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Sociology

Themes and Perspectives

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Chapter 1

Sociological perspectives

Introduction

'Human beings learn their behaviour and use their intelligence whereas animals simply act on instinct.' Like most commonsense notions, this idea has an element of truth, but reality is far more complex.

The regimented society of social insects such as ants and bees is an object lesson in order and organization. Every member has clearly defined tasks in a cooperative enterprise. Thus in a beehive the worker bees, depending on their age, will either feed the young, stand guard and repel strangers, forage for food, or ventilate the hive by beating their wings. The behaviour of insects is largely 'instinctive', it is based on programmes contained in the genes which direct their actions. However, it would be a mistake to assume that the behaviour of insects is based *solely* on instinct. Experiments have indicated that at least some have the ability to learn. For example, ants are able to memorize the path through a maze and are capable of applying this learning to other mazes.

Moving on from insects to reptiles, and on again to mammals, the importance of learned, as opposed to genetically determined, behaviour gradually increases. Studies of macaque monkeys on islands in northern Japan provide some indication of the importance of learned behaviour. On one island the macaques were living in the forested interior. Japanese scientists attempted to discover whether they could change the behaviour patterns of the troupe. They began by dumping potatoes in a clearing in the forest. Gradually the macaques changed their eating habits until they became largely dependent on potatoes – a food previously unknown to them – as their staple diet. The scientists slowly moved the food dumps towards the shoreline and the troupe followed. The potatoes were then regularly placed on the beach, which now became the normal habitat for the macaques.

In the following months, without any encouragement from the scientists, a number of new behaviour patterns emerged in the troupe. First, some members began washing the potatoes in the sea before eating them. Others followed suit until it became standard practice in the group. Then some of the younger macaques began paddling in the sea and eventually took the plunge and learned how to swim. They were imitated by their elders and, again, the novel behaviour of the few became the accepted behaviour of the group. Finally, some adventurous youngsters began diving off low rocky outcroppings on the shoreline, a practice which was copied by other members of the troupe.

The Japanese macaques had learned new behaviour patterns and these patterns were shared by members of the group. The simple generalization that animal behaviour is genetically determined whereas the behaviour of humans is learned is clearly incorrect. However, the range and complexity of learned behaviour in humans are far greater than in any other species. This is shown by experiments with humanity's nearest living relative, the chimpanzee. When chimpanzees are raised in human households, for the first few years they learn at the same rate as human infants of the same age, but they soon reach the limit of their ability and are rapidly overtaken by human youngsters. Compared to mammals other than humans, chimpanzees have a considerable learning capacity. They can solve simple problems in order to obtain food, they can learn a basic sign language to communicate with humans, and they can even ape their more intelligent cousins in the famous chimpanzee tea party. Yet, despite this capacity to learn, the behavioural repertoire of chimpanzees is rudimentary and limited compared to the behaviour of people.

More than any other species, humans rely for their survival on behaviour patterns that are learned. Humans have no instincts, that is they have no genetically programmed directives to behave in particular ways. An instinct involves not only the impulse to do something, but also specific instructions on how to do it. Birds have an instinct to build nests. They have an impulse for nest building and all members of a particular species are programmed to build nests in the same way.

If we look at the range and variety of dwellings constructed by humans we can see that there are no

directives based on instinct. The following examples from nineteenth-century North America provide an illustration. In the Arctic, the Eskimos constructed igloos from rectangular blocks cut from closely compacted snow. On the north-west coast of the USA and the west coast of Canada, tribes such as the Nootka built oblong houses with a framework of cedar logs, walled and roofed with planks. On the opposite side of the subcontinent, in the eastern woodlands, the Iroquois also lived in oblong dwellings, known as 'long houses', but they substituted birch bark for planks. On the prairies, the easily transportable conical tipi made from long saplings covered in buffalo hides provided shelter for tribes such as the Sioux and Cheyenne. Further south, the Apache of Arizona and New Mexico lived in domed wickiups made from brushwood and scrub. In the same area, tribes such as the Zuñi and the Hopi built the first apartment houses in the USA. Even today many members of these tribes live in multi-occupation dwellings made from sun-dried mud bricks known as adobe. These examples show clearly that the human genetic code does not contain specific instructions to behave in a particular way – at least as far as housebuilding is concerned.

Culture and society

To all intents and purposes a newborn human baby is helpless. Not only is it physically dependent on older members of the species but it also lacks the behaviour patterns necessary for living in human society. It relies primarily on certain biological drives, such as hunger, and on the charity of its elders to satisfy those drives. The infant has a lot to learn. In order to survive, it must learn the skills, knowledge and accepted ways of behaving of the society into which it is born. It must learn a way of life; in sociological terminology, it must learn the culture of its society.

Ralph Linton states that 'The culture of a society is the way of life of its members; the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation.' In Clyde Kluckhohn's elegant phrase, culture is a 'design for living' held by members of a particular society. Since humans have no instincts to direct their actions, their behaviour must be based on guidelines that are learned. In order for a society to operate effectively, these guidelines must be shared by its members. Without a shared culture, members of society would be unable to communicate and cooperate, and confusion and disorder would result. Culture therefore has two essential qualities: first, it is learned, second, it is shared. Without it there would be no human society.

Culture and behaviour

To a large degree culture determines how members of society think and feel: it directs their actions and defines their outlook on life. Members of society usually take their culture for granted. It has become so much a part of them that they are often unaware of its existence. The following example given by Edward T. Hall (1973) provides an illustration. Two individuals, one from North America, the other from South America, are conversing in a hall 40 feet long. They begin at one end of the hall and finish at the other end, the North American steadily retreating, the South American relentlessly advancing. Each is trying to establish the 'accustomed conversation distance' defined by their own culture. To the North American, the South American comes too close for comfort, whereas the South American feels uneasy conversing at the distance the North American demands. Often it takes meetings such as this to reveal the pervasive nature of culturally determined behaviour.

Culture defines accepted ways of behaving for members of a particular society. Such definitions vary from society to society. This can lead to considerable misunderstanding between members of different societies, as the following example provided by Otto Klineberg shows (Klineberg, 1971). Amongst the Sioux Indians of South Dakota, it is regarded as incorrect to answer a question in the presence of others who do not know the answer. Such behaviour would be regarded as boastful and arrogant, and, since it reveals the ignorance of others, it would be interpreted as an attempt to undermine their confidence and shame them. In addition, the Sioux regard it as wrong to answer a question unless they are absolutely sure of the correct answer. Faced with a classroom of Sioux children, a white American teacher, who is unaware of their culture, might easily interpret their behaviour as a reflection of ignorance, stupidity or hostility.

Every society has certain common problems to deal with: for example the problem of dependent members such as the very young and the very old. However, solutions to such problems are culturally determined: they vary from society to society. The

solutions provided in one society may well be regarded as unacceptable by members of other societies.

Under certain circumstances, infanticide (the killing of infants) and geronticide (the killing of old people) have been practised by particular groups of Australian aborigines, Eskimos and Caribou Indians. Particularly in the more arid parts of Australia, female infanticide was practised to reduce the population in times of famine, and occasionally the baby was eaten. In Tasmania aborigine hunters led a nomadic life to take advantage of the seasonal food supply in different regions. The old and infirm who were too feeble to keep up with the band were left behind to die. The Caribou Indians, who lived to the west of Hudson Bay in Canada, were dependent for their food supply on the caribou herds. Sometimes, in winter, the herds failed to appear. To prevent the starvation of the whole community, the following priorities were established. First, the active male adults were fed, because if they were too weak to hunt, nobody would eat. Next, their wives were fed, since they could bear more children. Male infants were considered more important than female because they would grow up to become hunters. Old people were the most expendable and in times of famine they committed suicide by walking naked into the snow. If there were no old people left, girl babies would be killed. The practices of infanticide and geronticide described here are culturally defined behaviour patterns designed to ensure the survival of the group in times of extreme food shortages. Like many of the customs of non-Western societies, they appear strange and even heartless to Westerners, but, in the context of the particular society, they are sensible, rational and an accepted part of life.

The above examples of culturally defined behaviour have been selected because they differ considerably from behaviour patterns in Western society. By looking at examples that appear strange to us as Westerners, it is easier to appreciate the idea that human behaviour is largely determined by culture.

Socialization

The process by which individuals learn the culture of their society is known as socialization Primary socialization, probably the most important aspect of the socialization process, takes place during infancy, usually within the family. By responding to the approval and disapproval of its parents and copying their example, the child learns the language and many of the basic behaviour patterns of its society. In Western society, other important agencies of socialization include the educational system, the occupational group and the peer group (a group whose members share similar circumstances and are often of a similar age). Within its peer group, the young child, by interacting with others and playing childhood games, learns to conform to the accepted ways of a social group and to appreciate the fact that social life is based on rules.

Socialization is not, however, confined to childhood. It is a lifelong process. At the beginning of their working lives, the young bricklayer, teacher and accountant soon learn the rules of the game and the tricks of the trade. Should they change jobs in later life, they will join a different occupational group and may well have to learn new skills and adopt different mannerisms and styles of dress.

Without socialization, an individual would bear little resemblance to any human being defined as normal by the standards of his or her society. The following examples, though they lack the reliability demanded by today's standards of reporting, nevertheless provide some indication of the importance of socialization.

It is reported that Akbar, who was an emperor in India from 1542 to 1602, ordered that a group of children be brought up without any instruction in language, to test the belief that they would eventually speak Hebrew, the language of God. The children were raised by deaf mutes. They developed no spoken language and communicated solely by gestures.

There is also an extensive, though somewhat unreliable, literature on children raised by animals. One of the best-documented cases concerns the so-called 'wolf-children of Midnapore'. Two females, aged 2 and 8, were reportedly found in a wolf den in Bengal in 1920. They walked on all fours, preferred a diet of raw meat, they howled like wolves and lacked any form of speech. Whether these children had been raised by wolves or simply abandoned and left to their own devices in the forest is unclear. However, such examples indicate that socialization involving prolonged interaction with adults is essential not only for fitting new members into society but also to the process of actually becoming human.

Norms and values

Norms

Every culture contains a large number of guidelines that direct conduct in particular situations. Such guidelines are known as norms. A norm is a specific guide to action which defines acceptable and appropriate behaviour in particular situations. For example, in all societies, there are norms governing dress. Members of society generally share norms which define acceptable male and female apparel and appropriate dress for different age groups: for

example, in British society, a 70-year-old grandmother dressed as a teenager would contravene the norms for her age group. Norms of dress provide guidelines on what to wear on particular occasions. A formal dance, a funeral, a day out on the beach, a working day in the bank, on the building site or in the hospital – all these situations are governed by norms which specify appropriate attire for the occasion.

Norms of dress vary from society to society. For example, take the case of the male missionary who was presented with bare-breasted African females in his congregation. Flushed with embarrassment, he ordered a consignment of brassières. The women could make little sense of them in terms of their norms of dress. From their point of view, the most reasonable way to interpret these strange articles was to regard them as headgear. Much to the dismay of the missionary, they placed the two cups on the top of their heads and fastened the straps under their chins.

Norms are enforced by positive and negative sanctions, that is rewards and punishments. Sanctions can be informal, such as an approving or disapproving glance, or formal, such as a reward or a fine given by an official body. Continuing the example of norms of dress, an embarrassed silence, a hoot of derision or a contemptuous stare will make most members of society who have broken norms of dress change into more conventional attire. Usually the threat of negative sanctions is sufficient to enforce normal behaviour. Conversely, an admiring glance, a word of praise or an encouraging smile provide rewards for conformity to social norms. Certain norms are formalized by translation into laws which are enforced by official sanctions. In terms of laws governing dress, the nude bather on a public beach, the 'streaker' at a sporting event, and the 'flasher' who exposes himself or herself to an unsuspecting individual are all subject to official punishments of varying severity. Like informal sanctions, formal sanctions may be positive or negative. In terms of norms associated with dress, awards are made by official bodies such as tailors' organizations to the best-dressed men in Britain.

To summarize, norms define appropriate and acceptable behaviour in specific situations. They are enforced by positive and negative sanctions which may be formal or informal. The sanctions that enforce norms are a major part of the mechanisms of social control which are concerned with maintaining order in society.

Values

Unlike norms, which provide specific directives for conduct, values provide more general guidelines. A value is a belief that something is good and desirable. It defines what is important, worthwhile and worth striving for. It has often been suggested that individual achievement and materialism are major values in Western industrial society. Thus individuals believe it is important and desirable to come top of the class, to win a race or to reach the top of their chosen profession. Individual achievement is often symbolized and measured by the quality and quantity of material possessions that a person can accumulate. In the West, the value of materialism motivates individuals to invest time and energy producing and acquiring material possessions.

Like norms, values vary from society to society. The Sioux Indians placed a high value on generosity. In terms of Sioux values, the acquisitive individual of Western society would at best be regarded as peculiar and more probably would be condemned as grasping, self-seeking and anti-social.

Many norms can be seen as reflections of values. A variety of norms can be seen as expressions of a single value. In Western society the value placed on human life is expressed in terms of the following norms: the norms associated with hygiene in the home and in public places; the norms defining acceptable ways for settling an argument or dispute, which usually exclude physical violence and manslaughter; the array of rules and regulations dealing with transport and behaviour on the highway, which are concerned with protecting life and limb; and similar standards that apply to safety regulations in the workplace, particularly in mining and manufacturing industries. All of these norms concerned with the health and safety of members of society can be seen as expressions of the value placed on human life.

Many sociologists maintain that shared norms and values are essential for the operation of human society. Since humans have no instincts, their behaviour must be guided and regulated by norms. Without shared norms, members of society would be unable to cooperate or even comprehend the behaviour of others. Similar arguments apply to values. Without shared values, members of society would be unlikely to cooperate and work together. With differing or conflicting values they would often be pulling in different directions and pursuing incompatible goals. Disorder and disruption might well result. Thus an ordered and stable society requires shared norms and values. This viewpoint will be considered in greater detail in a later section.

Status and role

All members of society occupy a number of social positions known as statuses. In Western society, an individual will usually have an occupational status

such as bus driver, secretary or solicitor; a family status such as son or daughter, father or mother; and a gender status such as male or female. Statuses are culturally defined, despite the fact that they may be based on biological factors such as sex or race. For example, skin colour assigns individuals to racial statuses such as black and white, but this merely reflects the conventions of particular societies. Other biological characteristics such as hair colour have no connection with an individual's status, and in future societies skin colour may be equally insignificant.

Some statuses are relatively fixed and there is little individuals can do to change their assignment to particular social positions. Examples of such fixed or ascribed statuses include gender and aristocratic titles. On rare occasions, however, ascribed statuses can be changed. Edward VIII was forced to abdicate for insisting on marrying an American divorcée. Revolutions in America and Russia abolished the ascribed status of members of the aristocracy. Ascribed statuses are usually fixed at birth. In many societies occupational status has been or still is transmitted from father to son and from mother to daughter. Thus in the traditional Indian caste system, a son automatically entered the occupation of his father.

Statuses that are not fixed by inheritance, biological characteristics, or other factors over which the individual has no control, are known as achieved statuses. An achieved status is entered as a result of some degree of purposive action and choice. In Western society an individual's marital status and occupational status are achieved. However, as Chapter 2 on social stratification will indicate, the distinction between ascribed and achieved status is less clearcut than has so far been suggested.

Each status in society is accompanied by a number of norms that define how an individual occupying a particular status is expected to act. This group of norms is known as a role. Thus the status of husband is accompanied by the role of husband, the status of solicitor by the role of solicitor and so on. As an example, solicitors are expected to possess a detailed knowledge of certain aspects of the law, to support their client's interests and respect the confidentiality of their business. Solicitors' attire is expected to be sober, their manner restrained and confident yet understanding, their standing in the community beyond reproach. Playing or performing roles involves social relationships in the sense that an individual plays a role in relation to other roles. Thus the role of doctor is played in relation to the role of patient, the role of husband in relation to the role of wife. Individuals therefore interact in terms of roles.

Social roles regulate and organize behaviour. In particular, they provide the means for accomplishing certain tasks. It can be argued, for example, that teaching can be accomplished more effectively if teacher and student adopt their appropriate roles. This involves the exclusion of other areas of their lives in order to concentrate on the matter in hand. Roles provide social life with order and predictability. Interacting in terms of their respective roles, teacher and student know what to do and how to do it. With a knowledge of each other's roles they are able to predict and comprehend the actions of the other. As an aspect of culture, roles provide an important part of the guidelines and directives necessary for an ordered society.

This section has introduced some of the basic concepts used by many sociologists. In doing so, however, it has presented a somewhat one-sided view of human society. Individuals have been pictured rather like automatons who simply respond to the dictates of their culture. All members of a particular society appear to be produced from the same mould. They are all efficiently socialized in terms of a common culture. They share the same values, follow the same norms and play a variety of roles, adopting the appropriate behaviour for each. Clearly this picture of conformity has been overstated and the pervasive and constraining influence of culture has been exaggerated. There are two reasons for this. First, overstatement has been used to make the point. Second, many of the ideas presented so far derive from a particular perspective in sociology which has been subject to the criticisms noted above. This perspective, known as functionalism, will be examined later in this chapter (see pp. 9–11).

The development of human societies

Some sociologists believe that human societies have passed through certain broad phases of development. Many sociologists distinguish between premodern and modern societies. The distinction is a very general one and can neglect differences between the societies of each type. Nevertheless, the distinction is both influential and useful. It is useful because it has allowed sociologists to identify some of the key changes that have taken place in human history. They have then been able to discuss the significance of

these changes. Some sociologists, though by no means all, argue that a new type of society, the postmodern society, has recently developed or is developing.

In this section we will briefly introduce some of the main ideas associated with the distinctions between premodern, modern and postmodern societies. These concepts have a very important role in the development of sociological thinking and will be developed in detail throughout the book.

Premodern societies

Premodern societies took a number of forms. Anthony Giddens distinguishes between three main types, hunting and gathering societies, pastoral and agrarian societies and non-industrial civilizations (Giddens, 1997).

Hunting and gathering societies

The earliest human societies survived by gathering fruit, nuts and vegetables and by hunting or trapping animals for food. They usually consisted of small tribal groups often numbering fewer than fifty people. Such societies tended to have few possessions and little material wealth. What possessions they did have were shared. According to Giddens, they had relatively little inequality, although elder members of the tribe may have had more status and influence than younger ones. Hunting and gathering societies have largely disappeared, but Giddens calculates that some 250,000 people (just 0.0001 per cent of the world's population) still survive largely through hunting and gathering. Hunters and gatherers still exist in regions of Africa, New Guinea and Brazil, but few have remained untouched by the spread of Western culture.

Pastoral and agrarian societies

According to Giddens, these first emerged some 20,000 years ago. Pastoral societies may hunt and gather but they also keep and herd animals (for example cattle, camels or horses). Animal herds provide supplies of milk and meat and the animals may also be used as a means of transport. Unlike hunting and gathering societies, pastoral societies make it possible for individuals to accumulate wealth in the form of their animals. They therefore tend to have more inequality than hunting and gathering bands. They also tend to be nomadic, since they have to move around to find pasture for their animals. Because of this they are likely to come into contact with other groups. The individual societies have tended to be larger than hunting and gathering bands and in all may number as many as 250,000. There are still some pastoral societies in parts of the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

Agrarian societies rely largely upon the cultivation of crops to feed themselves. Like the herding of animals, this provides a more reliable and predictable source of food than hunting and gathering and it can therefore support much larger populations. Such societies are not likely to be nomadic. Food such as grain is often stored and it is possible for individuals to accumulate substantial personal wealth. Agrarian societies can therefore have considerable inequality. Agriculture remains the main way of earning a living in many parts of the world today. Giddens quotes 1990 figures which showed that over 90 per cent of the population of Nepal and Rwanda, over 80 per cent of the population of Uganda, and nearly 70 per cent of the Bangladeshi population worked in agriculture. However, the culture of contemporary agrarian societies has not remained entirely traditional. Most have been influenced by the culture of modern, industrial societies.

Non-industrial civilizations

These types of society first developed around 6000 BC. According to Giddens, they 'were based on the development of cities, showed very pronounced inequalities of wealth and power, and were associated with the rule of kings and emperors'. Compared to the hunting and gathering and early pastoral and agrarian societies, they were more developed in the areas of art and science and had more institutionalized and centralized systems of government. Non-industrial civilizations also invented writing. Some of these civilizations expanded across wide areas and developed their own empires. Examples of non-industrial civilizations include the Aztecs, the Maya and the Incas in South and Central America; Ancient Greece and the Roman Empire in Europe; Ancient Egypt in Africa; and Indian and Chinese civilizations in Asia. Most of them had substantial armed forces, and some, such as the Romans, managed major military conquests. None of these civilizations survived indefinitely and none exist today. Despite their importance, none has had as big an impact on the development of human society as modern industrial societies. These first emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Modern industrial societies

According to Lee and Newby, in the early nineteenth century 'there was widespread agreement among observers and commentators at this time that Northern Europe and North America were passing through the most profound transformation of society in the history of mankind' (Lee and Newby, 1983).

Lee and Newby identify four main transformations that took place:

1 Industrialism. The industrial revolution, which started in the late eighteenth century, transformed Britain, and later other societies, from economies based largely on agriculture to economies based largely on manufacturing. New technology led to massive increases in productivity, first in the cotton industry and then in other industries. An increasingly specialized division of labour developed, that is people had more specialist jobs. Social life was no longer governed by the rhythms of the seasons and of night and day; instead people's lives were based on the clock. Instead of working when the requirements of agriculture demanded, people started working long shifts of fixed periods (often twelve hours) in the new factories.

2 Capitalism. Closely connected to the development of industrialism was the development of capitalism. Capitalism involves wage labour and businesses run for the purpose of making a profit. Before the advent of capitalism many peasants worked for themselves, living off the produce they could get from their own land. Increasingly, peasants lost their land and had to rely upon earning a wage either as agricultural labourers or as workers in the developing factories. Capitalist businesses were developed with the aim of making a profit year after year. New classes emerged – principally a class of entrepreneurs who made their living by setting up and running capitalist businesses, and a working class of wage labourers employed in the entrepreneurs' factories.

3 Urbanism. The development of industry was accompanied by a massive movement from rural to urban areas. In Britain in 1750, before the industrial revolution, only two cities had populations of over 50,000 (London and Edinburgh). By 1851, 29 British cities had a population of more than 50,000. The population no longer needed to be thinly spread across agricultural land, and was increasingly concentrated in the centres of capitalist industry. Urbanism – the growth of towns and cities – brought with it numerous social problems such as crime, riots, and health problems caused by overcrowding and lack of sanitation. To many commentators the new towns and cities also destroyed the traditional sense of community that they associated with the rural villages. They believed that urbanism undermined the informal mechanisms of social control (such as gossip), which operated in close-knit communities, but which became ineffective in the anonymity of urban life.

4 Liberal democracy. Before the changes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the right of kings and queens to rule was rarely questioned (an exception being the English Civil War of the seventeenth century). The monarch was accepted as God's representative on earth, and their authority was not therefore open to question. However, in the French Revolution of 1789 the French monarchy was overthrown. Similarly British monarchical rule in America was overthrown by the American War of Independence (1775–1783). In both cases there was a new emphasis on the citizenship rights of individuals – individuals were now to have a say in how their countries were ruled rather than accepting what they were told by monarchs. This opened the way for the development of political parties and new perspectives on society. How society was to be run became more a matter for debate than it had ever been before.

Modernity

Taken together, the changes described above are often seen as characterizing modern societies, or as constituting an era of modernity. Modernity involves the following concepts: a belief in the possibility of human progress; rational planning to achieve objectives; a belief in the superiority of rational thought compared to emotion; faith in the ability of technology and science to solve human problems; a belief in the ability and rights of humans to shape their own lives; and a reliance upon manufacturing industry to improve living standards. Sociology developed alongside modernity and, not surprisingly, it has tended to be based upon similar foundations. Thus early sociological theories tended to believe that societies could and would progress, that scientific principles could be used to understand society, and that rational thought could be employed to ensure that society was organized to meet human needs. For most of its history, sociological thinking has been dominated by such approaches. However, some thinkers, including some sociologists, believe that modernity is being, or has been, replaced by an era of postmodernity

Postmodernity

Some sociologists believe that in recent years fundamental changes have taken place in Western societies. These changes have led to, or are in the process of leading to, a major break with the old concept of modernity. They suggest that people have begun to lose their faith in science and technology. They have become aware, for example, of the damaging effects of pollution, the dangers of nuclear war and the risks of genetic engineering. People have become more sceptical about the benefits of rational planning. For example, many people doubt that large, rational, bureaucratic organizations (such as big companies or the British National Heath Service) can meet human needs. They have lost faith in political beliefs and grand theories that claim to be able to improve society. Furthermore, few people now believe

that communism can lead to a perfect society. The modern belief in progress has therefore been undermined and there has been a movement away from science and rationalism. Some people have turned to non-rational beliefs such as New Age philosophies (see Chapter 7) and religious cults as a reaction against scientific rationalism.

According to some postmodernists, these changes are linked to changes in the economy. Industrial society has been superseded by post-industrial society. Relatively few people in Western societies now work in manufacturing industry. More and more are employed in services and particularly in jobs concerned with communications and information technology. Computer technology has meant that fewer and fewer people are needed to work in manufacturing, and communications have become very much faster. Furthermore, in affluent Western countries people are spending a higher proportion of their income on leisure. When they purchase products it is often as much for the image that they represent as the quality and usefulness of the product. Thus people will pay high prices for clothes with designer labels. The media has become increasingly important in people's lives and in the economy.

Although some of these changes have undoubtedly taken place, some sociologists do not believe that the changes are sufficiently large and significant to justify the claim that there has been a shift from modern to postmodern society. Others believe not just that *societies* have changed, but also that new *theories* of society are necessary. Their views will be examined after we have considered some of the longer-established sociological theories.

Theories of society

In this section we will examine some of the most influential theories of society. A theory is a set of ideas which claims to explain how something works. A sociological theory is therefore a set of ideas which claims to explain how society or aspects of society work. The theories in this section represent only a selection from the range of modern sociological theories. They have been simplified and condensed to provide a basic introduction. Since they are applied to various topics throughout the text, an initial awareness is essential. Criticism of the theories has been omitted from this chapter for the sake of simplicity, but it will be dealt with throughout the text and in detail in the final chapter.

There are many variations on the basic theories examined in this chapter. Again, for simplicity, most of these variations will not be mentioned at this stage, but will be introduced when they become relevant to particular topics.

Functionalism

Functionalism first emerged in nineteenth-century Europe. The French sociologist Emile Durkheim was the most influential of the early functionalists. The theory was developed by American sociologists such as Talcott Parsons in the twentieth century, and it became the dominant theoretical perspective in sociology during the 1940s and 1950s, particularly in the USA. From the mid-1960s onwards its popularity steadily declined, due partly to damaging criticism, partly to competing perspectives which appeared to provide superior explanations, and partly to changes in fashion. The key points of the functionalist perspective may be summarized by a comparison drawn from biology. If biologists wanted to know how an organism such as the human body worked, they might begin by examining the various parts such as the brain, lungs, heart and liver. However, if they simply analysed the parts in isolation from each other, they would be unable to explain how life was maintained. To do this, they would have to examine the parts in relation to each other, since they work together to maintain the organism. Therefore they would analyse the relationships between the heart, lungs, brain and so on to understand how they operated and appreciate their importance. In other words, any part of the organism must be seen in terms of the organism as a whole.

Functionalism adopts a similar perspective. The various parts of society are seen to be interrelated and, taken together, they form a complete system. To understand any part of society, such as the family or religion, the part must be seen in relation to society as a whole. Thus where a biologist will examine a part of the body, such as the heart, in terms of its contribution to the maintenance of the human organism, the functionalist will examine a part of society, such as the family, in terms of its contribution to the maintenance of the social system.

Structure

Functionalism begins with the observation that behaviour in society is structured. This means that relationships between members of society are organized in terms of rules. Social relationships are

therefore patterned and recurrent. Values provide general guidelines for behaviour, and they are translated into more specific directives in terms of roles and norms. The structure of society can be seen as the sum total of normative behaviour – the sum total of social relationships, which are governed by norms. The main parts of society, its institutions – such as the family, the economy, and the educational and political systems – are major aspects of the social structure. Thus an institution can be seen as a structure made up of interconnected roles or interrelated norms. For example, the family is made up of the interconnected roles of husband, father, wife, mother, son and daughter. Social relationships within the family are structured in terms of a set of related norms.

Function

Having established the existence of a social structure, functionalist analysis turns to a consideration of how that structure functions. This involves an examination of the relationship between the different parts of the structure and their relationship to society as a whole. This examination reveals the functions of institutions. At its simplest, function means effect. Thus the function of the family is the effect it has on other parts of the social structure and on society as a whole. In practice, the term function is usually used to indicate the contribution an institution makes to the maintenance and survival of the social system. For example, a major function of the family is the socialization of new members of society. This represents an important contribution to the maintenance of society, since order, stability and cooperation largely depend on learned, shared norms and values.

Functional prerequisites

In determining the functions of various parts of the social structure, functionalists are guided by the following ideas. Societies have certain basic needs or requirements that must be met if they are to survive. These requirements are sometimes known as functional prerequisites. For example, a means of producing food and shelter may be seen as a functional prerequisite, since without food and shelter members of society could not survive. A system for socializing new members of society may also be regarded as a functional prerequisite, since, without culture, social life would not be possible. Having assumed a number of basic requirements for the survival of society, the next step is to look at the parts of the social structure to see how they meet such functional prerequisites. Thus a major function of the economic system is the production of food and shelter. An important function of the family is the socialization of new members of society.

Value consensus

From a functionalist perspective, society is regarded as a system. A system is an entity made up of interconnected and interrelated parts. From this viewpoint, it follows that each part will in some way affect every other part and the system as a whole. It also follows that, if the system is to survive, its various parts must have some degree of fit or compatibility. Thus a functional prerequisite of society involves at least a minimal degree of integration between the parts. Many functionalists argue that this integration is based largely on value consensus, that is on agreement about values by members of society. Thus if the major values of society are expressed in the various parts of the social structure, those parts will be integrated. For example, it can be argued that the value of materialism integrates many parts of the social structure in Western industrial society. The economic system produces a large range of goods, and ever-increasing productivity is regarded as an important goal. The educational system is partly concerned with producing the skills and expertise to expand production and increase its efficiency. The family is an important unit of consumption with its steadily rising demand for consumer durables such as washing machines, videos and microwaves. The political system is partly concerned with improving material living standards and raising productivity. To the extent that these parts of the social structure are based on the same values, they may be said to be integrated.

Social order

One of the main concerns of functionalist theory is to explain how social life is possible. The theory assumes that a certain degree of order and stability is essential for the survival of social systems. Functionalism is therefore concerned with explaining the origin and maintenance of order and stability in society. Many functionalists see shared values as the key to this explanation: value consensus integrates the various parts of society. It forms the basis of social unity or social solidarity since individuals will tend to identify and feel kinship with those who share the same values as themselves. Value consensus provides the foundation for cooperation since common values produce common goals. Members of society will tend to cooperate in pursuit of goals that they share.

Having attributed such importance to value consensus, many functionalists then focus on the question of how this consensus is maintained. Indeed the American sociologist Talcott Parsons has stated that the main task of sociology is to examine 'the institutionalization of patterns of value orientation in

the social system'. Emphasis is therefore placed on the process of socialization whereby values are internalized and transmitted from one generation to the next. In this respect, the family is regarded as a vital part of the social structure. Once learned, values must be maintained. In particular those who deviate from society's values must be brought back into line. Thus the mechanisms of social control discussed earlier in the chapter are seen as essential to the maintenance of social order.

In summary, society, from a functionalist perspective, is a system made up of interrelated parts. The social system has certain basic needs that must be met if it is to survive. These needs are known as functional prerequisites. The function of any part of society is its contribution to the maintenance of society. The major functions of social institutions are those that help to meet the functional prerequisites of society. Since society is a system, there must be some degree of integration between its parts. A minimal degree of integration is therefore a functional prerequisite of society. The progress of society is best achieved through maintaining order and then allowing society to evolve naturally without too much planning. Many functionalists maintain that the order and stability they see as essential for the maintenance of the social system are largely provided by value consensus. This means that an investigation of the source of value consensus is a major concern of functionalist analysis.

Conflict perspectives

Although functionalists emphasize the importance of value consensus in society, they do recognize that conflict can occur. However, they see conflict as being the result of temporary disturbances in the social system. These disturbances are usually quickly corrected as society evolves. Functionalists accept that social groups can have differences of interest, but these are of minor importance compared to the interests that all social groups share in common. They believe that all social groups benefit if their society runs smoothly and prospers.

Conflict theories differ from functionalism in that they hold that there are fundamental differences of interest between social groups. These differences result in conflict being a common and persistent feature of society, and not a temporary aberration.

There are a number of different conflict perspectives and their supporters tend to disagree about the precise nature, causes and extent of conflict. For the sake of simplicity, in this introductory chapter we will concentrate upon two conflict theories: Marxism and feminism. Other conflict theories will be introduced later in the book. (For example, the influential conflict theory of Max Weber is dealt with in Chapter 2, pp. 36–8.)

Marxism

Marxist theory offers a radical alternative to functionalism. It became increasingly influential in sociology during the 1970s, partly because of the decline of functionalism, partly because it promised to provide answers that functionalism failed to provide, and partly because it was more in keeping with the tenor and mood of the times. 'Marxism' takes its name from its founder, the German-born philosopher, economist and sociologist, Karl Marx (1818–83). The following account is a simplified version of Marxist theory. It must also be seen as one interpretation of that theory: Marx's extensive writings have been variously interpreted and, since his death, several schools of Marxism have developed. (See Marx and Engels, 1949, 1950 for extracts from Marx's most important writings.)

Contradiction and conflict

Marxist theory begins with the simple observation that, in order to survive, humans must produce food and material objects. In doing so they enter into social relationships with other people. From the simple hunting band to the complex industrial state, production is a social enterprise. Production also involves a technical component known as the forces of production, which includes the technology, raw materials and scientific knowledge employed in the process of production. Each major stage in the development of the forces of production will correspond with a particular form of the social relationships of production. This means that the forces of production in a hunting economy will correspond with a particular set of social relationships.

Taken together, the forces of production and the social relationships of production form the economic basis or infrastructure of society. The other aspects of society, known as the superstructure, are largely shaped by the infrastructure. Thus the political, legal and educational institutions and the belief and value systems are primarily determined by economic factors. A major change in the infrastructure will therefore produce a corresponding change in the superstructure.

Marx maintained that, with the possible exception of the societies of prehistory, all historical societies contain basic contradictions, which means that they cannot survive forever in their existing form. These contradictions involve the exploitation of one social group by another: in feudal society, lords exploit their serfs; in capitalist society, employers exploit

their employees. This creates a fundamental conflict of interest between social groups since one gains at the expense of another. This conflict of interest must ultimately be resolved since a social system containing such contradictions cannot survive unchanged.

We will now examine the points raised in this brief summary of Marxist theory in greater detail. The major contradictions in society are between the forces and relations of production. The forces of production include land, raw materials, tools and machinery, the technical and scientific knowledge used in production, the technical organization of the production process, and the labour power of the workers. The 'relations of production' are the social relationships which people enter into in order to produce goods. Thus in feudal society they include the relationship between the lord and vassal, and the set of rights, duties and obligations which make up that relationship. In capitalist industrial society they include the relationship between employer and employee and the various rights of the two parties. The relations of production also involve the relationship of social groups to the means and forces of production.

The means of production consist of those parts of the forces of production that can be legally owned. They therefore include land, raw materials, machinery, buildings and tools, but not technical knowledge or the organization of the production process. Under capitalism, labour power is not one of the means of production since the workers are free to sell their labour. In slave societies, though, labour power is one of the means of production since the workforce is actually owned by the social group in power. In feudal society, land, the major means of production, is owned by the lord, whereas the serf has the right to use land in return for services or payment to the lord. In Western industrial society, the capitalists own the means of production, whereas the workers own only their labour, which they hire to the employer in return for wages.

Exploitation and oppression

The idea of contradiction between the forces and relations of production may be illustrated in terms of the infrastructure of capitalist industrial society. Marx maintained that only labour produces wealth. Thus wealth in capitalist society is produced by the labour power of the workers. However, much of this wealth is appropriated in the form of profits by the capitalists, the owners of the means of production. The wages of the workers are well below the value of the wealth they produce. There is thus a contradiction between the forces of production, in particular the labour power of the workers which produces wealth, and the relations of production which involve the appropriation of much of that wealth by the capitalists.

A related contradiction involves the technical organization of labour and the nature of ownership. In capitalist society, the forces of production include the collective production of goods by large numbers of workers in factories. Yet the means of production are privately owned, and the profits are appropriated by individuals. The contradiction between the forces and relations of production lies in the social and collective nature of production and the private and individual nature of ownership. Marx believed that these and other contradictions would eventually lead to the downfall of the capitalist system. He maintained that, by its very nature, capitalism involves the exploitation and oppression of the worker. He believed that the conflict of interest between capital and labour, which involves one group gaining at the expense of the other, could not be resolved within the framework of a capitalist economy.

Contradiction and change

Marx saw history as divided into a number of time periods or epochs, each being characterized by a particular mode of production. Major changes in history are the result of new forces of production. Thus the change from feudal to capitalist society stemmed from the emergence, during the feudal epoch, of the forces of production of industrial society. This resulted in a contradiction between the new forces of production and the old feudal relations of production. Capitalist industrial society required relations of production based on wage labour rather than the traditional ties of lord and vassal. When they reach a certain point in their development, the new forces of production will lead to the creation of a new set of relations of production. Then, a new epoch of history will be born which will sweep away the social relationships of the old order.

However, the final epoch of history, the communist or socialist society that Marx believed would eventually supplant capitalism, will not result from a new force of production. Rather it will develop from a resolution of the contradictions contained within the capitalist system. Collective production will remain but the relations of production will be transformed. Ownership of the means of production will be collective rather than individual, and members of society will share the wealth that their labour produces. No longer will one social group exploit and oppress another. This will produce an infrastructure without contradiction and conflict. In Marx's view this would mean the end of history since communist society would no longer contain the contradictions which generate change.

Ideology and false consciousness

In view of the contradictions that beset historical societies, it appears difficult to explain their survival. Despite its internal contradictions, capitalism has continued in the West for over 200 years. This continuity can be explained in large part by the nature of the superstructure. In all societies the superstructure is largely shaped by the infrastructure. In particular, the relations of production are reflected and reproduced in the various institutions, values and beliefs that make up the superstructure. Thus the relationships of domination and subordination found in the infrastructure will also be found in social institutions. The dominant social group or ruling class, that is the group which owns and controls the means of production, will largely monopolize political power, and its position will be supported by laws which are framed to protect and further its interests.

In the same way, beliefs and values will reflect and legitimate the relations of production. Members of the ruling class produce the dominant ideas in society. These ideas justify their power and privilege and conceal from all members of society the basis of exploitation and oppression on which their dominance rests. Thus, under feudalism, honour and loyalty were 'dominant concepts' of the age. Vassals owed loyalty to their lords and were bound by an oath of allegiance that encouraged the acceptance of their status. In terms of the dominant concepts of the age, feudalism appeared as the natural order of things. Under capitalism, exploitation is disguised by the ideas of equality and freedom. The relationship between capitalist and wage labourer is defined as an equal exchange. The capitalist buys the labour power that the worker offers for hire. The worker is defined as a free agent since he or she has the freedom to choose his or her employer. In reality, equality and freedom are illusions: the employer–employee relationship is not equal. It is an exploitative relationship. Workers are not free since they are forced to work for the capitalist in order to survive. All they can do is exchange one form of 'wage slavery' for another.

Marx refers to the dominant ideas of each epoch as ruling class ideology. Ideology is a distortion of reality, a false picture of society. It blinds members of society to the contradictions and conflicts of interest that are built into their relationships. As a result they tend to accept their situation as normal and natural, right and proper. In this way a false consciousness of reality is produced which helps to maintain the system. However, Marx believed that ruling class ideology could only slow down the disintegration of the system. The contradictions embedded in the structure of society must eventually find expression.

In summary, the key to understanding society from a Marxist perspective involves an analysis of the infrastructure. In all historical societies there are basic contradictions between the forces and relations of production, and there are fundamental conflicts of interest between the social groups involved in the production process. In particular, the relationship between the major social groups is one of exploitation and oppression. The superstructure derives largely from the infrastructure and therefore reproduces the social relationships of production. It will thus reflect the interests of the dominant group in the relations of production. Ruling class ideology distorts the true nature of society and serves to legitimate and justify the status quo. However the contradictions in the infrastructure will eventually lead to a disintegration of the system and the creation of a new society in which there is no exploitation and oppression.

Although highly critical of capitalism, Marx did see it as a stepping stone on the way towards a communist society. Capitalism would help to develop technology that would free people from material need; there would be more than enough goods to feed and clothe the population. In these circumstances it would be possible to establish successful communist societies in which the needs of all their members were met. Despite its pessimistic tone, Marxism shares with functionalism the modern belief that human societies will improve, and that rational, scientific thinking can be used to ensure progress.

Feminism

There are several different versions of feminism but most share a number of features in common. Like Marxists, feminists tend to see society as divided into different social groups. Unlike Marxists, they see the major division as being between men and women rather than between different classes. Like Marxists, they tend to see society as characterized by exploitation. Unlike Marxists, they see the exploitation of women by men as the most important source of exploitation, rather than that of the working class by the ruling class. Many feminists characterize contemporary societies as patriarchal, that is they are dominated by men. For example, feminists have argued that men have most of the power in families, that they tend to be employed in better-paid and higher-status jobs than women, and that they tend to monopolize positions of political power. The ultimate aim of these types of feminism is to end men's domination and to rid society of the exploitation of women. Such feminists advance a range of explanations for, and solutions to, the exploitation of women. However,

they all believe that the development of society can be explained and that progress towards an improved future is possible.

Some feminist writers (sometimes called difference feminists) disagree that all women are equally oppressed and disadvantaged in contemporary societies. They believe that it is important to recognize the different experiences and problems faced by various groups of women. For example, they do not believe that all husbands oppress their wives, that women are equally disadvantaged in all types of work, or that looking after children is necessarily oppressive to women. They emphasize the differences between women of different ages, class backgrounds and ethnic groups. Like other feminists, they believe that the oppression of women exists, but they do not see it as affecting all women to the same extent and in the same way. For example, a wealthy white woman in a rich capitalist country is in a very different position to a poor black woman living in an impoverished part of Africa. Since their problems are different, they would require very different solutions.

Despite their disagreements, feminists tend to agree that, at least until recently, sociology has neglected women. Certainly until the 1970s sociology was largely written by men about men. There were relatively few studies of women, and issues of particular concern to women (such as housework and women's health) were rarely studied. A number of feminists criticize what they call malestream sociology. By this they mean mainstream, male-dominated sociology. They have attacked not just what male sociologists study, but also how they carry out their studies. For example, they have suggested that feminist sociology should get away from rigid 'scientific' methods and should adopt more sympathetic approaches. These can involve working in partnership with those being studied rather than treating them as simply the passive providers of data (see Chapter 4).

As feminist scholarship has developed it has started to examine numerous aspects of social life from feminist viewpoints. Many of the resulting studies will be examined in later chapters. (Feminist perspectives are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.)

Interactionism

Functionalism and Marxism have a number of other characteristics in common. First, they offer a general explanation of society as a whole, and as a result are sometimes known as macro-theories. Second, they regard society as a system, hence they are sometimes referred to as system theories. Third, they tend to see human behaviour as shaped by the system. In terms of Talcott Parsons's version of functionalism, behaviour is largely directed by the norms and values of the social system. From a Marxist viewpoint, behaviour is ultimately determined by the economic infrastructure. Some versions of feminism have similar characteristics in that they explain how society works in terms of the existence of a patriarchal system and explain the behaviour of males and females in terms of that system. (Other feminist theories are very different and share some features in common with interactionism.)

Interactionism differs from functionalism, Marxism and most feminist theories in that it focuses on small-scale interaction rather than society as a whole. It usually rejects the notion of a social system. As a result it does not regard human action as a response or reaction to the system. Interactionists believe that it is possible to analyse society systematically and that it is possible to improve society. However, improvements have to be made on a smaller scale and in a more piecemeal way than those implied by macro or system theories.

Meaning and interpretation

As its name suggests, interactionism is concerned with interaction, which means action between individuals. The interactionist perspective seeks to understand this process. It begins from the assumption that action is meaningful to those involved. It therefore follows that an understanding of action requires an interpretation of the meanings that the actors give to their activities. Picture a man and a woman in a room and the man lighting a candle. This action is open to a number of interpretations. The couple may simply require light because a fuse has blown or a power cut has occurred. Or, they may be involved in some form of ritual in which the lighted candle has a religious significance. Alternatively, the man or woman may be trying to create a more intimate atmosphere as a prelude to a sexual encounter. Finally, the couple may be celebrating a birthday, a wedding anniversary or some other red-letter day. In each case a different meaning is attached to the act of lighting a candle. To understand the act, it is therefore necessary to discover the meaning held by the actors.

Meanings are not fixed entities. As the above example shows, they depend in part on the context of the interaction. Meanings are also created, developed, modified and changed within the actual process of interaction. A pupil entering a new class may initially define the situation as threatening and even hostile. This definition may be confirmed, modified or changed depending on the pupil's perception of the interaction that takes place in the classroom. The pupil may come to perceive the teacher and fellow

pupils as friendly and understanding and so change his or her assessment of the situation. The way in which actors define situations has important consequences. It represents their reality in terms of which they structure their actions. For example, if the pupil maintains a definition of the classroom as threatening and hostile, they may say little and speak only when spoken to. Conversely if the definition changed, there would probably be a corresponding change in the pupil's actions in that context.

Self-concepts

The actions of the pupil in the above example will depend in part on their interpretation of the way others see them. For this reason many interactionists place particular emphasis on the idea of the self. They suggest that individuals develop a self-concept, a picture of themselves, which has an important influence on their actions. A self-concept develops from interaction processes, since it is in large part a reflection of the reactions of others towards the individual: hence the term looking glass self coined by Charles Cooley (1864–1929) (discussed in Coser, 1977). Actors tend to act in terms of their self-concept. Thus if they are consistently defined as disreputable or respectable, servile or arrogant, they will tend to see themselves in this light and act accordingly.

The construction of meaning

Since interactionists are concerned with definitions of situation and self, they are also concerned with the process by which those definitions are constructed. For example, how does an individual come to be defined in a certain way? The answer to this question involves an investigation of the construction of meaning in interaction processes. This requires an analysis of the way actors interpret the language, gestures, appearance and manner of others and their interpretation of the context in which the interaction takes place.

The definition of an individual as a delinquent is an example. Research has indicated that police are more likely to perceive an act as delinquent if it occurs in a low-income inner city area. The context will influence the action of the police since they typically define the inner city as a 'bad area'. Once arrested, a male youth is more likely to be defined as a juvenile delinquent if his manner is interpreted as aggressive and uncooperative, if his appearance is seen as unconventional or slovenly, if his speech is defined as ungrammatical or slang, and if his posture gives the impression of disrespect for authority, or arrogance. Thus the black American youth from the inner city ghetto with his cool, arrogant manner and colourful clothes is more likely to be defined as a delinquent than the white 'all-American girl' from the tree-lined suburbs.

Definitions of individuals as certain kinds of persons are not, however, simply based on preconceptions which actors bring to interaction situations. For example, the police will not automatically define black juveniles involved in a fight as delinquent and white juveniles involved in a similar activity as non-delinquent. A process of negotiation occurs from which the definition emerges. Often negotiations will reinforce preconceptions, but not necessarily. The young blacks may be able to convince the police officer that the fight was a friendly brawl which did not involve intent to injure or steal. In this way they may successfully promote images of themselves as high-spirited teenagers rather than as malicious delinquents. Definitions and meanings are therefore constructed in interaction situations by a process of negotiation.

