gender identities.

Although there is a popular stereotype of teenage boys being unable or unwilling to talk, especially about emotions, this was not the case in these interviews. It was found that it was important for the boys that they were seen as different from girls and separate from things associated with feminism. There was pressure to be 'hard', shown by success in sports, casual attitudes to school work and swearing. Football was important for masculinity; boys were expected to talk about football.

Looking good was important too, but played down because caring about appearance was seen as feminine.

Some boys put up a 'front' of masculinity with other boys but were willing to discard this in one to one interviews or when around girls. The boys did not want girls as friends, although they recognised they would be able to talk about emotions more with girls.

Many boys worked continuously on re-establishing their masculinity. Overall this research shows the importance of ideas about masculinity for boys' identities, and how attitudes are formed at quite an early age.

Question: Can you recognise any of these aspects of masculinity and masculine behaviour in your school or college?

Female identities

Ann Oakley (1972) suggested that female identities were shaped in childhood. Girls and boys are socialised

differently, into gendered roles that involve gendered identities. This happens in several ways. Girls and boys are treated differently by their parents, dressed in different clothes, are given different toys to play with and so on. Oakley suggested four main ways in which children are socialised into gender roles:

- By manipulation: for example, by stressing the importance of appearance for girls and of being brave or strong for boys.
- By canalisation: channelling children's time and attention onto different activities, such as the girl helping her mother cook while the boy plays sport with his father.
- By verbal appellation: how children are spoken to; for example, telling a girl she is pretty reinforces the idea that attractiveness in females is important.
- By different activities: what children see their parents and others doing leads to ideas about what is appropriate for each sex, for example that cooking and cleaning are for women.

According to Oakley, there are three main forms of feminine identity in contemporary societies:

- 1 Contingent femininities are framed and shaped by male beliefs, behaviours and demands:
 - Normalised identities, for example, involve women learning to play a secondary role to men – as mothers, girlfriends, partners and the like. Chambers et al. (2003) argue that such identities continually struggle with the problem of 'producing a femininity that will secure male approval'.
 - Sexualised identities are made through male eyes and fantasies. In these types of identity, women are sexual objects that exist for male gratification.
- 2 Assertive identities reflect the changing position of women in many societies. They involve women breaking free from traditional ideas about femininity, but not completely setting themselves apart from men. Froyum (2005) suggests that assertive femininities are adopted to 'resist male power without actually threatening to overthrow such power'. Different types of assertive identity include:
 - 'Girl power' identities: Hollows (2000) suggests that these emphasise 'sex as fun' and the importance of female friendship. These identities represent a way of 'coping with masculinity', but older women are excluded from this identity.

- Modernised femininities that relate to a slightly older age group. These locate new-found female economic and cultural power within the context of family relationships. The assertive aspect here is a desire for personal freedom and expression – what McRobbie (1996) termed ‘individualism, liberty and the entitlement to sexual self-expression’ – within the context of traditional gender relationships.
- Ageing femininities, which assert the right of elderly women to be fashionable, active and sexual beings.

3 Autonomous femininities, which involve competition with men, on female terms. Evans (2006), for example, points to a female individualism as part of a ‘new gender regime that frees women from traditional constraints’, such as pregnancy and childcare. Autonomous women are likely to be:

- highly educated
- successful
- professional middle class
- career-focussed.

They also tend to form non-committal heterosexual attachments. These may involve marriage but are unlikely to involve children.

Ethnic identities

When thinking about ethnic identities, it is helpful to keep two things in mind:

- 1 Ethnicity is not the same thing as race. As Ossorio (2003) argues, ‘the simple biological notion of race is wrong’ – there is no solid scientific evidence of genetically different ‘racial groups’.
- 2 Avoid thinking about ethnicity in terms of ‘minorities’. The Center for Social Welfare Research (1999) stated: ‘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.’

Ethnicity, therefore, refers to a combination of cultural differences, in areas such as:

- religion
- family structures
- beliefs
- values
- norms.

Winston (2005) suggests that ethnic identities develop when people ‘see themselves as being distinctive in some way from others’ because of a shared cultural background and history. Song (2003) claims that this is often expressed in terms of distinctive markers such as a common ancestry and ‘memories of a shared past’. A sense of ethnic identity is based on ‘symbolic elements ... such as family and kinship, religion, language, territory, nationality or physical appearance’. Ethnic identity does not necessarily relate to ‘any actual evidence of cultural distinctiveness as a group’. The key factor is whether people are ‘conscious of belonging to the group’.

Ethnicity as a source of personal and social identity is built on a range of ideas that include referring to:

- country of birth and the sense of a common geographic location
- traditions and customs that contribute to unique cultural practices that distinguish one ethnic group from another
- shared histories and experiences as a defining sense of identity, as with victims of slavery in the case of Black Caribbean and African identities or the Nazi holocaust in the case of Jewish identities
- religious beliefs, celebrations and traditions that connect people on the basis of shared cultural practices, such as common forms of worship.

Unlike racial identities, ethnic identities can be negotiated. Their nature and meaning can change because of external and internal factors. External factors might include contact with other cultures; internal factors might be a clash of ideas and experiences between different age, class or gender groups within a particular ethnic group. For this reason, ethnic identities require constant maintenance through collective activities, such as festivals, celebrations or religious gatherings, and a variety of material and symbolic cultural artefacts, such as traditional forms of dress, food and crafts.

Wimmer (2008) argues that an important aspect of ethnic identities is how they are defined in relation to other ethnic groups by constructing a sense of *difference*, which establishes boundaries for a particular identity. Ethnic boundaries may be positive, conferring a sense of belonging to a definable cultural group, or may protect – as a way of fighting racism and discrimination, for example. Boundaries may also be imposed through cultural stereotypes about ethnic groups and identities. This may in fact reinforce a stereotyped group’s sense of identity.

Another way in which ethnic identities can be imposed relates to how minority identities can be defined by majority ethnicities in terms of their 'Otherness'; how 'They' are different from 'Us'. While this relationship strengthens both majority and minority ethnic identities, it can also result in minority ethnicities being portrayed as a threat in two main ways:

- cultural, where minority beliefs and practices are set up as challenges to a particular way of life
- physical, where in countries such as Britain and the USA, following the 11 September 2001 World Trade Center attacks, the media framed and referenced this threat in terms of 'Muslims' and 'terrorism'.

ACTIVITY 1.15

Use the internet, and other forms of media, to find images of different class, gender and ethnic identities. In small groups, take it in turns to present your representations to one another. Explain clearly what the various elements of the image say about the social identity of the individual, or individuals, represented. Also, assess how far the image matches what you see as the social reality.

Combine your findings, and those of other groups, and present them in the form of a poster suitable for wall display.

Age Identities

On one level age is simply a matter of how many years someone has been alive, but sociologists are interested in the meanings attached to age. Age is a social construction, which means that what it means to be young, or old, or any age, depends on the society at the time.

In Western cultures, age is worked out by counting from the year of birth to the current time or until death occurs. Age is considered to be very important; it is the basis on which individuals are able to do certain things, or are prevented from doing other things.

In many traditional societies, in contrast, people may not know how old they are. Chronological age may not be recognised, or may be considered unimportant. The passing of time may be measured, not by dates, but by important events, or the passing of seasons. More important is the age set people belong to – the group of people with whom they go through important stages

in life, especially initiation into adulthood. In many traditional African societies, for example, there are three main stages in men's lives – as children, warriors and elders. Boys of roughly the same age are initiated into adulthood and become adults at the same time. The initiation may involve instruction in traditions and lore, and adult responsibilities, and an ordeal or test of strength.

Industrial societies, in contrast, usually place a great emphasis on age in terms of years. Some rights and responsibilities are only given to individuals when they reach a certain age.