Negotiation and roles

The idea of negotiation is also applied to the concept of role. Like functionalists, the interactionists employ the concept of role but they adopt a somewhat different perspective. Functionalists imply that roles are provided by the social system, and individuals enact their roles as if they were reading off a script that contains explicit directions for their behaviour. Interactionists argue that roles are often unclear, ambiguous and vague. This lack of clarity provides actors with considerable room for negotiation, manoeuvre, improvisation and creative action. At most, roles provide very general guidelines for action. What matters is how they are employed in interaction situations.

For example, two individuals enter marriage with a vague idea about the roles of husband and wife. Their interaction will not be constrained by these roles. Their definition of what constitutes a husband, a wife, and a marital relationship will be negotiated and continually renegotiated. It will be fluid rather than fixed, changeable rather than static. Thus, from an interactionist perspective, roles, like meanings and definitions of the situation, are negotiated in interaction processes.

In summary, interactionism focuses on the process of interaction in particular contexts. Since all action is meaningful, it can only be understood by discovering the meanings that actors assign to their activities. Meanings both direct action and derive from action. They are not fixed but constructed and negotiated in interaction situations. From their interaction with others, actors develop a self-concept. This has important consequences since individuals tend to act in terms of their definition of self. Understanding the construction of meanings and

self-concepts involves an appreciation of the way actors interpret the process of interaction. This requires an investigation of the way in which they perceive the context of the interaction and the manner, appearance and actions of others.

While interactionists admit the existence of roles, they regard them as vague and imprecise and therefore as open to negotiation. From an interactionist perspective, action proceeds from negotiated meanings that are constructed in ongoing interaction situations.

Postmodernism

The challenge to modernism

Since the 1980s, postmodern perspectives have become increasingly influential in sociology. These perspectives take a number of forms, and the more radical of these represent a major challenge to the perspectives examined so far.

Some postmodern theorists content themselves with describing and explaining what they see as the crucial changes in society. They retain elements of conventional approaches in sociology. For example, they still believe that it is possible to explain both human behaviour and the ways in which societies are changing. They no longer assume that the changes are progressive, but they stick to a belief that they can be explained through developing sociological theories. Some postmodernists go much further than this. They argue that conventional, modern approaches in sociology, which grew out of modern society, must be abandoned. While approaches such as Marxism, functionalism, feminism and interactionism might have explained how the social world worked in previous eras, they are no longer useful. New theories are needed for the postmodern age. They support this claim in two main ways.

First, some postmodernists argue that social behaviour is no longer shaped as it used to be by people's background and their socialization. They argue that factors such as class, ethnic group and whether people are male or female influence people a great deal less than they used to. Instead, people are much freer to choose their own identity and lifestyle. Thus, for example, people can choose whether to be heterosexual or homosexual, they have more choice about where they live and where they travel to, what sort of people they mix with and what clothes they wear. The boundaries between social groups are breaking down and you can no longer predict the sorts of lifestyles that people will adopt. If so much choice exists, then many of the aspects of social life studied by modern sociologists are no longer important and their studies are no longer useful.

Second, some postmodernists question the belief that there is any solid foundation for producing knowledge about society. They argue that modern sociologists were quite wrong to believe that sociology could discover the truth by adopting the methods of physical sciences. From their perspective, all knowledge is based upon the use of language. Language can never describe the external world perfectly. Knowledge is essentially subjective – it expresses personal viewpoints which can never be proved to be correct. Postmodernists such as Jean Baudrillard argue that it has become increasingly difficult to separate media images from anything even approximating to reality (see Chapter 15). Society has become so saturated with media images that people now confuse, for example, media characters with real life. An example of this occurred when some viewers launched a campaign to free Deirdre Rashid (a character in the British soap opera *Coronation Street*) from prison.

Postmodernists such as Jean François Lyotard (see Chapter 15) are particularly critical of any attempt to produce a general theory of how society works (for example Marxism or functionalism). Lyotard believes that all attempts to produce such theories are doomed to failure. They cannot truly explain something as complex as the social world. Generally such theories are simply used by groups of people to try to impose their ideas on other people, for example in communist or fascist societies. General theories are therefore dangerous and should always be rejected. In Lyotard's view, modern sociological theories fall into this category and should be rejected.

Difference

Many writers who adopt some of the stronger claims of postmodernism emphasize differences between people rather than similarities between members of social groups. They believe that it is the job of the researcher to uncover and describe these differences rather than to make generalizations about whole social groups. This involves acknowledging that there are many different viewpoints on society and that you should not judge between them. All viewpoints are seen as being equally valid; none is superior to any other. Sociologists should not try to impose their views on others, but should merely enable the voices of different people to be heard. This is very different from the goals of other sociologists (such as Marxists and functionalists) who set out to produce scientific explanations of how society works and how social groups behave.

Postmodern perspectives will be examined and evaluated in more detail later in relation to particular topics. The theory of postmodernism will be discussed in detail in Chapter 15.

Views of human behaviour

The last section looked briefly at five theoretical perspectives in sociology. This section deals with philosophical views of human behaviour. These views have influenced both the type of data sociologists have collected and the methods they have employed to collect the data.

Views of human behaviour can be roughly divided into those that emphasize external factors and those that stress internal factors. The former approach sees behaviour as being influenced by the structure of society. The latter approach places more emphasis upon the subjective states of individuals: their feelings, the meanings they attach to events, and the motives they have for behaving in particular ways. The use of this 'dichotomy' (sharply defined division) is somewhat artificial. In practice most sociologists make use of the insights provided by both approaches when carrying out research and interpreting the results. There are also a number of variations on each approach. For example, as a later section will show, phenomenologists differ in their approach from other sociologists who emphasize the importance of internal influences upon human behaviour.

Positivism

Many of the founders of sociology believed it would be possible to create a science of society based upon the same principles and procedures as the natural sciences such as chemistry and biology, even though the natural sciences often deal with inanimate matter and so are not concerned with feeling, emotions and other subjective states. The most influential attempt to apply natural science methodology to sociology is known as positivism.

Auguste Comte (1798–1857), who is credited with inventing the term sociology and regarded as one of the founders of the discipline, maintained that the application of the methods and assumptions of the natural sciences would produce a 'positive science of society'. He believed that this would reveal that the evolution of society followed 'invariable laws'. It would show that the behaviour of humans was governed by principles of cause and effect that were just as invariable as the behaviour of matter, the subject of the natural sciences.

In terms of sociology, the positivist approach makes the following assumptions. The behaviour of humans, like the behaviour of matter, can be objectively measured. Just as the behaviour of matter can be quantified by measures such as weight, temperature and pressure, methods of objective measurement can be devised for human behaviour. Such measurement is essential to explain behaviour.

For example, in order to explain the reaction of a particular chemical to heat, it is necessary to provide exact measurements of temperature, weight and so on. With the aid of such measurements it will be possible to observe accurately the behaviour of matter and produce a statement of cause and effect. This statement might read $A \times B = C$ where A is a quantity of matter, B a degree of heat and C a volume of gas. Once it has been shown that the matter in question always reacts in the same way under fixed conditions, a theory can be devised to explain its behaviour.

From a positivist viewpoint such methods and assumptions are applicable to human behaviour. Observations of behaviour based on objective measurement will make it possible to produce statements of cause and effect. Theories may then be devised to explain observed behaviour.

The positivist approach in sociology places particular emphasis on behaviour that can be directly observed. It argues that factors that are not directly observable – such as meanings, feelings and purposes – are not particularly important and can be misleading. For example, if the majority of adult members of society enter into marriage and produce children, these facts can be observed and quantified. They therefore form reliable data. However, the range of meanings that members of society give to these activities – their reasons for marriage and procreation – are not directly observable. Even if they could be accurately measured, they might well divert attention from the real cause of behaviour. One person might believe they entered marriage because they were lonely, another because they were in love, a third because it was the 'thing to do', and a fourth because they wished to have children. Reliance on this type of data for explanation assumes that individuals know the reasons for marriage. This can obscure the real cause of their behaviour.

The positivists' emphasis on observable 'facts' is due largely to the belief that human behaviour can be explained in much the same way as the behaviour of matter. Natural scientists do not inquire into the meanings and purposes of matter. Atoms and molecules do not act in terms of meanings, they simply react to external stimuli. Thus if heat, an external stimulus, is applied to matter, that matter will react. The job of the natural scientist is to observe, measure, and then explain that reaction.

The positivist approach to human behaviour applies a similar logic. People react to external stimuli and their behaviour can be explained in terms of this reaction. They enter into marriage and produce children in response to the demands of society: society requires such behaviour for its survival and its members simply respond to this requirement. The meanings and purposes they attach to this behaviour are largely inconsequential.

It has often been argued that systems theory in sociology adopts a positivist approach. Once behaviour is seen as a response to some external stimulus (such as economic forces or the requirements of the social system), the methods and assumptions of the natural sciences appear appropriate to the study of humans. Marxism has sometimes been regarded as a positivist approach, since it can be argued that it sees human behaviour as a reaction to the stimulus of the economic infrastructure. Functionalism has been viewed in a similar light. The behaviour of members of society can be seen as a response to the functional prerequisites of the social system. These views of systems theory represent a considerable oversimplification. However, it is probably fair to say that systems theory is closer to a positivist approach than the views that will now be considered.

Social action perspectives

Advocates of social action perspectives argue that the subject matter of the social and natural sciences is fundamentally different. As a result, the methods and assumptions of the natural sciences are inappropriate to the study of humans. The natural sciences deal with matter. To understand and explain the behaviour of matter it is sufficient to observe it from the outside. Atoms and molecules do not have consciousness: they do not have meanings and purposes that direct their behaviour. Matter simply reacts unconsciously to external stimuli; in scientific language, it 'behaves'. As a result, the natural scientist is able to observe, measure, and impose an external logic on that behaviour in order to explain it. Scientists have no need to explore the internal logic of the consciousness of matter simply because it does not exist.

Unlike matter, humans have consciousness – thoughts, feelings, meanings, intentions and an awareness of being. Because of this, humans' actions are meaningful: they define situations and give meaning to their actions and those of others. As a result, they do not just react to external stimuli, they do not merely behave – they act.

Imagine the response of early humans to fire caused by volcanoes or spontaneous combustion. They did not simply react in a uniform manner to the experience of heat. They attached a range of meanings to it and these meanings directed their actions. They defined fire as a means of warmth and used it to heat their dwellings; they saw it as a means of defence and used it to ward off wild animals; and they saw it as a means of transforming substances and employed it for cooking and hardening the points of wooden spears. Humans do not just react to fire, they act upon it in terms of the meanings they give to it.

If action stems from subjective meanings, it follows that the sociologist must discover those meanings in order to understand action. Sociologists cannot simply observe action from the outside and impose an external logic upon it. They must interpret the internal logic that directs the actions of the actor.

Max Weber (1864–1920) was one of the first sociologists to outline this perspective in detail. He argued that sociological explanations of action should begin with observing and interpreting the subjective 'states of minds' of people. As the previous section indicated, interactionism adopts a similar approach, with particular emphasis on the process of interaction. Where positivists emphasize facts and cause-and-effect relationships, interactionists emphasize insight and understanding. Since it is not possible to get inside the heads of actors, the discovery of meaning must be based on interpretation and intuition. For this reason, objective measurement is not possible and the exactitude of the natural sciences cannot be duplicated. Since meanings are constantly negotiated in ongoing interaction processes, it is not possible to establish simple cause-and-effect relationships. Thus some sociologists argue that sociology is limited to an interpretation of social action.

Nevertheless, both Weber and the interactionists did think it was possible to produce causal explanations of human behaviour, so long as an understanding of meanings formed part of those explanations. Some sociologists, particularly phenomenologists, take the argument further and claim that it is impossible for sociologists to find the causes of human action.

Phenomenology

To phenomenologists, it is impossible to measure objectively any aspect of human behaviour. Humans make sense of the world by categorizing it. Through language they distinguish between different types of objects, events, actions and people. For instance, some actions are defined as criminal and others are not; similarly some people are defined as criminals while others are seen as law-abiding. The process of

categorization is subjective: it depends upon the opinions of the observer. Statistics are simply the product of the opinions of those who produce them. Thus crime statistics are produced by the police and the courts, and they represent no more than the opinions of the individuals involved. If sociologists produce their own statistics, these too are the result of subjective opinions – in this case the opinions of sociologists.

Phenomenologists believe that it is impossible to produce factual data and that it is therefore impossible to produce and check causal explanations. The most that sociologists can hope to do is to understand the meaning that individuals give to particular phenomena. Phenomenologists do not try to establish what causes crime; instead they try to discover how certain events come to be defined as crimes and how certain people come to be defined as criminal. Phenomenologists therefore examine the way that police officers reach decisions about whether to arrest and charge suspects. In doing so, they hope to establish the meanings attached to the words 'crime' and 'criminal' by the police. The end product of phenomenological research is an understanding of the meanings employed by members of society in their everyday life.

Although there are differences between those who support social action and phenomenological views, they all agree that the positivist approach has produced a distorted picture of social life.

Peter Berger argues that society has often been viewed as a puppet theatre with its members portrayed as 'little puppets jumping about on the ends of their invisible strings, cheerfully acting out the parts that have been assigned to them' (Berger, 1966). Society instils values, norms and roles, and humans dutifully respond like Berger's puppets. However, interactionists and phenomenologists believe that humans do not react and respond passively to an external society. They see humans as actively creating their own meanings and their own society in interaction with each other. In this respect they have similarities with some of the postmodern approaches discussed earlier (see p. 16).

Sociology and values

The positivist approach assumes that a science of society is possible. It therefore follows that objective observation and analysis of social life are possible. An objective view is free from the values, moral judgements and ideology of the observer: it provides facts and explanatory frameworks which are uncoloured by the observer's feelings and opinions.

An increasing number of sociologists argue that a value-free science of society is not possible. They maintain that the values of sociologists directly influence every aspect of their research. They argue that the various theories of society are based, at least in part, on value judgements and ideological positions. They suggest that sociological perspectives are shaped more by historical circumstances than by objective views of the reality of social life.

Those who argue that an objective science of society is not possible maintain that sociology can never be free from ideology. The term ideology refers to a set of ideas which present only a partial view of reality. An ideological viewpoint also includes values. It involves not only a judgement about the way things are, but also about the way things ought to be. Thus ideology is a set of beliefs and values that provides a way of seeing and interpreting the world, which results in a partial view of reality. The term ideology is often used to suggest a distortion, a false picture of reality. However there is considerable doubt about whether reality and ideology can be separated. As Nigel Harris suggests, 'Our reality is the next man's ideology and vice versa' (Harris, 1971).

Ideology can be seen as a set of beliefs and values that express the interests of a particular social group. Marxists use the term in this way when they talk about the ideology of the ruling class. In this sense, ideology is a viewpoint that distorts reality and justifies and legitimates the position of a social group. Karl Mannheim (Mannheim, 1948) uses the term in a similar way. He states that ideology consists of the beliefs and values of a ruling group which 'obscures the real condition of society both to itself and others and thereby stabilizes it'. Mannheim distinguishes this form of ideology from what he calls utopian ideology. Rather than supporting the status quo – the way things are – utopian ideologies advocate a complete change in the structure of society. Mannheim argues that such ideologies are usually found in oppressed groups whose members want radical change. As their name suggests, utopian ideologies are based on a vision of an ideal society, a perfect social system. Mannheim refers to them as 'wish-images' for a future social order. Like the ideologies of ruling groups, he argues that utopian ideologies are a way of seeing the world which prevents true insight and obscures reality.

Mannheim's ideas will now be applied to two of the major theoretical perspectives in sociology: Marxism and functionalism. It has often been argued that Marxism is largely based on a utopian ideology, and functionalism on a ruling class ideology. Marxism contains a vision and a promise of a future ideal society – the communist utopia. In this society the means of production are communally owned and, as a result, oppression and exploitation disappear.

The communist utopia provides a standard of comparison for present and past societies. Since they inevitably fall far short of this ideal, their social arrangements will be condemned. It has been argued that the communist utopia is not a scientific prediction but merely a projection of the 'wish-images' of those who adopt a Marxist position. Utopian ideology has therefore been seen as the basis of Marxist theory.

By comparison, functionalism has often been interpreted as a form of ruling class ideology. Where Marxism is seen to advocate radical change, functionalism is seen to justify and legitimate the status quo. With its emphasis on order and stability, consensus and integration, functionalism appears to adopt a conservative stance. Rapid social change is not recommended since it will disrupt social order. The major institutions of society are justified by the belief that they are meeting the functional prerequisites of the social system. Although functionalists have introduced the concept of dysfunction to cover the harmful effects of parts of the system on society as a whole, the concept is rarely employed. In practice, functionalists appear preoccupied with discovering the positive functions and the beneficial effects of social institutions. As a result, the term function is associated with the idea of useful and good. This interpretation of society tends to legitimate the way things are. Ruling class ideology has therefore been seen as the basis of functionalist theory.

It is important to note that the above interpretation of the ideological bases of Marxism and functionalism is debatable. However, a case can be made to support the view that both perspectives are ideologically based.

The view that Marxism and functionalism are ideologically based would certainly be supported by postmodernists. Postmodernists do not just reject these particular perspectives – they reject any attempt to produce a theory of society as a whole. They see such theories as dangerous. This is because they can lead to one group trying to impose its will on others. From this viewpoint it is neither possible nor desirable to try to remove values from sociology. Instead, a range of different values should be accepted and tolerated. People have a right to be different from one another and to hold different views. It is not the job of the sociologist to arbitrate between these differences and say which is better.

Some sociologists reject this standpoint. Critical social scientists (whose ideas are examined in Chapter 14) do not deny that values must inevitably enter into sociology. However, they do not believe that sociologists should just accept the range of different values present in society. Rather, it is the duty of social scientists to try to improve society. If, like postmodernists, they were simply to accept the range of different values that exists, they would be shirking their responsibility. By refusing to make any judgement about whose values are better, they would be accepting the way society is. Taken to extremes, this would mean, for example, that the values of the rapist are no worse than those of the rape victim; the values of racists are no worse than those of people who campaign against racism; and the values of capitalists who exploit their workers are no worse than those of people who try to help the poor. Critical social scientists argue that sociologists should take sides and they should try to use their work to fight injustice and improve society.

This section has provided a brief introduction to the question of the relationship between sociology and values. The relationship will be considered in detail throughout the text. Each chapter in the main section of the book will conclude with an interpretation of the values involved in the views that are discussed.

The sociological imagination

Although sociologists vary in their perspectives, methods and values, they all (with the exception of some versions of postmodernism) share the aim of understanding and explaining the social world. Combining the insights offered by different approaches might be the best way of achieving this goal.

Structural theories of society, such as functionalism and Marxism, emphasize the importance of society in shaping human behaviour. On the other hand, approaches such as interactionism emphasize the importance of human behaviour in shaping society. Many sociologists today believe that good sociology must examine both the structure of society and social interaction. They believe that it is only by combining the study of the major changes in society and individual lives that sociologists can develop their understanding of social life.

This idea is not new. It was supported by the very influential German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) (see Chapter 15), and more recently has been examined in depth by the British sociologist

Anthony Giddens (see Chapter 15). However, perhaps the clearest exposition of this view was put forward by the American sociologist C. Wright Mills.

Mills called the ability to study the structure of society at the same time as individuals' lives the 'sociological imagination' (Mills, 1959). Mills argued that the sociological imagination allowed people to understand their 'private troubles' in terms of 'public issues'. Unemployment, war and marital breakdown are all experienced by people in terms of the problems they produce in their personal lives. They react to them as individuals, and their reactions have consequences for society as a whole. However, to Mills, these issues can only be fully understood in the context of wider social forces. For example, very specific circumstances might lead to one person becoming unemployed, but when unemployment rates in society as a whole rise, it becomes a public issue that needs to be explained. The sociologist has to consider 'the economic and political institutions of the society, and not merely the personal situation and character of a scatter of individuals'.

According to Mills, then, sociology should be about examining the biography of individuals in the context of the history of societies. The sociological imagination is not just of use to sociologists, it is important to all members of society if they wish to understand, change and improve their lives. Perhaps sociology can be seen as succeeding when it allows people to achieve this imagination, and the theories and studies examined in the rest of the book can be judged in these terms.

Chapter 2

Social stratification

Introduction

Egalitarianism

People have long dreamed of an egalitarian society, a society in which all members are equal. In such a society people will no longer be ranked in terms of prestige: no one will experience the satisfaction of occupying a high social status; no one will suffer the indignity of being put in a position that commands little respect. No longer will high status provoke deference and admiration or envy and resentment from those in less 'worthy' positions. Wealth will be distributed equally among the population: the rich and poor, haves and have-nots will be a thing of the past. Words such as 'privilege' and 'poverty' will either change their meaning or disappear from the vocabulary.

In an egalitarian society, the phrase 'power to the people' will become a reality. There will be an end to some people having power over others: positions of authority and the obedience they command will disappear. Exploitation and oppression will be concepts of history which have no place in the description of contemporary social reality. People will be equal both in the sight of God and in the eyes of their fellow people.

Clearly the egalitarian society remains a dream. All human societies from the simplest to the most complex have some form of social inequality. In particular, power and prestige are unequally distributed between individuals and social groups and in many societies there are also marked differences in the distribution of wealth.

1 Power refers to the degree to which individuals or groups can impose their will on others, with or without the consent of those others.

2 Prestige relates to the amount of esteem or honour associated with social positions, qualities of individuals and styles of life.

3 Wealth refers to material possessions defined as valuable in particular societies. It may include land, livestock, buildings, money and many other forms of property owned by individuals or social groups.

In this chapter we are going to study the unequal distribution of power, prestige and wealth in society.

Social inequality and social stratification

It is important at the outset to make a distinction between social inequality and social stratification. The term social inequality simply refers to the existence of socially created inequalities. Social stratification is a particular form of social inequality. It refers to the presence of distinct social groups which are ranked one above the other in terms of factors such as prestige and wealth. Those who belong to a particular group or stratum will have some awareness of common interests and a common identity. They will share a similar lifestyle which, to some degree, will distinguish them from members of other social strata. The Indian caste system provides one example of a social stratification system.

In traditional India, Hindu society was divided into five main strata: four *varnas* or castes, and a fifth group, the outcaste, whose members were known as untouchables. Each caste was subdivided into *jatis* or subcastes, which in total numbered many thousands. *Jatis* were occupational groups – there were carpenter *jatis*, goldsmith *jatis*, potter *jatis*, and so on.

Castes were ranked in terms of ritual purity. The Brahmins, or priests, members of the highest caste, personified purity, sanctity and holiness. They were the source of learning, wisdom and truth. They alone performed the most important religious ceremonies.

At the other extreme, untouchables were defined as unclean, base and impure, a status that affected all their social relationships. They had to perform unclean and degrading tasks such as the disposal of dead animals. They were segregated from members of the caste system and lived on the outskirts of villages or in their own communities. Their presence polluted to the extent that even if the shadow of an untouchable fell across the food of a Brahmin it would render it unclean.

In general, the hierarchy of prestige based on notions of ritual purity was mirrored by the hierarchy of power. The Brahmins were custodians of the law, and the legal system they administered was based largely on their pronouncements. Inequalities of wealth were usually linked to those of prestige and power. In a largely rural economy, the Brahmins tended to be the largest landowners and the control of land was monopolized by members of the two highest castes. Although the caste system has been made illegal in modern India, it still exercises an influence, particularly in rural areas.

As shown by the caste system, social stratification involves a hierarchy of social groups. Members of a particular stratum have a common identity, similar interests and a similar lifestyle. They enjoy or suffer the unequal distribution of rewards in society as members of different social groups.

Social stratification, however, is only one form of social inequality. It is possible for social inequality to exist without social strata. For example, some sociologists have argued that it is no longer correct to regard Western industrial society, particularly the USA, as being stratified in terms of a class system. They suggest that social classes have been replaced by a continuous hierarchy of unequal positions. Where there were once classes, whose members had a consciousness of kind, a common way of life and shared interests, there is now an unbroken continuum of occupational statuses which command varying degrees of prestige and economic reward. Thus it is suggested that a hierarchy of social groups has been replaced by a hierarchy of individuals.

Although many sociologists use the terms social inequality and social stratification interchangeably, the importance of seeing social stratification as a specific form of social inequality will become apparent as this chapter develops.

Strata subcultures

Before looking at some of the major issues raised in the study of social stratification, it is necessary to examine certain aspects of stratification systems. There is a tendency for members of each stratum to develop their own subculture, that is certain norms, attitudes and values which are distinctive to them as a social group. When some members of society experience similar circumstances and problems that are not common to all members, a subculture tends to develop.

For example, it has often been suggested that distinctive working-class and middle-class subcultures exist in Western industrial societies. Similar circumstances and problems often produce similar responses. Members of the lowest stratum in stratification systems that provide little opportunity for improvement of status tend to have a fatalistic attitude towards life. This attitude becomes part of their subculture and is transmitted from generation to generation. It sees circumstances as largely unchangeable; it regards luck and fate rather than individual effort as shaping life, and therefore tends to encourage acceptance of the situation. An attitude of fatalism may be seen in typical phrases from traditional low-income black American subculture such as 'I've been down so long that down don't bother me', 'I was born under a bad sign' and 'It's an uphill climb to the bottom.'

Members of a social group who share similar circumstances and a common subculture are likely to develop a group identity. They tend to have a feeling of kinship with other group members. They will therefore tend to identify with their particular stratum and regard themselves, for example, as middle or working class.

Social mobility

Strata subcultures tend to be particularly distinctive when there is little opportunity to move from one stratum to another. This movement is known as social mobility. Social mobility can be upward, for example moving from the working to the middle class, or downward.

Stratification systems which provide little opportunity for social mobility may be described as closed; those with a relatively high rate of social mobility as open. In closed systems an individual's position is largely ascribed: often it is fixed at birth and there is little he or she can do to change status. Caste provides a good example of a closed stratification system: individuals automatically belonged to the caste of their parents and, except in rare instances, spent the rest of their life in that status.

By comparison, social class, the system of stratification in capitalist industrial society, provides an example of an open system. Some sociologists claim that an individual's class position is largely achieved: it results from their personal qualities and abilities and the use they make of them rather than ascribed characteristics such as the status of their parents or the colour of their skin. By comparison with the caste system, the rate of social mobility in class systems is high.

Life chances

A person's position in a stratification system may have important effects on many areas of life. It may enhance or reduce life chances, that is their chances of obtaining those things defined as desirable and avoiding those things defined as undesirable in their society. Gerth and Mills, referring to Western society, state that life chances include:

Lowest stratum

Everything from the chance to stay alive during the first year after birth to the chance to view fine arts, the chance to remain healthy and grow tall, and if sick to get well again quickly, the chance to avoid becoming a juvenile delinquent and very crucially, the chance to complete an intermediary or higher educational grade

Gerth and Mills, 1954, p. 313

Social versus natural inequalities

Biology and inequality

Many stratification systems are accompanied by beliefs which state that social inequalities are biologically based. Such beliefs are often found in systems of racial stratification where, for example, whites might claim biological superiority over blacks, and see this as the basis for their dominance.

The question of the relationship between biologically based and socially created inequality has proved extremely difficult to answer. The eighteenth-century French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) provided one of the earliest examinations of this question. He refers to biologically based inequality as: 'natural or physical, because it is established by nature, and consists in a difference of age, health, bodily strength, and the qualities of the mind or the soul'. By comparison, socially created inequality: 'consists of the different privileges which some men enjoy to the prejudice of others, such as that of being more rich, more honoured, more powerful, or even in a position to exact obedience'. bio-small, unimp.

Rousseau believed that biologically based inequalities between people were small and relatively unimportant whereas socially created inequalities provide the major basis for systems of social stratification. Most sociologists would support this view.

However, it could still be argued that biological inequalities, no matter how small, provide the foundation upon which structures of social inequality are built. This position is difficult to defend in the case of certain forms of stratification. In the caste system, an individual's status was fixed by birth. People belonged to their parents' *jati* and automatically followed the occupation of the *jati* into which they were born. Thus, no matter what the biologically based aptitudes and capacities of an untouchable, there was no way he or she could become a Brahmin. Unless it is assumed that superior genes are permanently located in the Brahmin caste (and there is no evidence that this is the case) then there is probably no relationship between genetically based and socially created inequality in traditional Hindu society.

A similar argument can be advanced in connection with the feudal or estate system of medieval Europe. Stratification in the feudal system was based on landholding. The more land an individual controlled, the greater his or her wealth, power and prestige. The position of the dominant stratum, the feudal nobility, was based on large grants of land from the monarch. Their status was hereditary, land and titles being passed on from parent to child. It is difficult to sustain the argument that feudal lords ultimately owed their position to biological superiority when their children, no matter what their biological make-up, inherited the status of their parents.

Natural and cultural inequality

So far we have not answered the question of what exactly constitutes biological inequality. It can be argued that biological differences become biological inequalities when people define them as such. Biological factors assume importance in many stratification systems because of the meanings assigned to them by different cultures. For example, old age has very different meanings in different societies. In traditional aborigine societies in Australia it brought high prestige and power since the elders directed the affairs of the tribe, but in Western societies, the elderly are usually pensioned off, and old age assumes a very different meaning. Even with a change of name to 'senior citizen', the status of old age pensioner commands little power or prestige.

So-called racial characteristics are evaluated on the basis of similar principles, that is values which are relative to time and place. The physical characteristics of blacks in America were traditionally defined as undesirable and associated with a range of negative qualities. However, with the rise of Black Power during the late 1960s, this evaluation was slowly changed with slogans such as 'Black is beautiful.' In South Africa, such negative stereotypes among white South Africans began to be undermined when the apartheid regime, which treated black people as inferior, came to an end in 1992. The widespread respect for the first black leader of the country, Nelson Mandela, made it more difficult for the extreme racism of apartheid to be sustained.

Biological differences form a component of some social stratification systems simply because members of those systems select certain characteristics and evaluate them in a particular way. Differences therefore become inequalities only because they are defined as such. André Béteille argues that the search for a biological basis for social stratification is bound to end in failure since the 'qualities are not just there, so to say, in nature: they are as human beings have defined them, in different societies, in different historical epochs' (Béteille, 1977).

Beliefs which state that systems of social stratification are based on biological inequalities can be seen as rationalizations for those systems. Such

beliefs serve to explain the system to its members: they make social inequality appear rational and reasonable. They therefore justify and legitimate the system by appeals to nature. In this way a social contrivance appears to be founded on the natural order of things.

Inequalities between men and women and between different 'racial' groups are sometimes seen as being based on biological differences. We will discuss sociologists' views of whether this is justified in later chapters. (See Chapter 3 on sex and gender and Chapter 4 on 'race'.)

Having considered social stratification in general terms, we will now look at this subject from the various sociological perspectives.

Social stratification – a functionalist perspective

Functionalist theories of stratification must be seen in the context of functionalist theories of society. When functionalists attempt to explain systems of social stratification, they set their explanations in the framework of larger theories which seek to explain the operation of society as a whole. They assume that society has certain basic needs or functional prerequisites that must be met if it is to survive. They therefore look to social stratification to see how far it meets these functional prerequisites.

Functionalists assume that the parts of society form an integrated whole and thus they examine the ways in which the social stratification system is integrated with other parts of society. They maintain that a certain degree of order and stability is essential for the operation of social systems. They will therefore consider how stratification systems help to maintain order and stability in society. In summary, functionalists are primarily concerned with the function of social stratification: with its contribution to the maintenance and well-being of society.

Talcott Parsons – stratification and values

Like many functionalists, Talcott Parsons believed that order, stability and cooperation in society are based on value consensus – a general agreement by members of society concerning what is good and worthwhile. Parsons argued that stratification systems derive from common values. If values exist, then it follows that individuals will be evaluated and placed in some form of rank order. In Parsons's words, 'stratification, in its valuational aspect, then, is the ranking of units in a social system in accordance with the common value system.' Parsons.

In other words, those who perform successfully in terms of society's values will be ranked highly and they will be likely to receive a variety of rewards. At a minimum they will be accorded high prestige because they exemplify and personify common values.

For example, if a society places a high value on bravery and generosity, as was the case of the Sioux Indians in North America, those who excel in terms of these qualities will receive a high rank in the stratification system. The Sioux warrior who successfully raided the Crow and Pawnee – the traditional enemies of his tribe – captured their horses and distributed them to others, could have received a variety of rewards. He may have been given a seat on the tribal council, a position of power and prestige. His deeds would be recounted in the warrior societies and the women would sing of his exploits. Other warriors would follow him in raids against neighbouring tribes and the success of these expeditions might have led to his appointment as a war chief. In this way, excellence in terms of Sioux values was rewarded by power and prestige.

Because different societies have different value systems, the ways of attaining a high position will vary from society to society. Parsons argued that American society values individual achievement, efficiency and 'puts primary emphasis on productive activity within the economy'. Thus, successful business executives who have achieved their position through their own initiative, ability and ambition, and run efficient and productive businesses, will receive high rewards.

Parsons's argument suggests that stratification is an inevitable part of all human societies. If value consensus is an essential component of all societies, then it follows that some form of stratification will result from the ranking of individuals in terms of common values. It also follows from Parsons's argument that there is a general belief that stratification systems are just, right and proper, because they are basically an expression of shared values. Thus American business executives are seen to deserve their rewards because members of society place a high value on their skills and achievements.

This is not to say [illegible] is no conflict between the haves and have-nots, the highly rewarded and those with little reward. Parsons recognized that in Western

arrogance - have's.
Sour grapes - have not's.

industrial society there will be 'certain tendencies to arrogance on the part of some winners and to resentment and to a "sour grapes" attitude on the part of some losers'. However, he believed that this conflict is kept in check by the common value system which justifies the unequal distribution of rewards.

Organization and planning

Functionalists tend to see the relationship between social groups in society as one of cooperation and interdependence. In complex industrial societies, different groups specialize in particular activities. As no one group is self-sufficient, it alone cannot meet the needs of its members. It must, therefore, exchange goods and services with other groups, and so the relationship between social groups is one of reciprocity (mutual give and take).

This relationship extends to the strata in a stratification system. An oversimplified example is the argument that many occupational groups within the middle class in Western society plan, organize and coordinate the activities of the working class. Each class needs and cooperates with the other, since any large-scale task requires both organization and execution. In societies with a highly specialized division of labour, such as industrial societies, some members will specialize in organization and planning while others will follow their directives. Parsons argued that this inevitably leads to inequality in terms of power and prestige. Referring to Western society:

> *Organization on an ever increasing scale is a fundamental feature of such a system. Such organization naturally involves centralization and differentiation of leadership and authority; so that those who take responsibility for coordinating the actions of many others must have a different status in important respects from those who are essentially in the role of carrying out specifications laid down by others.*
>
> Parsons, 1964, p. 327

Thus those with the power to organize and coordinate the activities of others will have a higher social status than those they direct.

Power

As with prestige differentials, Parsons argued that inequalities of power are based on shared values. Power is legitimate authority in that it is generally accepted as just and proper by members of society as a whole. It is accepted as such because those in positions of authority use their power to pursue collective goals which derive from society's central values. Thus the power of the American business executive is seen as legitimate authority because it is used to further productivity, a goal shared by all members of society. This use of power therefore serves the interests of society as a whole.

Summary and evaluation

Parsons saw social stratification as both inevitable and functional for society.

1. It is inevitable because it derives from shared values which are a necessary part of all social systems.
2. It is functional because it serves to integrate various groups in society.

Power and prestige differentials are essential for the coordination and integration of a specialized division of labour. Without social inequality, Parsons found it difficult to see how members of society could effectively cooperate and work together. Finally, inequalities of power and prestige benefit all members of society since they serve to further collective goals which are based on shared values.

Parsons has been strongly criticized on all these points. Other sociologists have seen stratification as a divisive rather than an integrating force. They have regarded it as an arrangement whereby some gain at the expense of others, and questioned the view that stratification systems derive ultimately from shared values. We will examine these criticisms in detail in later sections.

Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore – role allocation and performance

The most famous functionalist theory of stratification was first presented in 1945, in an article by the American sociologists Davis and Moore entitled *Some Principles of Stratification*.

Effective role allocation and performance

Davis and Moore began with the observation that stratification exists in every known human society. They attempted to explain 'in functional terms, the universal necessity which calls forth stratification in any social system'. They argued that all social systems share certain functional prerequisites which must be met if the system is to survive and operate efficiently. One such functional prerequisite is effective role allocation and performance. This means that:

1. all roles must be filled
2. they must be filled by those best able to perform them
3. the necessary training for them must be undertaken
4. the roles must be performed conscientiously.

Davis and Moore argued that all societies need some 'mechanism' for ensuring effective role allocation and performance. This mechanism is social stratification, which they saw as a system that attaches unequal rewards and privileges to the different positions in society.

If the people and positions that make up society did not differ in important respects there would be no need for stratification. However, people differ in terms of their innate ability and talent, and positions differ in terms of their importance for the survival and maintenance of society. Certain positions are more functionally important than others. These require special skills for their effective performance and the number of individuals with the necessary ability to acquire such skills is limited.

A major function of stratification is to match the most able people with the functionally most important positions. It does this by attaching high rewards to those positions. The desire for such rewards motivates people to compete for them, and in theory the most talented will win through. Such positions usually require long periods of training that involve certain sacrifices, such as loss of income. The promise of high rewards is necessary to provide an incentive to encourage people to undergo this training and to compensate them for the sacrifice involved. It is essential for the well-being of society that those who hold the functionally most important positions perform their roles diligently and conscientiously. The high rewards built into these positions provide the necessary inducement and generate the required motivation for such performance. Davis and Moore therefore concluded that social stratification is a 'device by which societies ensure that the most important positions are conscientiously filled by the most qualified persons'.

Functional importance

Davis and Moore realized that one difficulty with their theory was showing clearly which positions are functionally most important. A position may be highly rewarded without necessarily being functionally important. They suggested that the importance of a position can be measured in two ways.

1 It can be measured by the 'degree to which a position is functionally unique, there being no other positions that can perform the same function satisfactorily'. Thus it could be argued that doctors are functionally more important than nurses since their position carries with it many of the skills necessary to perform a nurse's role but not vice versa.

2 The second measure of importance is the 'degree to which other positions are dependent on the one in question'. Thus it may be argued that managers are more important than routine office staff since the latter are dependent on direction and organization from management.

To summarize, Davis and Moore regarded social stratification as a functional necessity for all societies. They saw it as a solution to a problem faced by all social systems, that of 'placing and motivating individuals in the social structure'. They offered no other means of solving this problem and implied that social inequality is an inevitable feature of human society. They concluded that differential rewards are functional for society, because they contribute to the maintenance and well-being of social systems.

Melvin M. Tumin – a critique of Davis and Moore

Davis and Moore's theory provoked a lengthy debate. Melvin Tumin, their most famous opponent, produced a comprehensive criticism of their ideas.

Functional importance

Tumin began by questioning the adequacy of their measurement of the functional importance of positions. Davis and Moore tended to assume that the most highly rewarded positions are indeed the most important. Many occupations, however, which afford little prestige or economic reward, can be seen as vital to society. Tumin therefore argued that 'some labour force of unskilled workmen is as important and as indispensable to the factory as some labour force of engineers'.

In fact, a number of sociologists have argued that there is no objective way of measuring the functional importance of positions. Whether lawyers and doctors are considered as more important than farm labourers and refuse collectors is simply a matter of opinion.

Power and rewards

Tumin argued that Davis and Moore ignored the influence of power on the unequal distribution of rewards. Differences in pay and prestige between occupational groups may be due to differences in their power rather than their functional importance. For example, the difference between the wages of farm labourers and coal miners can be interpreted as a result of the relative bargaining power of the two groups. We will examine this point in detail in later sections.

The pool of talent

Davis and Moore assumed that only a limited number of individuals have the talent to acquire the skills necessary for the functionally most important

positions. Tumin regarded this as a very questionable assumption for three reasons:

1 An effective method of measuring talent and ability has yet to be devised (as the chapter on education in this book indicates).
2 There is no proof that exceptional talents are required for those positions which Davis and Moore considered important.
3 The pool of talent in society may be considerably larger than Davis and Moore assumed (as the chapter on education suggests). As a result, unequal rewards may not be necessary to harness it.

Training

Tumin also questioned the view that the training required for important positions should be regarded as a sacrifice and therefore in need of compensation. He pointed to the rewards of being a student - leisure, freedom and the opportunity for self-development. He noted that any loss of earnings can usually be made up during the first ten years of work. Differential rewards during this period may be justified. However, Tumin saw no reason for continuing this compensation for the rest of an individual's working life.

Motivation

The major function of unequal rewards, according to Davis and Moore, is to motivate talented individuals and allocate them to the functionally most important positions. Tumin rejected this view. He argued that social stratification can, and often does, act as a barrier to the motivation and recruitment of talent.

This is readily apparent in closed systems such as caste and racial stratification: the ascribed status of untouchables prevented even the most talented from becoming Brahmins. Until recently, the ascribed status of blacks in South Africa blocked them from achieving political office and entering highly rewarded occupations. Thus closed stratification systems operate in exactly the opposite way to Davis and Moore's theory.

Tumin suggested, however, that even relatively open systems of stratification erect barriers to the motivation and recruitment of talent. As Chapter 12 on education shows, there is considerable evidence to indicate that the class system in Western industrial society limits the possibilities of the discovery and utilization of talent. In general, the lower an individual's class position, the more likely he or she is to leave school at the minimum leaving age and the less likely to aspire and strive for a highly rewarded position. Thus the motivation to succeed is unequally distributed throughout the class system. As a result, social class can act as an obstacle to the motivation of talent.

In addition, Tumin argued that Davis and Moore failed to consider the possibility that those who occupy highly rewarded positions erect barriers to recruitment. Occupational groups often use their power to restrict access to their positions, so creating a high demand for their services and increasing the rewards they receive.

Tumin used the American Medical Association as an example. By controlling entry into the profession, it has maintained a shortage of doctors and so ensured high rewards for medical services. In this way the self-interested use of power can restrict the recruitment of talented individuals.

Inequality of opportunity

Tumin concluded that stratification, by its very nature, can never adequately perform the functions which Davis and Moore assigned to it. He argued that those born into the lower strata can never have the same opportunities for realizing their talents as those born into the higher strata. Tumin maintained:

> *It is only when there is a genuinely equal access to recruitment and training for all potentially talented persons that differential rewards can conceivably be justified as functional. And stratification systems are apparently inherently antagonistic to the development of such full equality of opportunity.*
>
> Tumin, 1953, in Bendix and Lipset, 1967, p. 55

Social divisions

Finally, Tumin questioned the view that social stratification functions to integrate the social system. He argued that differential rewards can 'encourage hostility, suspicion and distrust among the various segments of a society'. From this viewpoint, stratification is a divisive rather than an integrating force.

Stratification can also weaken social integration by giving members of the lower strata a feeling of being excluded from participation in the larger society. This is particularly apparent in systems of racial stratification. By tending to exclude certain groups from full participation in society, stratification 'serves to distribute loyalty unequally in the population', and therefore reduces the potential for social solidarity.

Tumin concluded that in their enthusiastic search for the positive functions of stratification, functionalists have tended to ignore or play down its many dysfunctions.

The debate between Davis and Moore and Tumin took place in the 1940s and 1950s. Interest in the issues raised by this debate has recently been revived with the development of 'New Right' perspectives in sociology. In the next section we will analyse the New Right theories of social stratification.

Social stratification – a New Right perspective

Introduction

The ideas of the 'New Right' became influential in the 1980s. In politics, they were closely associated with the British prime minister Margaret Thatcher and the American president Ronald Reagan. The American economist Milton Friedman and the Austrian academic Friedrich Hayek contributed much to the development of New Right thinking (see for example Friedman, 1962 and Hayek, 1944). In British sociology, Peter Saunders and David Marsland have been perhaps the most prominent advocates of this perspective. Marsland's views on poverty will be examined in Chapter 5 (pp. 318–19) and Peter Saunders's theory of stratification is discussed below.

The New Right bases its theories on nineteenth-century liberalism. This regarded the free market in capitalist economies as the best basis for organizing society. Market forces encourage competition, which stimulates innovation and efficiency. Businesses have to make products that are cheaper or better than those of their competitors in order to survive. Free market economies are based upon the choices made by individuals when spending their money, selling their labour or purchasing other people's labour. They therefore promote individual liberty.

Like their nineteenth-century liberal counterparts, the New Right sociologists believe that excessive state intervention in the economy must be avoided. The state should not act to redistribute resources and interfere with the workings of the free market. If it tries to do so it will undermine economic efficiency. Inefficient concerns propped up by the government needlessly use up resources. State intervention may take away the motivation for people to work hard. There is little incentive to strive for success if individuals know that the state will help them no matter how little effort they make. Government interference may also create injustice, taking from those who have earned their rewards and giving to those who are undeserving. Furthermore, as the state becomes stronger, the freedom of individuals may be suppressed. For all these reasons the New Right is strongly opposed to Marxism and socialism.

Peter Saunders – stratification and freedom

Saunders (1990) is generally sympathetic to Davis and Moore's theory of stratification: he is certainly much less critical than Melvin Tumin. He points out that even critics like Tumin accepted that all societies have been stratified – there has never been a completely egalitarian society. Furthermore, he suggests that systems which reward different positions unequally can be shown to have beneficial effects, such as motivating people to work hard.

However, Saunders does not argue that unequal rewards are the only way that a society could fill the important positions with capable people. He says that 'it is possible to imagine a society where all positions are rewarded equally in terms of material resources and formal status'. Such a society would have serious problems, however. Some people would not be happy to do the jobs they were allocated and others would not put in the effort needed to do their jobs properly. Saunders believes:

> *In the absence of economic rewards and penalties, the only sanctions available would be those involving the threat or use of physical force. Such people, in other words would have to be jailed, or forcibly set to work in supervised colonies, or even executed as an example to others.*
>
> Saunders, 1990, p. 65

This would be necessary because allowing people to get away with doing less than their fair share of work would undermine the whole system because it would reduce the commitment of others.

Saunders does not therefore accept the functionalist claim that stratification systems based upon economic differences are inevitable. However, he certainly agrees with functionalists that they are desirable. He admits that capitalist societies tend to create more inequality than socialist societies. He also argues that socialist societies are bound to be more repressive than capitalist ones in making people perform their roles. In the absence of adequate economic rewards, force must be used. Saunders even predicts that as countries such as China and the states of the former Soviet Union move towards market-based economies 'state coercion may be expected to decline'.

Equality and justice

In developing his own theory of stratification, Saunders distinguishes three types of equality:

1. Formal or legal equality involves all members of society being subject to the same laws or rules. Individuals are judged according to what they do, for example whether they break the law, and not according to who they are. Sanders sees this type of equality as being an integral part of Western capitalist societies, although he admits that 'in practice it is not always as rigorously applied as it

might be'. Legal equality does not imply that everybody ends up in the same position.

2 The second type of equality, equality of opportunity, means that people have an equal chance to become unequal. Individuals compete for success and those with greater merit achieve more. Merit might involve the ability to work harder or the possession of attributes or characteristics which are valued in a society. A society based on this type of equality is often called a meritocracy.