Status in industrial societies is closely based on occupation and income. Children are usually unable to work and are therefore dependent on adults. Older people may be prevented from working and so are often on low income, which means they may have less status than African elders, who may be just as infirm, but are usually seen as sources of knowledge and experience.

Members of an age group who share a common experience of growing up at the same point in history are an **age cohort**. They grow up and grow old together experiencing the same significant events. This means that whatever differences of gender and ethnicity there may be, everyone born in a certain year will belong to the same age cohort throughout their lives; they will, for example, be leaving school and, later, entering retirement at around the same age.



KEY TERM

Age cohort: The group of people who move together from one age to the next.

Older people

In many societies older people are respected and appreciated for the guidance based on experience that they can offer to the community. Elders, for example, can be sources of wisdom and can help to solve disputes. This aspect of old age has been less obvious in modern industrial societies where communities and extended families are often weaker. Based on the idea that we now live in a 'global village', a group called The Elders, first brought together by Nelson Mandela in 2007, offers its collective wisdom to help solve some of the world's problems and to inspire younger people to act on them.



Figure 1.15: The Elders

More people survive into old age than used to be the case. 'Old age' in modern industrial societies now covers such a huge age range that it has become widely accepted to think of it as being sub-divided:

- 65 to 74: the young elderly
- 75 to 84: the old elderly
- 85 and over: the very elderly

This helps us recognise that there can be big differences within the category of 'old age'.

One important role of many older people is as grandparents, or even great-grandparents. In modern industrial societies, more people today know their grandparents than was the case in the past.

"Whilst an average woman of the mid-18th century could expect to die twelve years before her last grandchild was born, a woman of the 1970s could expect to live twenty five years after the birth of her last grandchild." (Anderson, 1985, page 70).

Because there has been a trend in many developed countries for people having children later in life, it may become normal for people to become a grandparent in their eighties if they have had children late and their children do too. There is a very wide variation in the ages at which people become grandparents, from their late thirties to advanced old age, which leads to variations in the role and identity of a grandparent.

Better health at a later age has led to many older people being able to play an active role in family life as grandparents. Rather than being seen as a burden, needing to be financially supported and cared for by their adult children, many grandparents are able to play a positive part by, for example:

- contributing financially, especially if they are still working
- looking after young grandchildren, especially where the parents both work
- playing a part in the primary socialisation of their grandchildren
- providing nurturing and emotional support
- helping to keep cultural traditions alive, passing on stories and wisdom to their grandchildren.

While some grandparents live close to their children and their families and help out on a daily basis (for example, taking the role of an unpaid childminder if both parents or a single-parent are working) many live too far from their children for this. Both parents and children tend to lead full lives and time with grandchildren may have to be planned and may involve specific activities.

The role of older people in families is explored further in the section on age and family life in Chapter 3, The family.

Children

The way in which childhood is socially constructed has, according to historical research, changed completely in the last 500 years. Philippe Aries (1962) has gone so far as to argue that childhood in the modern sense did not exist in the Middle Ages. Children were not seen as different from adults; they wore the same clothes, worked alongside adults and shared the same recreations. The invention of the printing press, and the growth of formal education, created a new separate world of childhood. Today whole professions (educational psychologists, paediatricians, teachers, child psychiatrists, etc.) are based on the assumption that children are not yet fully developed people, that they are vulnerable, and need protection and guidance. Aries says this idea of childhood is a modern invention, or 'social construction'.

One of the most striking aspects of a child's identity is that it is defined in relation to adults. Adults have authority over children and children are largely dependent on adults. Children have to obey their parents and their teachers, and may be physically punished if they do not obey. Hood-Williams (1990) argues that there are three types of adult control of children

- Space: children are required to stay within spaces; they may be told to play in the house, or allowed to go a certain distance from home. Children in traditional

societies often have greater freedom to roam over a wider area; in Western societies, concern over safety, related to both traffic, or danger from other people, sometimes known as 'stranger danger', means that children are watched over more and kept closer to home.

- Time: parents often control children's time, such as when they must go to bed, or how long they spend on homework and watching television. Children have to go to school for set hours. Adults also decide whether a child is old enough for particular activities or privileges.
- Bodies: what children wear, their hair style and the ways they sit, walk, run etc. are all controlled by adults.

Children have ways of resisting adult authority. Children can 'act up'; that is behave as if they were adults, perhaps by smoking or swearing. Children often look for ways to give the impression that they are older than they really are. They can also sometimes 'act down', acting younger than they are in order to get some of the concessions given to the very young. Both forms of resistance can be seen as being about children trying to escape from being seen as children.

Part of the idea of childhood in the twentieth century was that it was a period of happiness and innocence in which children were, or at least should be, free of adult worries. Neil Postman (1994) argued that childhood changed again with the growth of television, computers and videos. These mean that children are exposed to the adult world earlier - they cannot be kept innocent of the adult world of sex, violence and so on. Postman cites increases in crime by children, and the tendency for children to dress and behave more like adults. Since Postman first raised these concerns, the growth of the internet, and the relative ease with which 'adult' images and content can be accessed, has probably shortened the period of childhood innocence for many children.

Teenagers

The idea of a youth, or teenager, is a relatively modern one. It was only in Western societies in the second half of the 20th century that people of this age were thought of as a distinctive category. Growing affluence by the 1950s meant that teenagers had money to spend and industries, such as popular music and fashion, developed to meet the demands of this new market. There was concern that the emergence of this new group meant a 'generation gap', with teenagers and people of their parents' generation

having few shared interests, little in common and different opinions.

Functionalists like Eisenstadt view the teenage years as a difficult period because they involve status anxiety - industrial societies emphasise achieved, not ascribed statuses, and, therefore, young people feel pressure to achieve. One response is to rely on the peer-group; they are after all people who are going through the same problems and anxieties. Young people therefore tended to share norms and values, even to form a youth culture, but Eisenstadt saw this as functional since it helped people through the transition to adult life. Some breaking of norms, even if teenagers got into trouble with the authorities, was seen as a testing of the boundaries of acceptable behaviour as young people sought to establish their status and identity.

This view came into question with the development from the 1950s onwards of youth subcultures which were seen as rejecting, or rebelling, against the dominant culture's values. Neo-Marxists developed the idea of working-class youth subcultures as resistance to capitalism. Young people were able to rebel because they were less held back than adults by responsibilities. These youth subcultures were marked by rejection of mainstream society's norms and values; for example, the music and clothing was often designed to provoke a negative reaction from authority, or from older people in general. A good example of this is the punk style of the mid 1970s.

How social class, gender, ethnicity and age identities may be changing due to globalisation, increased choice and the creation of new/hybrid identities

Some sociologists, such as postmodernists, believe that the old certainties of identity are giving way to new uncertainties. Identities until fairly recently were considered to be stable and fixed. For most people, important aspects of their identity were outside their control and decided by birth; for example, being born with a fixed gender identity into a particular social class, in a society where gender and class were decisive influences on identity. Until very recently, identities were clear, relatively fixed and certain in terms of what is expected by others. For example, people had a clear idea about what it *means* to be 'a man' or 'a woman' because there are relatively few *choices* available to

them in how these categories are defined, or in how to live as someone belonging to one sex. The social rules governing how to be young or old, male or female, upper-class or working-class were clear, consistent and firmly enforced. This has begun to change, at least for people in more highly developed societies. Reasons for this include:

- Globalisation: A key social change is the development of *global* economic and cultural influences, which have opened up societies, communities and individuals to new and different experiences, behaviours and ideas. In the UK, for example, people eat food from the USA, India and Thailand, wear clothes from China and listen to music from Korea. They have imported a range of cultural ideas, styles and fashions from around the globe. This cultural trend has resulted in broken up (fragmented) identities and has increased the choices available.
- Increased choice: Many people now have much greater choice. On one level, this is simply about what they can buy – a far greater range of goods are available and often affordable. This has led to society being based on consumerism. The choices people make have consequences beyond simply satisfying needs or owning something – they have become a way of impressing on others who and what you are. One way of expressing cultural identity, therefore, is through a display of wealth that emphasises an individual's social status and position. More generally, consumption is linked to identity because it represents a 'background presentation' of the self. What we buy, how we dress and where, and how, we spend our leisure time all reveal something about who and what we are.