3 Equality of outcome goes further than the idea of equality of opportunity. Saunders explains:

> *If a meritocracy is like a race where everybody lines up together at the start, a fully-fledged egalitarian society would be like a perfectly handicapped race where everyone passes the finishing tape at the same time no matter how hard and fast they have tried to run.*
>
> Saunders, 1990, p. 44

Broadly, Saunders accepts the principles behind the first two conceptions of equality but rejects the third. Following the ideas of Hayek, he argues that attempts to create equality of outcome undermine equality of opportunity and legal equality. To obtain equality of outcome you have to treat people differently. For example, 'affirmative action' programmes or 'positive discrimination', designed to equalize the achievements of men and women or blacks and whites, result in discrimination. Whites and males are discriminated against while blacks and females enjoy discrimination in their favour.

Saunders uses an example put forward by another New Right writer, Robert Nozick (1974), to show how pursuing equality of outcome leads to injustice. A group of students could agree before an exam that they should all be given a mark of 50 per cent. All would pass and none would have to fear failure, but the result would not be just. Some individuals would feel rightly aggrieved if they were stripped of 30 per cent of the marks they would normally have gained and which they had earned through their own efforts.

Saunders and Nozick therefore adopt a conception of equality based on legal equality and the idea of entitlement. Social justice is served when people are allowed to keep those things to which they are entitled. So long as people have earned the resources or money they possess legally through their own work or 'uncoerced exchanges with others', then there should be no question of them being robbed of their possessions. If people pass their wealth on to others then the recipients become entitled to keep it.

Saunders does, however, admit that there is one flaw in this argument. In a society such as Britain, it is not clear that all of the wealthy are actually entitled to what they own. Some of the land in private hands has been passed down to the descendants of Norman warlords who helped William the Conqueror conquer England. Saunders does not want to see the wealth of landowners such as the Duke of Westminster or the Queen taken from them. To do so would undermine 'the whole basis of modern-day property ownership'. He therefore turns to a second justification for inequality which comes from the work of Hayek.

Both Saunders and Hayek believe that inequality is justified because it promotes economic growth. By allowing and encouraging people to pursue their own self-interest, the interests of society as a whole are promoted. Some entrepreneurs who set up businesses fail. When this happens they bear the costs of their own failure. When they succeed they may, as Saunders says, 'accumulate a fortune, but in doing so they will have added to the productive power and wealth of the society as a whole'.

Competition ensures that goods or services increase in quality and fall in price, making them available to a wider section of the population. Not everyone will be able to afford consumer products initially, or indeed in the end, but living standards will constantly increase. The efforts of entrepreneurs make some of them rich, but at the same time 'the rest of society grows more affluent as it gains by their efforts'.

Saunders cites cars, air travel, ballpoint pens, colour televisions, home computers and central heating as examples of things that have become affordable for ordinary people.

Opportunity and inequality

Saunders clearly believes that competition in capitalist societies benefits the population. In his recent work, he has argued that Britain is close to being a meritocracy (Saunders, 1996). Although he does not claim that Britain or similar societies are perfect meritocracies, in which everyone has genuinely equal opportunities to use their talents to achieve success, he does believe that the distribution of economic rewards is closely related to merit.

He argues that much of the apparent inequality of opportunity between classes in capitalist societies may be due to the unequal distribution of ability and effort. In other words, the children of middle-class parents may deserve to be more successful than those from working-class backgrounds because they tend to have greater genetically inherited ability and because they work harder.

If this is the case, then it is not surprising if the children of the middle class get better jobs and higher pay than the children of the working class. Nor is this evidence of inequality of opportunity as the differences of outcome may well be based on

merit. Saunders's claim that Britain is close to being a meritocracy is highly controversial. It will be discussed in detail later in the chapter in the light of studies of social mobility (see pp. 105–8).

Saunders also emphasizes the increasing opportunities for people from all backgrounds as the proportion of well-paid, middle-class jobs in the occupational structure has steadily increased.

In societies such as Britain and the USA there are fewer people who are unsuccessful than there were in the past. Whatever the relative chances of people from different classes getting a higher-class job, the absolute chances have increased for everybody. Capitalism creates more well-paid, skilled and white-collar jobs for which people from all backgrounds can compete. Saunders concludes:

> *Capitalism is dynamic because it is unequal, and any attempt to equalise wealth and income will succeed only at the expense of stifling initiative, innovation and social and economic development.*
>
> Saunders, 1990, p. 53

A critique of the New Right perspective

The New Right perspective on stratification is open to a number of criticisms. Some of Tumin's criticisms of Davis and Moore are also relevant to New Right theories. For example, the New Right can be accused of playing down the possible harmful effects of stratification in undermining social cohesion and integration. Saunders's view that socialist societies are inevitably more repressive than free-market capitalist ones could be seen as an unjustified, sweeping generalization. For example:

1. Early capitalism was partly based upon the use of slave labour.
2. In South Africa, until relatively recently, a capitalist-free market economy went hand-in-hand with the apartheid system that separated 'races' and gave black South Africans very few opportunities.
3. In Chile, a democratically elected socialist government under the leadership of President Allende was overthrown in the 1970s in a coup led by General Pinochet. Pinochet followed free market economic policies and his seizure of power was partly engineered by the USA. Yet his regime was far more repressive than that of his predecessor. One of the Pinochet regime's first actions was to round up thousands of potential opponents and take them to the national football stadium where many were executed.

Examples such as these suggest that the free market and freedom do not inevitably go hand-in-hand.

Gordon Marshall and Adam Swift – social class and social justice

Marshall and Swift (1993) have made the most detailed evaluation of Saunders's views on stratification. They criticize him for trying to argue in favour of both equality of opportunity and formal or legal equality. These two principles may sometimes coincide, but often they do not. For example, Marshall and Swift argue:

> *If a millionaire chooses to bequeath his money to an untalented layabout then justice as entitlement demands that he be permitted to do so, and forbids taxation of the inheritance despite the fact that any normal conception of justice as desert or merit is here clearly violated.*
>
> Marshall and Swift, 1993, p. 191

Marshall and Swift then go on to examine the meritocracy thesis. They question the view that market forces necessarily reward merit. Success in business, for example, may depend as much on luck as on the hard work or personal attributes of the entrepreneur.

Furthermore, Marshall and Swift provide evidence which they claim shows that capitalist societies are not genuinely meritocratic. They use data from a study conducted by Gordon Marshall, Howard Newby, David Rose and Carolyn Vogler (1988). This study found that patterns of social mobility were influenced by class even when educational attainment was taken into account. People from working-class backgrounds had less chance than those from higher-class backgrounds of obtaining a position in one of the top classes even when they had the same level of educational qualifications.

This undermines Saunders's claim that inequalities between classes could be the result of genetic differences. Working-class people with, for example, the ability to get a degree, were still disadvantaged because of their class background. As Marshall and Swift say:

> *If people find their place in the occupational order according to meritocratic principles, then the impact of class background should not be apparent in class destinations, except as this is mediated by educational achievements.*
>
> Marshall and Swift, 1993, p. 202

The free market does not guarantee that merit is equally rewarded for all social groups. Social justice may therefore be promoted if the state intervenes to try to make job allocation meritocratic. (For more details of the study by Marshall *et al.* see pp. 102–5. For a fuller discussion of Saunders on Britain being a meritocracy see pp. 105–8.)

Social stratification – a Marxist perspective

Marxist perspectives provide a radical alternative to functionalist views of the nature of social stratification. They regard stratification as a divisive rather than an integrative structure. They see it as a mechanism whereby some exploit others, rather than as a means of furthering collective goals.

Marxists focus on social strata rather than social inequality in general. Functionalists, such as Parsons and Davis and Moore, say little about social stratification in the sense of clearly defined social strata whose members have shared interests. However, this view of social stratification is central to Marxist theory.

Marx's views will first be briefly summarized and then examined in more detail. For details of Marx's theory of stratification, see Marx 1970 (1867), 1974 (1909), Marx and Engels 1848, and Bottomore and Rubel 1963.

Classes

1 In all stratified societies, there are two major social groups: a ruling class and a subject class.
2 The power of the ruling class comes from its ownership and control of the means of production (land, capital, labour power, buildings and machinery).
3 The ruling class exploits and oppresses the subject class.
4 As a result, there is a basic conflict of interest between the two classes.
5 The various institutions of society, such as the legal and political systems, are instruments of ruling-class domination and serve to further its interests.
6 Only when the means of production are communally owned will classes disappear, thereby bringing an end to the exploitation and oppression of some by others.

From a Marxist perspective, systems of stratification derive from the relationships of social groups to the means of production. Marx used the term 'class' to refer to the main strata in all stratification systems, although most modern sociologists would reserve the term for strata in capitalist society. From a Marxist viewpoint, a class is a social group whose members share the same relationship to the means of production.

For example, in a feudal epoch, there are two main classes distinguished by their relationship to land (the crucial part of the means of production in an agricultural society). They are the feudal nobility who own the land, and the landless serfs who work the land. Similarly, in a capitalist era, there are two main classes: the bourgeoisie or capitalist class, which owns the means of production, and the proletariat or working class, whose members own only their labour which they hire to the bourgeoisie in return for wages.

Classes and historical epochs

Marx believed that Western society had developed through four main epochs:

1 primitive communism
2 ancient society
3 feudal society
4 capitalist society.

Primitive communism is represented by the societies of prehistory and provides the only example of a classless society. From then on, all societies are divided into two major classes: masters and slaves in ancient society, lords and serfs in feudal society and capitalists and wage labourers in capitalist society.

During each historical epoch, the labour power required for production was supplied by the subject class, that is by slaves, serfs and wage labourers respectively. The subject class is made up of the majority of the population whereas the ruling or dominant class forms a minority. The relationship between the two major classes will be discussed shortly.

Classes did not exist during the era of primitive communism when societies were based on a socialist mode of production. In a hunting and gathering band, the earliest form of human society, the land and its products were communally owned. The men hunted and the women gathered plant food, and the produce was shared by members of the band. Classes did not exist since all members of society shared the same relationship to the means of production. Every member was both producer and owner, all provided labour power and shared the products of their labour. Hunting and gathering is a subsistence economy which means that production only meets basic survival needs.

Classes emerge when the productive capacity of society expands beyond the level required for subsistence. This occurs when agriculture becomes the dominant mode of production. In an agricultural economy, only a section of society is needed to produce the food requirements of the whole society. Many individuals are thus freed from food production and are able to specialize in other tasks. The rudimentary division of labour of the hunting and

gathering band is replaced by an increasingly more complex and specialized division.

For example, in the early agricultural villages, some individuals became full-time producers of pottery, clothing and agricultural implements. As agriculture developed, surplus wealth – that is goods above the basic subsistence needs of the community – was produced. This led to an exchange of goods, and trading developed rapidly both within and between communities. This was accompanied by the development of a system of private property. Goods were increasingly seen as commodities or articles of trade to which the individual rather than the community had right of ownership.

Private property, and the accumulation of surplus wealth, form the basis for the development of class societies. In particular, they provide the preconditions for the emergence of a class of producers and a class of non-producers. Some people are able to acquire the means of production, and others are therefore obliged to work for them. The result is a class of non-producers which owns the means of production, and a class of producers which owns only its labour.

Dependency and conflict

From a Marxist perspective, the relationship between the major social classes is one of mutual dependence and conflict. Thus, in capitalist society, the bourgeoisie and proletariat are dependent upon each other. Wage labourers must sell their labour power in order to survive, as they do not own a part of the means of production and lack the means to produce goods independently. They are, therefore, dependent for their livelihood on the capitalists and the wages they offer. The capitalists, as non-producers, are dependent on the labour power of wage labourers, since, without it, there would be no production.

However, the mutual dependency of the two classes is not a relationship of equal or symmetrical reciprocity. Instead, it is a relationship of exploiter and exploited, oppressor and oppressed. In particular, the ruling class gains at the expense of the subject class and there is therefore a conflict of interest between them.

This may be illustrated by Marx's view of the nature of ownership and production in capitalist society.

The capitalist economy and exploitation

The basic characteristics of a capitalist economy may be summarized as follows:

1 Capital may be defined as money used to finance the production of commodities for private gain.
2 In a capitalist economy, goods and the labour power, raw materials and machinery used to produce them, are given a monetary value.
3 The capitalists invest their capital in the production of goods.
4 Capital is accumulated by selling those goods at a value greater than their cost of production.

Capitalism therefore involves the investment of capital in the production of commodities with the aim of maximizing profit in order to accumulate more capital. Money is converted into commodities by financing production, those commodities are then sold and converted back into money at such a price that the capitalists end up with more money than they started with.

Capital is privately owned by a minority, the capitalist class. In Marx's view, however, this capital is gained from the exploitation of the mass of the population, the working class. Marx argued that capital, as such, produces nothing. Only labour produces wealth. Yet the wages paid to the workers for their labour are well below the value of the goods they produce.

The difference between the value of wages and commodities is known as surplus value. This surplus value is appropriated in the form of profit by the capitalists. Because they are non-producers, the bourgeoisie are therefore exploiting the proletariat, the real producers of wealth.

Marx maintained that in all class societies, the ruling class exploits and oppresses the subject class.

Power and the superstructure

Political power, in Marxist theory, comes from economic power. The power of the ruling class therefore stems from its ownership and control of the means of production. As the superstructure of society – the major institutions, values and belief systems – is seen to be largely shaped by the economic infrastructure, the relations of production will be reproduced in the superstructure. Therefore, the dominance of the ruling class in the relations of production will be reflected in the superstructure. In particular, the political and legal systems will reflect ruling-class interests since, in Marx's words, 'the existing relations of production between individuals must necessarily express themselves also as political and legal relations'.

For instance, the various ownership rights of the capitalist class will be enshrined in and protected by the laws of the land. Thus the various parts of the superstructure can be seen as instruments of ruling-class domination and as mechanisms for the oppression of the subject class.

In the same way, the position of the dominant class is supported by beliefs and values which are systematically generated by the infrastructure. As noted on page 13, Marx referred to the dominant concepts of class societies as ruling-class ideology

since they justify and legitimate ruling-class domination and project a distorted picture of reality. For example, the emphasis on freedom in capitalist society, illustrated by phrases such as 'the free market', 'free democratic societies' and 'the free world', is an illusion that disguises the wage slavery of the proletariat.

Ruling-class ideology produces false class consciousness, a false picture of the nature of the relationship between social classes. Members of both classes tend to accept the status quo as normal and natural and are largely unaware of the true nature of exploitation and oppression. In this way, the conflict of interest between the classes is disguised and a degree of social stability produced, but the basic contradictions and conflicts of class societies remain unresolved.

Class and social change

Class struggle

Marx believed that the class struggle was the driving force of social change. He stated that 'the history of all societies up to the present is the history of the class struggle'.

A new historical epoch is created by the development of superior forces of production by a new social group. These developments take place within the framework of the previous era. The merchants and industrialists who spearheaded the rise of capitalism emerged during the feudal era. They accumulated capital, laid the foundations for industrial manufacture, factory production and the system of wage labour, all of which were essential components of capitalism. The superiority of the capitalist mode of production led to a rapid transformation of the structure of society. The capitalist class became dominant, and although the feudal aristocracy maintained aspects of its power well into the nineteenth century, it was fighting a losing battle.

The class struggles of history have been between minorities. Capitalism, for instance, developed from the struggle between the feudal aristocracy and the emerging capitalist class, both groups in numerical terms forming a minority of the population. Major changes in history have involved the replacement of one form of private property by another, and of one type of production technique by another: capitalism involved the replacement of privately owned land and an agricultural economy by privately owned capital and an industrial economy.

Marx believed that the class struggle that would transform capitalist society would involve none of these processes. The protagonists would be the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, a minority versus a majority. Private property would be replaced by communally owned property. Industrial manufacture would remain as the basic technique of production in the new society.

Marx believed that the basic contradictions contained in a capitalist economic system would lead to its eventual destruction. The proletariat would overthrow the bourgeoisie and seize the means of production, the source of power. Property would be communally owned and, since all members of society would now share the same relationship to the means of production, a classless society would result. Since history is the history of the class struggle, history would now end. The communist society which would replace capitalism would contain no contradictions, no conflicts of interest, and would therefore be unchanging. However, certain changes were necessary before the dawning of this utopia.

Class consciousness

Marx distinguished between a 'class in itself' and a 'class for itself'. A class in itself is simply a social group whose members share the same relationship to the means of production. Marx argued that a social group only fully becomes a class when it becomes a class for itself. At this stage, its members have class consciousness and class solidarity. Class consciousness means that false class consciousness has been replaced by a full awareness of the true situation, by a realization of the nature of exploitation. Members of a class then develop a common identity, recognize their shared interests and unite, so creating class solidarity. The final stage of class consciousness and class solidarity is reached when members realize that only by collective action can they overthrow the ruling class, and take positive steps to do so.

Marx believed that the following aspects of capitalist society would eventually lead to the proletariat developing into a 'class for itself'.

1. Capitalist society is by its very nature unstable. It is based on contradictions and antagonisms which can only be resolved by its transformation. In particular, the conflict of interest between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat cannot be resolved within the framework of a capitalist economy. The basic conflict of interest involves the exploitation of workers by the capitalists.
2. Marx believed that this first contradiction would be highlighted by a second: the contradiction between social production and individual ownership. As capitalism developed, the workforce was increasingly concentrated in large factories where production was a social enterprise. Social production juxtaposed with individual ownership illuminates the exploitation of the proletariat. Social production also makes it easier for workers to organize themselves against the capitalists. It facilitates communication and encourages a recognition of common circumstances and interests.

Polarization of the classes

Apart from the basic contradictions of capitalist society, Marx believed that certain factors in the natural development of a capitalist economy would hasten its downfall. These factors would result in the polarization of the two main classes: the gap between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie will become greater and the contrast between the two groups will become more stark. Such factors include:

1 First, the increasing use of machinery will result in a homogeneous working class. Since 'machinery obliterates the differences in labour', members of the proletariat will become increasingly similar. The differences between skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers will tend to disappear as machines remove the skill required in the production of commodities.

2 Second, the difference in wealth between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat will increase as the accumulation of capital proceeds. Even though the real wages and living standards of the proletariat may rise, its members will become poorer in relation to the bourgeoisie. This process is known as pauperization.

3 Third, the competitive nature of capitalism means that only the largest and most wealthy companies will survive and prosper. Competition will depress the intermediate strata – those groups lying between the two main classes – into the proletariat. Thus the petty bourgeoisie, the owners of small businesses, will sink into the proletariat. At the same time the surviving companies will grow larger and capital will be concentrated into fewer hands.

These three processes – the obliteration of the differences in labour, the pauperization of the working class, and the depression of the intermediate strata into the proletariat – will result in the polarization of the two major classes.

Marx believed he could see the process of polarization in nineteenth-century Britain. He wrote that 'society as a whole is more and more splitting into two great hostile camps ... bourgeoisie and proletariat'. The battle lines were now clearly drawn: Marx hoped that the proletarian revolution would shortly follow and the communist utopia of his dreams would finally become a reality.

Marx's work on class has been examined in detail for the following reasons:

1 Many sociologists claim that his theory still provides the best explanation of the nature of class in capitalist society.

2 Much of the research on class has been inspired by ideas and questions raised by Marx.

3 Many of the concepts of class analysis introduced by Marx have proved useful to Marxists and non-Marxists alike.

Social stratification – a Weberian perspective

The work of the German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) represents one of the most important developments in stratification theory since Marx. Weber believed that social stratification results from a struggle for scarce resources in society. Although he saw this struggle as being primarily concerned with economic resources, it can also involve struggles for prestige and for political power.

Market situation

Like Marx, Weber saw class in economic terms (Weber, 1947). He argued that classes develop in market economies in which individuals compete for economic gain. He defined a class as a group of individuals who share a similar position in a market economy, and by virtue of that fact receive similar economic rewards. Thus, in Weber's terminology, a person's 'class situation' is basically their 'market situation'. Those who share a similar class situation also share similar life chances. Their economic position will directly affect their chances of obtaining those things defined as desirable in their society, for example access to higher education and good quality housing.

Like Marx, Weber argued that the major class division is between those who own the forces of production and those who do not. Thus those who have substantial property holdings will receive the highest economic rewards and enjoy superior life chances. However, Weber saw important differences in the market situation of the propertyless groups in society. In particular, the various skills and services offered by different occupations have differing market values. For instance, in capitalist society, managers, administrators and professionals receive relatively high salaries because of the demand for their services. Weber distinguished the following class groupings in capitalist society:

1 the propertied upper class

2 the propertyless white-collar workers

3 the petty bourgeoisie

4 the manual working class.

In his analysis of class, Weber disagreed with Marx on a number of important issues:

1 Factors other than the ownership or non-ownership of property are significant in the formation of classes. In particular, the market value of the skills of the propertyless groups varies and the resulting differences in economic return are sufficient to produce different social classes.

2 Weber saw no evidence to support the idea of the polarization of classes. Although he saw some decline in the numbers of the petty bourgeoisie (the small property owners) due to competition from large companies, he argued that they enter white-collar or skilled manual trades rather than being depressed into the ranks of unskilled manual workers. More importantly, Weber argued that the white-collar 'middle class' expands rather than contracts as capitalism develops. He maintained that capitalist enterprises and the modern nation state require a 'rational' bureaucratic administration which involves large numbers of administrators and clerical staff. Thus Weber saw a diversification of classes and an expansion of the white-collar middle class, rather than a polarization.

3 Weber rejected the view, held by some Marxists, of the inevitability of the proletarian revolution. He saw no reason why those sharing a similar class situation should necessarily develop a common identity, recognize shared interests and take collective action to further those interests. For example, Weber suggested that individual manual workers who are dissatisfied with their class situation may respond in a variety of ways. They may grumble, work to rule, sabotage industrial machinery, take strike action, or attempt to organize other members of their class in an effort to overthrow capitalism. Weber admitted that a common market situation might provide a basis for collective class action but he saw this only as a possibility.

4 Weber rejected the Marxist view that political power necessarily derives from economic power. He argued that class forms only one possible basis for power and that the distribution of power in society is not necessarily linked to the distribution of class inequalities.

Status situation

While class forms one possible basis for group formation, collective action and the acquisition of political power, Weber argued that there are other bases for these activities. In particular, groups form because their members share a similar status situation. Whereas class refers to the unequal distribution of economic rewards, status refers to the unequal distribution of 'social honour'.

Occupations, ethnic and religious groups, and, most importantly, lifestyles, are accorded differing degrees of prestige or esteem by members of society. A status group is made up of individuals who are awarded a similar amount of social honour and therefore share the same status situation. Unlike classes, members of status groups are almost always aware of their common status situation. They share a similar lifestyle, identify with and feel they belong to their status group, and often place restrictions on the ways in which outsiders may interact with them.

Weber argued that status groups reach their most developed form in the caste system of traditional Hindu society in India. Castes and sub-castes were formed and distinguished largely in terms of social honour; lifestyles were sharply differentiated and accorded varying degrees of prestige.

Social closure

Castes also provide a good example of the process described by Weber as social closure. Social closure involves the exclusion of some people from membership of a status group. In the caste system social closure is achieved through prohibitions which prevent members of a caste from marrying outside their caste. The caste system is an extreme example of social closure since the exclusion of outsiders from the status group is so complete. Another example was the apartheid system in South Africa which lasted from the 1940s until 1992. The population was divided into whites, Asians, black Africans, and 'coloured' people descended from more than one 'race'. These different groups were kept apart in public places (for example they were required to use different public toilets), they had to live in different neighbourhoods and they were prohibited from marrying someone from a different group. Not surprisingly the better facilities and neighbourhoods were reserved for the dominant white population.

Other status groups erect less formidable barriers to entry. In modern Britain, studies of elite self-recruitment suggest that certain types of job, such as senior positions in the Civil Service, are usually filled by those who have attended public school. Although individuals who went to state schools have some chance of entering these jobs, public school educated elites largely reserve such positions for themselves and their children's group. (For details of elite self-recruitment see Chapter 9.)

Class and status groups

In many societies, class and status situations are closely linked. Weber noted that 'property as such is not always recognized as a status qualification, but

in the long run it is, and with extraordinary regularity'. However, those who share the same class situation will not necessarily belong to the same status group. For example, the *nouveaux riches* (the newly rich) are sometimes excluded from the status groups of the privileged because their tastes, manners and dress are defined as vulgar.

Status groups may create divisions within classes. In a study of Banbury, in Oxfordshire, conducted in the 1950s, Margaret Stacey (1960) found that members of the manual working class distinguished three status groups within that class: the 'respectable working class', the 'ordinary working class' and the 'rough working class'.

Economic factors influenced the formation of these groups – for example, the 'roughs' were often in the lowest income bracket – but they did not determine status since the income of many 'roughs' was similar to that of members of other status groups.

Status groups can also cut across class divisions. For example, homosexuals from different class backgrounds are involved in Gay Rights organizations and events such as the annual Gay Pride celebration in Britain.

Weber's observations on status groups are important because they suggest that in certain situations status rather than class provides the basis for the formation of social groups. In addition, the presence of different status groups within a single class and of status groups which cut across class divisions can weaken class solidarity and reduce the potential for class consciousness. These points are illustrated by Weber's analysis of 'parties'.

Parties

Weber defined parties as groups which are specifically concerned with influencing policies and making decisions in the interests of their membership. In Weber's words, parties are concerned with 'the acquisition of social "power"'.

Parties include a variety of associations, from the mass political parties of Western democracies to the whole range of pressure or interest groups which include professional associations, trades unions, the Automobile Association and the RSPCA. Parties often, but not necessarily, represent the interests of classes or status groups. In Weber's words, 'Parties may represent interests determined through "class situation" or "status situation" .... In most cases they are partly class parties and partly status parties, but sometimes they are neither.'

The combination of class and status interests can be seen in a group such as the Nation of Islam in the USA. As well as being a religious group it is also active in trying to achieve political change. It represents a status group but it also represents class interests – the majority of its members are working class.

Weber's view of parties suggests that the relationship between political groups and class and status groups is far from clearcut. Just as status groups can both divide classes and cut across class boundaries, so parties can divide and cut across both classes and status groups. Weber's analysis of classes, status groups and parties suggests that no single theory can pinpoint and explain their relationship. The interplay of class, status and party in the formation of social groups is complex and variable and must be examined in particular societies during particular time periods.

Marx attempted to reduce all forms of inequality to social class and argued that classes formed the only significant social groups in society. Weber argues that the evidence provides a more complex and diversified picture of social stratification.

Modern theories of stratification

Most contemporary studies of stratification are based either upon a Marxist or a Weberian perspective. Some modern sociologists have remained close to the original theories of Marx and Weber. Others have drawn their inspiration from one or other of these classic sociologists, but have made significant alterations to their original theories in an attempt to describe and explain the class structures of capitalist industrial societies. Such sociologists can be referred to as new, or neo-Marxists and neo-Weberians.

There has been a long-standing debate between those who draw their inspiration from Marx, and those who follow Weber, as to which approach is more useful as a way of developing a sociological understanding of class. We will analyse this debate in later sections of this chapter when we deal with the different classes in contemporary capitalism. Contemporary neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian theories of the class structure as a whole will also be examined towards the end of the chapter. In the next section, however, we will consider how the stratification system has changed over time in British society.

Changes in the British stratification system

As we discovered in the previous section, most contemporary theories of stratification have been influenced by the pioneering work of Marx or Weber. Despite the differences between these sociologists, both gave primary importance to material inequalities. Marx saw the most important divisions in any system of stratification as stemming from differences in the ownership of wealth, and specifically ownership of the means of production. Weber also saw ownership of wealth as an important criterion for distinguishing classes. Weber, however, placed more emphasis than Marx on divisions within the propertyless class – the class whose members did not own sufficient property to support themselves without working. Income levels and other life chances for this group depended largely upon the market situation of the occupational group to which the individuals belonged.

No system of class stratification is fixed and static. The distribution of resources within the class system constantly changes, and the size and market situation of occupational groups also alters over time. The next sections will describe some of the broad patterns of change in the composition of the occupational structure and the distribution of income and wealth in Britain in the twentieth century. Later sections will examine the changing position of particular classes in more detail.

Changes in the occupational structure

Sociologists from Marx and Weber onwards have debated how best to define social classes. Many, though not all, now base their class categories, at least partly, upon occupational groupings. Official government statistics distinguish between socio-economic groups, which, it is claimed, bring together people with jobs of similar social and economic status.

Although there are disagreements about where the boundary between the middle and working classes should be placed, it has often been the case that manual workers are regarded as being working class, and non-manual workers as middle class. In official publications, types of manual job are usually distinguished according to levels of skill, with separate categories being used for the unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled manual worker. Non-manual jobs are also usually divided into three categories: routine non-manual jobs, which include clerical and secretarial work; intermediate non-manual jobs such as teachers, nurses, librarians and some managers;

Table 2.1 Occupational class and industrial status of the economically active population in Great Britain, 1911, 1921, 1931, 1951, 1971 (numbers in thousands)

	All					Males					Females				
	1911	1921	1931	1951	1971	1911	1921	1931	1951	1971	1911	1921	1931	1951	1971
1 Professional															
(a) Higher															
Employers	–	25	38	34	79	–	25	37	33	75	–	–	–	1	4
Own account	–	36	44	44	59	–	35	41	40	53	–	2	3	4	7
Employees	–	134	158	356	687	–	126	144	326	646	–	8	15	31	40
All	184	195	240	434	824	173	186	222	399	774	11	10	18	36	50
%	1.00	1.01	1.14	1.93	3.29	1.34	1.36	1.50	2.56	4.87	0.20	0.18	0.29	0.52	0.55
(b) Lower															
Employers	–	18	15	10	25	–	14	8	7	17	–	4	7	3	7
Own account	–	62	70	42	59	–	20	22	22	37	–	42	48	20	22
Employees	–	600	643	1,007	1,863	–	242	270	463	892	–	357	373	544	971
All	560	680	728	1,059	1,946	208	276	300	492	946	352	403	428	567	1,000
%	3.05	3.52	3.46	4.70	7.78	1.61	2.02	2.03	3.16	5.95	6.49	7.07	6.83	8.18	10.95

continued ...

	All					Males					Females				
	1911	1921	1931	1951	1971	1911	1921	1931	1951	1971	1911	1921	1931	1951	1971
2 Employers, administrators, managers															
(a) Employers and proprietors															
Employers	763	692	727	457	621	661	613	646	400	485	102	79	82	56	136
Own account	469	626	682	661	435	339	435	483	494	320	130	191	196	167	115
All	1,232	1,318	1,409	1,118	1,056	1,000	1,048	1,129	894	805	232	270	278	223	251
%	6.71	6.82	6.70	4.97	4.22	7.74	7.69	7.65	5.74	5.07	4.28	4.74	4.44	3.22	2.75
(b) Managers and administrators															
Own account	21	29	30	31	46	20	27	28	27	35	2	2	2	2	11
Employees	608	675	740	1,215	2,008	486	557	642	1,029	1,698	123	118	98	186	310
All	629	704	770	1,246	2,054	506	584	670	1,056	1,733	125	120	100	189	321
%	3.43	3.64	3.66	5.53	8.21	3.91	4.28	4.54	6.78	10.91	2.30	2.11	1.60	2.73	3.51
3 Clerical workers															
Own account	–	1	2	3	22	–	1	2	2	5		–	–	1	17
Employees	887	1,299	1,463	2,401	3,457	708	735	815	988	1,008	179	564	648	1,413	2,449
All	887	1,300	1,465	2,404	3,479	708	736	817	990	1,013	179	564	648	1,414	2,466
%	4.84	6.72	6.97	10.68	13.90	5.48	5.40	5.53	6.35	6.38	3.30	9.90	10.34	20.41	27.00
4 Foremen, inspectors, supervisors															
Employees	236	279	323	590	968	227	261	295	511	801	10	18	28	79	168
%	1..29	1.44	1.54	2.62	3.87	1.75	1.91	2.00	3.28	5.04	0.18	0.32	0.45	1.14	1.84
5 Skilled manual															
Own account	329	293	268	251	349	170	205	200	214	324	159	88	68	37	25
Employees	5,279	5,280	5,351	5,365	5,045	4,094	4,200	4,223	4,519	4,295	1,185	1,080	1,128	847	750
All	5,608	5,573	5,619	5,616	5,394	4,264	4,405	4,423	4,733	4,619	1,344	1,168	1,196	884	775
%	30.56	28.83	26.72	24.95	21.56	32.99	32.30	29.96	30.36	29.08	24.78	20.50	19.09	12.75	8.48
6 Semi-skilled manual															
Own account	71	98	96	82	53	41	70	78	73	35	30	28	17	10	18
Employees	7,173	6,446	7,264	7,256	6,258	4,305	3,789	4,181	4,279	3,272	2,868	2,656	3,084	2,978	2,986
All	7,244	6,544	7,360	7,338	6,312	4,346	3,859	4,259	4,352	3,307	2,898	2,684	3,101	2,988	3,005
%	39.48	33.85	35.00	32.60	25.23	33.63	28.30	28.85	27.92	20.82	53.42	47.11	49.51	43.12	32.90
7 Unskilled manual															
Own account	47	62	78	33	92	38	48	65	29	86	9	14	13	3	6
Employees	1,720	2,678	3,034	2,676	2,895	1,455	2,232	2,580	2,129	1,803	265	446	454	547	1,092
All	1,767	2,740	3,115	2,709	2,987	1,493	2,280	2,645	2,158	1,889	274	460	467	550	1,098
%	9.63	14.17	14.81	12.03	11.94	11.55	16.72	17.92	13.84	11.89	5.05	8.07	7.45	7.94	12.02
All	18,347	19,333	21,029	22,514	25,021	12,925	13,636	14,761	15,584	15,884	5,425	5,697	6,264	6,930	9,138
%	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Note: Because numbers are rounded to the nearest thousand, totals may not equal the sum of their parts.
Source: G. Routh (1980) *Occupation and Pay in Great Britain 1906–79*, Macmillan, London, pp. 6–7

Table 2.2 Socio-economic group by sex: 1975 to 1994

All persons aged 16 and over (%)

Socio-economic group	1975	1979	1981	1983	1985	1987	1989	1991	1993	1994
Men										
Professional	5	6	4	5	6	7	7	7	7	7
Employers and managers	15	15	15	17	19	19	20	19	20	21
Intermediate and junior non-manual	17	17	17	15	17	16	16	17	17	17
Skilled manual and self-employed	41	40	41	39	37	37	38	38	37	35
Semi-skilled manual and personal service	17	17	18	18	16	15	15	14	14	14
Unskilled manual	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5
Base = 100%	10,902	10,280	10,880	8,886	8,787	9,190	8,815	8,596	8,089	7,948
Women										
Professional	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2
Employers and managers	4	5	5	6	7	8	9	9	10	11
Intermediate and junior non-manual	46	45	46	46	48	47	47	48	49	48
Skilled manual and self-employed	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	8	8
Semi-skilled manual and personal service	31	30	29	30	27	26	25	22	22	22
Unskilled manual	9	10	10	9	7	9	8	11	10	9
Base = 100%	11,799	11,102	11,743	9,754	9,439	9,976	9,600	9,254	9,009	8,698
Total										
Professional	3	3	2	3	3	4	4	4	4	4
Employers and managers	9	10	9	11	13	14	14	14	15	16
Intermediate and junior non-manual	32	32	32	31	33	32	32	33	34	33
Skilled manual and self-employed	24	24	24	24	23	23	23	23	22	21
Semi-skilled manual and personal service	24	24	24	24	22	21	20	18	18	18
Unskilled manual	7	8	8	7	6	7	7	8	7	7
Base = 100%	22,701	21,382	22,623	18,640	18,226	19,166	18,415	17,850	17,098	16,646

The socio-economic group shown is based on the informant's own job for those in employment or those who have never worked.

Source: N. Bennett, L. Jarvis, O. Howlands, N. Stapleton and L. Hasselden (1996) *Living in Britain: Results from the 1994 General Household Survey*, HMSO, London, p. 195.

and the highest class in this scheme, which includes professionals, such as doctors and accountants, as well as senior managers.

Although calculated in different ways, Tables 2.1 and 2.2 are both based upon the idea of socio-economic grouping. Table 2.1 shows changes in the occupational structure between 1911 and 1971. Table 2.2 is calculated on a different basis but shows changes between 1975 and 1994. (Table 2.2 includes personal service workers in the same category as semi-skilled manual and so includes a wider range of workers in the lower classes than Table 2.1.)

The shift to non-manual employment

The information contained in Tables 2.1 and 2.2 shows that there has been a long-term trend during the twentieth century for the proportion of non-manual jobs to increase, and of manual jobs to decrease. Less than half of all employees now have manual jobs, whereas in 1911, according to Routh, 79

per cent of jobs were manual. According to the *General Household Survey*, the proportion of manual and personal service workers declined from 55 per cent to 46 per cent between 1975 and 1994. There have been marked increases in professional, managerial, and routine non-manual work.

Over the course of the twentieth century various factors contributed to the shift towards non-manual employment. Manufacturing industry declined, while service industries, which employ a lower proportion of manual workers, expanded.

Between 1983 and June 1997, employment in all production and construction industries fell from 5,644,000 to 4,245,000. Employment in service industries over the same period rose from 13,541,000 to 16,865,000 (*Labour Market Trends*, 1997).

For much of the period since the Second World War, increasing numbers of people have been employed in jobs connected to the welfare state, particularly in the National Health Service (NHS), education and the welfare services. Employment has also expanded in local and national government. However, government policies since the late 1980s have reduced employment in local government and the civil service as a number of government functions have been privatized. Employment in public administration, defence and compulsory social security fell from 1,468,000 in 1983 to 1,308,000 in June 1997. Over the same period employment in hotels and restaurants rose from 917,000 to 1,249,000, and in renting, research, computer and other business activities from 1,562,000 to 2,617,000 (*Labour Market Trends*, 1997). Most of the increases in service sector employment have therefore come from the private sector.

Gender, full-time and part-time work

Women, particularly married women, increasingly started taking paid employment during the twentieth century, but they are not equally distributed throughout the occupational structure. Although women are more likely to have non-manual jobs than men, most female non-manual workers are concentrated in the lowest-paid sectors of non-manual work, and have routine non-manual jobs. As Table 2.2 shows, 48 per cent of female employees were in intermediate and junior non-manual jobs in 1994. Most of the remaining female employees (31 per cent) were in semi-skilled or unskilled manual work or personal service jobs.

Table 2.3, showing full- and part-time employment by gender, reveals a number of significant

Table 2.3 Full and part-time employment by gender

	Males (thousands)			Females (thousands)		
	Full-time	Part-time	All in employment[2]	Full-time	Part-time	All in employment[2]
1984	13,408	610	14,083	5,543	4,356	9,936
1985	15,537	670	14,217	5,697	4,465	10,173
1986	13,450	707	14,174	5,834	4,523	10,371
1987	13,488	798	14,309	5,953	4,651	10,621
1988	13,941	852	14,824	6,276	4,739	11,036
1989	14,347	846	15,219	6,493	4,964	11,470
1990	14,387	920	15,318	6,643	4,968	11,617
1991	13,958	919	14,887	6,541	4,966	11,512
1992	13,304	1,009	14,321	6,445	5,040	11,491
1993	12,990	1,037	14,035	6,383	5,085	11,476
1994	13,050	1,115	14,171	6,354	5,163	11,526
1995	13,200	1,171	14,374	6,440	5,153	11,599
1996	13,197	1,244	14,446	6,464	5,305	11,773
1997	13,386	1,328	14,720	6,592	5,367	11,962

1 At spring each year, includes employees, self-employed, those on government employment training schemes (from 1992 unpaid family workers).
Full/part-time is based on respondents' self-assessment.
2 Includes those who did not state whether they worked full-time or part-time.
Source: (1998) *Social Trends*, HMSO, London, p. 80.

trends. Male full-time employment declined slightly between 1984 and 1997, but part-time employment for men increased considerably, while female full-time and part-time employment both increased significantly. The traditional male 'breadwinner' with a full-time job is part of a declining group in the workforce. Women make up a growing proportion of the workforce and are rapidly catching up with men. Traditionally studies of class have concentrated on male full-time workers. The changes outlined here indicate that this is becoming less and less justifiable.

The changing distribution of income

The importance of income

Some sociologists have argued that inequalities in industrial societies are being progressively reduced; others go further and claim that class divisions are disappearing. Income has an important effect upon your life chances: for example on the chances of owning your own home, and on your life expectancy. If income inequalities were gradually disappearing this would be strong evidence that class divisions were weakening.

Some government policies seem designed to achieve greater income equality by redistributing income from more affluent to poorer groups. However, as we will see in the following sections, income can be measured in various ways and official statistics should be used with caution. In addition, it should not be assumed that long-term trends in income distribution continue forever: there is evidence that there have been significant changes in these trends in Britain in recent years. In particular, a long-term trend towards a more equitable distribution of income has been reversed.

The measurement of income distribution

Official statistics measure income in a variety of ways:

1 Original income refers to income from sources such as employment, occupational pensions, gifts, alimony payments, and investment. Figures on original income do not include benefits such as state pensions, family credit, and income support, which are paid by the state.

2 Gross income is a measure of all sources of income. Most individuals are not, however, free to spend all of their gross income, for some is deducted to pay income tax and national insurance contributions.

3 Disposable income is a measure of gross income less the above deductions.

4 Some taxes (indirect taxes) are not paid directly out of income, but are paid by consumers as part of the purchase price of goods. For example, value added tax (VAT) is payable on most categories of goods in the UK. Duties are also payable on products such as petrol, tobacco and alcohol. Post-tax income is the measure of income after the above taxes, and taxes such as the Council Tax, are deducted.

5 Final income adds on to income after taxes the value of benefits provided by the state which are not given in cash, for example medical care and education.

By examining these different measures it is possible to discover the effects of government policy on the distribution of income. Table 2.4 gives figures for 1995–6, based upon the *Family Expenditure Survey*.

The effects of taxation and benefits

Table 2.4 demonstrates that even after taxation and benefits are taken into account, considerable income inequalities remain. In 1995–6, the poorest 20 per cent of households received little more than half the average final income, whilst the richest 20 per cent received nearly twice the national average. However, it is clear that benefits help to reduce income inequality. In particular, benefits boost the very low original income of the poorest 20 per cent of households. Overall taxation and benefits also reduce the final income of richer groups in the population, although less than the higher rates of income tax for high earners would suggest. This is partly because poorer groups in the population tend to pay a higher proportion of their income in indirect taxes than richer ones.

The official government figures need to be treated with some caution. Only about 70 per cent of households approached agreed to participate in the *Family Expenditure Survey*. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that the information obtained is entirely reliable. Individuals may not declare all their income, particularly if they have not been truthful to the Inland Revenue or the DSS. The figures may be particularly prone to underestimating the income of the highest earners, who have more opportunities to hide substantial amounts of income than middle- and lower-income groups.

Sources of income

Income comes from a number of sources. According to British government statistics, wages and salaries are the most important source of income in the United Kingdom. In 1995, 56 per cent of all household income came from this source, 13 per cent from social security benefits, 11 per cent from private pensions and annuities, etc., 10 per cent from self-employment, 7 per cent from rent, dividends and interest, and 3 per cent from other current transfers (such as payments from abroad, from charities and government grants) (*Social Trends*, 1997).

Table 2.4 Redistribution of income through taxes and benefits, 1995–6

	Quintile group of households (£ per year)					
	Bottom fifth	Next fifth	Middle fifth	Next fifth	Top fifth	All
Average per household						
Wages and salaries	1,390	4,050	10,390	17,610	29,810	12,650
Imputed income from benefits in kind	30	30	100	290	890	270
Self-employment income	370	570	1,250	1,670	5,050	1,780
Occupational pensions, annuities	290	950	1,310	1,790	2,410	1,350
Investment income	200	340	580	830	2,640	920
Other income	150	160	170	250	460	240
Total original income	2,430	6,090	13,790	22,450	41,260	17,200
plus Benefits in cash						
Contributory	1,860	2,280	1,710	1,180	770	1,560
Non-contributory	3,050	2,380	1,650	950	430	1,690
Gross income	7,340	10,750	17,150	24,580	42,450	20,450
less Income tax and NIC	540	930	2,480	4,470	9,660	3,610
less Local taxes (gross)	590	590	650	710	820	670
Disposable income	6,210	9,230	14,020	19,400	31,980	16,170
less Indirect taxes	1,930	2,340	3,290	4,090	5,090	3,350
Post-tax income	4,280	6,890	10,730	15,310	26,890	12,820
plus Benefits in kind						
Education	1,810	1,300	1,420	1,070	830	1,290
National Health Service	1,890	1,830	1,730	1,520	1,330	1,660
Housing subsidy	90	80	40	20	10	50
Travel subsidies	50	70	60	60	140	70
School meals and welfare milk	100	30	10	–	–	30
Final income	8,230	10,200	13,990	17,980	29,200	15,920

Source: (1998) *Social Trends*, HMSO, London, p. 101.

Alissa Goodman, Paul Johnson and Steven Webb have conducted a study of household income inequality between 1961 and 1993 in Britain, based on data from the *Family Expenditure Survey* (Goodman, Johnson and Webb, 1997). They found that over this period the proportion of income received from wages declined from over three-quarters of all income to around 60 per cent, whereas social security payments doubled from around 10 per cent of all income to around 20 per cent. One of the main reasons for this change was the rising numbers of unemployed, pensioners, single parents, sick and disabled who are entitled to benefit. The sources of income vary considerably for households at different income levels. For example, Goodman, Johnson and Webb found that, in 1992–3, the richest fifth of the population received 61 per cent of all income from investments, compared to the poorest fifth who received just 3 per cent of income from this source. In comparison, 29 per cent of social security payments went to the poorest fifth of the population compared to 8 per cent going to the richest fifth.

Trends in income distribution 1949–79

Despite the limitations of the official figures, they do at least provide some indication of the overall historical trends in the distribution of income. In 1979, the Royal Commission on the Distribution of Income and Wealth published a report examining the changes in the distribution of income and wealth between 1949 and 1978–9. The results relating to income are summarized in Table 2.5.

Table 2.5 demonstrates that in the period covered there was some income redistribution, but mainly towards middle-income groups rather than those on the lowest levels. The top 10 per cent of income earners reduced their share of total income by 3.7 per cent, but the bottom 30 per cent also had their share reduced, in this case by 2.5 per cent. Although there was a slight shift in income distribution – from the top half of income earners to the bottom half – the poorest were not the beneficiaries.

Changes in taxation

The Royal Commission report was published in 1979, the same year as Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government came to power. Successive Conservative governments implemented policies that reversed the slight trend for income redistribution to poorer groups. The policies that had the most direct impact concerned income tax.

Income tax is a progressive tax because higher earners pay a higher proportion of their income in this tax than lower earners. If overall levels of income tax are cut, and if the higher rates in particular are reduced, the redistributive effects of taxation become smaller. Between 1979 and 1997, the basic rate of income tax was reduced from 33 to 23 per cent, while the highest rate fell from 80 to 40 per cent. In 1992, a lower-rate band of 20 per cent was introduced on the first £2,000 of taxable income; this was widened to £4,100 by April 1997. By the early 1990s the government was running into problems financing government spending and was forced to raise extra taxes. Although most of the extra revenue needed was raised through increases in indirect tax, there was an increase in national insurance contributions of 1 per cent in 1994. National Insurance contributions are effectively a form of direct tax. In 1997, a new Labour government was elected in Britain, the first Labour government for 18 years. Although traditionally committed to a redistributive tax system, the incoming government pledged not to increase income tax rates and to stick to Conservative spending limits in its early years in government.

Since 1979 there has been a distinct shift towards indirect taxation, which tends to take a greater proportion of the income of lower income groups than it takes from those on higher incomes. Government statistics show that the 20 per cent of households with the highest disposable income paid much less than 20 per cent of their disposable income in indirect taxes, compared to the poorest 20 per cent, who paid nearly 30 per cent of their income in this way (*Social Trends*, 1997). In 1979, the twin VAT rates of 8 and 12.5 per cent were replaced with a single rate of 15 per cent. This was raised again to 17.5 per cent in 1991.