New and hybrid identities

In the globalised world, there are so many ways to express identities that it is no longer possible to support, sustain and control simple, centred social identities. As a result, the rules governing the correct way to play out these identities ('real men don't cry', 'a woman's place is in the home') are relaxed, as people develop the freedom to both invent, and adapt, identities to their personal tastes and styles.

One outcome of this change is that identities become decentred; people are less certain about how to behave. If there are many ways to be 'middle-class', which is the 'right' way? Identity categories are also more

easily combined to create a whole new range of hybrid identities. Some young British Asians, for example, define themselves as *Brasian* – a mix of both British and Asian cultures and identities. This is a new identity, not open to previous generations, but also a hybrid one, because it combines aspects of at least two ethnic identities. The problem with almost unlimited choice from which we pick and mix identities is uncertainty and confusion about who we are and how we are supposed to behave.



Figure 1.16: How does the idea of choice produce uncertainty?

People are still socialised into a variety of roles, values and norms, but social identities no longer set certain standards of belief and behaviour. Rather, individuals shape their lives through the development of personal identities that are always unique in some way, shape or form. While individual development (or *personal narrative*) is influenced by others, it is not *determined* by these relationships. Whereas, for structuralist sociologists, socialisation controls the behaviour of the individual, interactionists believe that socialisation covers a range of possibilities. Every time new choices are added, the pattern of socialisation changes. Eventually, even tiny changes to an individual's life can have a significant outcome. This explains how, and why, those socialised in the same family, in apparently very similar ways, develop different adult personalities.

The decentring of culture and identity means that people are increasingly open to, and accepting of, different experiences, both 'the new', in the sense of something not previously seen or done, and 'the newly different', in the sense of changing how we relate to existing experiences. Rampton (2002) suggests that identity construction

in postmodern societies is 'something that involves assembling, or piecing together a sense of identity from many changing options'. Each individual creates their identity through their consumption choices and practices – something shown by the difference between shopping at a market stall in a small village and a vast mall situated on the edge of town, or the even wider range available online. The market stall presents a narrow range of goods from which to choose, as was the case with identities in the past. Shopping malls present people with the freedom to browse huge spaces filled with a wide range of consumer goods – where they 'shop for identities'. The online shopper no longer needs to go to the mall.

ACTIVITY 1.16

Assess the extent to which your social identity is shaped by the things that you own.



Reflection: What other factors influence your social identity? Ask other students for their views. Would you change your own views based on what they've said? Why/Why not?



KEY CONCEPT - SOCIAL CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

How do the changes explained here help us understand the transition from 'modern' to 'postmodern' societies?

WHAT'S THE EVIDENCE?

'The Question of Identity'

By Stuart Hall. In Hall, S., Held, D. and McGrew, T. (eds), *Modernity and Its Futures* Cambridge, Polity (1992)

Stuart Hall suggests in this essay that we have now reached a third historical stage in the development of ideas about identity, the stage of the postmodern subject. During the period of the Enlightenment subject (16th to 18th centuries in Europe), it was thought that each person had a unique individual and indivisible identity. Then, during the 19th century, the sociological subject, seeing the individual citizen as enmeshed in a network of relationships with the modern state developed. Now, however, identities are increasingly fragmented; people no longer have a single, unified idea of who they are and can have several possibly conflicting identities. Hall relates this change to globalisation, the rise of new social

movements, including feminism and identity politics, and of surveillance. These can lead to a defensive reassertion of national identity (for example, against immigrants), to minority ethnic groups identifying with the cultures of their countries of origin, and to new and hybrid identities. Identities have been decentred. Hall's is a strong argument for postmodern ideas about identity. This has been criticised for not recognising that older sources of identity, such as social class, are still important.