In March 1993, it was announced that VAT would be extended to include domestic fuel and would be charged at 8 per cent. In 1997, the new Labour government cut the VAT rate on domestic fuel from 8 to 5 per cent. Other important types of indirect tax are the duties levied on petrol, alcohol and tobacco.

There have also been important changes in the local taxes used to finance local government. In 1990

Table 2.5 Distribution of income in the UK before and after tax, 1949–78/9

	Percentage share of total income					
	Before tax			After tax		
	Top 10%	Next 60%	Bottom 30%	Top 10%	Next 60%	Bottom 30%
1949	33.2	54.1	12.7	27.1	58.3	14.6
1954	29.8	59.3	10.9	24.8	63.1	12.1
1959	29.4	60.9	9.7	25.2	63.5	11.2
1964	29.0	61.2	9.6	25.1	64.1	10.8
1967	28.0	61.6	10.4	24.3	63.7	12.0
1973–74	26.8	62.3	10.9	23.6	63.6	12.8
1978–79	26.1	63.5	10.4	23.4	64.5	12.1

Source: A.B. Atkinson (1983) *The Economics of Inequality*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, p. 53

the community charge, or 'poll tax', replaced a system based on property values called 'rates'. This meant that the taxation system in Britain became more regressive. Regressive taxes take a higher proportion of the income of those with low incomes than of those with high incomes. Under the poll tax, all those living in particular areas were charged the same, regardless of their ability to pay. Even though there were rebates on this tax of up to 80 per cent for the poorest, under the old rates system the worst-off had been able to claim a full 100 per cent rebate. The new tax proved extremely unpopular and in 1993 it was replaced by the rather less regressive council tax. This went back to the principle of basing local taxes on the value of property.

Figure 2.1 shows the results of a study by Christopher Giles and Paul Johnson into the effects of tax changes on the proportions of their income paid in tax by different groups in the population (Giles and Johnson, 1994). The population is divided into ten groups ranked according to level of income. Decile 1 represents the 10 per cent of the population with the lowest income; decile 10 the 10 per cent with the highest. The figure shows that between 1985 and 1995 taxation changes continued to favour the better off. The poorest 50 per cent of the population of Britain saw its taxes rise, while the richest 50 per cent saw its taxes cut.

Recent changes in the distribution of income

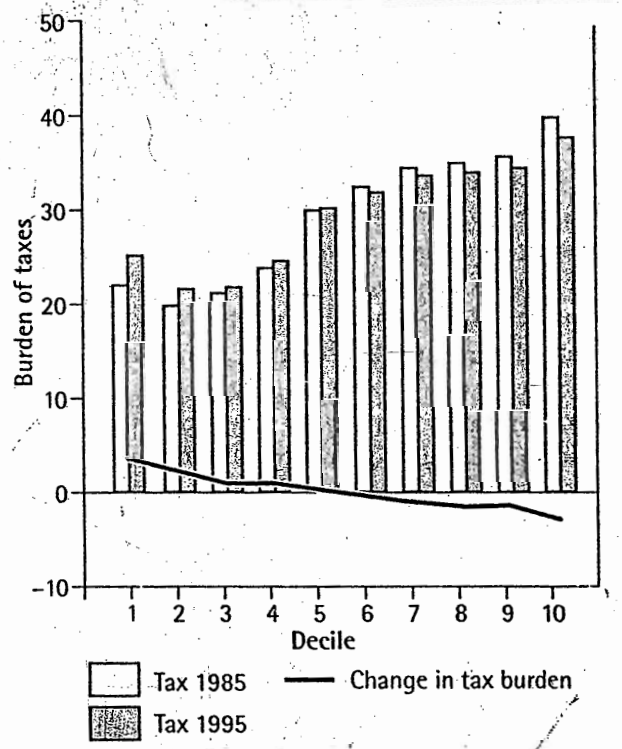
The study of household income inequality by Goodman, Johnson and Webb introduced above (see p. 44) clearly shows that any long-term trend towards more equitable income distribution has been reversed in the UK.

Table 2.6 shows that the poorest tenth and the poorest 50 per cent of the population both saw a fall in the proportion of national income they received between 1981–3 and 1991–3. This was particularly pronounced in the poorest tenth of the population whose share fell from 4.1 to 2.9 per cent. On the other hand, the richest 10 per cent of the population saw a rise from 21.3 to 26.2 per cent over the same period.

Goodman, Johnson and Webb found a number of reasons for these trends. One was a rise in inequalities in pay for male workers during the 1980s. Unemployment among males rose particularly fast in households where nobody else was working, making those households completely reliant upon benefits. Technological changes and government policies led to a reduction in the demand for unskilled labour and increasing unemployment and falling wages for unskilled workers. More people became reliant upon self-employment as their main source of income. The self-employed are disproportionately found among both the highest-earning and the lowest-earning groups, further widening income inequalities.

Although income inequalities have been reduced in Britain this century, this reduction has not been sufficient to justify the claim that class divisions are disappearing. The figures suggest that both an increase in income inequality and a strengthening of class divisions occurred during the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s.

Figure 2.1 Proportions of income taken in personal tax, by decile



Source: C. Giles and P. Johnson (1994) *Taxes Down, Taxes Up: The Effects of a Decade of Tax Changes*, The Institute for Fiscal Studies, London, p. 20.

Table 2.6 Percentage income shares

	1961–63	1971–73	1981–83	1991–93
Bottom tenth	3.7	3.9	4.1	2.9
Bottom half	32.6	32.2	32.1	27.1
Top tenth	21.2	21.4	21.3	26.2

Source: A. Goodman, P. Johnson and S. Webb (1997) *Inequality in the UK*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 92.

The changing distribution of wealth?

The importance of wealth

Inequalities in the distribution of wealth, like inequalities in the distribution of income, are an important indicator of class divisions and class inequality. A particular form of wealth – the means of production – is especially important to Marxist sociologists. Like income, wealth can affect life chances, but to Marxists, ownership of the means of production also gives power. (Today ownership of the means of production usually takes the form of share ownership.) Wealth is also important in Weberian theories of stratification, although it is given less emphasis than in Marxist theories.

If it could be shown that over the years there had been a major redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor, this would indicate a reduction in class inequalities. However, wealth is perhaps even more difficult to measure than income and reliable data prove elusive.

Measuring wealth

The definition and measurement of wealth, like income, are not straightforward. One problem is that the government does not collect information on wealth for tax purposes.

There is no wealth tax on the living, but taxes do have to be paid on the estates of those who have died. Figures on the value of estates left by the deceased are sometimes used to calculate the overall distribution of wealth. However, they may not be a reliable guide to the distribution of wealth among the living: for instance individuals may transfer some of their wealth to other family members before they die. Moreover, those who die tend to be older than other members of the population, and wealth is not equally distributed between age groups.

Another method of collecting information on wealth distribution is to use survey research, but this too has its drawbacks. Those who refuse to cooperate with the research may be untypical of the population as a whole, and their failure to take part may distort the findings. Those who do cooperate may not be entirely honest, and the richest members of society may be particularly prone to underestimating their wealth.

Defining wealth

Not only is wealth difficult to measure, but defining it is also problematic. Official statistics distinguish between marketable wealth and non-marketable wealth:

1 Marketable wealth includes any type of asset that can be sold and its value realized. It therefore includes land, shares, savings in bank, building society or other accounts, homes (minus any outstanding mortgage debts), and personal possessions such as cars, works of art, and household appliances. The figures on marketable wealth exclude the value of occupational pensions which cannot normally be sold. If such pensions are included in the figures, the statistics show wealth as being more equally distributed than is otherwise the case.

2 Non-marketable wealth includes items such as salaries and non-transferable pensions.

From a sociological point of view, the official figures on wealth are not ideal. They fail to distinguish between wealth used to finance production and wealth used to finance consumption. Wealth used for production (for example shares) is of particular interest to Marxist sociologists because they believe that power largely derives from ownership of the means of production. The distribution of wealth used for consumption is of less interest to Marxists, though its distribution does give some indication of lifestyle. Such figures are also useful for indicating the distribution of various life chances, for instance the chance that different social groups have of owning their own home.

Trends in wealth distribution

Despite the limitations of the available figures, it is possible to discern overall trends in wealth distribution over the twentieth century. Table 2.7 shows trends between 1911 and 1960. Table 2.8 shows trends between 1976 and 1994. The figures in the two tables are not strictly comparable since they are calculated on a different basis. The figures in Table 2.7 include an estimate for hidden wealth; those in Table 2.8 do not. The later figures may therefore underestimate the extent to which wealth is concentrated.

Table 2.7 suggests that there has been a considerable reduction in the degree of wealth inequality this century. The changes have been more marked than the changes in the distribution of income.

Table 2.8 shows that the trend towards greater equality of wealth distribution continued until the early 1990s, when it went into reverse. Although the long-term trend was towards greater equality, this is no longer the case, and most wealth still remains concentrated in the hands of a small minority. Thus in 1994 the wealthiest 1 per cent of the population still owned 19 per cent of all marketable wealth, and the wealthiest 10 per cent owned 51 per cent, leaving the other 90 per cent of the population to share the remaining 49 per cent between them.

A number of factors have contributed to the trends noted above. Westergaard and Resler (who produced the figures for the period up to 1960 in

Table 2.7 The distribution of private property from 1911 to 1960

Groups within adult population (aged 25+) owning stated proportions of aggregate personal wealth	Estimated proportion of aggregate personal wealth Period 1911–60 (common basis)				
	1911–13 %	1924–30 %	1936–38 %	1954 %	1960 %
Richest 1% owned	69	62	56	43	42
Richest 5% owned	87	84	79	71	75
Richest 10% owned	92	91	88	79	83
Hence:					
Richest 1% owned	69	62	56	43	42
Next 2–5% owned	18	22	23	28	33
Next 6–10% owned	5	7	9	8	8
95% owned only	13	16	21	29	25
90% owned only	8	9	12	21	17

Source: Westergaard and Resler (1976) Class in a Capitalist Society, Table [illegible]

Table 2.8 The distribution of wealth, 1976 to 1994

	1976	1981	1986	1991	1994
Marketable wealth					
Percentage of wealth owned by:					
Most wealthy 1%	21	18	18	17	19
Most wealthy 5%	38	36	36	35	38
Most wealthy 10%	50	50	50	47	51
Most wealthy 25%	71	73	73	71	73
Most wealthy 50%	92	92	90	92	93
Total marketable wealth (£ billion)	280	565	955	1,711	1,955
Marketable wealth less value of dwellings					
Percentage of wealth owned by:					
Most wealthy 1%	29	26	25	29	28
Most wealthy 5%	47	45	46	51	52
Most wealthy 10%	57	56	58	64	65
Most wealthy 25%	73	74	75	80	82
Most wealthy 50%	88	87	89	93	94

Source: (1998) Social Trends, HMSO, London, p. 80

Table 2.6) suggest that the most significant redistribution was within the wealthiest groups, rather than between them and the less well-off. A major reason for this was the transfer of assets from wealthy individuals to friends and other family members in order to avoid death duties.

In recent decades the most important factor has probably been the increasing number of home owners, although the slump in house prices in the early 1990s temporarily reduced the significance of home ownership. Wealth is less unequally distributed when non-marketable wealth is included in the

calculations. This is mainly because of the value of occupational pensions, which have become an increasingly important component of all wealth holdings in Britain. However, few of the poor have substantial pension rights.

Share ownership

Shares are a particularly important type of wealth, used to finance production. In Britain there has certainly been an increase in recent years in the percentage of the population who own shares. Westergaard and Resler estimated that in 1970 only 7 per cent of adults over the age of 25 owned shares. In 1995–6, according to the *Family Resources Survey*, around 16 per cent of adults in the UK owned shares.

Much of the increase in share ownership was due to the Conservative government's privatization programme, which encouraged small investors to buy shares in companies such as British Telecom and British Gas. In the 1990s share ownership was increased by the demutualization of building societies, such as the Halifax, Alliance & Leicester and Cheltenham & Gloucester, and the flotation of insurance companies such as Norwich Union. For example, around nine million people were entitled to shares as a result of the flotation of the Halifax in 1997. However, many of the new shareholders created by these flotations sold their shares very quickly. Furthermore, most new shareholders have only a very small stake in the companies in which they have invested, and in reality they may have little influence upon the way that the companies are run.

Most privately owned shares remain in the hands of a small minority of the population. Furthermore, the importance of privately held shares has declined. In 1971, 23 per cent of personal wealth was held in stocks, shares and unit trusts. This had declined to 15 per cent in 1995. On the other hand, the proportion of personal wealth held in life assurance and pension funds had increased from 15 to 34 per cent over the same period (*Social Trends*, 1997). Arguably, those who have wealth in life assurance and pension funds have even less control over how those assets are used than those who hold shares in individual companies.

Wealth taxes

Successive governments in Britain have made much less attempt to tax wealth than income. Before 1974 the main tax on wealth was estate duty, paid on the estate of someone who had died. It was easy to avoid this tax by transferring assets before death. In 1974, the Labour government introduced capital transfer tax which taxed certain gifts given by people who were alive. In 1981, the Conservative government abolished capital transfer tax and replaced it with inheritance tax. This raised the limits before which tax on wealth transfers were paid, and abolished taxes on gifts made ten years or more before someone died.

In 1986, this period was reduced to seven years and a sliding scale was introduced to determine the amount of tax paid. The longer people survived after giving assets to someone, the less tax they paid on the gift. These changes have considerably reduced the burden of taxation on the wealthy.

Classes in capitalist societies

We will now examine the changing position of particular classes within the class structure of capitalist societies, using British and American data. Three main classes – the upper class, the middle class and the working class – will be considered in turn, though as we will show, the location of the boundaries between these classes is disputed.

Most of the views dealt with in the following sections have been influenced by Marxist or Weberian theories of stratification.

The upper class

John Westergaard and Henrietta Resler – a Marxist view of the ruling class

Class divisions

In a study first published in 1975, John Westergaard and Henrietta Resler argue, essentially from a Marxist perspective, that Britain is dominated by a ruling class. They claim that the private ownership of capital provides the key to explaining class divisions.

Westergaard and Resler argue that in detail the class system is complex, but in essence it is simple: the major division is still between capital and labour. Sociologists who focus on the details of class – for example, the differences between manual and routine

white-collar workers – merely obscure the overall simplicity of the system. Such differences are insignificant compared to the wide gulf that separates the ruling class from the bulk of the wage- and salary-earning population.

Distribution of wealth

To support their argument, Westergaard and Resler point to the concentration of wealth in the hands of a small minority, the richest 5 per cent of the population. Although there has been some change in the distribution of wealth in Britain this century, this has largely taken place within the richest 10 per cent. Some members of the ruling class have transferred property to relatives and friends to avoid death duties. The spread of home ownership has spread wealth a little more widely, but the ownership of capital in private industry has remained highly concentrated.

In 1970, as we have seen (see p. 49), only about 7 per cent of adults over 25 owned any shares, and most of those who did own shares were 'smallholders', with stock worth less than £1,000.

Ruling-class power

Westergaard and Resler argue that the maintenance of inequalities of wealth is due to the power of the ruling class. They maintain:

> *The favoured group enjoys effective power, even when its members take no active steps to exercise power. They do not need to do so – for much of the time at least – simply because things work that way in any case.*
>
> Westergaard and Resler, 1976, p. 143

It is generally taken for granted (by members of society and governments alike) that investments should bring profit and that the living standards of the propertyless should be based on the demands of the market for their skills. In general, governments have favoured the interests of capital, assuming that the well-being of the nation is largely dependent upon the prosperity of private industry.

Composition of the ruling class

Westergaard and Resler believe that the ruling class is made up of perhaps 5 per cent, and at most 10 per cent of the population. It includes the major owners of the means of production, company directors, top managers, higher professionals and senior civil servants, many of whom are large shareholders in private industry. The subordinate classes consist of the bulk of the wage- and salary-earning population.

Westergaard and Resler reject the view that the so-called separation of ownership and control in the joint stock company results in the rise of salaried managers who should properly be placed in a middle class. They argue that 'directors in general are themselves large owners of share capital' and they make the crucial decisions for companies. Like the 'absentee owners', their main concern is the maximization of profit. As such, the interests of owners and controllers are largely similar.

Westergaard and Resler put forward what is essentially a conventional Marxist view of the ruling class. They assume that the ruling class continues to exist. They claim that it is a united group which continues to dominate British society, and argue that social changes have not significantly redistributed wealth and power. These views have been challenged by New Right theorists.

Peter Saunders – a New Right view of higher classes

An influential economic elite

Peter Saunders (1990) does not deny that there is a small group of people in British society who have considerable wealth and more power than other members of society. He accepts that many directors and top managers own shares in their own and other companies, and he also accepts that there is 'an interlocking network at the top of British industry and finance in which the same names and faces keep cropping up with different hats on'. He notes that the hundred largest companies produce more than half of Britain's manufacturing output, and therefore:

> *a few thousand individuals at most are today responsible for taking the bulk of the key financial and administrative decisions which shape the future development of British industry and banking.*
>
> Saunders, 1990, p. 88

However, Saunders rejects the Marxist view that such people constitute a capitalist ruling class. He sees them as merely 'an influential economic elite'.

Wealth, ownership and the capitalist class

Saunders identifies some groups who might be seen as a capitalist class. These consist of families who continue to own majority shareholdings in established large companies, entrepreneurs who have built up and still own big businesses, and large landowners.

Such people, however, control only a small fraction of the British economy. Most businesses are run by directors and managers whose income and power derive principally from their jobs and not from their ownership of wealth. Saunders claims that less than 25 per cent of the top 250 British companies are run by managers and directors who own 5 per cent or more of the company's shares. Such people are part

As a result the skills required became minimal. As tasks were broken down, the office became like a production line for mental work. Clerical workers lost the opportunity to use their initiative and instead their work became highly regulated. The nature of the workforce changed at the same time as the work. Clerical work was increasingly feminized: by 1970, 75 per cent of clerical workers in the USA were women.

Braverman also claims that most 'service workers' have been deskilled. He says:

> *the demand for the all-round grocery clerk, fruiterer and vegetable dealer, dairyman, butcher, and so forth, has long ago been replaced by a labor configuration in the supermarkets which calls for truck unloaders, shelf stockers, checkout clerks, meat wrappers, and meat cutters; of these only the last retain any semblance of skill, and none require any general knowledge of retail trade.*
>
> Braverman, 1974, p. 371

Computerization has further reduced the skill required of checkout assistants, and the control of stock and the keeping of accounts have also become largely automated.

Braverman believes that, as a consequence of the changes outlined above, the skills required of most routine white-collar workers are now minimal. Basic numeracy and literacy are often all that are needed. With the advent of mass compulsory education, the vast majority of the population now have the necessary skills to undertake this type of work. As a result the bargaining position of these workers when they try to find work or gain promotion is little better than that of manual workers.

David Lockwood – a Weberian perspective

According to many Marxists then, the positions in the class structure occupied by most routine non-manual workers have been proletarianized. In an early study of clerks from a neo-Weberian point of view, however, David Lockwood denied that clerks had been proletarianized (Lockwood, 1958). Lockwood did not follow Weber in identifying an upper class based on the ownership of property; he did, though, use a Weberian approach to distinguish between different groups of employees. He suggested that there were three aspects of class situation. These were market situation, work situation and status situation.

1. By market situation he was referring to such factors as wages, job security and promotion prospects.
2. By work situation he meant social relationships at work between employers and managers and more junior staff; this involved consideration of how closely work was supervised.
3. By status situation he meant the degree of prestige enjoyed by particular groups of workers in society.

In terms of market situation Lockwood admitted that the wages of clerical workers began to drop below the average for skilled manual workers from the 1930s onwards. However, he claimed that in other respects clerks had retained distinct market advantages over manual workers. They had greater job security and were less likely to be laid off or made redundant. They also worked shorter hours, had more chance of being promoted to supervisory and managerial positions, and they were more likely to be given fringe benefits such as membership of a pension scheme. Some manual workers had only overtaken clerical workers in terms of pay because of the overtime they worked.

Lockwood reached similar conclusions with regard to work situation. He accepted that there had been changes – in particular the offices had grown in size – but he denied that this had led to clerical workers becoming proletarian. Compared to manual workers at that time, clerks still worked in relatively small units; they did not work on huge factory floors. Lockwood accepted that clerical work was often divided up into separate departments, but he did not believe that this had led to deskilling. He believed that the division of the clerical workforce into smaller groups with specialized roles led to closer contacts and greater cooperation between them and management. Furthermore, he claimed that attempts to make clerical work more routine had had a limited impact because clerical skills and qualifications had not been standardized. The job of each clerical worker therefore had unique elements. It was not as easy to switch clerical workers around or to replace them as it was with manual workers.

Finally, in terms of status situation Lockwood was more willing to concede a deterioration in the position of the clerical workforce. He attributed this to the rise of the modern office, mass literacy, the recruitment of growing numbers of clerical workers from manual backgrounds, and the increasing employment of female labour in these jobs. Nevertheless, he did not believe that clerical workers had an identical status to the working class. Nor did they have the same status as managers. Lockwood believed that clerks were in a position of status ambiguity which fell somewhere between the degree of status enjoyed by the middle and working classes.

Lockwood's work is now dated and it is debatable how far his claims apply to contemporary clerical work. Nevertheless, it was an important study since it established many of the issues that were to occupy later sociologists who studied clerical work.

John H. Goldthorpe – clerks as an intermediate stratum

John H. Goldthorpe *et al.* (1968) also maintained that clerical workers fell between the working class and the middle class. Like Lockwood they based their analysis on market and work situations, but they did not take account of status situation. They believed that there was an intermediate stratum sandwiched between what they referred to as the working and service classes. This intermediate stratum also included such groups as personal service workers, the self-employed, and supervisors of manual workers. The intermediate group lacked any strong class identity because of the range of occupations within it, and because many of its members become socially mobile and moved into a different class.

A. Stewart, K. Prandy and R. M. Blackburn – clerks and social mobility

Other sociologists have supported Lockwood and Goldthorpe in denying that clerical workers have become proletarian, but they have attacked the proletarianization thesis in a different way.

In a study based on a sample of male white-collar workers in firms employing over 500 people, Stewart, Prandy and Blackburn argue that individual workers in the stratification system should be distinguished from the positions that they occupy (Stewart, Prandy and Blackburn, 1980). To them, whether or not routine white-collar work has become deskilled is largely irrelevant in discussing whether the workers in these jobs have become proletarian. This is because most male clerks do not stay as clerks for all their working lives.

Stewart *et al.*'s figures indicate that only 19 per cent of those who start work as clerks are still employed in clerical work by the time that they are 30. By that age, 51 per cent have been promoted out of clerical work. For them it is merely a stepping-stone to a higher-status non-manual job. The remaining 30 per cent leave clerical work before they are 30. Stewart *et al.* claim that many of those who are promoted before they are 30 embark upon successful management careers and end up in unambiguously middle-class jobs.

According to this study, clerical work is merely an occupational category through which men pass. Stewart *et al.* argue that clerks can have varied relationships to the labour market. Young men who take clerical work as the first step in a management career can be considered middle class. Older men who change from manual work to non-manual clerical work late in their careers can more reasonably be regarded as proletarian. However, as Stewart *et al.* point out, as the latter have always been proletarian, it is senseless to see them as being proletarianized.

R. Crompton and G. Jones – a defence of the proletarianization thesis

Rosemary Crompton and Gareth Jones have strongly attacked the work of Stewart *et al.* (Crompton and Jones, 1984). Crompton and Jones studied 887 white-collar employees in three large bureaucracies: a local authority, a life assurance company, and a major bank. They advance four main arguments to undermine the conclusions of Stewart *et al.*:

1 They point out that the study by Stewart *et al.* ignored female white-collar workers. In their own sample, a large majority of clerical workers – 70 per cent – were female. Furthermore, they found that female clerical workers were much less likely to achieve promotion than their male counterparts. Crompton and Jones found that 82 per cent of female white-collar workers in their sample were on clerical grades, compared to 30 per cent of men. Only 12 per cent of female workers had reached supervisory level and 1 per cent managerial positions, while the equivalent figures for men were 36 per cent and 34 per cent. Thus, the high rates of male upward social mobility out of clerical work were at the expense of the large number of female workers who were left behind. They argue that even if male clerical workers cannot be considered proletarian because of their upward mobility, this is not true of female clerks.

2 Crompton and Jones point out that the high rates of upward mobility for men in the study by Stewart *et al.* depended not only on the immobility of women, but also on the 30 per cent of male clerks who left this type of employment. Crompton and Jones suggest that in the future it will not necessarily be the case that male clerks will be able to enjoy so much upward mobility. If the number of managerial jobs does not continue expanding, more and more men may become trapped in the way that female clerks already are.

3 Crompton and Jones question the view that promotion to managerial and administrative jobs necessarily represents genuine upward mobility. On the basis of their own study they claim that many managerial and administrative jobs have become increasingly routine and require little use of initiative. They claim that employers use the grade structure to encourage loyalty and dedication from employees, but in reality many of the lower-level management and administrative jobs are little different from clerical work. Promotion might not necessarily represent a change in class position for all white-collar workers.

4 Crompton and Jones suggest that Stewart *et al.* ignored one of the central issues in the proletarianization debate, that is, whether clerical work had actually been deskilled. Crompton and Jones disagree that class consists only of people, and has nothing to do with places in the stratification

system. They say 'classes can be conceived of as sets of places within the social division of labour'. If the places occupied by clerical workers have lost their advantages over working-class jobs, then clerks can be considered proletarian.

Crompton and Jones carried out detailed investigations of the three institutions they studied and found strong evidence that proletarianization had taken place. Some 91 per cent of their sample of clerical workers did not exercise any control over how they worked: they simply followed a set of routines without using their initiative. As a result their work required very little skill. Deskilling appeared to be closely linked to computerization: least skill was required by the clerks at the most computerized of the institutions, the local authority.

Crompton and Jones concluded that clerical workers were a white-collar proletariat, and that female clerical workers in particular have little chance of promotion to what could be called middle-class or service-class jobs.

G. Marshall, H. Newby, D. Rose and C. Vogler – clerks and personal service workers

In a more recent contribution to the debate, Gordon Marshall, Howard Newby, David Rose and Carolyn Vogler (1988; see also Marshall, 1997) have rejected Crompton and Jones's view that clerical work has been deskilled. Marshall *et al.* do accept, though, that personal service workers such as shop-assistants, check-out and wrap operators, and receptionists are little different from the working class. Their evidence is based on structured interviews carried out with a sample of 1,770 British men and women.

In one of their questions they asked respondents whether their job required more, less or the same skill as when they had started work. Overall only 4 per cent claimed that their jobs required less skill, and only 4 per cent of women in lower-grade white-collar jobs claimed to have been deskilled. No men in the latter type of job claimed that skill requirements had gone down. Workers were also questioned about such issues as whether they could design and plan important parts of their work, decide on day-to-day tasks, and decide the amount and pace of their work.

From this evidence Marshall *et al.* also conclude that clerical work has not been proletarianized. They support the views of Goldthorpe and Lockwood that clerical workers are in an intermediate class between the working and service classes.

They did, however, find that personal service workers tended to give different answers to the questions about autonomy at work. For example, 80 per cent of female personal service workers said they could not design and plan important parts of their work; 96 per cent said they could not decide their starting and finishing times; and 63 per cent said they could not initiate new tasks during their work. Marshall *et al.* conclude that personal service workers are 'more or less indistinguishable' from the working class.

The work of Marshall *et al.* draws attention to the position of personal service workers in the stratification system. Compared to clerical workers, they have been a somewhat neglected part of the workforce in stratification research. Certainly it is hard to see how it is possible to regard, for example, check-out assistants as middle class given their low wages, working conditions, and lack of autonomy.

Marshall *et al.*'s rejection of the proletarianization theory for clerical workers must, however, be regarded with some caution. In particular, the significance of the small number who say their work has been deskilled is open to question. The deskilling argument as advanced by Braverman refers to a time-span of a century or more, stretching back far earlier than the experience of those currently employed in such jobs. Indeed, Marshall *et al.* themselves admit that 'a definitive answer to the question of job techniques and job autonomy could be provided only by systematic and direct observation over a prolonged period of time'.

Middle class, or middle classes?

As we have seen, there is no agreement among sociologists about the position of the middle class, or classes, in the stratification system. They are divided about which non-manual workers should be placed in the middle class, and disagree about whether the middle class is a united and homogeneous, or divided and heterogeneous group.

Anthony Giddens – the middle class

The simplest position is taken by Anthony Giddens (1973). He argues that there is a single middle class, based on the possession of 'recognised skills – including educational qualifications'. Unlike the members of the working class, who can sell only their manual labour power, members of the middle class can also sell their mental labour power. Giddens

distinguishes the middle class from the upper class because the middle class does not own 'property in the means of production' and so has to work for others to earn a living.

John H. Goldthorpe – the service and intermediate classes

Giddens follows Weber's views quite closely, but other neo-Weberians do not agree that there is a single middle class. John Goldthorpe, in his early work (Goldthorpe, 1980, and Goldthorpe, Llewellyn and Payne, 1987), defines class in terms of market and work situation, but in his research does not follow Weber in distinguishing the propertied from the propertyless. Goldthorpe does not therefore clearly distinguish an upper class, nor does he claim that there is a united middle class. As Figure 2.6 (on p. 115) shows, Goldthorpe sees the highest class as the service class, and this includes large proprietors as well as administrators, managers and professionals. This class itself is internally divided between those in upper and lower positions. However, he sees no significant division between managers and professionals within the service class.

Goldthorpe's class in the middle is not called the middle class, but the intermediate class. It includes clerical workers, personal service workers, small proprietors and lower-grade technicians. To Goldthorpe these workers have poorer market and work situations than the service class. In his scheme this class is also seen as being internally divided, but nevertheless at the most basic level he sees what is normally regarded as the middle class as being split in two. (For further details of Goldthorpe's views see pp. 114–15.)

In his later work, Goldthorpe (1995) has changed tack and argues that there is a primary division between different sections of the middle class based on employment status. That is, the employed, employees and the self-employed are in different positions. Beyond that, there are secondary divisions based on different employee relationships and it is these, rather than the nature of the work tasks that they do, that distinguishes classes. What makes the service class distinctive is that it not only receives a salary but is also provided with increments, pension rights, and career development opportunities.

Goldthorpe's views are controversial. In particular, many sociologists argue, in contradiction to both of Goldthorpe's approaches, that there is a significant division between professionals and managers in Goldthorpe's service class (for example, Savage, Barlow, Dickens and Fielding, 1992). A further problem is that Goldthorpe himself admits that, strictly speaking, large employers should be seen as a separate category from the service class employees. However, in his social mobility research, for example, he incorporates large employers into his category of the service class because the group is so small. He accepts that this 'means introducing some, though in all probability only a quite small, degree of error'.

K. Roberts, F. G. Cook, S. C. Clark and E. Semeonoff – the fragmented middle class

Some sociologists see the middle class as being even more divided than Goldthorpe does.

From a study of images of class, Roberts, Cook, Clark and Semeonoff claim that 'the middle classes are being splintered' (Roberts *et al.*, 1977). They argue that the middle class is becoming increasingly divided into a number of different strata, each with a distinctive view of its place in the stratification system. Roberts *et al.* base these observations on a survey conducted in 1972, of the class images of a sample of 243 male white-collar workers. They found a number of different images of class. Below are the four most common:

1 Some 27 per cent of the white-collar sample had a middle-mass image of society. They saw themselves as part of a middle class made up of the bulk of the working population. This middle mass lay between a small, rich and powerful upper class and a small, relatively impoverished, lower class. No division was drawn between most manual and non-manual workers, and within the large central class 'no basic ideological cleavages, divisions of interest or contrasts in life-styles' were recognized. Those who held a middle-mass image of society were likely to be in the middle-range income bracket for white-collar workers.

2 The second most common image, held by 19 per cent of the sample, was that of a compressed middle class. Those who subscribed to this view saw themselves as members of a narrow stratum squeezed between two increasingly powerful classes. Below them, the bulk of the population formed a working class and above them was a small upper class. Small business people typically held this compressed middle-class image. They felt threatened by what they saw as an increasingly powerful and organized working class, and by government and big business which showed little inclination to support them.

3 A third group of white-collar workers saw society in terms of a finely graded ladder containing four or more strata. Although this is assumed to be the typical middle-class image of society, it was subscribed to by only 15 per cent of the sample. Those who saw society in these terms tended to be well educated, with professional qualifications, and relatively highly paid. Though they described

themselves as middle class, they indicated no apparent class loyalty and often rejected the whole principle of social class.

4 Finally, 14 per cent of the white-collar sample held a proletarian image of society. They defined themselves as working class and located themselves in what they saw as the largest class at the base of the stratification system. They saw themselves as having more in common with manual workers than with top management and higher professionals. Those who held a proletarian image were usually employed in routine white-collar occupations with few promotion prospects and relatively low wages.

The wide variation in white-collar class imagery leads Roberts *et al.* to conclude that not only is the middle class fragmented but social trends will make it even more so in the future. The middle classes will come to form separate and distinctive strata in the stratification system.

The diversity of class images, market situations, market strategies and interests within the white-collar group suggests that the middle class is becoming increasingly fragmented. Indeed, the proposition that white-collar groups form a single social class is debatable.

Criticisms of Roberts *et al.*

The work of Roberts *et al.* can be criticized for relying on subjective class images. Neo-Weberians such as Goldthorpe (Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1987) prefer to analyse class in terms of market and work situation, while neo-Marxists such as the Ehrenreichs (1979) advocate a discussion of the function that different strata perform for capitalism. For most Marxists it is the places in the stratification system (which are produced by the economic system) that are important in defining class, and not the individuals who occupy those places. For some Marxists this leads to the conclusion that the middle class is split in two.

Writers such as Crompton and Jones (1984) Braverman (1974) and the Ehrenreichs (1979) all agree that routine white-collar work has been deskilled and proletarianized. These workers do not have any stake in owning the means of production; they have little autonomy or responsibility at work; and they have lower wages than many members of the working class.

The upper reaches of what is usually referred to as the middle class, are, however, much closer to the bourgeoisie. They are unproductive labourers who do not produce wealth, but carry out important functions for capitalists. For example, managers play a vital role in controlling the workforce. Marxists and neo-Marxists disagree about the extent of their independence from the bourgeoisie. Braverman believes that they have little independence, while the Ehrenreichs claim that the professional-managerial class has increasingly come to defend its own interests rather than those of the ruling class.

N. Abercrombie and J. Urry – the polarizing middle class

In a review of debates about the middle class, Nicholas Abercrombie and John Urry argue that both Marxist and Weberian theories of stratification are useful, and that the two approaches can be combined (Abercrombie and Urry 1983). To Abercrombie and Urry, classes consist both of individuals, or people, and the places that they occupy.

They disagree with Marxists who argue that the capitalist economic system automatically produces certain types of job with particular functions, since they point out that groups of workers can organize to try to protect their work. Professional workers have thus been quite successful in retaining their independence and work responsibilities, whereas clerical workers have not. The result has been to split the middle class in two.

In terms of the Marxist concept of functions performed, and also in terms of the Weberian concepts of market and work situations, there is a major division between managers and professionals on the one hand, and routine white-collar workers on the other. According to Abercrombie and Urry, whether a Marxist *or* a Weberian theory of class is used, one section of the middle class has moved closer to the upper class, while the other has more or less become proletarian. In between, the so-called 'middle class' is hard to find.

Mike Savage, James Barlow, Peter Dickens and Tony Fielding – *Property, Bureaucracy and Culture*

Savage, Barlow, Dickens and Fielding (1992) follow many other theories by claiming that the middle class is not a united group. However, they do not argue that this lack of unity is inevitable, nor that the divisions within the middle class always stay the same. For example, they believe that France has tended to have a more united service class (of managers and professionals) than Britain. Furthermore, they believe that the nature of divisions in the British middle class may have been changing in recent times.

Savage *et al.* distinguish groups in the middle class according to the types of assets that they possess, rather than in terms of a hierarchy according to their seniority in the class structure. The importance of these different groups can change

over time and is affected by the particular circumstances in which classes are formed. Thus, for example, in one set of circumstances, professionals might form a more cohesive and influential class than managers; at another time in another place the reverse might be true.

Social classes

Savage *et al.* see social classes as 'social collectivities rooted in particular types of exploitative relationships'. These social collectivities are 'groups of people with shared levels of income and remuneration, lifestyles, cultures, political orientations and so forth'. As collectivities they may engage in social action that will affect how societies develop. However, to do this they have to actively form themselves into classes. Class formation does not automatically follow from social divisions. Savage *et al.* therefore examine how class formation has developed in the middle classes.

They point out, though, that there are many social collectivities with, for example, a shared lifestyle. What makes class distinctive is that it is based around exploitative relationships in which some people become better off at the expense of others. These may take place through wage labour (as in Marxist theory), but exploitation can also be found outside the workplace. One example is where a person's contribution to an activity is neither recognized nor rewarded. They illustrate this with the case of a male academic who relies on his wife to type his manuscript or do the housework so that he can get on with writing. He gives her no share of the royalties and no acknowledgement as a co-author. Savage *et al.* say, 'her labour has been "deleted"'.

Classes and types of asset

The three types of asset which give the middle classes their advantaged life chances are: property assets, organizational assets and cultural assets. Individuals may have some combination of these three types of asset, but distinctive middle classes can develop based on each type. Different types of asset have different qualities and provide different possibilities for exploitation.

1 The propertied middle class are those who have property assets. This group consists of the 'petit bourgeoisie', which includes the self-employed and small employers. Their property assets are not as great as those of the 'dominant class' made up of landowners, financiers and capitalists. Property assets are most easily passed down from generation to generation. They can be stored in the form of various types of capital or in other possessions such as property. Property assets are the most 'robust in conveying exploitative potential'. As Marxist theory claims, you can use capital to hire and exploit the labour of others by not giving them the full value of their labour.

2 Organizational assets stem from holding positions in large bureaucratic organizations. These assets are held by managers. In the past a considerable number of people gained organizational assets by working their way up a bureaucratic hierarchy in a company without necessarily having high educational qualifications. Organizational assets are the most fragile type of asset. They cannot be stored and it may be very difficult to pass them down to the next generation. Certainly, today, managers are unlikely to be able to ensure that their children also obtain jobs as managers. In some cases, the assets are specific to a single organization and cannot readily be transferred to another company if the employee tries to move job. On the other hand, employment in organizations does provide opportunities for exploiting the labour of others.

3 Cultural assets derive partly from educational attainment and credentials. These sorts of cultural asset are particularly important to professional workers. However, they can also take the form of class taste. They can be found in 'what Bourdieu calls the habitus, or set of internalised dispositions which govern people's behaviour. Cultural assets are stored physically in people's bodies and minds: the body itself materialises class tastes. They can be reproduced through the passing on of cultural tastes to offspring.'

Class taste can be important in gaining educational qualifications (see the discussion of Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital', in Chapter 11). Women play a key role here because of their prevalence in the teaching profession and their importance in the provision of childcare. Cultural assets, however, cannot be used to directly exploit the labour of others. For this to happen they have to be used to accumulate property assets or to achieve positions which bring with them organizational assets.

Different sections of the middle class will tend to try to use their assets to gain other assets that will make their position secure, and enable them to exploit other workers and pass down their advantages to their children. So, for example, the cultured will try to obtain good jobs or use their cultural assets to start their own businesses. Managers who have worked their way up in a company may try to gain educational qualifications so they have the option of applying for jobs in other companies. Owners of successful small businesses may pay for a private education for their children in the hope that they will acquire cultural assets.

Historical middle-class formation in Britain

According to Savage *et al.*, these three sections of the middle class in Britain have all enjoyed different degrees of success at different times.

The *petit bourgeoisie* were of little importance in rural parts of Britain after the enclosure of land and the Industrial Revolution. Most of the land was owned by big landowners, with others reduced to landless labourers. In the towns, however, the *petit bourgeoisie* were more important, with shopkeepers and private landlords being particularly prominent. They were distinctive in their attitudes and lifestyles, partly because they tended to oppose the kinds of government expenditure that were welcomed by the professional middle class. Because of the nature of their assets it was relatively easy for them to pass them on to their children.

The professions have been a particularly successful group in the development of British society. The state played a crucial role in establishing an education system that formalized qualifications, from quite early on. It has also employed many professionals or defined the terms under which they could operate.

Professional associations have tended to link membership of professions closely with cultural assets by ensuring that a general liberal education was a prerequisite for a professional training. The professions have therefore had a high level of self-recruitment, with most new professionals coming from professional backgrounds.

In Britain the distinction between professionals and managers has been quite strong. Managers have generally been in a weaker position than professionals. Although their pay has been quite high, they have, until recently, relied very much on internal promotions within companies and have had little chance to switch between employers to further their careers. Levels of self-recruitment have not been so high and managers have not formed as cohesive a class as professionals.

Contemporary class formation in the British middle class

Savage *et al.* claim to have detected some significant changes in the middle class in contemporary Britain. The emphasis on controlling or reducing public expenditure by successive governments, and the increased stress on market forces, have tended to weaken the position of public sector professionals. There have also been important changes in industry. Savage *et al.* support the view that industry has moved in the direction of becoming post-Fordist. This involves moving away from mass production in very large hierarchical firms and instead producing smaller batches of more specialized products in less hierarchical and more flexible firms. (See Chapter 10 for a discussion of post-Fordism.) In the process, firms have come to rely more upon self-employed consultants of various types.

Particularly important are professionals and others working in areas such as advertising and marketing. They play an important role in 'defining and perpetuating consumer cultures associated with private commodity production'. Their cultural capital is not legitimated so much by qualifications and by employment by the state, as by their ability to make money by tapping into consumer tastes. Managers have become even less of a cohesive grouping than they once were. The internal labour markets of companies have become less important for promotion prospects. Managers have tried to cement their position by gaining greater cultural assets such as educational qualifications. These make them less reliant on single companies.

Savage *et al.* claim, on the basis of such arguments, that there is a new division in the British middle classes between:

> *a public sector, professional, increasingly female, middle class on the one hand, opposed to an entrepreneurial, private sector, propertied middle class on the other. This latter group might include the self-employed, some managerial groupings and the private sector professionals.*
>
> *Historically, we have argued, the professional middle class lorded over the rest: today managerial and private sector professionals may be shifting from its sphere of influence and may be joining the previously marginalised petit bourgeoisie in a more amorphous and increasingly influential private sector middle class.*
>
> Savage, Barlow, Dickens and Fielding, 1992, p. 218

The culture and lifestyles of the middle classes

Using data from 1988 survey research from the British Market Research Bureau, Savage *et al.* claim to have detected cultural differences between these new middle-class groupings. However, they distinguish three lifestyle groups rather than two. The public sector professionals – such as those working in health and education and social workers, who are described as 'people with cultural asset, but not much money' – were found to have 'an ascetic lifestyle founded on health and exercise'. They drank less alcohol than the middle class as a whole and were heavily involved in sports such as hiking, skating and climbing.

On the other hand, the rather better paid 'private sector professionals and specialists' had a 'post-modern' lifestyle. This involved an appreciation of high art and of pop culture, and a combination of extravagance and concern for health and fitness. Thus 'appreciation of high cultural forms of art such as opera and classical music exists cheek by jowl

with an interest in disco dancing or stock car racing ... a binge in an expensive restaurant one day might be followed by a diet the next'. This lifestyle was 'post-modern' because it rejected traditional cultural values about the worthiness of different types of art, and because it drew on consumer culture and its willingness to combine a wide variety of images and lifestyles (see pp. 119–22 for a discussion of post-modernism). A third group, consisting largely of managers and civil servants, is described as having an undistinctive lifestyle.

If Savage *et al.* are right, then the middle classes remain divided, but the nature of those divisions has changed significantly over recent decades. These changes have been influenced by the policies of the British state, and the middle classes have also exercised greater choice in deciding to adopt different lifestyles.

Evaluation

The work of Savage *et al.* does highlight some important divisions within the middle class. It provides a useful analysis of the basis of middle-class life chances. It does not fall into the trap of assuming that class divisions are static, and rightly emphasizes the active role of groups in developing their own class identities. It does concentrate, however, on the higher reaches of the middle class – their theory does not explain the position of routine white-collar workers.

Furthermore, it could be argued that their analysis of contemporary divisions in the middle class is not entirely convincing. Senior managers could be seen as forming an increasingly powerful and influential group in Britain, who may have combined the acquisition of qualifications with gaining increased opportunities for movement between companies. For example, those with MBA (Master of Business Administration) qualifications, particularly from the most prestigious business schools, may find it easier to gain and move between powerful and highly paid jobs. In a later work, Savage and Butler (1995) do admit that some senior managerial groups may have benefited from recent changes. They say 'it seems likely that the most senior managers of large organizations actually have enhanced powers. Such senior managers are also increasingly likely to be significant property owners of their organizations, through devices such as share options.' They speculate that such managers may have professional backgrounds and they are increasingly forming 'a small cadre who can mobilize organization, property and cultural assets simultaneously'.

The characterization of the lifestyle of different groups does seem to be based on rather simplified generalizations. For example, there are plenty of teachers and doctors who drink large amounts of alcohol and who are interested in popular culture. There are also plenty of private sector professionals who have a particular interest in health and fitness. If some theorists of postmodernism are correct, lifestyles are becoming less associated with particular class groupings in any case.

The working class

The market situation of manual workers

In official statistics based upon the Registrar-General's scale, and in most occupational classifications, the working class is usually regarded as consisting of manual workers. As we saw previously (see p. 57), there are important differences between manual and non-manual workers:

1 Non-manual workers, on average, receive higher wages than their manual counterparts.

2 A second market advantage of white-collar workers concerns the differences in income careers between manual and non-manual employees. The wages of manual workers typically rise gradually during their twenties, peak in their early thirties, and then slowly but steadily fall. By comparison, the earnings of many white-collar workers continue to rise during most of their working lives. Manual workers have relatively few opportunities for promotion and their pay structure is unlikely to include incremental increases.

3 A third white-collar market advantage involves security of earnings and employment: compared to non-manual workers, manual workers have a greater risk of redundancy, unemployment, lay-offs, and short-time working.

4 Finally, the gross weekly earnings of white- and blue-collar workers do not reveal the economic value of fringe benefits. Such benefits include company pension schemes, paid sick leave, the use of company cars, and meals and entertainment which are paid for in part or in total by the employer.

Life chances

The inferior market situation of manual workers is also reflected in their inferior life chances. A variety of studies show that, compared with non-manual

workers, they die younger and are more likely to suffer from poor health; they are less likely to own their own homes and a variety of consumer goods; they are more likely to be convicted of a criminal offence; and their children are less likely to stay on at school after the age of 16 to achieve educational qualifications, or to go on to higher education. In short, compared to non-manual workers, manual workers have less chance of experiencing those things defined as desirable in Western societies, but more chance of experiencing undesirable things.

Class and lifestyle

The above evidence suggests that manual workers form at least part of the working class in Britain. As previous sections have indicated, some sociologists – particularly those influenced by Marxism – would also include routine non-manual workers in the working class. However, many sociologists argue that social class involves more than a similar market situation and similar life chances.

In order to become a social class, a collection of similarly placed individuals must, to some degree, form a social group. This involves at least a minimal awareness of group identity, and some appreciation of and commitment to common interests. It also involves some similarity of lifestyle. Members of a social group usually share certain norms, values and attitudes that distinguish them from other members of society. Finally, belonging to a social group usually means that a member will interact primarily with other members of that group.

We will now analyse manual workers in terms of these criteria for class formation.

Class identity

A number of studies conducted in Britain over the past 30 years have revealed that the vast majority of the population believes that society is divided into social classes. These studies show that most manual workers describe themselves as working class, and most white-collar workers see themselves as middle class. For example, in a study by Marshall, Newby, Rose and Vogler (1988), 60 per cent of respondents said they thought of themselves as belonging to a particular class, and 90 per cent could assign themselves to a class category (see pp. 84–5 for further details of this study).

However, there are a number of problems with this type of evidence. Because people identify with a class does not necessarily mean that they will act in ways consistent with that identification. In addition, the labels 'middle and working class' may mean different things to different people.

In a survey conducted in 1950, F. M. Martin (1954) found that 70 per cent of manual workers regarded themselves as working class. The remaining 30 per cent, who defined themselves as middle class, did so partly because of the meanings they attached to the term working class. They saw the working class as a group bordering on poverty and defined its members as lazy and irresponsible; hence their desire to dissociate themselves from this classification.

However, despite the above problems, the fact that most manual workers define themselves as working class indicates at least a minimal awareness of class identity.

Class subcultures

From his observations of the working class in nineteenth-century England, Freidrich Engels wrote: 'the workers speak other dialects, have other thoughts and ideals, other customs and moral principles, a different religion and other politics than those of the bourgeoisie. Thus they are two radically dissimilar nations.'

Few, if any, sociologists would suggest that the gulf between the classes is as great today. Many, though, would argue that the norms, values and attitudes of the working and middle classes differ to some degree. They would therefore feel justified in talking about working-class subculture and middle-class subculture. As a result it has been argued that manual and non-manual workers form social groups distinguished by relatively distinct subcultures.

The proletarian traditionalist

Sociologists have long been aware of variations in working-class subcultures. Members of the working class have never had identical lifestyles. Nevertheless, a number of sociologists have identified characteristics that have been seen as typical of the traditional working class. Basing his ideas on classic studies of working-class communities, David Lockwood (1966) described the subculture of one working-class group, the proletarian traditionalists. When sociologists try to determine the extent to which the working class might have changed, they tend to make comparisons with the proletarian traditionalist.

The proletarian traditionalist lives in close-knit working-class communities and is employed in long-established industries such as mining, docking and shipbuilding. Such industries tend to concentrate workers together in communities dominated by a single occupational group. These communities are relatively isolated from the wider society. Consequently, they tend to produce a strong sense of belonging and solidarity. The workers are very loyal to their workmates and 'a strong sense of shared occupational experiences make for feelings of fraternity and comradeship'.

Friendship with workmates extends into leisure activities. Workmates are often neighbours and relatives as well. They spend much of their leisure time together in pubs and working men's clubs. There is little geographical and social mobility, so the sense of belonging to a community is reinforced. The strong social networks 'emphasise mutual aid in everyday life and the obligation to join in the gregarious pattern of leisure'.

The proletarian traditionalist is not an individualist. Lockwood describes 'a public and present-oriented conviviality' which 'eschews individual striving "to be different"'. Unlike the middle class, proletarian traditionalists do not pursue individual achievement by trying to gain promotion at work or success in running their own businesses. Instead they identify strongly with the pursuit of collective goals. This is often expressed through strong loyalty to a trades union. This loyalty comes from an emotional attachment to the organization rather than from a calculation of the benefits that union membership might bring.

The proletarian traditionalist's attitude to life tends to be fatalistic. From this perspective there is little individuals can do to alter their situation, and changes or improvements in their circumstances are largely due to luck or fate. In view of this, life must be accepted as it comes. Since there is little chance of individual effort changing the future, long-term planning is discouraged in favour of present-time orientation. There is a tendency to live from day to day and planning is limited to the near future. As a result, there is an emphasis on immediate gratification. There is little pressure to sacrifice pleasures of the moment for future rewards; desires are to be gratified in the present rather than at a later date. This attitude to life may be summarized by the following everyday phrases: 'what will be will be', 'take life as it comes', 'make the best of it', 'live for today because tomorrow may never come.'

By comparison, middle-class subculture is characterized by a purposive approach to life; humanity has control over its destiny and, with ability, determination and ambition, can change and improve its situation. Associated with this attitude is an emphasis on future-time orientation and deferred gratification. Long-term planning and deferring or putting off present pleasures for future rewards are regarded as worthwhile. Thus individuals are encouraged to sacrifice money and/or leisure at certain stages of their lives to improve career prospects.

Images and models of class

In addition to particular values and attitudes, members of society usually have a general image or picture of the social structure and the class system. These pictures are known as images of society or, more particularly, images of class.

The proletarian traditionalist tends to perceive the social order as sharply divided into 'us' and 'them'. On one side are the bosses, managers and white-collar workers who have power, and on the other, the relatively powerless manual workers. There is seen to be little opportunity for individual members of the working class to cross the divide separating them from the rest of society.

This view of society is referred to as a power model. Research has indicated that traditional workers may hold other images of society and their perceptions of the social order are not as simple and clearcut as the above description suggests. However, the power model appears to be the nearest thing to a consistent image of society held by a significant number of traditional workers.

By comparison, the middle-class image of society resembles a ladder. There are various strata or levels differentiated in terms of occupational status and lifestyles of varying prestige. Given ability and ambition, opportunities are available for individuals to rise in the social hierarchy. This view of the social order is known as a status or prestige model.

The above account of proletarian traditionalists is largely based on a description of men. Working-class communities have usually been seen as having strongly segregated gender roles. Husbands have been regarded as the main breadwinners while wives have retained responsibility for childcare and housework. Husbands and wives tend to spend leisure time apart. While the men mix with their work colleagues, women associate more with female relatives. The bond between mother and daughter is particularly strong. (For an example of a detailed description of gender roles in a traditional working-class community see Chapter 8.)

The description is also one which has been applied largely to white men rather than to members of ethnic minorities.

Marxism and the working class

Marxist sociologists have tended to support the view that there is a distinctive working class which is distinguished by its non-ownership of the means of production and its role in providing manual labour power for the ruling class. Marxists also tend to see the working class as a social group with a distinctive subculture and at least some degree of class consciousness.

Marx himself predicted that the working class would become increasingly homogeneous: its members would become more and more similar to one another. He assumed that technical developments in industry would remove the need for manual skills.

As a result craftspeople and tradespeople would steadily disappear and the bulk of the working class would become unskilled machine minders. The growing similarity of wages and circumstances would increase working-class solidarity. Marx argued:

> *The interests and life situations of the proletariat are more and more equalized, since the machinery increasingly obliterates the differences of labour and depresses the wage almost everywhere to an equally low level.*
>
> Marx and Engels, 1950, p. 40

Marx thought that, as a consequence, members of the working class would be drawn closer together and would eventually form a revolutionary force which would overthrow capitalism and replace it with communism. There have been several revolutionary movements in capitalist industrial societies, but none have come close to success.

Changes in the working class

Some sociologists now believe that the working class has undergone changes during the twentieth century that have weakened and divided it, reducing its distinctiveness from the middle class, and removing the potential for the development of class consciousness. One of the most obvious changes is the shrinking size of the working class if it is defined as consisting of manual workers. According to Routh, manual workers declined from 79 per cent of those in employment in 1911, to just under half in 1971 (Routh, 1980).

A somewhat different impression is provided by the *General Household Survey*, a survey carried out regularly by the British government. This uses slightly different categories from the manual/non-manual division, including personal service workers and self-employed non-professional workers with manual workers. On this basis 47 per cent of the population were found to be in the working class in 1994, compared to 55 per cent in 1975 (see Table 2.2, p. 41).

In part, this decline has been due to de-industrialization as manufacturing industry employs a decreasing percentage of the workforce. Between 1966 and 1997, the number of people employed in manufacturing in Great Britain fell from 8.6 to 4 million. In 1997, only around 18 per cent of those in employment had jobs in manufacturing. If all jobs in construction and production are combined, they still only represented about 23 per cent of those employed in 1997 (*Labour Market Trends*, 1997).

Employment has fallen particularly rapidly in those jobs most likely to produce the subculture of the traditional proletarian worker. Heavy industries such as coalmining, shipbuilding and the steel industry, in which employees tend to live close together in occupational communities, have declined. In 1947 there were 740,000 British miners; by 1997 just 56,500 were employed in the mining and quarrying of all energy-producing materials, and the numbers have fallen since then (Beynon, 1992 and *Labour Market Trends*, 1997).

Recent declines in manufacturing employment have gone beyond the traditional heavy industries. As Huw Beynon points out, 'the car workers, it seems have gone the way of miners; as have the shipyard workers, the steel workers and those men ... who in mechanical engineering factories supplied components for the consumer industries'. In 1992 there were more people employed in hotel and catering than in steel, shipyards, cars, mechanical engineering and coal combined.

The new industrial jobs tend to be concentrated in the electronics industries located in such areas as 'silicon glen' in Scotland, East Anglia, the M4 corridor and South Wales. These changes have been accompanied by a major shift in the proportions of men and women employed in manufacturing. Beynon describes the 'rise of industries based upon information technology, in which women play a central part: they manufacture the microchip in factories in the Far East and they assemble the computer boards in the lowlands of Scotland'.

The end of the industrial worker?

Although he accepts that industrial work has changed a great deal and declined significantly, Beynon argues that we are far from witnessing the 'end of the industrial worker' or the demise of the working class. He argues that the decline of industrial work may be exaggerated, for a number of reasons:

1. Many manufacturing jobs have not disappeared, they have simply been moved abroad to take advantage of cheaper labour costs. In countries such as Brazil, Mexico, Malaysia, South Korea and China, manufacturing employment has risen rapidly since the war. Manufacturing employment in Britain is also low compared to most other advanced industrial capitalist countries because of 'a competitively weak industrial structure and the economic policies followed in the UK in the 1980s'.
2. Many jobs which are classified as being in the service sector are involved in producing things, and the distinction between manufacturing and services is therefore somewhat artificial. For example, workers at McDonald's are mainly involved in 'distinctly manual, repetitive and unpleasant work'. Cooking beefburgers is as much a manual task as assembling motor cars, yet it is not classified as such.
3. Some jobs have been redefined as belonging to the service sector because of changes in who employs

the workers rather than changes in the nature of the work. For example, at companies like Nissan, jobs such as cleaning have been subcontracted out to independent companies. As a result they are no longer defined as manufacturing jobs.

Beynon concludes that there are still very substantial numbers of workers involved in manufacturing and it cannot be argued that the industrial worker is disappearing.

Living standards and splits in the working class

Although the number of manual workers has declined, average living standards for manual workers in regular employment have improved. According to government figures, net income after housing costs for individuals rose by about 80 per cent between 1971 and 1990, and, while economic growth has levelled off in most years since then, there was a record growth of 2.2 per cent in 1995 (*Social Trends*, 1997). The better-paid groups of manual workers were among the beneficiaries of this general rise in living standards.

As early as the 1960s, some commentators were arguing that rising living standards were creating a new group of affluent members of the working class who had started acting like members of the middle class. Affluent manual workers were seen as developing a privatized home-based lifestyle and as becoming more concerned with purchasing consumer goods than with showing solidarity with their workmates. A recent variation on this theme suggests that home ownership, particularly among former council house tenants, has transformed the attitudes and values of some sections of the working class.

Some sociologists do not accept that affluent manual workers have become middle class, nor that they have developed a more privatized lifestyle, but they do believe that the working class is increasingly split into different groups. Workers with different degrees of skill, and those belonging to particular trades, are more concerned with protecting their own interests than they are with making common cause with the working class as a whole. To some, members of the working class have become interested primarily in the size of their wage packets, and they have little potential for developing class consciousness. We will now examine these views in more detail.

Embourgeoisement

Writing in the nineteenth century, Marx predicted that the intermediate stratum would be depressed into the proletariat. During the 1950s and early 1960s, a number of sociologists suggested that just the opposite was happening. They claimed that a process of embourgeoisement was occurring whereby increasing numbers of manual workers were entering the middle stratum and becoming middle class.

During the 1950s there was a general increase in prosperity in advanced industrial societies and, in particular, among a growing number of manual workers whose earnings now fell within the white-collar range. These highly-paid, affluent workers were seen as increasingly typical of manual workers.

This development, coupled with studies that suggested that poverty was rapidly disappearing, led to the belief that the shape of the stratification system was being transformed. From the triangle or pyramid shape of the nineteenth century (with a large and relatively impoverished working class at the bottom and a small wealthy group at the top), many now argued that the stratification system was changing to a diamond or pentagon shape, with an increasing proportion of the population falling into the middle range. In this middle-mass society, the mass of the population was middle- rather than working-class.

Economic determinism

The theory used to explain this presumed development was a version of economic determinism. It was argued that the demands of modern technology and an advanced industrial economy determined the shape of the stratification system.

For instance, the American sociologist Clark Kerr (Kerr *et al.* 1962) claimed that advanced industrialism requires an increasingly highly educated, trained and skilled workforce which, in turn, leads to higher pay and higher status occupations. In particular, skilled technicians are rapidly replacing unskilled machine minders.

Jessie Bernard (1957) argued that working-class affluence is related to the needs of an industrial economy for a mass market. In order to expand, industry requires a large market for its products. Mass consumption has been made possible by high wages which, in turn, have been made possible because large sectors of modern industry have relatively low labour costs and high productivity. Bernard claimed that there is a rapidly growing

middle market which reflects the increased purchasing power of affluent manual workers. Home ownership and consumer durables such as washing machines, refrigerators, televisions and cars are no longer the preserve of white-collar workers. With reference to the class system, Bernard states:

> *The 'proletariat' has not absorbed the middle class but rather the other way round. In the sense that the class structure here described reflects modern technology, it vindicates the Marxist thesis that social organization is 'determined' by technological forces.*
>
> Quoted in Goldthorpe and Lockwood 1969, p. 9.

Thus Bernard suggests that Marx was correct in emphasizing the importance of economic factors but wrong in his prediction of the direction of social change.

The supporters of embourgeoisement argued that middle-range incomes led to middle-class lifestyles. It was assumed that the affluent worker was adopting middle-class norms, values and attitudes. For example, in Britain, it was believed that affluence eroded traditional political party loyalties and that increasing numbers of manual workers were now supporting the Conservative Party.

The process of embourgeoisement was seen to be accelerated by the demands of modern industry for a mobile labour force. This tended to break up traditional close-knit working-class communities found in the older industrial areas. The geographically mobile, affluent workers moved to newer, suburban areas where they were largely indistinguishable from their white-collar neighbours.

J. Goldthorpe, D. Lockwood, F. Bechhofer and J. Platt – *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*

Despite the strong support for embourgeoisement, the evidence on which it was based was largely impressionistic. As such, embourgeoisement remained a hypothesis, a process that was assumed to be occurring but which had not been adequately tested.

In a famous study entitled *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*, conducted in the 1960s, Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechhofer and Platt (1968a, 1968b, 1969) presented the results of research designed to test the embourgeoisement hypothesis. They tried to find as favourable a setting as possible for the confirmation of the hypothesis. If embourgeoisement were not taking place in a context that offered every opportunity, then it would probably not be occurring in less favourable contexts.

Goldthorpe *et al.* chose Luton, then a prosperous area in south-east England with expanding industries. A sample of 229 manual workers was selected, plus a comparative group of 54 white-collar workers drawn from various grades of clerks. The study was conducted from 1963 to 1964 and examined workers from Vauxhall Motors, Skefko Ball Bearing Company and Laporte Chemicals. Nearly half the manual workers in the survey had come from outside the south-east area in search of stable, well-paid jobs. All were married and 57 per cent were home owners or buyers. They were highly paid relative to other manual workers and their wages compared favourably with those of many white-collar workers.

Although the Luton study was not primarily concerned with economic aspects of class, Goldthorpe, *et al.* argue, like many of the opponents of the embourgeoisement thesis, that similarity of earnings is not the same thing as similarity of market situation. White-collar workers retained many of their market advantages such as fringe benefits and promotion chances.

The Luton study tested the embourgeoisement hypothesis in four main areas:

1. attitudes to work
2. interaction patterns in the community
3. aspirations and social perspectives
4. political views.

If affluent workers were becoming middle class they should be largely indistinguishable from white-collar workers in these areas.

Instrumental orientation to work

The affluent workers defined their work in instrumental terms, as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Work was simply a means of earning money to raise living standards. Largely because of this instrumental orientation they derived little satisfaction from work. They had few close friends at work and participated little in the social clubs provided by their firms.

Most affluent workers accepted their position as manual wage earners as more or less permanent. They felt that there was little chance for promotion. They were concerned with making a 'good living' from their firms rather than a 'good career' within their company.

Like the traditional worker, affluent workers saw improvements in terms of wages and working conditions as resulting from collective action in trade unions rather than individual achievement. However, their attitude to unions differed from traditional working-class collectivism which was based largely on class solidarity, on strong union loyalty and the

belief that members of the working class ought to stick together. The affluent workers joined with their workmates as self-interested individuals to improve their wages and working conditions. Thus the solidaristic collectivism of the traditional worker had largely been replaced by the instrumental collectivism of the affluent worker.

By contrast, white-collar workers did not define work in purely instrumental terms. They expected and experienced a higher level of job satisfaction. They made friends at work, became involved in social clubs and actively sought promotion. However, because promotion prospects were increasingly slim for many lower-grade white-collar workers, they were adopting a strategy of instrumental collectivism and joining trades unions in order to improve their market situation.

In general, though, Goldthorpe et al. concluded that, in the area of work, there were significant differences between affluent manual workers and white-collar workers.

Friendship, lifestyle and norms

Supporters of the embourgeoisement thesis argued that once the affluent workers left the factory gates, they adopted a middle-class lifestyle.

Goldthorpe *et al.* found little support for this view. Affluent workers drew their friends and companions from predominantly working-class kin and neighbours and in this respect they followed traditional working-class norms. By comparison, white-collar workers mixed more with friends made at work and with people who were neither kin nor neighbours. The affluent workers showed no desire to mix with members of the middle class and there was no evidence that they either valued or sought middle-class status.

In one respect there was a convergence between the lifestyles of the affluent worker and the lower middle class. Both tended to lead a privatized and home-centred existence. The affluent workers' social relationships were centred on and largely restricted to the home. Their time was spent watching television, gardening, doing jobs around the house and socializing with their immediate family. There was no evidence of the communal sociability of the traditional working class. However, apart from the similarity of the privatized and family-centred life of affluent workers and the lower middle class, Goldthorpe *et al.* argued that the affluent workers had not adopted middle-class patterns of sociability.

Images of society

In terms of their general outlook on life, affluent workers differed in important respects from the traditional workers. Many had migrated to Luton in order to improve their living standards rather than simply accepting life in their towns of origin. In this respect, they had a purposive rather than a fatalistic attitude. As we noted previously, however, the means they adopted to realize their goals – instrumental collectivism – was not typical of the middle class as a whole. In addition, their goals were distinct from those of the middle class in that they focused simply on material benefits rather than a concern with advancement in the prestige hierarchy.

This emphasis on materialism was reflected in the affluent workers', images of society. Few saw society in terms of either the power model, based on the idea of 'us and them' which was characteristic of the traditional workers, or the prestige model which was typical of the middle class. The largest group (56 per cent) saw money as the basis of class divisions. In terms of this money, or pecuniary model, they saw a large central class made up of the majority of the working population.

Although differing from the traditional workers, the affluent workers' outlook on life and their image of society did not appear to be developing in a middle-class direction.

Political attitudes

Finally, Goldthorpe *et al.* found little support for the view that affluence leads manual workers to vote for the Conservative Party. In the 1959 election, 80 per cent of the affluent worker sample voted Labour, a higher proportion than for the manual working class as a whole. However, support for the Labour Party, like support for trade unions, was often of an instrumental kind. There was little indication of the strong loyalty to Labour that is assumed to be typical of the traditional worker.

The 'new working class'

Goldthorpe *et al.* tested the embourgeoisement hypothesis under conditions favourable to its confirmation, but found it was not confirmed. They concluded that it was therefore unlikely that large numbers of manual workers were becoming middle class. Even so, the Luton workers differed in significant respects from the traditional working class. In view of this, Goldthorpe *et al.* suggested that they may have formed the vanguard of an emerging new working class. While the new working class was not being assimilated into the middle class, there were two points of normative convergence between the classes: privatization and instrumental collectivism.

Finally, Goldthorpe *et al.* argued that the results of their study represented a rejection of economic determinism. The affluent worker had not simply been shaped by economic forces. Instead, the lifestyle

and outlook of the affluent worker were due in large part to the adaptation of traditional working-class norms to a new situation; they were not simply shaped by that situation.

Embourgeoisement and the privatized worker

David Lockwood (1966) believed that the privatized instrumentalist revealed by the affluent worker study would gradually replace the proletarian traditionalist. John Goldthorpe (1978) went further, claiming that working-class instrumentalism was a major factor in causing inflation in the 1970s. As groups of workers pushed for higher wages and tried to keep ahead of other manual workers in the earnings league, industrial costs went up, and with them prices. As prices rose, workers demanded even higher wages.

Stephen Hill – London dockers

A study of London dockers conducted in the 1970s by Stephen Hill (1976) provided some support for the view that the privatized instrumental worker was becoming more common. However, the study also raised doubts about the extent to which workers had ever conformed to the image of the proletarian traditionalist.

Stephen Hill suggests that the new working class might not be as new as Goldthorpe *et al.* believed. The 139 dock labourers in Hill's survey were remarkably similar to the Luton workers. Judging from past studies, the docks are one of the heartlands of proletarian traditionalism. Strong working-class solidarity, long-standing loyalties to unions and the Labour Party, close bonds between workmates, communal leisure activities, an emphasis on mutual aid, and a power model of society have all been seen as characteristic of dock workers. Either this picture has been exaggerated, or there have been important changes in dockland life.

There is probably some truth in both these viewpoints. The system of casual labour in the docks was abolished in 1967 and replaced by permanent employment. The constant threat of underemployment entailed in the casual labour system tended to unite dock workers. The change to permanent employment may have reduced the traditional solidarity of dockland life.

Like the Luton workers, the dockers in Hill's study defined their work primarily in instrumental terms. Their main priority was to increase their living standards. Only a minority made close friends at work, and only 23 per cent reported seeing something of their workmates outside work. Most dockers lived a privatized lifestyle and leisure activities were mainly home- and family-centred.

Like the Luton workers, the dockers regarded collective action in trade unions as essential for economic improvement. Over 80 per cent of dockers voted Labour, the most common reason for this being an identification with Labour as the party of the working class. Again these findings are very similar to those of the Luton study.

In terms of their views of society, the dockers belied their proletarian traditionalist image. Only 14 per cent saw the class structure in terms of a power model, whereas 47 per cent – the largest group subscribing to one particular view – saw society in terms of a money model. In this respect they are again similar to the Luton workers. Hill concludes that the working class is a relatively homogeneous group and the argument that there is a division between an old and new working class has been exaggerated.

Fiona Devine – *Affluent Workers Revisited*

Fiona Devine (1992) has directly tested Lockwood's claim that the privatized instrumentalist would become the typical member of the working class. While Hill had examined a traditional proletarian group and found evidence to support Lockwood, Devine went back to studying 'affluent workers'.

Between July 1986 and July 1987 she conducted in-depth interviews with a sample of 62 people from Luton. The sample consisted of 30 male manual workers employed on the shop floor at the Vauxhall car plant, their wives, and two further wives of Vauxhall workers whose husbands refused to participate. By returning to Luton, Devine was able to make direct comparisons between her own findings in the 1980s and those of Goldthorpe *et al.* in the 1960s.

Geographical mobility

Like the earlier study, Devine's found high levels of geographical mobility. Some 30 per cent of the sample had grown up away from Luton. However, unlike Goldthorpe *et al.*, she did not find that they had moved to Luton in search of higher living standards. With high levels of unemployment in the 1980s many had gone to Luton in search of greater job security. Some of those who had moved from London had done so in order to find more affordable housing.

Orientation to work

Devine found that her sample was interested in using work as a means of improving their living standards. However, they were 'faced with the threat of redundancy and unemployment which hung over their daily lives'. Thus, while they wanted to 'better

themselves', they were more concerned with attaining greater security. They expected no more than 'small, cumulative gains' in their living standards. Their consumer aspirations were more limited than those of their 1960s counterparts, though they were still rather greater than those supposed to be possessed by the 'traditional' working class.

The 1980s sample continued to belong to and support trades unions. Furthermore, they saw unions as a 'collective means of securing working class interests'. Money was not their only concern, and other issues led to feelings of solidarity with fellow workers. Devine says that 'their poor conditions of work, for example, were often shared with fellow workers, and this was recognised to be the case'. They were also concerned about the distribution of power at work, and were interested in securing humane and fair treatment for their colleagues and themselves in their working lives. Many of them were critical of unions, but these criticisms were directed at union tactics and not at the principle of having unions to defend working-class interests.

Overall, Devine follows Goldthorpe *et al.* in describing the workers' orientation to work as instrumental collectivism, but she found more evidence of collectivism in the 1980s than had appeared to be present in the 1960s. The concern with money and living standards did not prevent them from feeling a sense of solidarity with fellow workers.

Friendship, lifestyle and norms

Like Goldthorpe *et al.*, Devine did not find that Vauxhall manual workers were befriending members of the middle class. In some respects they had traditional working-class friendship patterns: men had friends from work and many of their wives retained close contacts with relatives. Men still enjoyed leisure outside the home with other men, particularly playing sports or going to the pub. Traditional gender roles were also in evidence; although many wives had paid employment they still had primary responsibility for domestic chores. This reduced their freedom to engage in leisure outside the home.

Nevertheless, Devine did find important differences between her sample and the supposed characteristics of traditional workers. She says that they 'were not engaged in extensive sociability in pubs, clubs or whatever', and they did not have a communal existence based on their neighbourhood. Their lifestyles 'did not totally revolve around the immediate family in the home' but at particular stages in the life cycle the home was very important. Families with young children had restricted opportunities for leisure in the community. Men were often working overtime to help provide materially for the family, and women had most of the responsibility for childcare. In short, their lifestyle was neither as communal as that of the proletarian traditionalist, nor as home-centred and privatized as Goldthorpe *et al.*'s affluent workers.

Images of society

The images of society held by Devine's sample were found to be very similar to those in the earlier study. They had a 'pecuniary model of the class structure.' Most saw themselves as belonging to a 'mass working/middle class' in between the very rich and the very poor. This did not, though, prevent them from sharing certain values with the traditional working class. Many felt resentment at those who had inherited money and a sense of injustice at the existence of extreme class inequalities. One said 'I disagree with a silver spoon. People should work for their money, not inherit it.' They wanted some redistribution of wealth away from the very rich and, with it, the creation of a somewhat more egalitarian society.

Political attitudes

Devine did find evidence of declining support for the Labour Party. As Table 2.14 shows, only 24 of the 62 in the sample had voted Labour in the 1979 or 1983 elections. On the surface this would seem to support the view that affluent workers were increasingly voting for individualistic and instrumental reasons. However, Devine did not find that disillusioned Labour Party supporters had abandoned their belief in the values traditionally associated with voting Labour. Instead, they had withdrawn their allegiance, perhaps only temporarily, because of the party's political failings. They were highly critical of the 'Winter of Discontent' in 1978–9 when a Labour government had presided over widespread strikes. They were also unhappy about the breakdown in relations between the party and the unions, and critical of the party's performance in running the economy during the 1970s, and of internal divisions during the 1980s.

Table 2.14 Political allegiances of the interviewees in Devine's study

Political allegiance	Number of interviewees
Labour Party supporters	24
Disillusioned Labour Party supporters	24
Non-Labour Party supporters	14
Total	62

Source: F. Devine (1992) [illegible] Press, Edinburgh, p. 189.

A number of the disillusioned voters felt fatalistic about politics. While they still felt that theoretically the Labour Party represented working-class interests, they doubted its ability to deliver economic prosperity or low unemployment. Nine of the disillusioned Labour voters said they intended to vote Conservative at the next election. Yet they hardly embraced the Conservative Party with wholehearted enthusiasm: for them, 'the only positive attraction of the Conservatives was their policy of selling council houses which was seen as "giving people the chance to better themselves".'

Conclusion

Devine's findings are rather different from those of Goldthorpe *et al.* some three decades earlier. She did not find that her sample had become the increasingly instrumental privatized workers predicted. She says:

> *The interviewees were not singularly instrumental in their motives for mobility or in their orientations to work. Nor did they lead exclusively privatised styles of life. Their aspirations and social perspectives were not entirely individualistic. Lastly, the interviewees were critical of the trades unions and the Labour Party, but not for the reasons identified by the Luton team [i.e. Goldthorpe* et al.*]*
>
> Devine, 1994, p. 9.

Devine rejects the idea of a 'new' working class and denies that the affluent workers have been persuaded to accept capitalist society uncritically. They have aspirations as consumers and their living standards have risen, but they would still like to see a more egalitarian society. They have lost faith in the ability of unions and the Labour Party to deliver this objective, but they have not fundamentally changed their values.

G. Marshall, H. Newby, D. Rose and C. Vogler – continuities in the working class

There is considerable support for Devine's findings in a study of the British stratification system carried out by Gordon Marshall, Howard Newby, David Rose and Carolyn Vogler (1988). Based on a national sample of 1,770 adults, the study found that 'sectionalism, instrumentalism, and privatism among the British working class are not characteristics somehow peculiar to the recent years of economic recession'.

Marshall *et al.* claim that historical studies show that there were artisans who put primary emphasis on their home life, and who had an instrumental attitude to work, well back into the nineteenth century. Furthermore, their data on contemporary workers suggest that they retain some commitment to their work and do not follow completely privatized lifestyles. For example, 73 per cent of their sample thought that their work was at least as important as any non-work activity, and over half numbered one or more workmates among their friends. They concluded that there was no evidence of a significant shift towards instrumentalism and privatism.

Divisions in the working class

Marxism and the homogeneous working class

Marx and Engels (1848) predicted that members of the working class would become increasingly homogeneous, or alike. The American Marxist Harry Braverman (1974) agrees with Marx. He claims that the pursuit of profit has led to more and more automation in factories. This in turn has reduced the need for skilled workers and has led to an increasingly undifferentiated and unskilled working class.

Ralf Dahrendorf – the disintegration of the working class

Official employment figures directly contradict this picture, and suggest that during the course of the twentieth century the number of skilled manual workers increased, while the number of unskilled manual workers fell. Such statistics seem to support the views of the German sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf (1959), rather than those of Marx and Braverman.

Dahrendorf argued that, contrary to Marx's prediction, the manual working class has become increasingly heterogeneous, or dissimilar. He saw this as resulting from changes in technology, arguing that 'increasingly complex machines require increasingly qualified designers, builders, maintenance and repair men and even minders'.

Dahrendorf claimed that the working class is now divided into three distinct levels: unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled manual workers. Differences in economic and prestige rewards are linked to this hierarchy of skill. Thus skilled craftspeople enjoy higher wages, more valuable fringe benefits, greater job security and higher prestige than semi-skilled and unskilled workers.

Dahrendorf argued that in place of a homogeneous proletariat 'we find a plurality of status and skill groups whose interests often diverge'. For example, craftspeople jealously guard their wage differentials against claims for pay increases by the less skilled.

In view of the differences in skill, economic and status rewards and interests within the ranks of manual workers, Dahrendorf claimed that 'it has become doubtful whether speaking of the working class still makes much sense'. He believed that during

the twentieth century there has been a 'decomposition of labour', a disintegration of the manual working class.

Roger Penn – historical divisions in the working class

Roger Penn (1983) agrees with Dahrendorf that the British working class is divided between different levels of skill; however, he does not believe that these divisions are anything new. Penn's views are based upon a study of workers in the cotton and engineering industries in Rochdale between 1856 and 1964.

He found that over the whole of that period the working class was sectionally organized in unions that represented specific groups of workers. The unions of skilled workers used social closure – they attempted to limit the recruitment and training of workers in skilled jobs – in order to maintain or improve the bargaining position of their members.

Penn found that unions were fairly successful over long periods of time in maintaining relatively high levels of pay for skilled and semi-skilled workers. Not surprisingly this tended to create competing groups within the working class and to weaken the extent to which members of different segments of the working class could act together.

However, if this has been the case for a century or more, it implies that Dahrendorf was wrong to see the working class as being more divided in the twentieth century than it was in the nineteenth.

Ivor Crewe – the 'new working class'

A second argument relating to divisions within the working class originates from studies of voting, and has been used to explain the failure of the Labour Party to retain working-class loyalty in the late 1970s and 1980s in UK elections. On the basis of his studies of British voting patterns, Ivor Crewe (1983) claims that the working class is divided, but not according to levels of skill but rather according to more specific factors.

Crewe believes that there is a new working class whose members possess one or more of the following characteristics:

1 they live in the south
2 they are union members
3 they work in private industry
4 they own their own homes.

They can be distinguished from the diminishing numbers of old working class who live in the north, belong to unions, work directly or indirectly for the government, and live in council houses. Crewe uses figures such as those in Table 2.15 to suggest that the new working class are deserting the Labour Party in large numbers, and abandoning the traditional proletarian socialist collectivism.

Crewe accepts that traditional proletarian collectivist views continue to exist, but believes that they are held by an ever-decreasing segment of the population. (For further details and evaluation of Crewe's work see Chapter 9.)

G. Marshall, H. Newby, D. Rose and C. Vogler – skill and sectional divisions

Gordon Marshall, Howard Newby, David Rose and Carolyn Vogler (1988) have used data from their study of the British stratification system to evaluate the claim that the working class is divided. In general terms, they support the view that the working class is divided into strata according to the level of skill involved in their work, but deny that the types of sectoral divisions identified by Crewe are significant.

Like Roger Penn, Marshall *et al.* believe that competition between different sections of the working class has created divisions lasting from the nineteenth century until the present day. In the nineteenth century, for example, the 'labour aristocracy' of skilled artisans caused splits in the working class. However, Marshall *et al.* do not claim that such divisions automatically prevent the working class acting as a group. They say:

Table 2.15 The two working classes: voting in Labour Party vote, 1983

	New working class			Old working class		
	Owner-occupiers %	Works in private sector %	Lives in south %	Council tenants %	Works in public sector %	Lives in Scotland/north %
Conservative	47	36	42	19	29	32
Labour	25	37	26	57	46	42
Liberal/SDP	28	27	32	24	25	26

Source: Crewe, *The Sociologist*, June 1983

The 'working class' has always been stratified according to industry, locality, grade and occupation, and was so long before the emergence of Labour as a political force. Yet this prevented neither the emergence of a specifically working class party on the political stage nor the subsequent structuring of politics along class lines.

Marshall *et al.*, 1988, pp. 253–4

According to Marshall *et al.*, these class divisions are, nevertheless, much more important than sectoral cleavages. They measured the voting intentions of their sample and compared different classes, home owners and tenants, and public and private sector workers. Class was most closely connected with voting behaviour while there was no significant difference between the voting intentions of those in public or private sector employment. Council tenants were more likely to vote Labour whatever their social class, but an overwhelming majority of council tenants were working-class anyway.

Dennis Warwick and Gary Littlejohn – divisions in mining communities

Warwick and Littlejohn (1992) studied four communities in a mining area of West Yorkshire, surveying a total of 324 households in 1986 and 1987. They found evidence which appeared to contradict Marshall *et al.*'s views on the insignificance of sectoral cleavages. There was a 'strong element of anti-Thatcherism' among owner-occupiers and council tenants alike. For example, a majority in both groups opposed government support for private health and private education, and wanted higher taxes for the rich and reduced spending on defence. But there were significant differences in their politics. Some 65 per cent of tenants and 65 per cent of owner-occupiers claimed their parents had voted Labour. However, among males, 83 per cent of tenants now supported Labour compared to 57 per cent of those who owned or were buying their own homes.

Warwick and Littlejohn do not follow Crewe in claiming that housing tenure itself is the cause of increased divisions within the working class. Instead, they argue that housing tenure reflects a polarization between the relatively economically secure who have regular employment, and the rest. For the less well-off members of the working class, insecure employment, low income and poor health and residence in council housing tended to go together. Rising unemployment in the economic recessions, combined with the sale of council houses to the better-off, had led to a 'cleavage between citizens who still have clear means of participating in democracy, and those who are being pushed into what some call an "underclass"'.

From this point of view then, the major division in the working class is based on economic differences rather than level of skill. While there are sectoral cleavages, these derive from economic inequalities. Warwick and Littlejohn use the concept of an underclass very tentatively. This is not surprising since this concept is highly controversial. We will discuss it in detail later in the chapter (see pp. 89–96).

Class consciousness

Many Marxist sociologists argue that the contradictions of capitalism will eventually lead to a class-conscious proletariat. Class consciousness involves a full awareness by members of the working class of the reality of their exploitation, a recognition of common interests, the identification of an opposing group with whom their interests are in conflict, and a realization that only by collective class action can that opponent be overthrown. When practical steps are taken in pursuit of this goal, the working class becomes a 'class for itself'. Evidence from a variety of studies suggests that the working class is a long way from becoming a class for itself.

The limits to class consciousness

It has often been argued that the image of society held by proletarian traditionalists contains certain elements of class consciousness. The power model, with its emphasis on 'us and them', implies some recognition of common class interests, an indication of class solidarity, and at least a vague awareness of an opponent with whom the workers are in conflict.

The money model, on the other hand – which, judging from the studies of Goldthorpe *et al.* (1968a, 1968b, 1969), and Hill (1976), is the dominant image of society held by workers in Britain – suggests that the working class is becoming less rather than more class-conscious.

Further evidence from these studies supports this view. Nearly 70 per cent of the Luton workers believed that the inequalities portrayed in their images of society were a necessary and inevitable feature of industrial society. They were concerned with improving their position in the existing society rather than trying to create a new social order. Given the fact that they had improved their economic position, they had some commitment to the existing order. More recent evidence of the persistence of such attitudes can be found in a study conducted for the International Social Attitudes Report (Evans, 1993). This survey, based on a sample of nearly 2,500 people in Britain in 1987, found that 66 per cent of the working class and 62 per cent of skilled manual

workers agreed that large differences in pay are necessary.

Marxists have often argued that the road to revolution involves an alliance between the trade union movement and a radical political party. Workers must see the politics of the workplace and society as one and the same. The Luton workers typically saw the union as an organization limited to advancing their economic interests in the workplace. In fact 54 per cent of the Luton trade unionists expressed clearcut disapproval of the link between trade unions and the Labour Party.

In general the Luton workers saw little opposition between themselves and their employer, 67 per cent agreeing with the statement that at work 'teamwork means success and is to everyone's advantage'. They were largely indifferent to 'exploitation' at work, home and family being their central life interest.

This picture of harmony must not be overdrawn. As Goldthorpe and Lockwood *et al.* state (Goldthorpe and Lockwood, 1968a, 1968b, 1969), the employer–employee relationship is not free from 'basic oppositions of interest'. Workers are concerned with maximizing wages, employers with maximizing profits. The teamwork image of industrial relations held by the majority of workers did not prevent a bitter strike in 1966 at the Luton branch of Vauxhall Motors.

Despite the apparent acceptance of the social order by the Luton workers, their responses to a number of questions indicate some resentment about social inequality: 75 per cent agreed with the statement that there is 'one law for the rich and another for the poor' and 60 per cent agreed that big business has 'too much power'.

The dock labourers in Stephen Hill's study (1976) expressed similar attitudes to those of the Luton workers. They showed no great hostility to employers or management, the majority being 'fairly indifferent' towards them. Most were opposed to the link between trades unions and the Labour Party. Hill states:

> *The dock workers I interviewed were certainly hostile to the traditional alliance between unionism and Labour, refusing to accept the view that these formed the industrial and political wings of an integrated labour movement.*
>
> Hill, 1976, p. 140

However, despite the lack of radicalism in the workers' views of employers and of the link between trade unions and political parties, Hill did find evidence of left-wing opinions. Over 80 per cent of the dockers agreed with the statements that there is 'one law for the rich and another for the poor' and 'big business has too much power', and nearly 75 per cent agreed that 'the upper classes prevent fair shares'. Thus, like the Luton workers, the dockers appear to hold apparently conflicting radical and conservative views. We will discuss possible reasons for this shortly.

The potential for class consciousness

The studies by Hill, and Goldthorpe *et al.* may be interpreted as indicating a reduction of the potential for class consciousness. It appears that the proletarian traditionalist has been replaced by the privatized worker who is preoccupied with home and family and largely indifferent to wider political issues. John Westergaard, however, takes a rather different view (Westergaard, 1975):

1. First, he argues that the relatively self-contained working-class communities of the proletarian traditionalist encouraged a parochial outlook. Workers tended to have a narrow identification with their occupational group rather than with the working class as a whole. Westergaard argues that the break-up of traditional working-class communities may be necessary to provide 'a recognition of common interests with workers in other situations, outside the immediate locality'.
2. Second, since privatized workers define their work in instrumental terms, their sole attachment to work is the cash-nexus or money connection. As such, their attachment to work is single-stranded. It is not strengthened by pride in work, friendships at work or loyalty to the employer. A single-stranded connection is brittle: it can easily snap. If the privatized workers' demands for high wages and rising living standards are not met (for example in times of economic depression) the cash-nexus may well snap and there will be nothing else to hold them to their jobs and make them accept the situation. In such circumstances, privatized workers may become increasingly radical and recognize that their interests lie in collective class action.
3. Third, Westergaard argues that the seeds of class consciousness are already present even in the apparently conservative Luton workers. He sees evidence of this from their views on the power of big business and the workings of the legal system, views echoed by the London dockers. Westergaard claims that this demonstrates that the working class have at least a basic grasp of their class interests and of the conflict in interests between themselves and the ruling class.

The persistence of class consciousness

Westergaard's view that the seeds of class consciousness remain within the working class has been supported by Fiona Devine (1992, 1994). Her study of affluent workers in Luton during the 1980s (see pp. 81–3 for further details) found considerable evidence of the persistence of class consciousness. The workers wanted to improve their living standards and those of their families, but that did not prevent them from

perceiving society as unjust or from desiring change. They shared with other workers a similar living standard and a desire to improve it and gain increased security.

According to Devine, these shared experiences and desires were a basis for class solidarity. The affluent workers' sense of injustice focused on the very rich. Many resented the fact that, unlike ordinary members of society, the very rich did not have to work for a living. This led the affluent workers to hope for:

> *a more equitable distribution of resources in society as it stood, and, by implication, a more equal, free and democratic society in which people would be more justly and fairly rewarded than at present.*
>
> Devine, 1994, p. 8.

Trade unions and the Labour Party were still regarded as 'collective means of securing both individual and collective ends'. However, support for them had declined because some of Devine's sample thought they had failed in delivering improvements for the working class.

While there was a strong awareness of a class division between the very rich and ordinary workers, there was less consciousness of a split between the working class and the middle class. Most of the sample thought that class divisions had declined in significance and saw themselves as belonging to a large class of 'ordinary' working people. Nevertheless, those who were employed at the Vauxhall plant still experienced a strong sense of class division at work:

> *Manual workers at the car plant were aware of a sense of superiority and separateness held by the foremen and white-collar workers which placed them in an inferior position. The status aspects of the organisation of the workplace and people's attitudes of social superiority were a considerable source of grievance.*
>
> Devine, 1994

The affluent workers of the 1980s were more pessimistic about the prospects for changing society but they had not lost the desire for change nor their sense of class inequality. To Devine, they retained a considerable amount of class consciousness.

Inconsistencies in class consciousness

There is a tendency in many studies of class consciousness to assume that workers hold a clear, consistent and coherent image of society, and to mould data into neat, tidy categories.

For example, the Luton workers of the 1960s are usually discussed in terms of their money model of society, yet only 54 per cent held that model, while 26 per cent had images which fitted neither power, prestige nor money models, and 7 per cent had 'no communicable image' (Goldthorpe *et al.* 1969). Hill's study revealed that only 47 per cent of dockers held a money model and he was impressed with 'the range of different images which people within one group can embrace' (Hill, 1976). More emphasis might well be given to the variety and diversity of workers' images of society.

In addition, many workers do not hold clear and consistent views on society. Hill found that the dockers' fairly radical opinions on the power of big business, the workings of the law and the maintenance of inequality by the upper classes were inconsistent with their relatively conservative views on the role of trade unions and the nature of employment. He notes that they 'appeared to have their views fairly well compartmentalized'. As a result, the dockers seemed to have no problem with holding apparently contradictory views.

Similar findings were produced from a study of the ideology of 951 unskilled manual workers in Peterborough, conducted in 1970–1 by R. M. Blackburn and Michael Mann (1975). They found that both right- and left-wing views co-existed in the workers' ideology. Blackburn and Mann concluded that the workers did not possess consistent images of society.

In fact, Blackburn and Mann suggest that there is every reason to expect that this should be the case. The workers' experience of subordination and exploitation in the workplace tends to produce a power model of society and radical attitudes that demand a change in the status quo. However, the workers are also exposed to the ideology of the dominant class broadcast by the mass media and transmitted by the educational system and various other institutions. This ideology is conservative: it supports the existing social arrangements and states that the relationship between capital and labour is right, natural and inevitable. As a result, workers 'remain confused by the clash between conservatism and proletarianism, but touched by both'.

Beliefs and actions

On the basis of questionnaire research with a national sample of British adults, David Marshall, Howard Newby, David Rose and Carolyn Vogler (1988) reached somewhat similar conclusions to Blackburn and Mann. They claimed that class consciousness often did not produce a coherent view of the world. Respondents quite frequently gave inconsistent answers. For example:

1. Only 30 per cent of those who rejected leaving the economy to market forces to produce economic revival, also supported using government intervention for this purpose.

2 Some 19 per cent of those who wanted increased taxation to expand the welfare state, were themselves unwilling to pay more tax for this purpose.

3 A mere 25 per cent of those who supported the use of an incomes policy to reduce wage differentials, were themselves willing to accept pay restraint to achieve it.

The last two examples suggest that beliefs and actions will not always coincide, so class consciousness does not necessarily lead to class-based actions.

The continuing relevance of class

Nevertheless, Marshall *et al.* emphasize the continuing relevance and importance of class for the British population. Rose and Marshall summarize some of their findings in the following way:

> *over 90 per cent of our respondents could place themselves in one of the conventionally defined class categories; 73 per cent viewed class as an inevitable feature of British society; and 52 per cent recognised the existence of class conflicts over important social issues in Britain.*
>
> Rose and Marshall, 1988 p. 23

Furthermore, half of the sample believed there was a dominant class that possessed economic and political power, and a lower class that had no economic and political power.

Marshall *et al.* found a surprisingly widespread sense of injustice about the distribution of income and wealth in British society. Table 2.16 shows the percentage of the population who believed the distribution of income in Britain was unfair, and the reasons they gave for this belief. The class categories

Table 2.16 Attitudes to distributional justice by Goldthorpe class

A Is distribution of wealth and income fair?	Class I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	All	Total
Yes	31	34	28	44	24	25	22	29	(368)
No	69	66	72	56	76	75	78	71	(914)

B Why not?	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Distribution favours those at the top							
Gap between haves and have-nots is too wide	57	59	63	64	55	63	63
Pay differentials are too wide	21	19	19	19	26	21	19
Too much poverty, wages too low, too many reduced to welfare	13	17	20	16	13	17	18
Some people acquire wealth too easily (unearned income, etc.)	31	16	13	13	20	10	9
The higher paid are not taxed severely enough	9	15	11	9	12	20	16
Welfare benefits are too low	6	5	6	2	8	9	6
The lower paid or working class are taxed too severely	2	3	3	5	3	0	2
Inequalities of opportunity (in education, for jobs, etc.)	2	2	2	0	0	1	2
Unequal regional distribution (of jobs, income, etc.)	4	3	3	0	2	1	2
Distribution favours those at the bottom							
There are too many scroungers around	6	5	12	9	15	8	10
Pay differentials are too narrow	5	4	1	3	4	4	4
The higher paid are taxed too severely	4	2	3	8	3	3	3
Other reasons							
Inequality of wealth and income inevitable	1	4	4	2	7	2	2
Key groups of workers can hold the country to ransom	1	1	0	0	0	0	0

Note: Percentages in the 'Why not?' columns are based on respondents who said the distribution was unfair.
Source: G. Marshall, H. Newby, D. Rose and C. Vogler (1988) *Social Class in Modern Britain* (Hutchinson, London), p. [illegible]

used are based upon John Goldthorpe's classifications (see pp. 114–16 for further details). They show that a majority of all social classes believed that the existing distribution of income and wealth was unfair, and, although lower classes were more likely to believe this, the percentage difference between them and higher classes was not particularly great.