Question: List the different aspects of your identity – gender, ethnic group, age group and so on. Are there situations where one, or more, of these are more, or less, important than others?

Changing class identities

Peele (2004) argues that recent global economic changes have resulted in 'a blurring of traditional class identities'. We can see this in cultural changes in taste and consumption. In particular, a joining up of working-class and middle-class tastes makes it increasingly difficult to define class identity clearly. Clear boundary lines between working-, middle- and upper-class identities have changed dramatically, although they have not disappeared completely.

Savage (2007) argues that, although people still use class categories as a source of identity, the meaning of these categories has changed. Greater emphasis is placed on individual, rather than collective, experiences; this undermines the importance of class, which is by its nature collective. As a result, working-class identities, in particular, have become more varied. Class identity is becoming increasingly fluid – based on someone's ability to choose who they are or who they want to be.



Figure 1.17: What are the elements of working- and middle-class taste cultures in the 21st century?

WHAT'S THE EVIDENCE?

The Great British Class Survey

Research team led by Mike Savage and Fiona Devine

Savage, M., Devine, F., Cunningham, N., Taylor, M., Li, Y., Hjellbrekke, J., Le Roux, B., Friedman, S., Miles, A. (2013). 'A New Model of Social Class: Findings from the BBC's Great British Class Survey Experiment'. *Sociology*, volume 47 number 2

summary available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-22007058> (accessed 1 January 2018)

The largest ever survey of the British class system, with responses from more than 160 000 respondents, combined conventional ways of measuring social class based on income and occupation with data on social and cultural capital. For example, the survey asked about leisure activities, and interests and tastes in music and food, and also who respondents knew, reflecting changes in thinking about social class. The research demonstrated the existence of an elite clearly separate from the middle-class. Overall, the researchers suggested that there were now seven classes, reflecting the social polarisation of British society and growing fragmentation, especially in the middle layers of society. The lowest class is described as the precariat, to indicate its precarious position in society. Its members score lowly on all forms of capital, live in old industrial areas and have high levels of insecurity. The emergence of this class has been seen as a worrying development in British society.

Question: Why are 'leisure activities, and interests and tastes in music and food, and also who respondents knew' a new development in researching and thinking about class? How important do you think they are?

Changing gender identities

Benyon (2002) argues that contemporary global societies are experiencing a crisis of masculine identity caused by a combination of:

- long-term unemployment
- the loss of traditional male employment in manufacturing industries
- lower educational achievement relative to girls
- the rise of female-friendly service industries.

Male identities once focused on traditional ideas such as providing for a family, but this is no longer the case for all. Marginalised masculinities cannot demonstrate traditional male qualities because they no longer control

the economic resources on which such masculinity was based. This male identity crisis has resulted in the rise of forms of exaggerated masculinity that try to bring back traditional forms of male identity. Retributive masculinities aim to get back traditional masculinity from their 'emasculated' peers. Typical behaviours include heavy drinking, fighting and romancing women. These behaviours are based on an idealised version of a traditional masculinity. This identity is:

- firmly patriarchal
- aggressive, both physically and verbally
- oppositional, in the sense of rejecting complicit masculinities
- reclamational – it seeks to 'reclaim masculinity' as an identity.

These types of masculinity, reacting against social change, can be seen, for example, in violence against women and sexual minorities.

Feminine identities are also changing as ideas about gender equality are more accepted globally. This enables more women to move away from the conventional feminine role based on the home and family, and take on new work-based identities. Some work-based identities such as that of domestic servant, are still strongly linked to the feminine role. Globalisation has led to many women from developing countries migrating to work as domestic servants, nannies and similar roles, sending remittances (money) to their families. This has led to a 'care deficit' as children are raised by grandparents, or others, while the mother cares for another family's children abroad. There has also been an increase in the number of women working in the global sex trade, often due to trafficking, carrying out a conventional female role of provider of sexual services in a newly globalised industry.

Changing ethnic identities

Globalisation, and the associated movement of people around the world, mean, that many societies are more ethnically mixed than in the past. This happens through two main processes:

- immigration, where different ethnic groups physically meet
- cultural globalisation, where, through agencies such as the internet, ethnic cultures and identities are increasingly exposed to different cultural influences.

This can lead to established identities gradually changing, by constantly drawing on new influences and re-establishing old identities in the face of new challenges. White English youth identities have, for example, *included* aspects of other cultures relating to:

- music, such as rock, pop, rap and hip-hop
- food, such as hamburgers, Asian cuisine and German beer
- language, especially slang terms associated with youth cultures and subcultures
- clothing that includes jeans and T-shirts.

These processes can also lead to a mixing of distinctive ethnic styles to produce new and unique identities. This mixing tends to take place on the margins of identity, involving the combination of specific features of ethnic identities rather than a complete change. Examples include things such as:

- Food: Indian, Chinese and Italian cuisine, for example, have become a key part of British culture, often with subtle changes that give them a unique 'British' identity twist.
- Clothing, where the American style of jeans and T-shirts has been added into a variety of global ethnic identities.
- Music, such as Bhangra, which displays cross-over styles to produce unique musical mixtures and genres.

Changing age identities

Age identities are also changing in response to social changes linked to globalisation and increased choice.

Older people

For many older people in developed countries, there are greater opportunities in later life than existed for previous generations. Pensions, better health care, and other developments, mean more years of active life after retirement. Pensions, in particular, have given older people financial power they did not often have in the past – this spending power is known in the UK as the 'grey pound', and has led to a range of industries and services aimed at older people. For example, some types of holidays such as cruises are aimed mainly at people in this age group. Some older people have also adopted new technology, often as a way of staying in contact (via social media) with relatives who live far away.

At the same time, rising life expectancy and lower birth rates mean that the populations of developed countries are ageing – the average age is going up, so that older people represent a growing proportion of the total population. This is referred to as the ageing population. Although older people are healthier and more active than many in the past, the last few years of life are still for many people marked by declining health and a growing reliance on care and support. This is likely to be provided by a combination of family and state.

Some older people take up new challenges and continue to contribute to family and community life in many ways. However, concern about the cost to governments of pensions has led to recent increases in the age at which people can retire, so that working life is being extended beyond the previous expected retirement age. This means that some people who in the past would have retired are still working and contributing to the economy by, for example, paying taxes and this is changing perceptions about when old age begins.

Young people and children

There are fewer children in most developed countries as a result of falling birth and fertility rates. As a consequence, children are highly valued and societies have become more child-centred. As with older people, a growing range of industries and services are aimed at children, and allow them the possibility of making consumer choices that contribute to shaping their identities.

In developing countries, the age profile of populations is very different, with far more children and young people. In Africa, 77% of the population is under 35 – a total of around 770 million people. Many of these young people have, or will soon have, access to social media via mobile phones and will have greater choices for shaping their identities. They will be more aware of lifestyles and living standards in the developed world. Without strong economic growth, it is likely that many young African people will aspire to migrate to developed countries to improve their life chances.

Social changes have led to the period of adolescence being extended. In developed countries in the mid-20th century, it was common for people to start full-time work in the mid to late teenage years and to marry in their early twenties. In most developed countries, the period of compulsory education has been extended, while at the same time many more young people go into higher

education, such as studying for a degree at a university. This means that young people tend to be dependent on their parents for longer, with more living at home until well into adulthood, so they do not gain independence until they are older than previous generations were. In some countries, this situation has been added to by a lack of jobs for younger people and by the rising cost of renting or buying accommodation, which pushes young people toward staying in their parents' home. These trends have

also pushed up the ages at which people first get married and at which they have their first child.