Marshall *et al.* do not claim that there is widespread support for radical changes in the social structure, but they do believe that there is support for reforms that would lead to a more equitable society. They found little optimism, though, that such reforms were likely, or even possible.

Rose and Marshall claim:

> *At the risk of oversimplifying, it would appear that while most people disapprove of social injustice, they do not think that they can do anything to change the system. Nor do they think that our elected leaders will do anything either.*
>
> Rose and Marshall, 1988, p. 24.

Marshall *et al.* do not believe that class consciousness is automatically produced by the existence of class divisions. Rose and Marshall say:

> *class consciousness is not simply a matter of individual beliefs, attitudes and values, which can be explained by reference to social locations and can be tapped by questions in a survey. To be sure, individuals have beliefs and experiences which reflect their social location. But for such beliefs to have effectiveness, for them to produce class consciousness rather than class awareness, requires that they be given explanation and direction. That is, they require organising.*
>
> Rose and Marshall, 1988, p. 25

Despite the potential for class consciousness, the British population has not been mobilized in support of a programme that would tackle the sources of their sense of injustice. In this respect, Rose and Marshall point their fingers at the Labour Party for having failed to tap the reservoir of potential support for change.

Many Marxists believe that class consciousness will eventually be generated by the contradictions of capitalism. Many non-Marxists would regard this as a possibility, but an unlikely one: they would tend to agree with Ken Roberts *et al.* (1997) that 'the working class remains an unstable and continuing challenge but not a revolutionary threat'.

The lower strata

Although some sociologists see the working class as the lowest stratum in capitalist societies, others argue that there is a group beneath it. The most disadvantaged sections of capitalist society have been described in many ways. Kirk Mann says:

> *Terms such as 'the underclass', 'marginalized groups/stratum', 'excluded groups', 'reserve army of labour', 'housing classes', 'the pauper class', 'the residuum', 'relative stagnant population' and, more obviously, the poor, have all been used to describe a section of society which is seen to exist within and yet at the base of the working class.*
>
> Mann, 1992, p. 2.

Of these terms, underclass is the one that has enjoyed the widest currency in recent years. Those sociologists who have identified a group of people at the bottom of the stratification system have seen them as having various distinguishing characteristics. These have included being poor, unemployed or dependent on benefits. In some cases they have been defined as a group whose behaviour contravenes the norms and values of society. Thus some sociologists have emphasized the economic distinctiveness of the lower strata while others have concentrated on their supposed cultural or behavioural differences from the rest of the population.

In the latter case, the lower strata have been seen as constituting a social problem that poses a threat to society. They can also, however, be seen as a sociological problem for theories of stratification. Some theories of stratification have been based upon occupations, leaving the unemployed as a group who are difficult to categorize. In this chapter we will focus on the implications of the existence of lower strata for theories of stratification. Later chapters will discuss the relationship between the underclass and poverty (see pp. 323–33), and the underclass and ethnicity (see pp. 283–5).

Marx's view of the lower strata

The lumpenproletariat

In recent years, sociologists, journalists and politicians have all paid considerable attention to the 'problem' of the lower strata, but this interest is nothing new. In the nineteenth century Karl Marx was among those who expressed views on these groups. He used a number of different terms to

describe those at the bottom of the stratification system of capitalist societies.

He used the word 'lumpenproletariat' to describe the lowest group of all. The picture he paints of them is less than flattering. They are variously seen as:

> *This scum of the depraved elements of all classes ... decayed roués, vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, escaped galley slaves, swindlers, mountebanks, lazzaroni, pickpockets, tricksters, gamblers, brothel keepers, tinkers, beggars, the dangerous class, the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of the old society.*
>
> Marx and Engels, 1950, p. 267

It is unclear from Marx's writing whether he regarded this group as a class or not.

Lydia Morris points out that his usage of the term is inconsistent and it may 'variously refer to an historical remnant from an earlier society, a group of individual social degenerates, or a category located outside of the economic system of industrial capitalism'.

Although, at times, Marx did refer to these people as a class, at other times he dismissed the idea that they can form a class because he saw them as having little potential for developing class consciousness or taking collective action.

The reserve army of labour

The term lumpenproletariat has not been widely used by contemporary sociologists, but the idea of a reserve army of labour has been more influential. It exists because of the way the capitalist economy works. According to Marx, there are inevitably periods of boom, during which more workers are taken on, and periods of slump when many workers lose their jobs. The reserve army of labour consists of those who are employed as substitute workers and who are only needed during the booms.

To Marx, they perform important functions in capitalist societies. In *Capital* he says: 'the industrial reserve army, during periods of stagnation and average prosperity, weighs down the active army of workers; during the periods of over-production and feverish activity, it puts a curb on their pretensions'. It helps to drive down wage costs for capitalist employers by providing a flexible group of workers who are desperate for jobs and are willing to undercut the wages demanded by other workers. They will take the places of those who are sacked or made redundant. When the profitability of a company falls, threatening its survival, the employer may be forced to recruit cheaper workers from the reserve army of labour.

The existence of a reserve army of labour makes it more difficult for the employed workforce to be radical and to resist, for example, the introduction of new machinery or more intensive work practices.

The relative surplus population

Rather confusingly, Marx also used a third term, the relative surplus population, to refer to those at the bottom of the stratification system. This includes members of the reserve army of labour, but it also embraces groups which at other times he defined as members of the lumpenproletariat.

The relative surplus population is divided into four:

1. The floating surplus population consists of workers who are employed until they reach adulthood but are then dismissed, because adults are paid higher wages. (In contemporary Britain those young people on government training programmes who are used as a cheap labour force and are not offered a job on completion of their training could be seen as part of this group.)
2. The latent surplus population is made up of agricultural workers who are no longer needed and who are on the point of seeking work in urban areas.
3. The stagnant surplus population is part of the active labour force 'but with extremely irregular employment'. It is part of 'an inexhaustible reservoir of disposable labour-power', and it has living standards that are lower than average for the working class. Workers who have been made redundant and whose jobs have been lost as a result of new technology are likely to be in this group. Marx claimed that members of the stagnant surplus population tend to have large families – indeed the lower the workers' wages, the more children they have.
4. At the bottom of the relative surplus population 'dwells the sphere of pauperism'. Pauperism is itself divided into four groups: first, 'criminals, vagabonds, prostitutes, in short the actual lumpenproletariat'; second, paupers who are capable of working but who simply cannot find jobs; third, 'orphans and pauper children' who are likely to be recruited to the reserve army of labour in prosperous years; and fourth, 'the demoralized, the ragged and those unable to work'. This includes the elderly, victims of industrial accidents, 'the mutilated, the sickly, the widows, etc.'

Evaluation and criticisms of Marx

Some aspects of Marx's work on the lower strata have been quite influential. For example, the concept of a reserve army of labour has been applied by some feminist sociologists to the position of women in modern capitalist societies (see pp. 170–1). However, his views have also been heavily criticized.

Kirk Mann argues that Marx uses a wide range of criteria to distinguish the lower strata from the rest of the working class. He says 'Marx links economic,

social and psychological issues to the pathology of individuals and social groups'. He does not stick to using the purely economic definition of class which characterizes his work on other classes. Furthermore, many of Marx's views are so critical of the lower strata they seem to represent little more than personal prejudice. Mann argues:

> *Even allowing for the late Victorian period, the terms 'stagnant', 'floating', 'latent' and 'lowest sediment' suggest an unsympathetic stance. When he asserts that certain sections of the reserve army of labour breed more rapidly, and 'succumb to their incapacity for adaptation', while others are part of some criminal class, Marx reproduces the prejudices of the Victorian middle classes.*
>
> Mann, 1992, p. 139

One reason perhaps why Marx was so critical of the relative surplus population was that he did not see them as having the potential to develop class consciousness. Mann questions this view, suggesting, for example, that urban riots and the existence of Claimants' Unions (organizations for those drawing benefits) show that the 'surplus population' is no more conservative than the working class.

Although Marx's writings on these particular groups seem rather dated, they do reflect problems that more contemporary sociologists have faced in trying to distinguish a group below the working class. Some have emphasized the cultural distinctiveness of such a group, while others have looked for a definition based upon economic differences. Both these elements are contained in Marx's work. Unlike Marx, most contemporary sociologists have used the term underclass to describe the groups at the bottom of the stratification system.

Charles Murray – the underclass in America and Britain

The underclass in America

Although not the first writer in recent times to use the term underclass, the American sociologist Charles Murray has probably done more than anyone else to popularize its usage. In *Losing Ground*, published in 1984, Murray argues that the USA has a growing underclass which poses a serious threat to American society. Murray argues that government policies are encouraging increasing numbers of Americans to become dependent on benefits. During the 1960s, welfare reforms led to an increase in the numbers of never-married black single parents, and to many black youths losing interest in getting a job. Increases in the level of benefits and changes in the rules governing them discouraged self-sufficiency. Murray argues that the growing size of the underclass is a threat to the social and economic well-being of the country because its members are responsible for a rising crime rate and the benefits paid to them are costly to taxpayers.

The underclass in Britain

Charles Murray visited Britain in 1989 and wrote an article for the *Sunday Times*. In it he argues that Britain too has a developing underclass, although unlike America it is neither firmly established nor is it mainly composed of ethnic minorities. Murray defines the underclass in terms of behaviour. He says 'the "underclass" does not refer to a degree of poverty, but to a type of poverty'. These types of poor people were known to him in his youth and:

> *They were defined by their behaviour. Their homes were littered and unkempt. The men in the family were unable to hold a job for more than a few weeks at a time. Drunkenness was common. The children grew up ill-schooled and ill-behaved and contributed a disproportionate share to the local juvenile delinquents.*
>
> Murray, 1989, p. 26

Describing himself as 'a visitor from a plague area come to see if the disease is spreading', he finds signs that Britain too is being infected. These signs consist of figures showing rising rates of illegitimacy, a rising crime rate and an alleged unwillingness among many of Britain's youth to take jobs. In certain neighbourhoods, traditional values such as beliefs in honesty, family life and hard work have been seriously undermined. As a consequence, increasing numbers of children are being raised in a situation where they are likely to take on the underclass values of their parents.

Evaluation of Murray

Murray's views on the underclass add little to theories of stratification. By insisting on using a cultural definition of the underclass he neglects any economic divisions that contribute to the creation of any such class: in many ways his work is better seen as a theory of poverty than as a theory of stratification. We will therefore evaluate his work in more detail in Chapter 5 on poverty and social exclusion (see pp. 323–8), where we will show that in America much of the evidence suggests that the benefits system does not have the effects he claims. The evidence he uses to make out the case for an underclass in Britain is flimsy and sometimes contradictory.

Murray blames the underclass for its predicament, explaining the situation in terms of its own aberrant behaviour. To quote Kirk Mann, he sees the British underclass as 'criminally violent bastards who refuse

to work'. Most sociologists view the so-called underclass rather more sympathetically. Unlike behavioural and cultural accounts of the underclass, structural accounts tend to see the lowest strata in society as the victims of inequality. They therefore tend to make more explicit connections between the underclass and the stratification system of society as a whole.

Ralf Dahrendorf – the underclass and the erosion of citizenship

The culture of the underclass

Dahrendorf's characterization of the underclass has some similarities with that of Murray. Dahrendorf also sees the underclass as a type of social illness, calling it 'a cancer which eats away at the texture of societies'. He believes that an underclass exists both in America and in Britain, and he sees it as having undesirable cultural characteristics. Its culture:

> *includes a lifestyle of laid-back sloppiness, association in changing groups of gangs, congregation around discos or the like, hostility to middle class society, peculiar habits of dress, of hairstyle, often drugs or at least alcohol – a style in other words which has little in common with the values of the work society around.*
>
> Dahrendorf, 1992 p. 13

Although this is very similar in tone to Murray's argument, Dahrendorf parts company from him in explaining how the underclass came about.

Changes in work

Dahrendorf claims that the development of an underclass has been caused by changes in work. Technological innovation has made it possible to produce far more with far fewer workers. He says 'we can produce mountains of goods while reducing the number of producers', and claims that current levels of output could be achieved with 20 per cent fewer workers.

Some have argued that jobs in services will replace jobs in manufacturing, but Dahrendorf does not believe this will eliminate the problem. Wage costs are high in much of Europe and this makes many services too expensive for consumers to afford. The consequence is that they generate little extra employment and they do not prevent the growth of an underclass of the unemployed. In the USA, on the other hand, wages are more flexible and it is more common to employ workers at very low wage rates to provide services. The problem is that these wages are so low that those receiving them cannot escape membership of the underclass.

Even those who have relatively well-paid employment are increasingly employed part-time or on short-term contracts. Many worry about their job security and 'such doubts are one of the reasons why they tend to close doors behind them'. The successful majority who have adequate sources of income make sure that their position is protected. Trade unions, companies and educational establishments all tend to exclude the underclass from the institutions that could bring them success. Unions protect their members' wages at the expense of creating unemployment for others; companies employ the well-qualified; and the education system does not give members of the underclass adequate opportunities to gain the qualifications they need. Dahrendorf says 'Those who are in, by and large, stay in, but those who are not, stay outside.'

The underclass and citizenship

Dahrendorf argues that citizenship involves the existence of entitlements which everybody shares. Members of the underclass are not full citizens because they do not have an economic stake in society, and society provides them with little security. They include many immigrants and young people who have not had a chance to become full members of society, while some of the elderly and 'those who have suffered mishaps of one kind or another' have lost their place in society.

Those who lack a stake in society have no reason to conform to society's norms. They develop their own norms. These are sometimes antagonistic to mainstream society and are passed down from generation to generation. The underclass then comes to pose a threat to other members of society. Although it is not a revolutionary force, the frustrations of the underclass do lead to rioting and violent crime. It therefore threatens the well-being of those who are full citizens.

Dahrendorf sees no easy solution to the problem of the underclass. He doubts that full employment can ever be achieved again but he does believe that there is something to be gained by a more equitable distribution of work. Job sharing and similar measures will allow more members of society to become full citizens. He also calls for 'a hundred if not a thousand local initiatives' by charismatic individuals who can help the underclass escape from its position by promoting community development.

Evaluation

Dahrendorf provides a rather more convincing explanation of the development of the underclass than Murray, but he too resorts to rather stereotypical descriptions of its behaviour. He includes a wide variety of groups in his underclass: the elderly, those

who have suffered 'misfortune', the unemployed, the low-paid, the young and immigrants who have not gained a foothold in society. It is unclear exactly what these groups have in common. While they are all held to lack citizenship rights, Dahrendorf fails to provide a precise definition of those rights.

Furthermore, in his original article (1987) he is unclear about whether the underclass should be seen as a class or not. He says that 'one may wonder whether the word class is as yet appropriate'. The lack of precision in his argument makes it difficult to determine whether the use of the term underclass is appropriate or not. In a later article he says that 'it is precisely not a class', arguing that the underclass is simply a group of people who are not needed by society and who represent a challenge to dominant values.

If Dahrendorf's view that the underclass is not a class is accepted, then, as in the case of Murray, his work seems to add little to theories of stratification.

Anthony Giddens – the underclass and the dual labour market

The middle class, working class and underclass

Giddens (1973) is more confident than Dahrendorf that an underclass exists. He also integrates his theory of the underclass more fully into a theory of stratification, and he defines the underclass more precisely. As mentioned earlier in the chapter (see pp. 69–70), Giddens sees the middle class as those who possess educational or technical qualifications. This gives them an advantage in the labour market over the working class who have only their manual labour power to sell. Members of the underclass also have to rely upon selling their manual labour power, but, compared to the working class, they are at a disadvantage when trying to do so. As a result, they tend to secure employment in the least desirable and most insecure jobs.

The dual labour market

Giddens argues that contemporary capitalist societies have a dual labour market. Jobs in the primary labour market have 'high and stable or progressive levels of economic returns, security of employment and some chance of career mobility'. Jobs in the secondary labour market have 'a low rate of economic return, poor job security, and low chances of career advancement'. Employers need to plan ahead, and to be able to do so they need a reliable and committed group of workers in key positions. High and secure rewards are necessary to ensure the loyalty of these workers. This inevitably raises labour costs. In order to reduce overall costs, workers who are in less important positions and who are more easily replaced are paid much lower wages and are offered less job security. It is these secondary sector workers who come to make up the underclass.

The composition of the underclass

Giddens argues that women and ethnic minorities are particularly likely to be found in the underclass. Employers recruit women to underclass jobs partly because of 'social prejudice', but also because they are likely to interrupt their careers as a result of marriage and childbirth. Ethnic minorities are also the victims of discrimination and prejudice. In the USA, blacks and Hispanics form the main members of the underclass. Indeed, at one point Giddens defines the underclass in terms of its ethnicity. He says:

> *Where ethnic differences serve as a 'disqualifying' market capacity, such that those in the category are heavily concentrated in the lowest paid occupations, or are chronically unemployed or semi-employed, we may speak of the existence of an underclass.*
>
> Giddens, 1973, p. 112.

Giddens sees the American underclass as the most developed, but also sees West Indians and Asians in Britain, and Algerians in France as constituting underclasses. He notes that migrant workers often become members of the underclass. Many black Americans in the underclass migrated to the cities from rural areas. He claims that 'in many contemporary European societies the lack of an indigenous ethnic minority leads to a 'transient underclass' (which turns out not to be so transient after all) being imported from the outside'.

The underclass and class conflict

Giddens argues that there is a basic difference of interest between the underclass and the working class. The underclass are radicalized by their experience of deprivation. On the other hand, members of the working class, with relatively secure jobs and comfortable living standards, have more conservative attitudes. They are likely to be hostile to calls for radical social change emanating from the underclass.

Evaluation of Giddens

Although Giddens's argument is more coherent than Dahrendorf's, it has also come in for strong criticism.

Kirk Mann has raised serious questions about the concept at the heart of Giddens's theory, that of the dual labour market. He argues that there is no clear dividing line between a primary and a secondary labour market. For example, some jobs are well paid but with little job security; others are poorly paid but

relatively secure. It is unclear from the dual labour market theory whether such jobs should be seen as primary or secondary jobs.

Mann also questions the claim that dual labour markets, if they exist, result from the tactics used by employers to recruit suitable workers and keep their labour costs down. He gives an example saying:

> *The miners in the mid-1970s were able to gain large wage increases and considerable improvements in their pension and other occupational welfare packages, but these were not offered by the National Coal Board (NCB). On the contrary, they were fought for and squeezed from the NCB at a time when the NCB was trying to shed labour.*
>
> Mann, 1992, p. 122.

The labour market is influenced by the actions of workers as well as the wishes of employers.

Perhaps Mann's strongest criticism concerns the theory's attempt to explain why certain groups of workers end up in the dual labour market. According to Mann there is no real explanation of why particular groups are the victims of discrimination. The dual labour market theory fails to provide an account of the 'racist and sexist ideologies' that lead to the exclusion of women and ethnic minorities from many of the better jobs. Furthermore, Giddens and other dual labour market theorists ignore the role of workers and union organizations in excluding women and ethnic minorities.

The relationships between ethnicity and the underclass and between gender and poverty have both been the subject of considerable sociological controversy. We analyse these controversies in later chapters (see pp. 283–5 on ethnicity and the underclass and pp. 311–13 on gender and poverty). Some sociologists have also questioned Giddens's view that the underemployed or semi-employed should be included as part of the underclass. These views will be dealt with later in this section.

Duncan Gallie – the heterogeneity of the underclass

Labour market inequalities

Duncan Gallie (1988, 1994) has questioned both conservative views of the underclass (such as those of Murray) and radical ones (such as those of Giddens). He denies that the so-called underclass has a distinctive culture. Like Mann, he rejects the idea of a dual labour market, suggesting that there is little empirical evidence that it exists. However, he follows Giddens in arguing that there are substantial and increasing numbers of people in a very weak position in the labour market. He says:

> *A significant sector of the employed population receives pay close to or below the official poverty line and there are marked inequalities of pay by race and gender. There has been a substantial increase in the proportion of part-time rather than full-time work. Perhaps most important of all, there has been a substantial increase in the 1980s of the most severe type of labour market disadvantage, the experience of unemployment.*
>
> Gallie, 1988

All of this does seem to point to a growing underclass, but what Gallie questions is whether the groups involved can be seen as forming a class in either cultural or other terms.

The culture of the underclass

Gallie uses data from the Economic and Social Research Council's Social Change and Economic Life Initiative to evaluate different claims about the underclass (Gallie, 1994). This research used interviews carried out in 1986 to examine the labour market in six areas: Swindon, Aberdeen, Northampton, Coventry, Rochdale and Kircaldy. It found no evidence to support Murray's claim that the unemployed lacked the attitudes and commitment necessary to hold down employment. Both the employed and the unemployed had had an average of six jobs during their work careers.

Looking at the average length of the longest job ever held by different groups again revealed little variation. For the employed the average was 76 months, for the unemployed 74 months, and for the long-term unemployed 73 months. The unemployed, it seemed, had, in the past at least, been able to keep jobs for a substantial period, suggesting they were by no means unemployable. Furthermore, the unemployed were more committed to working than the employed: 77 per cent of the unemployed said they would want to work even if they had enough money to retire in comfort, compared to 66 per cent of the employed and self-employed.

Nor was there any evidence that the long-term unemployed became apathetic and resigned to being without work. Those who had been unemployed for long periods felt a greater sense of deprivation at being without work than those who had been without work for only a short time.

Divisions in the underclass

Gallie's research did find that the unemployed were materially deprived, and tended to be considerably worse off than those in employment. Nevertheless, he did not accept the view of some radical writers that this had led to them forming a distinctive group below the working class. To Gallie, there was little chance of, or evidence for, either the unemployed, or

more generally the most disadvantaged in society, forming a united, class-conscious group.

Ethnic minorities are disadvantaged in the labour market, but there is considerable variation in individual situations. Some members of ethnic minorities are very successful.

The same applies to women, and in any case women are less likely to be unemployed than men. Although many women leave the labour market when they have young children, most women appear to regard this as 'basically legitimate'. They have little sense of grievance that would lead them to make common cause with other people who have no paid employment. Women are more likely to be employed in part-time work than men, 'but the evidence suggests that women involved in such work have high levels of satisfaction with their employment situation'.

Gallie sees the unemployed as the group most likely to develop some sort of distinctive underclass culture. Even so, many of the unemployed quickly find work and 'there are huge flows into and out of the stock of the unemployed each month'. This does not disguise the existence of a large and growing group of long-term unemployed. Yet even this group is unlikely to develop any sort of underclass consciousness.

The long-term unemployed are quite heterogeneous. Men and women in this group are often in different personal circumstances, and individuals suffering long-term unemployment may be at very different stages in the life cycle. For example, an unemployed female school leaver may feel she has little in common with an unemployed man of 55.

The underclass and the working class

Gallie also found little evidence of a political split between the working class and the underclass. Members of the working class who had kept their jobs did not blame unemployment on the laziness or personal inadequacy of those without jobs. There is no evidence of a 'conservative backlash'.

In his later research (1994), Gallie found that the unemployed tended to have traditional working-class political views. Very few of them had engaged in non-conventional political protests, such as going on demonstrations and marches or undertaking direct action. On the other hand, they were more likely to express support for government spending on the welfare state than members of the working class. They were also more likely to support the Labour Party: 54 per cent of employed unskilled manual workers said they would vote Labour, compared to 67 per cent of the short-term unemployed, 78 per cent of the medium-term, and 78 per cent of the long-term unemployed who had previously had unskilled manual work. Gallie concludes that 'unemployment neither leads to a propensity to direct action nor to political passivity. Rather the resentments of the unemployed are channelled into increased support for the traditional party of the working class – the Labour Party.'

Despite all his arguments, Gallie does not dismiss the idea of an underclass out of hand. He does say:

> *The one case where the concept of an underclass would appear to have some relevance is that of the long-term unemployed. Their deprivations are distinctive from those generated directly by the employment relationship and they have the type of stability over time that is assumed by underclass theory.*
>
> Gallie, 1988

Even this tentative use of the term is qualified. Gallie points out that the long-term unemployed have close connections with the working class: most were formerly manual workers or came from working-class backgrounds.

Evaluation

While Gallie successfully shows that the supposed underclass, particularly the unemployed, may not form a particularly cohesive group, some writers question whether this invalidates the idea of the underclass altogether. Ken Roberts (1997) argues that the underclass includes a wide variety of groups with different lifestyles, but it may still be a useful concept.

Similarly 'hustlers, the homeless, and young single mothers do not share a common way of life. Welfare dependants who need to know their rights develop quite different skill repertoires to drug dealers.' Nevertheless, they all have certain characteristics in common. They are all more deprived than the working class, their deprivation may persist over considerable periods of time, and they may have lifestyles and social networks which are distinct from those in employment.

While Roberts is not sure that an underclass exists yet, in contrast to Gallie he does believe it is quite likely that one is being formed and that it will become well established in the future. (See pp. 330–3 for ethnographic studies relating to the underclass debate.)

W.G. Runciman – the underclass as claimants

The underclass and the class structure

Runciman has devised a seven-class model of the British class structure based upon differences in control, ownership and marketability (Runciman,

1990). We will examine this model in detail later in this chapter (see pp. 117–18). Runciman identifies an underclass at the bottom of his class structure. He explicitly rejects Giddens's view that it should be defined as 'a category of workers systematically disadvantaged in the labour market'. Runciman mentions Gallie's work in suggesting that a different definition of the underclass is needed.

Runciman defines the underclass as: 'those members of British society whose roles place them more or less permanently at the economic level where benefits are paid by the state to those unable to participate in the labour market at all'.

Many are from ethnic minority backgrounds, and many are women, particularly single mothers, but it is their reliance upon state benefits that places them in the underclass, not their gender or ethnicity. (A similar view which also sees the underclass as consisting of claimants has been put forward by Frank Field. It is discussed on pp. 328–30.)

Criticisms of Runciman

Runciman appears to offer a straightforward and plausible definition of the underclass. However, Hartley Dean and Peter Taylor-Gooby (1992) have attacked his views. They point out that Runciman stresses the importance of 'career' in class analysis: that is, the future prospects and past history of individuals in the class system must be examined before allocating them to a class. Yet Runciman fails to take this into account when considering the underclass.

For example, figures suggest that on average lone parents stay as lone parents for a mere 35 months. Similarly, most of the long-term unemployed have had jobs in the past. They are unstable members of the working class rather than members of a stable underclass. To Dean and Taylor-Gooby the so-called underclass is simply too unstable and impermanent to be seen as a class.

They also attack Runciman for basing his definition of the underclass on quite different criteria to those used in his definitions of other classes. Members of the underclass are not defined in terms of their relationship to the market but in 'purely institutional terms'. They exist in a relationship with the state, not the economic system. In terms of Runciman's definition, their existence depends upon the existence of state benefits. Nevertheless, in comparing his class scheme with classes in Britain in 1910, Runciman equates the underclass with a 'loafer class' described by an Edwardian commentator called D'Aeth. Dean and Taylor-Gooby say:

> *The implication would seem to do Runciman's argument no good at all, because without an institutional relationship to the post-war welfare state, the roles assigned to the underclass are defined in terms of behaviour – the intermittence of their labour and their drinking habits.*
>
> Dean and Taylor-Gooby, 1992, pp. 40–1

Conclusion

Dean and Taylor-Gooby's latter criticism is not particularly strong. However Runciman defines the Edwardian underclass, it is clear that the contemporary underclass is defined in terms of its dependence on benefits and not in terms of behaviour. This dependence can be seen as a consequence of the lack of control, power and particularly marketability possessed by the underclass.

However, Dean and Taylor-Gooby do have a point when they suggest that there is a constant danger of the term underclass being misused. They say that 'underclass is a symbolic term with no single meaning, but a great many applications. It represents, not a useful concept, but a potent symbol.' It has become a symbol of 'socially constituted definitions of failure'. However it is used by sociologists, in society in general it is used to lay the blame on the disadvantaged for the social problems of which they are the victims.

Dean suggests that the term underclass should be abandoned. Not only is it misused, but in his view no underclass as such exists. He says that it 'does not usefully define a real or tangible phenomenon'. He believes that the debate about the underclass has touched on important issues though. He therefore concludes:

> *Recent structural and cultural changes have intersected, not to produce an 'underclass', but to shift the boundaries between core workers, peripheral workers and non-workers; between the individual and the family; and between the citizen and the welfare state. Such changes have also exacerbated regional inequalities and inner-city decay and, some would argue, may have contributed to rising levels of crime. We should not go in search of the underclass, but strive for a better understanding of structural and cultural changes and their complex interrelationships and effects.*
>
> Dean, 1991

Social mobility in capitalist society

Having looked at the different classes, we will now consider the amount of movement from one class to another within capitalist society.

Ascription and achievement

This section examines the nature of social mobility in capitalist society. It is generally agreed that the rate of social mobility – the amount of movement from one stratum to another – is significantly higher in industrial societies than in pre-industrial societies. Industrial societies are therefore sometimes described as open. In other words, they have a relatively low degree of closure.

In particular, it is argued that status in pre-industrial societies is largely ascribed, whereas in industrial societies it is increasingly achieved. As a result, ascribed characteristics such as class of origin, sex, race and kinship relationships have less and less influence on an individual's social status. Status is seen to be increasingly achieved on the basis of merit: talent, ability, ambition and hard work are steadily replacing ascribed characteristics as the criteria for determining a person's position in the class system. Indeed, a number of sociologists have suggested that this mechanism of social selection is built into the values of industrial society. Thus Talcott Parsons (1964) argues that achievement is one of the major values of American society. Individuals are judged and accorded prestige in terms of their occupational status, which is seen to be largely achieved by their own effort and ability.

The importance of social mobility

Sociologists are interested in social mobility for a number of reasons:

1 The rate of social mobility may have an important effect on class formation. For example, Anthony Giddens (1973) suggests that if the rate of social mobility is low, class solidarity and cohesion will be high. Most individuals will remain in their class of origin and this will 'provide for the reproduction of common life experiences over the generations'. As a result, distinctive class subcultures and strong class identifications will tend to develop.

2 A study of social mobility can provide an indication of the life chances of members of society. For example, it can show the degree to which a person's class of origin influences his or her chances of obtaining a high status occupation.

3 It is important to know how people respond to the experience of social mobility. For example, do the downwardly mobile resent their misfortune and form a pool of dissatisfaction which might threaten the stability of society?

Before considering these issues, it is necessary to examine the nature and extent of social mobility in capitalist society.

Types of social mobility

Sociologists have identified two main types of social mobility:

1 The first, intragenerational mobility, refers to social mobility within a single generation. It is measured by comparing the occupational status of an individual at two or more points in time. Thus, if a person begins their working life as an unskilled manual worker and ten years later is employed as an accountant, they are socially mobile in terms of intragenerational mobility.

2 The second type, intergenerational mobility, refers to social mobility between generations. It is measured by comparing the occupational status of sons with that of their fathers (and only rarely the occupational status of fathers or mothers with that of their daughters). Thus, if the son of an unskilled manual worker becomes an accountant, he is socially mobile in terms of intergenerational mobility.

This section will focus mainly on intergenerational mobility, the type of social mobility most frequently studied by sociologists.

Problems of measurement

There are many problems associated with the study of social mobility:

1 Occupation is used as an indicator of social class and researchers use different criteria for ranking occupations. Many researchers classify occupations in terms of the prestige associated with them; others place more emphasis on the economic rewards attached to them. As a result, occupational classifications differ and the results of various studies are not strictly comparable.

2 A further problem arises from the fact that it is not possible to identify many members of the bourgeoisie on the basis of their occupations: a person's occupation does not necessarily say anything about the extent of their investments in private industry.

3 Furthermore, many studies of social mobility have not included data on women's mobility, and patterns of female mobility tend to be rather different from men's. This is largely because women tend to be concentrated in particular parts of the occupational structure.

4 The findings of studies can be expressed in different ways; for example in simple percentages or in odds ratios, and odds ratios themselves can be calculated in different ways (see below, p. 103). There is controversy about which types of data best represent the structure of opportunity in society. Similar controversies surround the use of absolute and relative mobility rates (see below for details).

In view of these and other problems, the findings of social mobility studies must be regarded with caution.

David Glass – social mobility before 1949

The first major study of intergenerational mobility in England and Wales was conducted by David Glass and his associates in 1949 (Glass (ed.), 1954). The main findings of this study are summarized in Table 2.17.

The percentages in the horizontal rows (in the top right-hand corner of each cell) compare the status of sons with the status of their fathers. Thus, taking all the sons whose fathers were in the status category 1, 38.8 per cent of these sons are themselves in category 1, 14.6 per cent are in category 2 and so on through to category 7 in which only 1.5 per cent of sons born into category 1 are located. The figures in bold print, going diagonally across the table, indicate the extent to which sons share the same status as their fathers. For example, 27.4 per cent of all sons whose fathers were in category 7 are themselves in that same category in 1949.

The percentages in the vertical columns (in the bottom left-hand corner of each cell) refer to the parental status of the men found in each category in 1949. For example, of all the men in status category 1 in 1949, 48.5 per cent have fathers who were in that category, 15.5 per cent have fathers who were in category 2 and so on. The bold figures show the percentage of men in each category who have the same status as their fathers. For example, 25 per cent of all the men in category 7 are the sons of fathers from that category.

Overall, the table indicates a fairly high level of intergenerational mobility. Nearly two-thirds of the men interviewed in the 1949 study were in a different status category from that of their fathers. Roughly one-third moved upward and one-third downward. However, for the most part, the change in status is not very great. Most mobility is short range: sons generally moving to a category either adjacent or close to that of their fathers. There is little long-range mobility either from top to bottom or vice versa.

In the higher-status categories there is a considerable degree of self-recruitment – a process by which members of a stratum are recruited from the sons of

Table 2.17 Social mobility in England and Wales before 1949

Fathers' status category	Sons' status category in 1949: 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
1	**38.8** **48.5**	14.6 11.9	20.2 7.9	6.2 1.7	14.0 1.3	4.7 1.0	1.5 0.5	100.0 (129)
2	10.7 15.5	**26.7** **25.2**	22.7 10.3	12.0 3.9	20.6 2.2	5.3 1.4	2.0 0.7	100.0 (150)
3	3.5 11.7	10.1 22.0	**18.8** **19.7**	19.1 14.4	35.7 8.6	6.7 3.9	6.1 5.0	100.0 (345)
4	2.1 10.7	3.9 12.6	11.2 17.6	**21.2** **24.0**	43.0 15.6	12.4 10.8	6.2 7.5	100.0 (518)
5	0.9 13.6	2.4 22.6	7.5 34.5	12.3 40.3	**47.3** **50.0**	17.1 43.5	12.5 44.6	100.0 (1,510)
6	0.0 0.0	1.3 3.8	4.1 5.8	8.8 8.7	39.1 12.5	**31.2** **24.1**	15.5 16.7	100.0 (458)
7	0.0 0.0	0.8 1.9	3.6 4.2	8.3 7.0	36.4 9.8	23.5 15.3	**27.4** **25.0**	100.0 (387)
Total	100.0 (103)	100.0 (159)	100.0 (330)	100.0 (459)	100.0 (1,429)	100.0 (593)	100.0 (424)	(3,497)

Status categories

No. Description

1 Professional and high administrative
2 Managerial and executive
3 Inspectional, supervisory and other non-manual (higher grade)
4 Inspectional, supervisory and other non-manual (lower grade)
5 Skilled manual and routine grades of non-manual
6 Semi-skilled manual
7 Unskilled manual

Source: D. V. Glass (ed.) (1954) *Social Mobility in Britain*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, p. 183.

those who already belong to that stratum. The way the figures are presented tends to disguise the degree of self-recruitment. From the table it appears that the highest level of self-recruitment is in category 5: in 1949, 50 per cent of the members of category 5 are the sons of fathers who were in that same category. However, since category 5 is by far the largest group, a relatively high degree of self-recruitment is to be expected. By comparison, category 1 is a very small group made up of just over 3.5 per cent of the sample. Yet in 1949, 48.5 per cent of the members of category 1 are the sons of fathers who were in that same category. This is over 13 times greater than would be expected by chance. If parental occupation had no influence on a person's status, only some 3.5 per cent of the sons in category 1 would have fathers in that category.

Family background appears to have an important influence on life chances. The higher the occupational status of the father, the more likely the son is to obtain a high-status position. Most men are likely to stay at roughly the same level as their fathers and this is particularly true at the top end of the scale. Glass's study therefore reveals a significant degree of inequality of opportunity.

Criticisms of Glass

Any conclusions drawn from this study must, however, be tentative. Not only is the data now very dated, but the research methodology has been the subject of lengthy criticism. In particular, it has been argued that Glass's findings do not reflect changes in the occupational structure before 1949. For example, a comparison of the actual numbers of sons born into the first four status categories (shown in the right-hand vertical column of the table) with the number found in those categories in 1949 (shown in the horizontal row across the bottom) suggests a contraction of white-collar occupations. However, as Payne, Ford and Robertson note (1977) there was a 16 per cent expansion of these occupations during the 30 years preceding 1949. This throws doubt on the validity of Glass's sample. It suggests that his findings may seriously underestimate the rate of social mobility and in particular the degree of long-range upward mobility. (For a detailed criticism of Glass's methodology see Payne, Ford and Robertson, 1977.)

The Oxford Mobility Study

After 1949, the next major study of social mobility in England and Wales was conducted in 1972 and published in 1980, with an updated version published in 1987 (Goldthorpe, 1980, Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1987). Known as the Oxford Mobility Study, it was undertaken by a group of sociologists at Nuffield College, Oxford. The results cannot be compared in detail with those of the 1949 study since different criteria were used as a basis for constructing the various strata. Where Glass used a classification based on occupational prestige, the Oxford study categorized occupations largely in terms of their market rewards. These categories are based on John Goldthorpe's original seven-class scheme, which was introduced earlier in the chapter (see p. 70) and will be discussed later (see pp. 114–15).

Table 2.18 summarizes the main findings on intergenerational mobility from the Oxford survey.

Absolute mobility

The 1972 study revealed higher rates of long-range mobility than the 1949 study. For example, Table 2.18 shows that 7.1 per cent of sons of class 7 fathers were in class 1 in 1972. In addition, the table suggests that there are high rates of absolute mobility (the total amount of social mobility); in no social class did more than 50 per cent of the sample originate from the same social class. The Oxford Mobility Study found high rates of social mobility, and more was upward than downward. It also found that the chances of those from working-class backgrounds reaching a higher social class had improved during the course of the century.

Relative mobility

On the surface, these findings seem to support the claim that British society is becoming more open. However, the study found that relative mobility chances varied greatly between the classes, and the relative chances had changed little during the course of the century.

The concept of relative mobility refers not to the total amount of social mobility, but to the comparative chances of those from various class backgrounds of reaching particular positions in the social structure. Thus 45.7 per cent of sons with class 1 fathers – but just 7.1 per cent of those with class 7 fathers – ended up in class 1.

By comparing the relative mobility chances of different generations it is possible to determine whether the class structure has become more open. In Figure 2.2 those born in 1908–17 are compared with those born in 1938–47. The seven-class scheme usually used by Goldthorpe is simplified by amalgamating classes to reduce the number of classes to three. (The service class consists of classes 1 and 2, the intermediate class of classes 3, 4 and 5, and the working class of classes 6 and 7.)

Figure 2.2 shows that the chances of members of all social classes attaining service-class jobs increased over the period studied. However, this was largely the

result of changes in the occupational structure: service-class jobs as a proportion of male employment rose from 13 to 25 per cent, while intermediate jobs declined from 33 to 30 per cent, and working-class jobs from 54 to 45 per cent. The relative chances of the sons of those from different classes taking advantage of the increasing room at the top of the stratification system changed little.

This has been neatly summarized by Kellner and Wilby (1980) as the 1:2:4 rule of relative hope. This rule suggests that over the period covered, as a rough estimate, whatever the chances of a working-class boy reaching the service class, they were twice as great for intermediate-class boys, and four times as great for service-class boys. In other words, there has been no significant increase in the openness of the British stratification system.

Trends since the Oxford Mobility Study

In a follow-up study Goldthorpe and Payne (1986) brought figures on social mobility more up-to-date by examining data from the 1983 *British Election Survey*. They wanted to discover whether economic recession in the period 1972–83 had produced different patterns of mobility to those found in the Oxford study, carried out during a period of economic expansion.

Overall, they found few differences between the results of the two studies. Service-class jobs continued to expand as a proportion of all male jobs; absolute mobility continued to increase, but relative mobility stayed about the same.

However, they did find that unemployment had affected the position of all classes, and the working class in particular. There were still opportunities for upward mobility from the working class, but members of the working class were more likely to become unemployed than members of the higher classes.

Table 2.18 The Oxford study of mobility

Fathers' class	Sons' class in 1972: 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
1	**45.7** **25.3**	19.1 12.4	11.6 9.6	6.8 6.7	4.9 3.2	5.4 2.0	6.5 2.4	100.0 (680)
2	29.4 13.1	**23.3** **12.2**	12.1 8.0	6.0 4.8	9.7 5.2	10.8 3.1	8.6 2.5	100.0 (547)
3	18.6 10.4	15.9 10.4	**13.0** **10.8**	7.4 7.4	13.0 8.7	15.7 5.7	16.4 6.0	100.0 (687)
4	14.0 10.1	14.4 12.2	9.1 9.8	**21.1** **27.2**	9.9 8.6	15.1 7.1	16.3 7.7	100.0 (886)
5	14.4 12.5	13.7 14.0	10.2 13.2	7.7 12.1	**15.9** **16.6**	21.4 12.2	16.8 9.6	100.0 (1,072)
6	7.8 16.4	8.8 21.7	8.4 26.1	6.4 24.0	12.4 31.0	**30.6** **41.8**	25.6 35.2	100.0 (2,577)
7	7.1 12.1	8.5 17.1	8.8 22.6	5.7 17.8	12.9 26.7	24.8 28.0	**32.2** **35.6**	100.0 (2,126)
Total	100.0 (1,230)	100.0 (1,050)	100.0 (827)	100.0 (687)	100.0 (1,026)	100.0 (1,883)	100.0 (1,872)	(8,575)

Classes
No. Description
1 Higher professionals, higher grade administrators, managers in large industrial concerns and large proprietors
2 Lower professionals, higher grade technicians, lower grade administrators, managers in small businesses and supervisors of non-manual employees
3 Routine non-manual (mainly clerical and sales) employees
4 Small proprietors and self-employed artisans
5 Lower grade technicians and supervisors of manual workers
6 Skilled manual workers
7 Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers

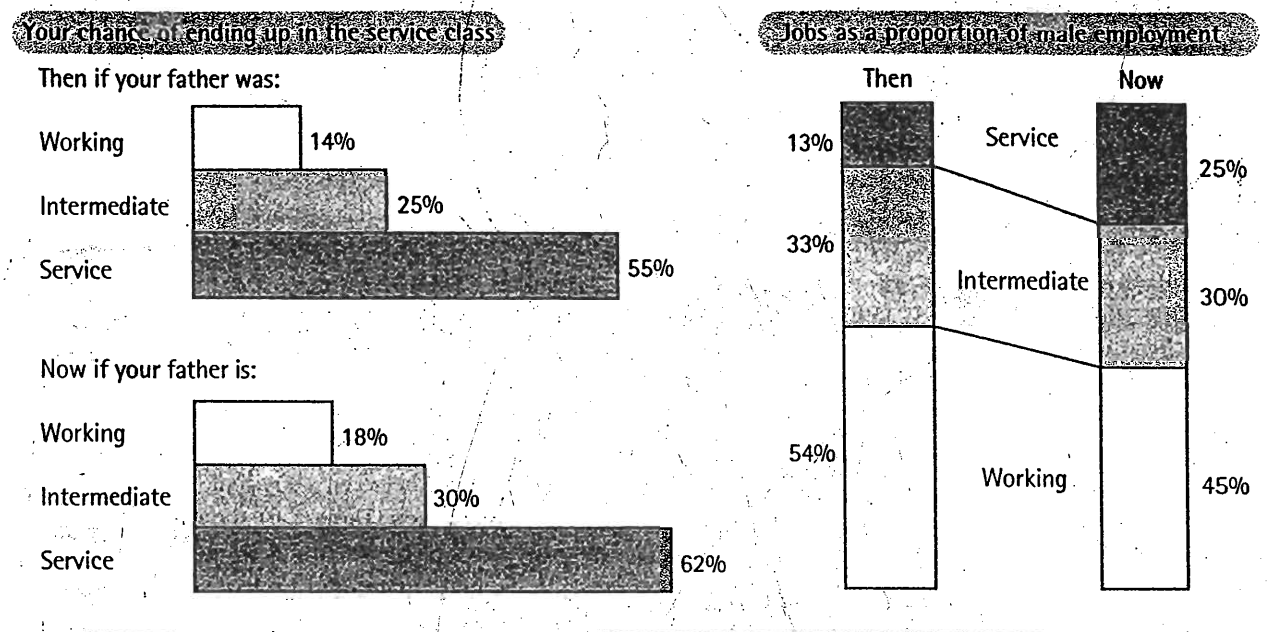
Source: J. Goldthorpe (1980) *Social Mobility and Class Structure in Modern Britain*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, pp. 44–48.

Elite self-recruitment

The Oxford Mobility Study and Goldthorpe's later work suggest that there is not a high degree of social closure at the top of the British stratification system, but Goldthorpe can be criticized for ignoring the existence of small elites or, in Marxist terms, a ruling class. Goldthorpe's class 1 is a relatively large grouping, containing 10–15 per cent of the male working population. Studies that concentrate on small elite groups within class 1 reveal a much higher degree of closure.

The process by which members of wealthy and powerful groups are drawn from the children of those who already belong to such groups is known as elite self-recruitment. A number of studies have indicated the degree of elite self-recruitment in Britain. For example, a survey by Stanworth and

Figure 2.2 Relative mobility chances of different generations



Source: R. Kelley, cited in Wilson, *The Sociology of Modern Britain*, 1st edn, 1985.

Giddens (1974), designed to investigate the social origins of company chairmen, revealed a high degree of elite self-recruitment. Out of 460 company chairmen in 1971, only 1 per cent had manual working-class origins, 10 per cent had middle-class backgrounds, and 66 per cent came from the upper class, which was defined as 'industrialists, landowners, (and) others who possess substantial property and wealth'. (There were insufficient data to classify the remaining 23 per cent.) (See Chapter 9 for further studies of elite self-recruitment.)

Thus the Oxford study, while showing a relatively high rate of mobility into class 1, does not indicate the degree of elite self-recruitment. Though class 1 as a whole appears fairly open, elite groups within that class are relatively closed.

Gender and mobility

J. H. Goldthorpe and C. Payne's views on gender and social mobility

A second major problem with the Oxford Mobility Study is the fact that it ignores women. Goldthorpe believes that the unit of stratification in industrial societies is the family. The class position of the family is given according to the occupation of the main breadwinner, which is usually a man. Other sociologists hotly dispute this view. (For details of the debate on gender and stratification see pp. 109–11.)