KEY CONCEPT - INEQUALITY AND OPPORTUNITY

How do these different elements of social identity (social class, gender, ethnicity and age) help us understand how inequality affects different sections of society?

Summary

You should know:

The process of learning and socialisation

- Culture, roles, norms, values, beliefs, customs, ideology, power and status are elements in the social construction of reality.
- Socialisation is important in influencing human behaviour.
- There is a debate about the roles of nature and nurture in influencing human behaviour.
- Agencies of socialisation and social control include family, education, peer-group, media and religion.

Social control, conformity and resistance

- Structure and agency shape the relationship between the individual and society.
- There are differences between structuralist and interactionist views.

- Factors explaining why individuals conform to social expectations include sanctions, social pressure, self interest and social exchange.
- The mechanisms through which order is maintained include power, ideology, force and consensus.
- Sociologists explain deviance and non-conformity by reference to subcultures, under-socialisation, marginalisation, cultural deprivation and social resistance.

Social identity and change

- Social class, gender, ethnicity and age are elements in the construction of social identity.
- Social class, gender, ethnicity and age identities may be changing due to globalisation, increased choice and the creation of new/hybrid identities.

Exam-style questions and sample answers have been written by the authors. References to assessment and/or assessment preparation are the publisher's interpretation of the syllabus requirements and may not fully reflect the approach of Cambridge Assessment International Education. Cambridge International recommends that teachers consider using a range of teaching and learning resources in preparing learners for assessment, based on their own professional judgement of their students' needs.

Exam-style questions

Choose one set of questions to answer in the time available.

Set 1

- 1 'Fixed gender roles are important for making societies stable'.
 - a Explain this view. [10]
 - b Using sociological material, give one argument against this view. [6]
- 2 Evaluate the view that class identities are no longer as important as they used to be. [26]

Set 2

- 1 'Globalisation is changing gendered identities'.
 - a Explain this view. [10]
 - b Using sociological material, give one argument against this view. [6]
- 2 Evaluate the view that nature is more important than nurture in shaping human behaviour. [26]

Set 3

- 1 'Globalisation is giving people greater choice over their identities'.
 - a Explain this view. [10]
 - b Using sociological material, give one argument against this view. [6]
- 2 Evaluate the view that families are the most important influence on an individual's identity. [26]

Set 4

- 1 'Nature is more important than nurture in explaining human behaviour'.
 - a Explain this view. [10]
 - b Using sociological material, give one argument against this view. [6]
- 2 Evaluate the view that age identities are changing. [26]

Sample answer and activity

Set 1

1 Fixed gender roles are important for making societies stable.

a Explain this view.

[10]

You should make at least two clear and developed points in your answer.

Here is an example of a developed point:

The view that the family is the most important agency of social control is based on the fact that socialisation within the family when a child is very young is the most important stage of socialisation, referred to as primary socialisation. This is when the child, at an impressionable age, learns and internalises the main norms and values of their society from their parents and others in their immediate family. Parents are important in this because of the strong bond with their children. This includes learning the limits of acceptable behaviour, and so socialisation also is bound to involve social control. This learning is done in a variety of informal ways, including imitation (when the child copies the behaviour of a parent, who is acting as a role model), comments and smiles by parents that reinforce approved behaviour.

Point 1: Notice that this answer has already included a number of key sociological terms, such as primary socialisation, internalises, social control and imitation. It is important to demonstrate your sociological knowledge and understanding by using key terms whenever possible.

Point 2: This point could be improved by including some sociological theory. In this case, functionalism is the obvious choice, but both Marxists and feminists would have different views on the norms and values transmitted during primary socialisation. This opens up possibilities analysis and evaluation.

ACTIVITY 1.17

Now continue this answer by writing about the sanctions that can be used within families. Be sure to include a range of sanctions, and to explain why these may be successful in ensuring children conform to the norms and values of their family and of wider society.