With specific reference to gender and social mobility, Goldthorpe and Payne have examined data from the 1983 *British Election Survey* to determine what difference it makes to the results of studies of social mobility if three different approaches are adopted to including women in the data (Goldthorpe and Payne, 1986):

1. In the first approach, women are included but their class is determined by their husband's occupation. Goldthorpe and Payne found this made little difference to either the absolute or relative rates of intergenerational social mobility found in studies using an all-male sample.
2. In the second approach, the occupation of the partner in full-time employment with the highest class position is used to determine the class of both partners. Single women are included on the basis of their own job. This approach also made little difference to relative mobility rates although Goldthorpe and Payne conceded that it does at least allow information on women who are unattached, or who are household heads, to be included.
3. In the third approach, individuals are allocated to classes on the basis of their own jobs. This did show that absolute mobility rates for women and men were very different. This was largely due to the fact that women are distributed differently from men in the occupational structure (see later sections). However, once again this method of including women in the data made little difference to the intergenerational, relative mobility rates of different classes. In other words, the mobility chances of women compared to other women from different classes were as unequal as the social mobility chances of men compared to men from other classes.

Table 2.19 Gross mobility rates by gender in the Scottish Mobility Study in 1974–5

Gender	Mobility (%) Upward	Static	Downward	% upwardly mobile moved to Classes I or II	Classes I or IV
Men	42.5	27.4	30.4	44	29
Women	32.2	19.9	48.8	6	67

Source: P. Abbott and G. Payne, 'Women's social mobility: terms agreed', in G. Payne and P. Abbott (eds) (1990) *The Social Mobility of Women*, Falmer Press, Basingstoke, p. 18.

Goldthorpe and Payne therefore concluded that the non-inclusion of women in earlier studies of social mobility was not important since it made little difference to the overall results, at least in terms of determining the openness of the stratification system.

Alternative views

Michelle Stanworth (1984) is highly critical of Goldthorpe for insisting on categorizing women in social mobility studies according to the class of their husband. She prefers an approach based upon individuals being allocated to a class according to their own job.

Some research seems to support Stanworth's view in that it shows important differences in the social mobility of men and women. Anthony Heath has used data from the 1972 and 1975 *General Household Surveys* to examine the intergenerational mobility of women (Heath, 1981). He compared women's social class with their father's class (though not their mother's), and reached the following conclusions:

1 Women of class 1 and 2 origins were much more likely to be downwardly mobile than men of the same class origin. This was largely because of the preponderance of females in class 3 (routine non-manual jobs).

2 Women from higher social classes were less likely to follow in their father's footsteps than men from the same classes.

3 On the other hand, women of class 5, 6 or 7 origins were far more likely to be upwardly mobile to class 3 than their male counterparts, although Heath points out that whether this movement can be considered 'upward mobility' is a moot point. As indicated earlier, some sociologists do not believe that routine non-manual workers have any significant advantages over most manual workers (see pp. 66–7, 68–9).

Heath argues that the disadvantages suffered by the daughters of fathers in the higher classes are greater than the advantages experienced by the daughters of fathers from lower classes. If Heath is to be believed, then the British stratification system is less open than studies based on males would suggest.

Rather similar conclusions have been reached by Pamela Abbott and Geoff Payne (1990). They used data from a study of social mobility in Scotland to compare men and women. This study was carried out by Geoff Payne in 1974–5 and used a sample of 5,000 men born between 1909 and 1955 and 3,500 wives of these men. Table 2.19 shows the gross mobility rates of the men and women in the sample.

The data demonstrate that many more women than men were downwardly mobile, fewer women were upwardly mobile, and very few of the women who did manage to be upwardly mobile ended up in the top two classes. Once again they suggest that the omission of women from data can give a misleading impression of absolute mobility rates.

The Essex study of mobility

As part of their study of social class in Britain, Gordon Marshall, David Rose, Howard Newby and Carolyn Vogler (1988) collected data on social mobility (details of the study can be found on p. 83). Since the study collected data on male and female mobility rates it allows some evaluation of the controversies about female mobility. It also provides more recent data than the Oxford Mobility Study as it was carried out in 1984. The study collected information on both intergenerational and intragenerational mobility.

Table 2.20 shows Marshall *et al.*'s results on intergenerational mobility. These are based on a comparison between the respondent and the person who was their 'chief childhood supporter' at the same age as the respondent. It uses Goldthorpe's original seven-class model (see pp. 114–15 for details of this model).

Like earlier studies the Essex study found there had been an expansion of white-collar jobs and consequently there were high absolute rates of upward mobility. The results for men are fairly similar to those in the Oxford study, but the results for women show different patterns of social mobility. They confirm the findings of Heath, and Abbott and Payne that women's mobility patterns are affected a great deal by the concentration of

Table 2.20 Class distribution of respondents by sex and class of chief childhood supporter at same age as respondent – Goldthorpe class categories

		Class of respondent								
		I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	Total	
Males (n = 632)										
	I	27.7	31.9	12.8	6.4	4.3	10.6	6.4	100.0	(47)
	II	20.8	39.6	3.8	11.3	1.9	13.2	9.4	100.0	(53)
Class of chief	III	25.0	21.9	0.0	6.3	9.4	31.3	6.3	100.0	(32)
childhood	IV	14.4	15.6	5.6	28.9	10.0	11.1	14.4	100.0	(90)
supporter	V	14.4	18.9	4.5	7.2	13.5	13.5	27.9	100.0	(111)
	VI	8.0	12.4	9.5	6.6	14.6	23.4	25.5	100.0	(139)
	VII	11.9	8.1	4.4	11.9	10.0	18.8	35.0	100.0	(160)
Females (n = 425)										
	I	13.8	27.6	48.3	3.4	0.0	0.0	6.9	100.0	(29)
	II	14.3	42.9	32.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	10.7	100.0	(28)
Class of chief	III	4.2	37.5	37.5	4.2	0.0	4.2	12.5	100.0	(24)
childhood	IV	9.1	25.5	30.9	9.1	3.6	1.8	20.0	100.0	(55)
supporter	V	0.0	27.5	42.5	6.3	1.3	6.3	16.3	100.0	(80)
	VI	3.6	15.3	44.1	2.7	5.4	8.1	20.7	100.0	(111)
	VII	2.0	8.2	30.6	8.2	6.1	5.1	39.8	100.0	(98)

Source: G. Marshall, D. Rose, H. Newby and C. Vogler (1988) *Social Class in Modern Britain*, Unwin Hyman, London, p. 77.

women in routine non-manual jobs. Large numbers of women were both upwardly and downwardly mobile into class III.

Odds ratios

The Essex study also expressed the data collected in terms of odds ratio tables measuring relative mobility chances. These compare the chances of people competing for places in classes. For example, they measure the chances of service-class children ending up in the working class compared to the chances of working-class children ending up in the service class. As Marshall *et al.* put it, they 'are an indication of the relative chances of getting to alternative class destinations. They are the outcomes, as it were, of a competition between individuals of different class origins to achieve or avoid one rather than another destination in the class structure.' Tables 2.21, 2.22 and 2.23 use this type of data:

1 Table 2.21 compares the class of a person's chief childhood supporter with that person's first job.

2 Table 2.22 compares the class of a person's chief childhood supporter with that person's current job.

3 Table 2.23 compares a person's class in their first job with their current class.

The tables are based upon a simplified three-class version of Goldthorpe's scheme (i.e. service class, intermediate class and working class). For example, Table 2.21 shows that when men from service- and working-class backgrounds compete for service-class rather than working-class destinations, those from service-class backgrounds are 7.76 times as successful. For women the equivalent figure is 14.07.

According to the authors, the tables support Goldthorpe's contention that relative intergenerational mobility rates for women are influenced by class in a similar way and to a similar extent to those of men. Marshall *et al.* say 'Overall patterns among women and men are not dissimilar although there are differences in the relative odds pertaining to particular transitions.' According to this view, class background influences women's mobility as much as it does men's, although the absolute patterns of mobility are different for the sexes because women are more highly concentrated in certain parts of the stratification system than men.

Table 2.21 Relative mobility chances in terms of odds ratios, by Goldthorpe class and sex. Transition from class of origin to class position on entry into employment

Pairs of origin classes in competition	Pairs of destination classes competed for: Men S vs I	Men S vs W	Men I vs W	Women S vs I	Women S vs W	Women I vs W
S vs I	2.02	4.13	2.05	2.43	4.63	1.90
S vs W	1.95	7.76	4.09	3.84	14.07	3.63
I vs W	0.96	1.88	2.00	1.58	3.04	1.91

Table 2.22 Relative mobility chances in terms of odds ratios, by Goldthorpe class and sex. Transition from class of origin to present class position

Pairs of origin classes in competition	Pairs of destination classes competed for: Men S vs I	Men S vs W	Men I vs W	Women S vs I	Women S vs W	Women I vs W
S vs I	2.75	3.09	1.12	1.67	3.75	2.23
S vs W	4.00	7.35	1.82	3.77	12.95	3.43
I vs W	1.47	2.37	1.62	2.23	3.45	1.54

Table 2.23 Relative mobility chances in terms of odds ratios, by Goldthorpe class and sex. Transition from class on entry into employment to present class position

Pairs of origin classes in competition	Pairs of destination classes competed for: Men S vs I	Men S vs W	Men I vs W	Women S vs I	Women S vs W	Women I vs W
S vs I	2.39	8.71	3.64	4.31	10.96	2.51
S vs W	6.08	41.68	7.01	6.04	50.00	8.15
I vs W	2.54	4.79	1.93	1.40	4.56	3.25

Service (Classes I and II)
I: Intermediate (Classes III, IV and V)
W: Working classes (VI and VII)

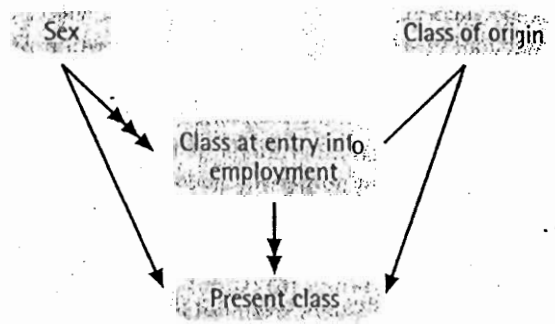
Source: G. Marshall, D. Rose, H. Newby, and C. Vogler (1988) *Social Class in Modern Britain*, Unwin Hyman, London, p. 105.

Sex, class, intergenerational and intragenerational mobility

The Essex study also examined the relationship between sex, class of origin and class at entry into employment and present class. Figure 2.3 illustrates its findings. The number of heads in the arrow indicates the strength of the effects involved. Thus the data suggests that sex has a particularly strong influence on first jobs but a rather weaker effect upon current class. Class of origin has a strong effect upon present class, and the first job also affects the class people end up in.

The data include some interesting findings on intragenerational mobility. Some 84 per cent of men who started their careers in service-class jobs and

Figure 2.3 The relationship between class of origin, class destination and sex



Source: G. Marshall, D. Rose, H. Newby, and C. Vogler (1988) *Social Class in Modern Britain*, Unwin Hyman, London, p. 106.

who came from service-class backgrounds were still in the service class when they were interviewed. However only 64 per cent of men who started work in the service class but came from working-class backgrounds were still in the service class. (For women the corresponding figures were 77 per cent and 43 per cent.) Thus even when individuals start their careers in the upper part of the stratification system, class background still exercises a strong influence on their chances in life, dragging down a considerable proportion of those from working-class backgrounds.

As we shall see, though, some aspects of the Essex study have been attacked by Peter Saunders.

Is Britain a meritocracy?

Peter Saunders – *Unequal but Fair?*

All the evidence examined so far would suggest that Britain is not a meritocracy: success and failure in the labour market do not depend on ability and effort. Peter Saunders, however, whose New Right theory of stratification was outlined earlier (see pp. 30–2), challenges the view that studies of social mobility demonstrate a high degree of inequality of opportunity. In *Unequal but Fair?* (1996), Saunders seeks 'to demonstrate, against the popular myth and the received sociological wisdom, that occupational selection and recruitment is much more meritocratic than most of us realise or care to believe'. Although he does not claim that Britain is a perfect meritocracy, he does believe that merit is the most important factor determining the sort of jobs that people get. He advances a number of arguments to support this claim:

1 Many studies which deny Britain is meritocratic nevertheless find considerable upward mobility from the working class. Thus the Essex study found that one-third of those in the service class were from working-class backgrounds.

2 Studies of social mobility tend to stress relative mobility rates and fail to emphasize the degree of openness that is demonstrated by the very high rates of absolute mobility. He compares the position to a one-metre dwarf and a three-metre giant in a hot air balloon. As they rise into the sky in the balloon, 'both clearly benefit from an enhanced view but the dwarf never gets his or her head to the level enjoyed by the giant'. Relying on relative mobility rates stresses the remaining difference in their viewpoints, whereas in reality both are much better off.

3 Saunders argues that relative inequality is further exaggerated by the odds ratios used in the Essex study to measure inequality of opportunity. To Saunders, 'odds ratios are extreme measures which combine success and failure chances in a single statistic and which therefore multiply up any apparent class advantages or disadvantages enjoyed by one group relative to another'. Thus, for example, they compare the chances of service-class children ending up in the working class with the chances of working-class children moving in the opposite direction. Because these two sets of odds are multiplied together it results in what appear to be very unequal opportunities in the statistics. Saunders thinks it is far better to use what he calls disparity ratios. These simply compare the odds on children from different origins ending up in the same class. For example, they might compare the chances of working-class and service-class children ending up in the service class. When calculated in this way they show much less extreme differences in mobility patterns.

4 According to Saunders, the relatively small inequalities discovered in such studies of social mobility might be largely explicable in terms of inherited intelligence, talent and motivation. Saunders says, 'what if the sons and daughters of doctors are on average, more talented or more motivated that the sons and daughters of dockers? If this were the case, evidence on relative mobility rates would of itself tell us nothing about the fairness of the system, for we would then expect children from certain origins to perform better than those from others.' Saunders then carries out a statistical study to try to demonstrate that middle-class children might do better than working-class ones simply because they are cleverer and work harder.

Evidence of meritocracy

In order to test his claims, Saunders uses evidence from the *National Child Development Survey*: a panel study or longitudinal study that has collected a wide range of information on (as far as possible) all children born between the 3rd and 9th of March 1958. The study used an initial panel of 17,414 children, and by 1991 the researchers were still succeeding in collecting data from 11,397 of the original panel.

In 1991, 6,795 individuals in the study were in full-time employment, and these were allocated to three classes on the basis of British government classifications. Saunders calls these the middle class, the intermediate class and the lower working class. Some 52 per cent had experienced intergenerational

mobility, and those with middle-class fathers were twice as likely as those with lower working-class fathers to end up as middle-class. This is a less marked difference than that found in most previous studies. The difference was somewhat greater when women were excluded from the analysis (as they were in the Oxford Mobility Study), with men from middle-class backgrounds having 2.6 times the chance of being in middle-class jobs compared with those from lower working-class backgrounds.

More importantly, from Saunders's point of view, the data provided a chance to try to test the significance of ability in determining people's class destinations. All children took tests of their verbal and non-verbal abilities at ages 7, 11, and 16. Although there was a statistical relationship with their class of origin (with middle-class children doing better than those from the other classes), there was a stronger relationship with the class they ended up in. Their abilities as children could have been related to inherited ability or to social and economic factors, but to Saunders it was highly significant that ability was closely linked to the sort of job they ended up with. This suggested that occupational status was closely linked to merit.

Saunders did also find, however, that substantial numbers of low-ability children (as measured in tests) ended up in the middle class. If occupation were entirely determined by ability, then only those who scored 49 or more in their general ability tests as children would have gained middle-class jobs. In fact, 38 per cent of those who gained middle-class jobs had scores lower than 49. Furthermore, the majority of them came from middle-class backgrounds: 32 per cent of this group were of middle-class origin, compared to just 17 per cent from lower working-class origins.

This might seem to undermine Saunders's claim that Britain is meritocratic, since it appears that class background as well as ability has an important influence on your chances. However, he goes on to point out that the idea of meritocracy also involves effort, and the differences in opportunity that were not explained by differences in ability might be explicable in terms of differences in effort. In short, they could result from middle-class children and young adults working harder.

The *Child Development Survey* included data on a number of factors that could be used to measure the amount of effort children were prepared to put into achieving success. Saunders uses three types of information to measure 'effort':

1 A motivation scale derived from questions put to the sample when 16 years old.
2 A measure of absenteeism from school based on truancy records and 'reports of trivial absences'.
3 A measure of 'job commitment' based on answers to attitude questionnaires the sample were given when they were 33 years old.

Saunders also examined data that could be used to measure the extent of social and economic deprivation. These included how often parents read to their children, the parents' educational qualifications, overcrowding in the childhood home, and so on. Saunders found that most of these factors made no difference to the class the children ended up in. Ability test scores remained the most powerful predictor, while measures of motivation were the second best predictor.

Saunders reaches three key conclusions on the basis of such evidence. First, he argues that 'ability correlates more strongly with class of destination than class of origin'. Second, 'ability and motivation are the key predictors of lower-working-class success and of middle-class failure'. Third, in view of the first two findings, he feels confident in claiming that 'class destinations reflect individual merit (ability and motivation) much more than class background'.

Criticisms of Saunders

If Saunders were correct, it would mean that sociologists had greatly exaggerated the inequality of opportunity in Britain and that little needs to change to make Britain a genuine meritocracy. However, there are a number of flaws in Saunders's arguments and his interpretation of the research. First, Saunders excludes the unemployed and those in part-time employment from his analysis. These might be the very groups most disadvantaged by virtue of their class background.

Second, a number of the measures of ability and effort might themselves reflect class differences as much as real differences in the 'merit' of individuals. As Saunders himself notes, there is the possibility of class bias in ability tests. Measures of absenteeism and trivial absences might reflect the labelling and stereotypes of teachers (see Chapter 11 for details of labelling theory and education) as much as a real lack of motivation on the part of working-class pupils. Furthermore, factors such as ill-health and unsympathetic teachers might encourage children to be absent from school, and these factors in turn may be related to children's backgrounds.

It is not surprising if those from working-class backgrounds who have gained middle-class jobs appear more motivated in their work than those from middle-class backgrounds, since the former have all had substantial upward mobility and are likely to have experienced significant improvements in their living standards. Thus many of the measures used by Saunders may reflect social class differences rather

Chapter 3

Sex and gender

Kessler and McKenna note that, despite these anomalies, both the public and scientists tend to see males and females as opposites, refusing to recognize the possibility of an intermediate state. However, this has not always been the case. Some societies have recognized a third gender role: the *berdache*. A number of North American Indian tribes contained *berdache*. They were usually 'men' who dressed and in some ways acted like women. In some societies they had a high status, in others a low one, but in all cases they were treated as a distinct gender. In Western industrial society, hermaphrodites are almost always categorized as male or female. In tribes such as the Potock of East Africa they would be more likely to be allocated to a third category.

Allocation to sexes

Having questioned the most basic assumption (that there are just two sexes), Kessler and McKenna go on to discuss how individuals are allocated to sexes by others. This process was studied by interviewing transsexuals, people who seem biologically normal but who feel themselves to be members of the 'opposite' sex. Some, but not all, transsexuals undergo operations to alter their genitals, usually changing from male to female.

Normally gender and genitals are equated with each other: the connection between them is taken for granted. However, people are not expected to ask others whom they have just met to remove their clothes so that they can determine which sex they are. Various types of evidence are pieced together so that a gender attribution can be made by the observer. Someone with the appearance and behaviour of a female or male will simply be assumed to have the appropriate genitals. The existence of transsexuals means that this assumption is not always accurate. Biological males sometimes live as, and are accepted as, females.

How then do people decide what gender another person is? According to Kessler and McKenna there are four main processes involved:

1 The content and manner of the speech of others are taken into account. Some male to female transsexuals have trained themselves to appear to be women by putting more inflection in their voice and by having more mobile facial movements when talking. Others introduce themselves as 'Miss' to settle any doubt there might be in an observer's mind.

2 Another important factor in gender attribution is public physical appearance. For example, female to male transsexuals may disguise their breasts by wearing baggy clothing or by using strapping.

3 The information people provide about their past life helps to determine gender attribution. Again, transsexuals have to be careful to avoid suspicion. They may need a cover story. In one case a female to male transsexual attributed pierced ears to belonging to a tough street gang.

4 The final important factor is the private body. Usually there is little problem in keeping the body covered, but transsexuals may need to avoid certain situations (such as visiting beaches or sharing rooms with others) if they have not undergone the appropriate operations to change their sex physically.

Taking on the identity of a sex to which they do not belong biologically is difficult and demanding for the transsexual. For most people, hormones, chromosomes, genitals and the gender attributed to them will all coincide. Nevertheless, the exceptions studied by Kessler and McKenna demonstrate that even the most basic division – that between male and female – can be seen as being at least in part a social construct.

Sex and gender differences–conclusion

Some sociologists have tried to move beyond the debate on whether sex or gender shapes the behaviour of men and women. Both David Morgan (1986) and Linda Birke (1986) argue that sex and gender interact. Sex differences influence gender differences and vice versa. Linda Birke argues that 'women's biology actually and materially affects their lives'. She suggests that feminists cannot ignore biological facts, for example that women menstruate and can give birth.

However, both Morgan and Birke also argue that the cultural interpretation placed on biological differences is very important. Thus David Morgan says:

> *if certain distinctions between men and women come to be seen as crucial, this itself is a cultural fact and has its consequences, although this is the outcome of a complex interaction between the biological and the cultural rather than the primary assertion of the former.*
>
> Morgan, 1986, p. 35

In the nineteenth century, for example, some people believed that men and women had fixed amounts of energy. Unlike men, women were believed to use up much of this energy in menstruation, pregnancy and the menopause.

Today, many people believe that hormonal differences play a major part in shaping the behaviour of men and women. Birke points out that this belief is held despite the fact that 'there simply is no one hormone or even class of hormone, that belongs uniquely to one gender or the other'. What matters

most is the meaning attached to differences, real or imagined, in a society. For a different view of the relationship between sex and gender differences, see the discussion of Connell's work on masculinity (pp. 191–6).

In recent years, there has been an increased theoretical emphasis upon the differences among women, and the differences among men. It has been recognized that there are a variety of ways to be feminine and a variety of ways to be masculine. There has been less emphasis on the sex/gender differences between men in general and women in general. These new approaches will be discussed later in the chapter (see pp. 157–63 and 191–6).

Gender inequality

So far in this chapter we have examined explanations for differences between men and women. These differences have sometimes been seen as the basis for inequalities between them, and we will now look at those inequalities in more detail.

The development of feminism has led to attention being focused on the subordinate position of women in many societies. Feminist sociologists have been mainly responsible for developing theories of gender inequality, yet there is little agreement about the causes of this inequality, nor about what actions should be taken to reduce or end it. More recently, the focus has changed from an emphasis on inequality to one on difference.

Several feminist approaches can be broadly distinguished:

1 radical feminism
2 Marxist and socialist feminism
3 liberal feminism
4 Black feminism
5 postmodern feminism.

There is considerable overlap between these approaches, and each contains feminists with a variety of views. Nevertheless, the distinction between these perspectives is important. It helps to clarify some of the major disputes within feminism, and feminists often attribute themselves to one of these categories.

We will briefly outline each perspective before considering a more detailed examination of how they have been applied to particular aspects of gender inequality.

Radical feminism

Radical feminism blames the exploitation of women on men. To a radical feminist, it is primarily men who have benefited from the subordination of women. Women are seen to be exploited because they undertake unpaid labour for men by carrying out childcare and housework, and because they are denied access to positions of power.

Radical feminists see society as patriarchal – it is dominated and ruled by men. From this point of view, men are the ruling class, and women the subject class. The family is often seen by radical feminists as the key institution oppressing women in modern societies. The family is certainly given more prominence than in Marxist sociology, where, as part of the superstructure, it is given only secondary importance.

Radical feminists tend to believe that women have always been exploited and that only revolutionary change can offer the possibility of their liberation. However, there are disagreements within this group about both the origins of women's oppression and the possible solutions to it. Some radical feminists, such as Shulamith Firestone (1972), believe women's oppression originated in their biology, particularly in the fact that they give birth. Others do not see biology as so important; they see male rule as largely a product of culture. Some stress rape and male violence towards women as the methods through which men have secured and maintained their power.

Because men are seen as the enemies of women's liberation, many radical feminists reject any assistance from the male sex in their struggle to achieve the rights they seek. Separatist feminists argue that women should organize independently of men outside the male-dominated society. A few, like The Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group (1982), argue that only lesbians can be true feminists, since only they can be fully independent of men.

A particularly radical group, female supremacists, argue that women are not just equal but are actually morally superior to men. They wish to see patriarchy replaced by matriarchy (male rule replaced by female rule). From such perspectives, men are responsible not only for the exploitation of women, but also for many other problems. These may include conflict, war, destruction of the environment, the abuse of science so that it fails to meet human needs, and so on.

Rosemarie Tong distinguishes between two groups of radical feminists (Tong, 1998). Radical-libertarian feminists believe that it is both possible and desirable for gender differences to be eradicated or at least greatly reduced. They therefore aim for a state of androgyny in which men and women are not significantly different. The ideal state is one in which women and men take on the more desirable characteristics of one another. They believe that differences between the masculine and feminine are socially constructed. If they are removed then equality between men and women can follow.

The second group, radical-cultural feminists, believe in the superiority of the feminine. As Tong puts it:

> *far from believing that the liberated woman must exhibit both masculine and feminine traits and behaviour, these radical-cultural feminists expressed the view that it is better to be female/feminine than it is to be male/masculine. Thus women should not try to be like men.*
>
> Tong, 1998

According to Tong, they celebrate characteristics associated with femininity such as 'interdependence, community, connection, sharing, emotion, body, trust, absence of hierarchy, nature, immanence, process, joy, peace and life'. On the other hand, they are hostile to characteristics associated with masculinity, such as 'independence, autonomy, intellect, will, wariness, hierarchy, domination, culture, transcendence, product, asceticism, war and death'.

Tong accepts that a distinction between radical-libertarian feminists and radical-cultural feminists can be overstated, but believes that it does reflect real and significant differences.

Marxist and socialist feminism

Marxist and socialist feminists do not attribute women's exploitation entirely to men. They see capitalism rather than patriarchy as being the principal source of women's oppression, and capitalists as the main beneficiaries. Like radical feminists, they see women's unpaid work as housewives and mothers as one of the main ways in which women are exploited. Although men in general benefit, it is primarily capitalists who gain from women's unpaid work since new generations of workers are reproduced at no cost to the capitalist. (For a discussion of this issue see Chapter 8.)

Thus Marxist and socialist feminists relate women's oppression to the production of wealth, while radical feminists attribute greater importance to childbearing. Marxist feminists also place much greater stress on the exploitation of women in paid employment. The disadvantaged position of women is held to be a consequence of the emergence of private property and subsequently their lack of ownership of the means of production, which in turn deprives them of power.

Although Marxist and socialist feminists agree with radical feminists that women as a group are exploited, particularly since the advent of capitalism, they are more sensitive to the differences between women who belong to the ruling class and proletarian families. In this respect, women have interests in common with the working class, and Marxist and socialist feminists see greater scope for cooperation between women and working-class men than do radical feminists.

Marxist feminists share with radical feminists a desire for revolutionary change; however, they seek the establishment of a communist society. In such a society (where the means of production will be communally owned) they believe gender inequalities will disappear. This view is not shared by radical feminists who believe that women's oppression has different origins and causes, and therefore requires a different solution.

There is no clearcut division between Marxist and socialist feminists; they share much in common. Marxist feminists, though, tend to seek more sweeping changes than socialist feminists. Socialist feminists tend to give more credence to the possibility of capitalist societies gradually moving towards female equality. They see more prospect for change within the democratic system.

Liberal feminism

Liberal feminism does not have such clearly developed theories of gender inequalities as radical and Marxist and socialist feminism. Nevertheless, liberal feminism probably enjoys greater popular support than the other perspectives. This is largely because its aims are more moderate and its views pose less of a challenge to existing values. Liberal feminists aim for gradual change in the political, economic and social systems of Western societies.

To the liberal feminist, nobody benefits from existing gender inequalities; both men and women are harmed because the potential of females and males alike is suppressed. For example, many women with the potential to be successful and skilled members of the workforce do not get the opportunity to develop their talents, while men are denied some of the pleasures of having a close relationship with their children. The explanation of this situation, according to liberal feminists, lies not so much in the structures and institutions of society, but in its culture and the attitudes of individuals.

Socialization into gender roles has the consequence of producing rigid, inflexible expectations of men and women. Discrimination prevents women from having equal opportunities.

The creation of equal opportunities, particularly in education and work, is the main aim of liberal feminists. They pursue this aim through the introduction of legislation and by attempting to change attitudes. In Britain, they supported such measures as the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and the Equal Pay Act (1970) in the hope that these laws would help to end discrimination. They try to eradicate sexism and stereotypical views of women and men from children's books and the mass media. They do not seek revolutionary changes in society: they want reforms that take place within the existing social structure, and they work through the democratic system. Since they believe that existing gender inequalities benefit nobody (although they are particularly harmful to women), liberal feminists are willing to work with any members of society who support their beliefs and aims.

Although the least radical of feminist perspectives, the liberal view could still lead to considerable social change. At the very least, the changes it supports could lead to women having the same access as men to high-status jobs.

Black feminism

Black feminism has developed out of dissatisfaction with other types of feminism. Black feminists such as Bell Hooks (1981) have argued that other feminists, as well as male anti-racists, have not addressed the particular problems faced by black women. Writing in 1981, Hooks claimed that black women in the USA had not joined:

> *together to fight for women's rights because we did not see 'womanhood' as an important aspect of our identity. Racist, sexist socialization had conditioned us to devalue our femaleness and to regard race as the only relevant label of identification.*
>
> Hooks, 1981

Black women had joined in the fight for civil rights, but the organizations were dominated by men, and women's issues received no consideration.

Hooks argued that contemporary black women could learn a lot from some of their nineteenth-century counterparts who had pioneered a distinctive Black feminism. Hooks describes the views of Sojourner Truth, a black American woman who had campaigned for black women to gain the right to vote along with black men. Truth had said that if black women failed in their campaign for voting rights, but black men succeeded, then 'the coloured men will be masters over the women, and it will be just as bad as it was before' (quoted in Hooks, 1981). At a convention of the women's rights movement in Ohio in 1852, white males argued that women should not have equal rights to men because they were physically inferior to men and were unsuited to heavy manual labour. Sojourner Truth countered this argument in a passionate speech saying:

> *Look at me! look at my arm! ... I have plowed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me – and ain't I a woman? I could work as much as any man (when I could get it), and bear de lash as well – and ain't I a woman?*
>
> Hooks, 1981, p. 160

Truth's speech highlighted the differences in the experiences of black women and white women. For some Black feminists these differences are the legacy of slavery. Patricia Hill Collins (1990) says that slavery 'shaped all subsequent relationships that black women had within African-American families and communities, with employers, and among each other, and created the political context for women's intellectual work'. To Collins, writing in 1990, most feminist theory has 'suppressed Black women's ideas' and has concentrated on the experiences and grievances of white and usually middle-class women. For example, feminist critiques of family life tended to examine the situation of middle-class wives who were in a very different position from most black women. There was a 'masculinist bias in Black social and political thought' and a 'racist bias in feminist theory'.

Black feminism could correct that bias by drawing on black women's experiences. Many black women had been employed as domestic servants in white families. From this position they could see 'white power demystified'. They could see whites as they really were, yet they remained economically exploited outsiders. Thus Black feminists could draw upon the 'outsider-within perspective generated by black women's location in the labour market' and could develop a 'distinct view of the contradictions between the dominant groups' actions and ideologies'.

Like Hooks, Collins draws inspiration from the insights of Sojourner Truth to show how black women can attack patriarchal ideology. For example, they could attack the belief that women are fragile and weak by drawing on their own experience of physically demanding labour.

Rose M. Brewer (1993) sees the basis of Black feminist theory as an 'understanding of race, class and gender as simultaneous forces'. Black women suffer from disadvantages because they are black, because they are women, and because they are working-class, but their problems are more than the

sum of these parts: each inequality reinforces and multiplies each of the other inequalities. Thus black women's problems can be represented as stemming from 'race × class × gender' rather than 'race + class + gender'. The distinctive feature of Black feminism to Brewer is that it studies the 'interplay' of race, class and gender in shaping the lives and restricting the life chances of black women.

Heidi Safia Mirza (1997) argues that there is a need for a distinctive Black British feminism. She does not claim that black British women have a unique insight into what is true and what is not, but she does believe that this group can make an important contribution to the development of feminist and other knowledge. They can challenge the distorted assumptions of dominant groups by drawing on their own experiences. They offer 'other ways of knowing' and can 'invoke some measure of critical race/gender reflexivity into mainstream academic thinking'.

In particular, Black British feminists can challenge the predominant image of black British women as passive victims of racism, patriarchy and class inequality. They can undermine the image of 'the dutiful wife and daughter, the hard (but happy and grateful!) worker, the sexually available exotic other, the controlling asexual mother, or simply homogenized as the "third world" woman'. Instead, Black British feminists have been able to show how black British women have been 'brave, proud and strong'. They have struggled against domestic violence; tried to overcome sexism and racism in school; developed alternative family forms in which women have autonomy, and challenged the activities of the police and immigration authorities. They have made their own voice heard rather than relying on others to tell their story.

Black feminist thought has had some influence upon postmodern feminism. This will be discussed on pp. 157–63.

The origins of gender inequalities – feminist views

Although many feminists clearly align themselves to one of the perspectives that we have just outlined, others do not. Thus, in the subsequent sections, not all the explanations for gender inequalities that we will discuss can be 'neatly' attributed to one perspective.

Feminists do not agree about the origins of inequality between men and women. Some believe that women have always had a subordinate position in all societies; others argue that the origins of gender inequalities can be traced back to particular historical events.

Shulamith Firestone – a radical feminist view

In her book, *The Dialectics of Sex*, published in 1970, Firestone was the first to outline a radical feminist explanation of female inequality. To Firestone, sexual oppression was the first and most fundamental form of oppression. Unlike Marxists, Firestone does not attach primary importance to economic differences in the explanation of inequality. Although she acknowledges the importance of the work of Marx and Engels, she criticizes them for confining their studies to economic production. In her view, they ignored an important part of the material world: 'reproduction'.

Firestone believes that what she calls the sexual class system was the first form of stratification. It predated the class system and provided the basis from which other forms of stratification evolved. She provides a very clear explanation for its origins. She says 'men and women were created different and not equally privileged'. Inequalities and the division of labour between men and women arose directly from biology. Biological differences produced a form of social organization she calls the biological family. Although societies vary in the roles of men and women and the form the family takes, all societies share the biological family, which has four key characteristics:

The biological family

1. Women are disadvantaged by their biology. Menstruation, the menopause and childbirth are all physical burdens for women, but pregnancy and breastfeeding have the most serious social consequences. At these times, when women are pregnant or looking after infants, they are 'dependent on males (whether brother, father, husband, lover or clan, government, community-at-large) for physical survival'.
2. Women's dependence on men is increased by the long periods during which human infants are dependent, compared to the infants of other species.
3. The interdependence between mother and child, and in turn their dependence on men, has been found in every society, and it has influenced the psychology of every human being. Dependence on men produced unequal power relationships and power psychology.

4 The final characteristic of the biological family is that it provides the foundations for all types of inequality and stratification. Men derived pleasure from their power over women and wished to extend their power to the domination of men. The sexual class system provided the blueprint and prototype for the economic class system. The economic class system provided the means through which some men came to dominate other men. Because the sexual class system is the basis for other class systems, Firestone believes that it must be destroyed before any serious progress can be made towards equality. She says 'the sexual class system is the model for all other exploitative systems and thus the tapeworm that must be eliminated first by any true revolution'.

Biology and equality

Because sexual class has a biological origin, biological equality is the only effective starting point for securing its elimination. Firestone believes that effective birth control techniques have helped to loosen the chains of women's slavery by giving them more control over whether they become pregnant. Even so, the pill and other contraceptives have not freed women from pregnancy altogether; this would only be possible when babies could be conceived and developed outside the womb. Once this occurred, women would no longer be forced into dependence on men for part of their lives.

Yet even this would only be the first step towards a complete revolution. In addition to the biological changes, the economic class system and the cultural superstructure would also have to be destroyed. Economic equality would have to follow biological equality, and power psychology would need to be overcome.

The strength of Firestone's argument lies in its ability to explain all forms of stratification, but this radical feminist perspective on inequality has been subject to criticism. Firestone does not explain variations in women's status in different societies at different times. For example, in some societies women do not have primary responsibility for childcare and women's biology does not seem to make them dependent on men for long periods (as we saw in Oakley's discussion on the cultural division of labour, p. 133). If this is the case, then it may not be biology alone that explains gender inequalities.

Sherry B. Ortner – culture and the devaluation of women

Sherry B. Ortner (1974) agrees with Firestone that women are universally oppressed and devalued. However, she claims that it is not biology as such that ascribes women to their status in society, but the way in which every culture defines and evaluates female biology. Thus, if this universal evaluation changed, then the basis for female subordination would be removed.

Ortner argues that in every society, a higher value is placed on culture than on nature. Culture is the means by which humanity controls and regulates nature. By inventing weapons and hunting techniques, humans can capture and kill animals; by inventing religion and rituals, humans can call upon supernatural forces to produce a successful hunt or a bountiful harvest. By the use of culture, humans do not have to passively submit to nature: they can regulate and control it. Thus humanity's ideas and technology (that is, its culture), have power over nature and are therefore seen as superior to it.

Women and nature

This universal evaluation of culture as superior to nature is the basic reason for the devaluation of women. Women are seen as closer to nature than men, and therefore as inferior to men.

1 Ortner argues that women are universally defined as closer to nature because their bodies and physiological functions are more concerned with 'the natural processes surrounding the reproduction of the species'. These natural processes include menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and lactation, processes for which the female body is 'naturally' equipped.
2 Women's social role as mothers is also seen as closer to nature. They are primarily responsible for the socialization of the young. Infants and young children are seen as 'barely human', as one step away from nature because their cultural repertoire is small compared to that of adults. Women's close relationships with young children further associate them with nature.
3 Since the mother role is linked to the family, the family itself is regarded as closer to nature compared to activities and institutions outside the family. Thus activities such as politics, warfare and religion are seen as more removed from nature, as superior to domestic tasks, and therefore as the province of men.
4 Finally, Ortner argues that woman's psyche, her psychological make-up, is defined as closer to nature. Because women are concerned with childcare and primary socialization, they develop more personal, intimate and particular relationships with others, especially their children. By comparison, men, by engaging in politics, warfare and religion, have a wider range of contacts and less personal and particular relationships. Thus men are seen as being more objective and less emotional: their thought processes are defined as more abstract and general, and less personal and particular. Ortner argues that culture is, in one sense, 'the transcendence, by means of systems of thought and technology, of the natural

givens of existence'. Thus men are seen as closer to culture since their thought processes are defined as more abstract and objective than those of women. Since culture is seen as superior to nature, woman's psyche is devalued and once again, men come out on top.

Ortner concludes that in terms of her biology, physiological processes, social roles and psychology, woman 'appears as something intermediate between culture and nature'.

Criticisms of Ortner

Ortner fails to show conclusively that in all societies culture is valued more highly than nature. Although many societies have rituals that attempt to control nature, it is not clear that nature is necessarily devalued in comparison to culture. Indeed it could be argued that the very existence of such rituals points to the superior power of nature.

Stephanie Coontz and Peta Henderson (1986) provide some examples to contradict Ortner. Among the Sherbo of West Africa, children are seen as close to nature, but adults of both sexes are seen as close to culture. Coontz and Henderson also claim that not all societies devalue nature. The Haganers of Papua and New Guinea distinguish culture and nature, but do not rank one above the other.

Michelle Z. Rosaldo – the public and the domestic

The anthropologist Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo (1974) was the first to argue that women's subordination was the consequence of a division between the public and the private (or domestic) world.

She argues that there are two distinctive areas of social life:

1. She defines the domestic as 'institutions and modes of activity that are organized immediately around one or more mothers and their children'. As her use of the word 'mother' implies, she believes that it is usually women who are associated with this sphere.
2. In contrast, the public sphere is seen as being primarily the province of men. She defines the public as, 'activities institutions and forms of association that link, rank, organize, or subsume particular mother child groups'.

Thus the domestic sphere includes the family and life in the place of residence of the family, while the public sphere includes the activities and institutions associated with rituals and religion, politics and the economy.

Like Firestone and Ortner, Rosaldo argues that women have been disadvantaged in every known society – 'women everywhere lack generally recognized and culturally valued authority'. Although she accepts that biology is the basis of women's oppression, she argues, like Ortner, that the link between the two is indirect. It is the *interpretation* given to women's biology that leads to their disadvantages, not the biology itself. This interpretation ties them to the rearing of children and the domestic sphere.

Men, on the other hand, are better able to keep their distance from domestic life. As a result, they do not need the same personal commitment to other humans as that required from mothers. Men are associated more with abstract authority, and with the political life of society as a whole. Men's separation from the domestic sphere sets them apart from the intimacy of the domestic world, and makes them more suitable for involvement in religious rituals. Rosaldo argues that as a consequence of men's involvement in religious and political life, they can exercise power over the domestic units which are the focus of women's lives.

Although Rosaldo argues that women have less power than men in all societies, she does believe that inequalities between the sexes are greater in some societies than in others. Even though she does not appear to accept that there is any prospect of a totally egalitarian society, she does believe that women can come closer to equality if men become more involved in domestic life.

Rosaldo justifies this claim with reference to societies in which men have an important domestic role. Thus the Mbuti Pygmies of Africa have a relatively egalitarian society because men and women cooperate in both domestic and economic life. Yet even here men retain some independence from the domestic sphere by having separate and secret flute cults.

Criticisms of Rosaldo

Undoubtedly the distinction between the domestic or private sphere and the public sphere provides a useful way of analysing and explaining the relative powerlessness of women in many societies. If women are largely excluded from the institutions that exercise power in society, then it is hardly surprising that men possess more power than women. Furthermore, this distinction helps to explain how the position of men and women in society has changed (see, for example, the section on 'Gender and industrialization', pp. 144–5).

However, there are difficulties involved in Rosaldo's theory and in the use of the terms 'public' and 'domestic'. Janet Siltanen and Michelle Stanworth (1984) point out that there are many ways in which public and private lives overlap. For example, in modern industrial societies it is women's labour in

the home that makes it possible for men to devote themselves to work in the public sphere.

Linda Imray and Audrey Middleton (1983) argue that women's activities tend to be devalued even when they take place in the public sphere. When women take paid employment outside the home, the jobs they do are often regarded as being of less importance than those of men. From this point of view, the devaluation of women must have deeper roots than their association with domestic life. Certainly, as we will demonstrate in later sections, the increasing employment of women outside the private home has not produced equality for women within work.

Firestone, Ortner and Rosaldo all agree that women's subordination to men is universal. They all to some extent agree that the ultimate source of inequality between the sexes is biology, or the interpretation placed on biology. These views are not accepted by all sociologists. Marxist and socialist feminists question the view that women's subordination has always been universal. They claim that it is necessary to examine history to find out how and why inequality between the sexes came about. As Stephanie Coontz and Peta Henderson put it:

> *a number of scholars have begun to address the issue of male dominance as a historical phenomenon, grounded in a particular set of circumstances rather than flowing from some universal aspect of human nature or culture.*
>
> Coontz and Henderson, 1986, p. 1

We will examine some of these viewpoints next.

The origins of gender inequality – Marxist and socialist perspectives

Marx's associate, Freidrich Engels, devoted more attention to the sociology of gender than Marx himself. In *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Engels, 1972), Engels outlined his theory of how human societies developed.

Engels – inequality and private property

In the earliest phases of societal development (which Engels called savagery and barbarism), gender inequalities favoured women rather than men. There was a division of labour by sex, with men mainly responsible for procuring food and women mainly responsible for the domestic sphere, but women were not subordinate to men. Private property existed in only a rudimentary form and consisted mainly of simple tools, utensils and weapons. What private property there was passed down through the female, not the male, line. This was because monogamous marriage did not exist. Both men and women could have sex with as many partners as they chose. Consequently, men could never be sure about who their children were. In contrast, as women give birth there is no such doubt about their offspring, and so the property was passed on to their children by the women.

According to Engels, it was during the period of barbarism that women suffered a 'world-historic' defeat. Men gained the upper hand when animals were domesticated and herded and became an important form of private property. Then meat and other animal products became crucial parts of the economy of early societies. Men gained the responsibility for owning and controlling livestock, and were unwilling to allow this important property to be passed down the female line; through owning livestock men overthrew the dominance of women in the household. In Engels's words, 'the man seized the reins in the house also, the woman was degraded, enthralled, the slave of the man's lust, a mere instrument for breeding children'.

In order to ensure that they could identify their own children, men increasingly put restrictions on women's choice of sexual partners. Eventually, during the period Engels calls civilization, monogamous marriage was established. By this stage, men had gained control over what was now the patriarchal family.

Criticisms of Engels

Unfortunately, Engels's theory was based upon unreliable anthropological evidence. His history of early societies no longer seems plausible in the light of more recent research into simple societies (which we discuss later in this chapter). Nevertheless, Engels's pioneering Marxist theory of the origins of gender inequalities laid the foundations upon which later Marxist and socialist feminists have built. Engels suggested that particular historical conditions led to the subordination of women, and he directed attention towards the material, economic reasons that could account for this.

Stephanie Coontz and Peta Henderson – women's work, men's property

Stephanie Coontz and Peta Henderson (1986) provide an example of an attempt to explain women's subordination from a Marxist/socialist perspective. They agree with Engels on a number of important points. Like him, they reject the view that women's subordination has always been a universal feature of human society, and they believe that the roots of women's oppression today are to be found in social causes. They emphasize that it was the difference between the roles of men and women in the production of goods that resulted in gender inequality, and not the difference between the contribution each makes to the reproduction of the species. In all these ways, Coontz and Henderson reject the radical feminism of Firestone.

However, they also disagree with Engels over some issues. For example, they deny that history started with a period of female dominance. On the basis of anthropological evidence, Coontz and Henderson argue that most early societies began with equality between the sexes. They accept that, from earliest times, there was a division of labour by sex, but this in itself did not make inequality inevitable. In most (though not all) societies, some women were excluded from hunting and risky tasks, such as trading and warfare, that could involve travel over long distances. However, it was only pregnant women and nursing mothers who had these restrictions placed on them. It was a matter of social convenience, rather than biological necessity, that led to an early division of labour. For example, it was difficult for women nursing children to combine this activity with warfare as young babies could prove a considerable inconvenience in battle. Women did, nevertheless, become successful warriors in some societies, for example, Dahomey in West Africa.

The existence of a sexual division of labour did not in itself lead to inequality. According to Coontz and Henderson, the earliest societies were communal – the resources produced by men and women alike were shared by everyone. Meat from the hunt and gathered vegetables were given both to the kin and the non-kin of those who produced the food. Even strangers would usually be fed. In these circumstances, it was not important to identify the father of a specific child since the offspring of particular individuals had no special rights to food.

Property and gender inequality

Like Engels, Coontz and Henderson believe that social inequalities developed as a result of changes in property ownership. They follow Engels in arguing that the introduction of herding and agriculture laid the foundations for gender inequalities. These new modes of production made it more likely that a surplus would be produced which could be accumulated or distributed. However, they suggest that some societies, including some North American Indian tribes, produced a surplus in favourable environmental conditions without developing herding or agriculture.

The most important factor in the transition to a society with gender stratification was the appearance of a form of communal property to which a group of kin had exclusive rights. Kin corporate property, as Coontz and Henderson describe it, meant that for the first time non-kin and strangers lost their right to share food and other resources. In these circumstances, parenthood and kinship relationships became important, and senior members of kinship groups gained control over property. Age and seniority began to provide greater economic power, as well as higher status.

Patrilocality and gender inequality

So far, Coontz and Henderson have tried to account for the origins of inequality, but have not explained why men became the dominant group. According to their theory, the key to this development lay in marriage arrangements. Some societies had a system of patrilocality, in other words wives went to live with their husband's kin. Women, as gatherers, continued to act as producers, but they lost control over the products of their labour. What they produced no longer belonged to their own kin corporate group but to that of their husband.

Not all societies had a system of patrilocality, some were matrilocal: husbands moved to live with their wife's kin group. Coontz and Henderson claim that such societies were more egalitarian; women retained greater power. Not only did the food they produced stay with their own kin group, but husbands had to share what they produced with their sister's household as well as their wife's. There was less opportunity for men to concentrate property in their own hands.

However, for a number of reasons matrilocal societies tended to be less successful. For example, patrilocal societies had more chance of producing a surplus. More successful kin groups could expand by the practice of polygamy (men could marry a number of women) and, in doing so, increase the labour force. The extra wives could gather and process more food. Patrilocal societies therefore expanded at the expense of matrilocal ones so that societies in which women were subordinate became more common than those in which they enjoyed greater equality.

To Coontz and Henderson, then, women's subordination arose out of a complex process in which kin corporate property made inequality possible, and patrilocal residence rules for those who married led to men's dominance. According to Coontz and Henderson, gender and class inequalities were closely linked: women lost power in the same process that led to some kin groups accumulating more property than others. Ultimately, property became largely owned by individuals rather than collective groups, and wealthy men came to dominate other men as well as women.

This theory of the development of gender inequalities is perhaps more sophisticated than Engels's, and rests upon sounder anthropological evidence. Despite its claims to provide an entirely social explanation, though, it still uses a biological starting-point. It assumes that women's capacities to give birth and suckle children tended to result in a division of labour in which women were largely responsible for cooking and gathering, and men for hunting.

Gender and industrialization

No blanket statements can be made about the position of women in industrializing societies. In different pre-industrial nations the position of women has varied, and has altered in several ways during industrialization. Nevertheless, Britain, as the first nation to industrialize, provides some indication of the effects of industrialization on women in Western industrial societies.

Women and industrialization – a historical perspective

Ann Oakley (1981) has traced the changing status of women in British society from the eve of the Industrial Revolution to the 1970s. She claims that 'the most important and enduring consequence of industrialization for women has been the emergence of the modern role of housewife as "the dominant mature feminine role"'. In this section, we summarize Oakley's view of the emergence of the housewife role.

The family as the unit of production

In pre-industrial Britain, the family was the basic unit of production. Marriage and the family were essential to individuals for economic reasons since all members of the family were involved in production. Agriculture and textiles were the main industries, and women were indispensable to both. In the production of cloth, the husband did the weaving while his wife spun and dyed the yarn. On the farm, women were in charge of dairy produce. Most of the housework – cooking, cleaning, washing, mending and childcare – was performed by unmarried offspring. The housewife role (which involved the domesticity of women and their economic dependence on men) had yet to arrive. Public life concerned with economic activity, and the private life of the family, were not as distinct as they are today.

The factory as the unit of production

During the early stages of industrialization (which Oakley dates from 1750 to 1841), the factory steadily replaced the family as the unit of production. Women were employed in factories where they often continued their traditional work in textiles.

The first major change that affected their status as wage earners was the Factory Acts, beginning in 1819, which gradually restricted child labour. Children became increasingly dependent upon their parents and required care and supervision, a role that fell to women. Oakley argues that 'the increased differentiation of child and adult roles, with the child's growing dependence, heralded the dependence of women in marriage and their restriction to the home'.

Restrictions on women's employment

From 1841 until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, a combination of pressure from male workers and philanthropic reformers restricted female employment in industry. Women were seen by many male factory workers as a threat to their employment. As early as 1841, committees of male factory workers called for the 'gradual withdrawal of all female labour from the factory'. In 1842, the Mines Act banned the employment of women as miners. In 1851, one in four married women were employed; by 1911 this figure was reduced to one in ten.

Helen Hacker states that with the employment of women as wage earners:

> *Men were quick to perceive them as a rival group and make use of economic, legal and ideological weapons to eliminate or reduce their competition. They excluded women from the trade unions, made contracts with employers to prevent their hiring women, passed laws restricting the employment of*

married women, caricatured the working woman, and carried on ceaseless propaganda to return women to the home and keep them there.

Hacker, 1972

Victorian ideology, particularly the versions of the upper and middle classes, stated that a woman's place was in the home. No less a figure than Queen Victoria announced: 'Let woman be what God intended, a helpmate for man, but with totally different duties and vocations' (quoted in Hudson, 1970). The following quotations from articles in the *Saturday Review* illustrate the ideal of womanhood in mid-Victorian times. In 1859:

Married life is a woman's profession, and to this life her training – that of dependence – is modelled.

And in 1865:

No woman can or ought to know very much of the mass of meanness and wickedness and misery that is loose in the wide world. She could not learn it without losing the bloom and freshness which it is her mission in life to preserve.

Quoted in Hudson, 1970, pp. 53–4

Oakley claims that during the second half of the nineteenth century these attitudes began to filter down to the working class. Thus a combination of factors which included ideology, the banning of child labour, and restrictions on the employment of women, locked the majority of married women into the mother–housewife role.

The return to paid employment

Oakley states that from 1914 to 1950, there was a 'tendency towards the growing employment of women coupled with a retention of housewifery as the primary role expected of all women'. During these years, women received many legal and political rights (for example, the vote in 1928) but these had little effect on the central fact of their lives: the mother–housewife role.

Oakley concludes that industrialization has had the following effects on the role of women:

1. the 'separation of men from the daily routines of domestic life'
2. the 'economic dependence of women and children on men'
3. the 'isolation of housework and childcare from other work'.

In twentieth-century British society, the role of housewife–mother became institutionalized as 'the primary role for all women'.

These generalizations perhaps became less valid as the twentieth century progressed. Subsequent sections will suggest that women have made gains in terms of increasing their economic independence. Furthermore, although the housewife-mother role may continue to be the primary role for many women, it is not the case for all. The increase in homeworking and male unemployment may have had a small effect in reducing the separation of men from domestic life. Even so, the changes produced by the Industrial Revolution still exert a powerful influence.

Gender in contemporary societies – radical feminist perspectives

For radical feminists, patriarchy is the most important concept for explaining gender inequalities. Although literally it means 'rule by the father', radical feminists have used it more broadly to refer to male dominance in society. From this point of view, patriarchy consists of the exercise of power by men over women. Kate Millett was one of the first radical feminists to use the term and to provide a detailed explanation of women's exploitation by men.

Kate Millett – radical feminism and sexual politics

In her book, *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett (1970) argues that politics is not just an activity confined to political parties and parliaments, but one which exists in any 'power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another'. Such relationships of domination and subordination can exist at work where a man instructs his female secretary to make a cup of tea, or in the family when a husband's meal is cooked by his wife. Political relationships between men and women exist in all aspects of everyday life.

According to Millett, such relationships are organized on the basis of patriarchy, a system in which 'male shall dominate female'. She believes that patriarchy is 'the most pervasive ideology of our culture, its most fundamental concept of power'. It is 'more rigorous than class stratification, more uniform, certainly more enduring'.

Like other radical feminists, Millett suggests that gender is the primary source of identity for individ-

uals in modern societies. People react to others first and foremost as men and women, rather than in terms of their class membership. It is a rigid system of stratification: sex is ascribed and almost impossible to change.

The basis of patriarchy

Millett identifies no fewer than eight factors which explain the existence of patriarchy:

1 First, she considers the role of biology. Although she admits that it is difficult to be certain about the origins of patriarchy, she attributes some importance to superior male strength. She suggests that this on its own cannot explain female subordination, claiming that there may have been 'pre-patriarchal' societies in which men were not dominant. Furthermore, she points out that in contemporary, technologically advanced societies, strength is itself of little significance. Despite this, she speculates that at some point in history strength may have assumed a degree of importance which accounts for the origins of patriarchy.

   To Millett though, it is more significant that in early socialization males are encouraged to be aggressive and females to be passive. Males and females are taught to behave and think in ways which reinforce the biological differences that exist.

2 Millett points to ideological factors in her search for the roots of patriarchy. Again, she attaches importance to socialization. Men are socialized to have a dominant temperament. This provides men with a higher social status, which in turn leads to them filling social roles in which they can exercise mastery over women.

3 Millett also considers sociological factors to be important. She claims that the family is the main institution of patriarchy, although men also exercise power in the wider society and through the state. Within the family it is the need for children to be legitimate, to have a socially recognized father, that gives men a particularly dominant position. Mothers and children come to rely for their social status on the position of husbands and fathers in society.

   The family therefore plays an important part in maintaining patriarchy across generations, socializing children into having different temperaments and leading them to expect and accept different roles in later life.

4 Millett discusses the relationship between class and subordination. She believes that women have a caste-like status that operates independently of social class. Even women from higher-class backgrounds are subordinate to men. She believes that the economic dependency of women on men almost places them outside the class system. Romantic love appears to place males and females on an equal footing but in truth it merely 'obscures the realities of female status, and the burden of economic dependency'. Women's inferior status is reinforced and underlined by the ability of men to gain psychological ascendancy through the use of physical or verbal bullying and obscene or hostile remarks.

5 Millett discusses the educational factors which handicap women and she expands upon the question of women's economic dependency. In traditional patriarchies, women lacked legal standing and were not able to own property or to earn their own living. In today's society, Millett accepts that women can and do take paid work, but believes that their work is usually menial, badly paid and lacking in status.

   Furthermore, in societies in which women retain their roles as mothers and housewives, much of that work is unpaid. She sees women as being essentially a reserve labour force who are made use of when they are needed (for example, in wartime) but are discarded when not required.

   Economic inequalities are reinforced by educational ones. Women tend to study the humanities which, according to Millett, have a lower status than sciences. As a result, women lack knowledge and this restricts their power. For example, women often do not understand technology so they cannot compete on equal terms with men to earn a living.

6 Millett argues that men also retain patriarchal power through myth and religion. Religion is used as a way of legitimating masculine dominance. As Millett puts it, 'patriarchy has God on its side'. To illustrate this point she notes that the Christian religion portrays Eve as an afterthought produced from Adam's spare rib, while the origins of human suffering are held to have their source in her actions.

7 An additional source of men's power is psychology. Patriarchal ideology is 'interiorized' by women because of all the above factors. Women develop a passive temperament and a sense of inferiority. This is further reinforced by sexist European languages which use words such as 'mankind' to refer to humanity. Media images of women also play their part, but to Millett the greatest psychological weapon available to men is the length of time they have enjoyed worldwide dominance. Women have simply come to take men's dominance for granted.

8 Millett identifies physical force as the final source of male domination. Despite the extent of men's ideological power, Millett believes that patriarchy is ultimately backed up by force. She points to many examples of the use of violence against women, such as the stoning to death of adulteresses in Muslim countries, and 'the crippling deformity of footbinding in China, the lifelong ignominy of the Veil in Islam'. In modern Western societies, women are also the victims of violence. Millett does not admit that women are inevitably physically weaker, but 'physical and emotional training' make it very difficult for women to resist the force used against

them by individual men. Rape and other forms of sexual violence are ever-present possibilities and ways in which all women are intimidated by all men.

Criticisms of Millett

Millett made an important contribution towards explaining the disadvantaged position of women within society. However, her work has been criticized by socialist and Marxist feminists. They have identified three main weaknesses in her theory of sexual politics:

1 Sheila Rowbotham (1979) argues that patriarchy is too sweeping a category. Because Millett regards all societies as patriarchal, she fails to explain the particular circumstances which have produced male domination in its current forms. According to Rowbotham, describing all societies as patriarchal implies that male domination has some universal cause which stems from the biology of women and the fact that they bear and rear children. In Rowbotham's words, it 'ignores the multiplicity of ways in which societies have defined gender'.

2 Rowbotham questions the assumption implied in the use of the term 'patriarchy' – that all men exploit all women. She says that 'patriarchy cannot explain why genuine feelings of love and friendship are possible between men and women, and boys and girls, or why people have acted together in popular movements'.

3 Another criticism of Millett, and radical feminists in general, is that they ignore the material basis of much of the oppression of women. Robert McDonough and Rachel Harrison (1978) criticize Millett for ignoring the possibility that women's lack of wealth and economic power is the most important factor determining their disadvantages. To Marxist and socialist feminists, it is capitalism rather than patriarchy that explains women's oppression in modern societies.

Gender in contemporary societies – Marxist and socialist perspectives

Marx and Engels and women under communism

Apart from explaining the origins of inequality between men and women, Engels also tried to foresee how women's position in society would change as capitalism developed (Engels, 1972). Engels believed that economic factors caused women's subservience to men, and only economic changes could lead to their liberation. He stated that 'the predominance of the man in marriage is simply a consequence of his economic predominance and will vanish with it automatically'. Men enjoyed greater power than women because it was men who owned the means of production, or who earned a wage outside the home.

However, Marx and Engels believed that capitalism would eventually lead to some reduction in inequalities between men and women. They argued that the demand for female wage labour would raise the status and power of proletarian women within the family.

Marx believed that, despite its many evils, capitalist industry 'creates a new economic foundation for a higher form of the family and of relations between the sexes'. Female employment would largely free women from economic dependence upon their husbands and so from male dominance within the family. Engels took a similar view maintaining that with female wage labour:

> *the last remnants of male domination in the proletarian home have lost all foundation – except, perhaps, for some of the brutality towards women which became firmly rooted with the establishment of monogamy.*
>
> Engels, 1972

However, the bourgeois wife in capitalist society was still required to produce heirs and so forced to submit to male control.

Although women entered the labour force in increasing numbers in the twentieth century, many contemporary Marxist and socialist feminists deny that this led to the changes anticipated by Marx and Engels. As we will indicate in a later section, women continue to be financially disadvantaged compared to men, even when they take paid employment. They tend to get lower wages and lower-status jobs than men (see pp. 163–8). Furthermore, they still seem to have less power than men within the family. (Further details can be found in Chapter 8.)

Gender under communism

Engels believed that true equality between men and women would arrive with the establishment of communism when the means of production would be communally owned. Engels predicted that the communal ownership of the means of production would be accompanied by the socialization of

housework and childcare. Sexual inequality would end. Gender roles would disappear.

Evidence from former communist countries suggests that Engels was wrong. In a review of studies of the USSR, Nickie Charles (1993) found that women did make significant progress under communism. In 1991, just before the USSR broke up with the collapse of communism, women made up a majority of the Soviet workforce – 51 per cent. Under communism women were guaranteed the right to work, and laws gave them the right to equal pay for equal work. Women also had the right to paid maternity leave and breaks during working hours to feed their babies.

However, although Charles believes that women made significant gains under communism, she does not think that they achieved full equality. In 1991, average wages for women were only about two-thirds of those for men. Laws made it easier for women to work and have children, but this also meant that 'childcare was viewed as a purely female concern'. As in Western capitalist societies, women continued to have most of the responsibility for childcare and housework even when they had full-time employment outside the home.

If women's progress under communism in the USSR was limited, early evidence suggests that the move towards a market economy and a Western-style democracy has undermined some of the gains that were made. Charles found that in 1992 after the withdrawal of the right to employment, women had twice the redundancy rate of men. In the light of rising unemployment, Charles thought it likely that women would 'be encouraged to return to the home either full or part-time' and state childcare services would be withdrawn.

Nickie Charles found that by the late 1980s women had high rates of participation in the East European labour market. Women made up 50 per cent of the workforce in East Germany and nearly 50 per cent in Czechoslovakia. In Poland and Hungary they made up about 44 per cent of the workforce. Charles argues that despite these figures women remained disadvantaged because of the persistence of a familial ideology 'which defined women primarily as wives and mothers'.

Such examples suggest that societies claiming to be communist had made inroads into reducing gender inequality, but did not succeed in coming anywhere near to eradicating it. Nickie Charles argues that communist states have made much more effort than capitalist states to reduce the burden of childcare and housework on women, but 'in both types of society women are to be found in the lowest paid and least skilled jobs'. This suggests that factors other than the economic system are at least partly responsible for gender inequalities.

Contemporary Marxist feminism

Some Marxist feminists have argued that women's position in society primarily benefits capitalism and capitalists rather than men. Margaret Benston (1972) argues that capitalism benefits from a large reserve labour force of women 'to keep wages down and profits up'. (For a discussion of the reserve army of labour theory see pp. 170–1.) In their roles as secondary breadwinners, married women provide a source of cheap and easily exploitable labour. Because women have been socialized to comply and submit, they form a docile labour force that can be readily manipulated and easily fired when not required.

Compared to male workers, women are less likely to join unions, to go on strike or take other forms of militant action against employers. Even when women join unions, they often find themselves in male-dominated organizations where, according to Barron and Norris (1976), men 'often do not share the interests or outlook of their fellow female unionists'. To some degree, sexist ideology splits the working class and in doing so serves the interests of capital. It divides workers along sex lines and thereby makes them easier to control.

Some Marxists also believe that women benefit capitalists and the capitalist system in their capacities as mothers and housewives by reproducing labour power at no cost to employers. (We discuss this in more detail in Chapter 8.)

Criticisms of Marxist feminism

There are a number of difficulties with Marxist approaches that explain gender inequalities in terms of how they benefit capitalism. Some Marxist feminists claim that such explanations ignore many of the questions raised by feminists. In terms of the Marxist theory, women appear insignificant: they sit on the sidelines of the grand struggle between capital and labour. Marxists may explain capitalism, but this does not explain patriarchy.

Heidi Hartmann (1981) compares the situation to a marriage in which the husband represents Marxism, the wife represents feminism, and it is the husband who has all the power. She says: 'the "marriage" of Marxism and feminism has been like the marriage of husband and wife depicted in English common law: Marxism and feminism are one, and that one is Marxism'.

She does not believe that Marxism on its own can explain gender inequalities because it is 'sex-blind'. In other words, Marxism can explain why capitalists exploit workers, but not why men exploit women. For example, it might be possible to explain in Marxist terms how it benefits capitalism for housework and childcare to be carried out free of

charge, but not why women in particular should be responsible for these tasks. Capitalism would benefit as much from househusbands as housewives.

Michelle Barrett (1980, 1984) also attacks Marxist theories which see capitalism alone benefiting from the exploitation of women. She points out that working-class men can benefit from the labour of their wives as well as capitalists. Furthermore, there may be cheaper alternative ways of reproducing labour power than the use of the nuclear family unit with unpaid housewives. It might be less expensive for capitalist countries to use migrant workers. They could be accommodated in cheap barracks. Furthermore, their early socialization has already been carried out in another country at no cost to capitalists.

Both Hartmann and Barrett accept that Marxism can play an important part in explaining gender inequalities; however, they believe that feminism must be fully incorporated into any adequate theory. Both these writers attempt to cement a 'marriage' between Marxist and feminist theory.

The 'marriage' of Marxism and feminism

In her article 'The unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism', Heidi Hartmann (1981) claims that Marxism makes an important contribution to explaining Western industrial societies, including 'the structure of production, the generation of a particular occupational structure, and the nature of the dominant ideology'. It explains the creation of particular jobs, but to Hartmann it is 'indifferent' to who fills them. Thus it does not explain why women have lower-paid and lower-status employment outside the home, nor why they continue to carry the main burden of domestic responsibilities, even when they are working as well.

Following radical feminists, Hartmann argues that patriarchy provides the key to explaining the sexual division of labour. Unlike radical feminists though, she believes that patriarchy has a 'material' base which is not directly related to biological differences between men and women. Men maintain their material control over women by controlling women's labour power. They largely deny access for working women to jobs that pay a living wage. They force women into financial dependence on husbands and thereby control the labour of women in their capacities as housewives and mothers. Because of men's dominance within the family they also control women's bodies and sexuality. Women who are married become almost their husbands' property.

Hartmann believes that capitalism and patriarchy are very closely connected – she describes them as 'intertwined' – but she does not believe that the interests of men as a group and capitalists as a group are identical. For example, ruling-class men may benefit from increasing numbers of women entering the labour force, whereas working-class men may prefer their wives to stay at home to perform personal services for them.

Furthermore, Hartmann denies that capitalism is all-powerful: the capitalist system has to be flexible, and the need for social control may sometimes become more important than the need to produce the maximum possible profit. In this context, Hartmann claims that historically there has been an accommodation between patriarchy and capitalism. They have learned to co-exist in a partnership that fundamentally damages neither partner.

Hartmann believes that in the nineteenth century capitalism gave way to pressure from men about female employment. Male-dominated trade unions in Britain persuaded the state to pass legislation limiting the degree to which women were permitted to participate in paid employment. Although capitalists may not have accepted this situation as ideal, it did have certain advantages for them. The family wage, paid to men and sufficiently large for them to be able to support their wives and children, led to some increase in the wage bill, but ensured that when women did work they could be paid very low wages. It also placated men since their power over women was maintained, and as such it reduced the likelihood of class-conscious action by male workers.

Hartmann accepts that the increasing participation of women in work today has made them slightly less dependent on men. There are more opportunities for women to become independent. Nevertheless, she believes that the persistence of relatively low wage levels for women prevents patriarchy from becoming seriously undermined. She claims 'women's wages allow very few women to support themselves independently and adequately'.

In *Women's Oppression Today*, Michelle Barrett (1980) adopts a similar approach. Although she considers herself a Marxist she believes that it is necessary to go beyond Marxism in order to explain women's oppression. Like Hartmann, she sees the origins of women's oppression today as lying in the nineteenth century, and she argues that a coalition of men and capitalists led to women being excluded from work and being forced to take on a primarily domestic role.

In this process women's oppression became lodged in what she calls the family-household system: members of the household came to rely on the wages of a few adults (primarily men) while all family members relied on the unpaid housework mainly carried out by women. In the process an ideology was developed in which this division of labour in the family came to be accepted as normal and natural.

In the twentieth century, the family-household system became an entrenched part of capitalism. Although there is no inevitable reason why capitalism needs women (as opposed to men, for example) to do the unpaid housework, the capitalist class does benefit politically from this division of labour. According to Barrett, the working class is divided by the family-household system; husbands and wives, men and women, fight each other instead of uniting to fight capitalism.

Biology, capitalism and the oppression of women

Both Hartmann and Barrett move away from seeing gender inequalities as being an inevitable product of capitalism. Both accept that an extra dimension needs to be added to Marxist analysis since Marxism is sex-blind. However, according to some critics, neither has succeeded in unifying Marxism and feminism.

Johanna Brenner and Maria Ramas (1984) believe that Barrett has adopted a dual-system approach, in which class inequalities are explained in terms of capitalism, and gender inequalities are explained in terms of patriarchal ideology, but the two approaches are not combined. They do not believe that Barrett has demonstrated a material need for men and women to have different roles within capitalism. According to Brenner and Ramas, there is a material basis for women's oppression under capitalism, and it is to be found in women's biology.

In pre-capitalist times women were able to combine the demands of childbirth, breastfeeding, and childcare with work, because work was largely based around the home. Furthermore, families could be flexible about when they carried out their work.

With the introduction of factory production, though, work and home became separated, and it also became uneconomic to allow breaks from work to allow women to breastfeed their children. This would have entailed interruptions in production which would have meant that expensive machinery was not fully used.

Furthermore, capitalists were unwilling to provide for expensive maternity leave or childcare facilities at work. With the long hours of work demanded in early factories, the high costs of any domestic help, and the lack of sterilization techniques which would have made bottlefeeding a viable proposition, there was little option but for mothers to withdraw from work.

Brenner and Ramas admit that many of the conditions that originally forced mothers into domestic roles have now changed. Bottlefeeding is now a safe option for babies; there is some provision for maternity leave; hours of work are shorter; it is easier to afford help with childcare; and in any case women are on average having fewer children. However, most women still get paid lower wages than most men, and for most working-class families there are likely to be real financial benefits if the woman rather than the man withdraws from work.

To Brenner and Ramas the sexual division of labour was at least in part produced by the rational choices taken by members of the working class. Because, however, the situation has now changed, there is considerable potential for greater gender equality. If that potential is to be realized, though, it will require a political struggle in which more state nurseries are demanded. It is still cheaper for capitalism if the family rather than the state pays for childcare.

Michelle Barrett (1984) remains unconvinced by the arguments of Brenner and Ramas. She believes that ideology played a greater role in producing the family-household system than biology.

Marxist feminists continue to disagree amongst themselves as well as with other feminists, and they have yet to provide a conclusive explanation for gender inequalities. Marxism and feminism remain something of an unhappy marriage, but the writers in this section have begun to explore how best to avoid separation, or even divorce, of the two perspectives.

Sylvia Walby – *Theorizing Patriarchy*

Sylvia Walby has developed an approach to understanding gender in contemporary societies which does not fit into any of the types of feminism described in earlier sections. Indeed, she starts her 1990 book, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (1990), by pointing out the main criticisms that have been made of other approaches.

Criticisms of existing perspectives

1 Radical feminism has been criticized for 'a false universalism which cannot understand historical change or take sufficient account of divisions between women based on ethnicity and class'.

2 Marxist feminism has been criticized for concentrating on gender inequalities under

capitalism and therefore being unable to explain the exploitation of women in non-capitalist societies.

3 Liberal feminism has been seen as lacking 'an account of the overall social structuring of gender inequality'. Its approach can provide no more than partial explanations. For example, it offers no explanation of how gender inequalities first developed.

4 Walby also criticizes what she calls dual-systems theory. By this she means approaches such as that of Hartmann (see pp. 149–50) which explain women's exploitation in terms of two separate systems of capitalism and patriarchy. Walby criticizes Hartmann for underestimating the amount of tension between capitalism and patriarchy and for failing to take account of aspects of patriarchy such as violence and sexuality.

Walby tries to improve on other perspectives by incorporating their strengths into her own theory while avoiding their weaknesses.

Patriarchy

To Walby, the concept of patriarchy must remain central to a feminist understanding of society. She says that '"patriarchy" is indispensable for an analysis of gender inequality' (Walby, 1990). However, her definition of patriarchy is different from that of other feminists. She argues that there are six patriarchal structures which restrict women and help to maintain male domination. These are:

1 paid work
2 patriarchal relations within the household
3 patriarchal culture
4 sexuality
5 male violence towards women
6 the state.

Each of these structures has some independence from the others, but they can also affect one another, reinforcing or weakening patriarchy in a different structure. Each structure is reproduced or changed by the actions of men and women, but the existence of the structure also restricts the choices that humans, particularly women, can make.

Walby claims that patriarchy is not a fixed and unchanging feature of society (as some radical feminists seem to imply) but both its strength and its form change over time. For example, she believes that patriarchy in Britain during the last two centuries has become slightly less strong and has changed from private patriarchy to public patriarchy. (We will examine the idea of a shift from private to public patriarchy at the end of this section.)

Walby's concept of patriarchy does not regard relations between males and females as the only source of inequality. She acknowledges that there are also 'divisions between women based on ethnicity and class', and she discusses the ways that patriarchy, racism and capitalism interact.

We will now examine in detail how Walby uses her concept of patriarchy to explain gender inequalities.

The structures of patriarchy

As we saw earlier, Walby identifies six structures of patriarchy. We will examine each of these in turn before looking at Walby's overall conclusions about changes in patriarchy.

Paid employment

Walby believes that paid employment has been and remains a key structure in creating disadvantages for women. In nineteenth-century Britain, regulations excluded women from whole areas of work altogether. Male-dominated trade unions and the state ensured that women's opportunities were severely restricted. In the twentieth century, women, and particularly married women, were able to take employment, but not on equal terms with men. In recent years, 'the degree of inequality between men and women in terms of pay, conditions, and access to well-rewarded occupations has declined only very slightly'. The gap between men's and women's wages has only been reduced a little and women continue to predominate in low-paid, part-time employment. In theory, the state has supported greater equality between men and women in the labour market by passing the Equal Pay (1970) and Sex Discrimination (1975) Acts, but in practice such policies are not 'pursued with vigour'.

Walby believes that the labour market has more influence than the family on women's decisions about whether to take paid employment. When women decide not to seek paid work they do so more because of the restricted opportunities open to them than because of cultural values that suggest that mothers and wives should stay at home. According to Walby, when opportunities have been presented to women in the labour market, they have taken advantage of them. For example, the removal of the bar on married women working in some occupations during the Second World War led to a big increase in the numbers of married women in paid work. Feminist struggles and capitalism's demands for cheap labour have created a big increase in women's employment but have failed to prevent exploitation at work. Some women continue to stay at home because the wages they are likely to earn are too low to make paid work worthwhile.

Household production

According to Walby, households sometimes involve distinctive patriarchal relations of production. Individual men directly exploit women by gaining benefits from women's unpaid labour, for example in the home. In the nineteenth century, many women were forced into patriarchal relations of production through their exclusion from the labour market. In the twentieth century, exploitation within this structure was reduced, at least for some women. Women now spend more time in paid work, and the relaxation of divorce laws means that women 'are no longer necessarily bound to an individual husband who expropriates their labour till death does them part'.

For some groups of women, life within households may seem like an escape from exploitation. For example, Walby points out that some Black feminists believe that the family can be 'a site of resistance to racism', and life within the family may be less exploitative for black women than life in the labour market where they tend to receive the least desirable jobs.

However, Walby does not see exploitation of women in the household as having disappeared. Women who are housewives spend as many hours on domestic labour as they did decades ago. Women with children who leave their husbands are disadvantaged in a 'patriarchally structured labour market'. They are unlikely to find a job with reasonable pay so that '"Liberation" from marriage is then usually a movement into poverty.' Some women continue to allow themselves to be exploited by their husbands because the alternatives are so unappealing. Marriage may offer personal survival and greater material comfort for many women when most women have such poorly paid work, but the short-term benefits of marriage for particular women undermine women's 'long-term interests in the eradication of the oppression which exists within the family'. This oppression is sometimes manifested in terms of violence and sexuality, which we will examine shortly.

Culture

Walby believes that the culture of Western societies has consistently distinguished between men and women and has expected different types of behaviour from them. She says that 'while variable across class, ethnicity and age in particular, femininity is consistently differentiated from masculinity over the last century and a half'. However, although the differentiation has remained strong, the characteristics which are seen as making a woman feminine have changed significantly.

In the nineteenth century, women were thought more feminine if they confined their activities to the domestic sphere and did not take paid work. Walby claims that 'the key sign of femininity today ... is sexual attractiveness to men'. Furthermore, 'it is no longer merely the femininity of young single women that is defined in this way, but increasingly that of older women as well'. Sexual attractiveness was also important in Victorian times, but less important than today. It was also 'relatively undercover' compared to contemporary culture.

Escaping from the confinement of domesticity has created greater freedom for women, but the new emphasis on sexuality is not without its costs. Pornography, in particular, increases the freedom of men while threatening the freedom of women. To Walby, 'the male gaze, not that of women, is the viewpoint of pornography', and pornography encourages the degradation of women by men and sometimes promotes sexual violence.

Sexuality

Walby argues that 'heterosexuality constitutes a patriarchal structure'. However, she accepts that the nature of this patriarchal structure has undergone important changes.

In the nineteenth century, women's sexuality was subject to strict control and was largely confined by a 'plethora of practices' to sex within marriage. Women's sexuality was therefore 'directed to one patriarchal agent for a lifetime', although the result was to reduce women's 'sexual interest in anything, including marriage'.

In the twentieth century it became easier for women to be sexually active. Improved contraception reduced the risk of unwanted pregnancy, and the increasing availability of divorce created the possibility of exchanging 'an inadequate husband for a new one'. Walby refers to a study by Lawson and Sampson conducted in 1988 which found that of women marrying in the 1960s, 75 per cent had remained faithful to their husbands during the first ten years of marriage whereas only 46 per cent of those who had married since the 1970s had done so. The study also found that for those married in the earlier period men had been more likely to be unfaithful, whereas for those married in the later period more women had had affairs.

Women themselves played an important part in fighting for greater sexual freedom in campaigning for birth control, abortion and easier divorce, but sexual liberalization has not worked to their advantage in every respect. For example, Walby says 'the sexual double standard is still alive and well'. Young women who are sexually active are condemned by males as 'slags'; those who are not are seen as 'drags'. On the other hand, males with many sexual conquests are admired for their supposed virility.

There is more pressure on women today to be heterosexually active and to 'service' males by marrying or cohabiting with them. Thus heterosexuality remains patriarchal, even though women have made some genuine gains.

Violence

Walby starts her discussion of violence by noting that 'male violence against women includes rape, sexual assault, wife beating, workplace sexual harassment and child sexual abuse'. Like other feminists, she sees violence as a form of power over women. The use of violence, or the threat of violence, helps to keep women in their place and discourages them from challenging patriarchy.

According to Walby, the lack of reliable evidence from the past makes it impossible to determine whether the amount of violence against women by men has increased or decreased. She does believe, however, that it is possible to detect changes in the response to male violence. The state, and in particular the police, have become more willing to take action against the worst offenders. Nevertheless, action against violent husbands is still infrequent and some women continue to be subject to male violence while other women continue to fear it.

The state

State policies relating to gender have changed considerably since the nineteenth century. For example there has been:

> *the cessation of legal backing to exclusionary practices in employment; the increased ease of divorce and financial provision for non-wage earners; the ending of state backing to exclusionary practices in education and the removal of most forms of censorship of pornography; the decriminalization of contraception and abortion under most circumstances; and minor changes in the law making it marginally easier for a woman to leave a violent man.*
>
> Walby, 1990

Most of these changes have been gains for women but, to Walby, 'the state is still patriarchal as well as capitalist and racist'. State policies are no longer directed at confining women to the private sphere of the home, yet there has been little real attempt to improve women's position in the public sphere. Women still receive lower wages than men, and equal opportunities legislation is not often enforced. Women in one-parent families receive little state benefit and women have been harmed by the greater availability of pornography. While the state itself is not so obviously as patriarchal as it used to be, it still does little to protect women from patriarchal power in society.

From private to public patriarchy

As we have seen in each of the preceding sections on the different structures of patriarchy, Walby recognizes that important changes have taken place in every aspect of gender relations. Liberal feminists tend to see these changes as progress. Radical feminists tend to argue that little has changed and patriarchal domination remains firmly intact. Marxists usually claim that industrialization and the advent of capitalism led to a deterioration in the position of women and since the Industrial Revolution little has improved.

Walby does not accept any of these general views, arguing instead that the nature of patriarchy has changed. To her, different aspects of patriarchy are interrelated and together they produce a system of patriarchy and it is this system which has changed.

In the nineteenth century, patriarchy was predominantly private; in the twentieth century, it became public. Table 3.1 summarizes how Walby characterizes this change.

Private patriarchy

In private patriarchy an individual patriarch, the male head of household, controls women 'individually and directly in the relatively private sphere of the home'. It is 'the man in his position as husband or father who is the direct oppressor and beneficiary, individually and directly, of the subordination of women'. Women remain oppressed because they are prevented from entering the public sphere in areas such as employment and politics.

Although household production was the most important structure of private patriarchy, it was backed up by the other patriarchal structures which excluded women.

The shift away from private patriarchy

The shift away from private patriarchy was in part a consequence of first wave feminism. Between 1850 and 1930, women in the USA and Britain campaigned for much more than just voting rights. They also sought:

> *the containment of predatory male sexual behaviour (Christabel Pankhurst's slogan was 'Votes for women, chastity for men'), access to employment, training and education, reform of the legal status of married women so they could own property, for divorce and legal separation at the woman's behest as well as that of the husband ... for the collective rather than private organization of meal preparation.*
>
> Walby, 1990

These campaigns took place 'against the background of an expanding capitalist economy' and capitalists

Table 3.1 Private and public patriarchy

Form of patriarchy	Private	Public
Dominant structure	Household production	Employment/State
Wider patriarchal structures	Employment	Household production
	State	Sexuality
	Sexuality	Violence
	Violence	Culture
	Culture	
Period	Nineteenth century	Twentieth century
Mode of expropriation	Individual	Collective
Patriarchal strategy	Exclusionary	Segregationist

Source: S. Walby (1990) *Theorizing Patriarchy*, Blackwell, Oxford, p. 24.

requiring a larger workforce. There was pressure from male trade unionists to continue to exclude women from employment so that they could not compete for men's jobs.

The result was a series of compromises in which women gained greater access to the public sphere, capitalists were able to employ more women in their enterprises, and male workers ensured that women were restricted in the employment opportunities open to them. (We will discuss Walby's ideas on male trade unionism and female employment later in the chapter. See pp. 172–3 for further details.) These compromises led to the emergence of a new public form of patriarchy.

Public patriarchy 'is a form in which women have access to both public and private arenas. They are not barred from the public arenas, but are nonetheless subordinated within them'. In the public sphere, women tend to be segregated into certain jobs which are lower-paid and are given a lower status than men's jobs. The state and employment become the dominant structures of patriarchy but the other structures remain important. Women are no longer exploited so much by individual patriarchs but instead are exploited collectively by men in general through their subordination in public arenas. As Walby puts it, 'women are no longer restricted to the domestic hearth, but have the whole society in which to roam and be exploited'.

Variations in patriarchy

Walby believes that there has been some reduction in patriarchal exploitation in certain areas as a consequence of the change from private to public patriarchy. The extent of any such reduction varies between groups of women, however, as does the balance between public and private elements of patriarchy. For example, Walby believes that Muslim women are more restricted by family structures than other women, and are therefore more subject to private patriarchy than other groups. Afro-Caribbean women, on the other hand, are more likely to have paid employment and to head their own families than other ethnic groups, and are therefore more subject to public patriarchy.

Walby's arguments are largely confined to an examination of Britain and the USA, but she does give some indications of how these compare to other countries. She suggests that the state has played a more important role in public patriarchy in some countries, whereas in others the labour market has been more important. In the former communist countries of Eastern Europe, for instance, it was the state which was predominant. In the USA, the most capitalist and free-market of Western countries, employment has been of greatest importance. In Western Europe, with more developed welfare states, the state and employment have played a more equal role in public patriarchy.

Gender Transformations

In *Gender Transformations* (1997), Walby reviews changes in patriarchy in the 1990s. Although she discovers plenty of evidence that patriarchal structures remain in place in Britain, she also finds evidence of important changes. In particular, she claims that there is evidence of a generational difference between older and younger women. Older women tend to be restricted by the constraints of private patriarchy, which was the dominant form of patriarchy in their early lives. They are likely to have few qualifications and therefore have limited opportunities in the labour market. They are more

likely than younger women to be dependent upon a male partner for their material well-being. They are particularly vulnerable with the increasing divorce rate which makes reliance upon a male partner problematic.

Younger women, on the other hand, have benefited from some of the changes that have taken place. Using official figures, Walby notes that women made up 49.6 per cent of employees in Britain in 1995. She also points out that female school leavers now have more qualifications than their male counterparts. Women are also catching up male peers in higher education. In other areas, women of all generations have made some gains, although the biggest beneficiaries have mostly been younger women. For example, the police have become more willing to intervene in dealing with male violence against women. There is more awareness of sexual harassment at work, and increasingly employers have policies to deal with it. Furthermore, 'there has been a decline in the discourse and practice of confining sexuality to marriage and an increase in its public presence'. Subjects such as AIDS and the affairs of the royal family have made the discussion of sexuality more open and, according to research, women are becoming more likely to engage in extra-marital sexual relationships. Women are also increasingly entering the public sphere by taking part in political and social movements such as environmental movements, the refuge movement for victims of domestic violence, and protest movements such as that against the poll tax in spring 1990.

However, the impact of such gains is tempered both by a polarization between different groups of women and by areas in which women have made little progress. Well-qualified young women have generally been able to take advantage of new opportunities in the labour market. The same is not true of most of those with few qualifications. The move towards a post-Fordist (see Chapter 10 for a discussion of post-Fordism) and 'flexible' labour market in Britain has relied upon the employment of large numbers of young women in low-paid and insecure jobs. Women have become more independent of men (74 per cent of women in Britain were married in 1979, but just 57 per cent in 1994), but conversely this has made some low-paid women poorer. The increasing number of female single-parents are particularly disadvantaged because childcare responsibilities greatly restrict their opportunities to do paid work.

In most of the most powerful positions in public life, women continue to be seriously under-represented. Walby notes that in 1992 only 9.2 per cent of MPs were women, there were no women Chief Constables until the 1990s, and in 1994 only one in 25 High Court judges was a woman. In 1996, there was only one woman among 50 British ambassadors or heads of overseas missions. There are very few women heading major corporations or public bodies.

For these reasons, Walby argues that a 'system of patriarchy' continues to exist, although 'gender regimes' affect groups of women differently. She argues that:

> *different forms of gender regime coexist as a result of the diversity in gender relations consequent upon age, class, ethnicity and region. As a result of the recent changes, older women will be more likely than younger women to be involved in a more domestic gender regime. Women whose own occupations place them in higher socio-economic groups are more likely to be involved in a more public form of patriarchy. Women of Pakistani and Bangladeshi descent are more likely to be in a domestic form and Black Caribbean women more likely to be in a more private form than white women. There are complex interactions between these different forms of gender regime, as well as between gender, ethnicity and class.*
>
> Walby, 1997, p. 6

Evaluation of Walby

Walby's theory of patriarchy incorporates the insights of many different feminists. Like Marxist and socialist feminists, she acknowledges the importance of economic inequality. Like many radical feminists, she discusses how factors such as violence, sexuality and culture can maintain patriarchy. Like liberal feminists, she attaches some importance to changes in the law and accepts that in some respects women's campaigns have won important citizenship rights. Walby recognizes that patriarchy has undergone significant changes and she attempts to explain and understand these changes through the use of the concepts of private and public patriarchy.

Nevertheless, her work has been criticized. Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis (1992) criticize her for using what they see as a three-systems approach. According to them, Walby treats gender, 'race' and class as separate systems which interact with one another. Anthias and Yuval-Davis believe that patriarchy, capitalism and racism are all part of one system which advantages some groups and disadvantages others.

Jackie Stacey (1993) praises Walby for 'an all-encompassing account of the systematic oppression of women in society' and for showing an awareness of historical changes in the position of women. However, she criticizes her for her use of the concept of structure. Stacey says that 'some structures are

more clearly conceptualised than others (for example, paid employment and culture)'. In the case of some other structures, Walby does not make such a good case for the existence of relatively fixed relationships which contain women. Stacey believes that Walby neglects 'any consideration of identity and lived experience' by focusing on a structuralist analysis which 'fails to explain how people negotiate such a system'.

To Stacey, good feminist sociology pays more attention to the subjective states of women and to how women come to terms with or resist the oppression of which they are a victim. Similar reservations are expressed by Anna Pollert (1996) who questions the usefulness of the whole concept of patriarchy.

Anna Pollert – *The Poverty of Patriarchy*

Anna Pollert (1996) has criticized the use of the term patriarchy by feminists in general, and by Sylvia Walby in particular. She notes that feminists have attacked the use of male 'grand narratives', such as the Marxist analysis of capitalism and the whole idea of progress, but have stubbornly stuck to using the idea of patriarchy. Pollert, on the other hand, believes that the concept is of little use and tends to hold back feminist analysis rather than helping it to develop.

Pollert's central point is that the idea of patriarchy often involves the use of a circular argument. Patriarchy is used both as a description of inequalities between men and women and as an explanation of those inequalities. She uses the example of Heidi Hartmann's work (see pp. 149–50). According to Pollert, Hartmann sees patriarchy as based upon male control over female labour power. In doing so, she fails to explain how men come to control women's labour power in the first place. Hartmann argues that the control comes from the exclusion of women from independent work and control over their work, but this can only be explained in terms of the control over women's labour power which it is supposed to be explaining. Thus Pollert believes that Hartmann is arguing, in effect, that men have control over women because men have control over women. Such circular arguments are typical of most theories that employ the concept of patriarchy.

Other theories, such as that of Walby, can be criticized because they claim, but fail to establish, that patriarchy is a system which forms part of society. Thus Walby sees patriarchy as a system which is sustained by sub-structures such as violence, sexuality, culture, and so on. Pollert does not believe that patriarchy is a system or a structure in the same sense as capitalism. She says that 'there is no intrinsic motor or dynamic within "patriarchy" which can explain its self-perpetuation. Capitalism, on the other hand, does have such an internal dynamic: the self-expansion of capital – profit – which drives the system.' Capitalists are constrained to pursue profit. If they fail to do so, they will go out of business. Gender systems are not constrained in the same way. Men and women can treat each other differently, or even change sex, 'without social production grinding to a halt, or abolishing all gender relations between men and women'.

Pollert believes that theories such as those of Walby lose sight of 'agency'. That is, they neglect the choices made by individual actors as they reproduce or resist existing sets of social relationships. She describes Walby's division of patriarchy into six structures as 'an arbitrary exercise' which 'leads to the static perspective of arbitrating parts in which agency is even more absent than before.

Pollert believes that Walby has not succeeded in breaking free from dual systems theory, seeing capitalism and patriarchy as two separate if linked systems. Pollert argues they are not separate at all. She says 'class relations are infused with gender, race and other modes of social differentiation from the start'. Because class and gender are intertwined it is inappropriate to use structural analysis to understand how they relate to one another. Instead, it is necessary to carry out detailed empirical studies of how they and other social differences relate to each other in particular contexts.

Pollert is in favour of using a materialist analysis which stresses economic inequalities and favours detailed qualitative research. She herself has conducted research of this type with women working in a hosiery factory (Pollert, 1981). However, as Pollert acknowledges, this is not the only way in which sociologists have reacted to criticisms of structural concepts such as patriarchy. Postmodernists too have tended to reject any overarching theory of gender in favour of describing the viewpoints of different women. Pollert rejects postmodernism because it uses obscure language which is hard for ordinary people to understand. It is also relativistic, that is it records the viewpoints of different women but is unwilling to say that any viewpoint is stronger than any other. It therefore loses any sense of trying to change and improve the lives of women.

Notwithstanding Pollert's criticisms, postmodernism has become a major influence on the theories of gender which we will now consider.

a similar culture to white British. She could therefore 'hazard the guess that over the next decades in Britain the West Indian migrants and their children will follow in the steps of the Irish' and achieve almost complete assimilation into British society.

John Richardson and John Lambert – a critique of the immigrant-host model

Strengths and weaknesses of the immigrant-host model

Richardson and Lambert (1985) are generally critical of the immigrant-host model, but do believe that it has some strengths. They believe that the process of migration can influence relationships between ethnic groups and that it is therefore well worth studying. They argue:

> *The model effectively drew attention to the dislocation caused by migration, it bravely addressed the complexities of assimilation, and it demonstrated the dynamic processes of change, rather than settling for a misleadingly static view of black-white conflict.*
>
> Richardson and Lambert, 1985

It raised important issues and, although it 'failed to supply satisfactory answers to all the issues, at least it stimulated further development of the debates'.

Richardson and Lambert identify four main flaws or limitations in the immigrant-host model:

1 First, they argue that it tends to be unclear about the status of the different stages that are usually outlined. Sometimes it is seen as inevitable that a society will move through these stages with a gradual movement towards assimilation; at other times the process seems less than inevitable. Both Patterson and Park recognized that there could be long delays before a society moved on to the next stage and that sometimes reversals were possible. However, at times Park also suggested that the 'race relations cycle' was an inevitable process. Thus some of the theories contradict themselves. Richardson and Lambert argue that concepts like accommodation and assimilation 'are not really spelled out, and in practice it remains difficult to identify the exact stage of "adjustment" which has been reached'.

2 Second, Richardson and Lambert question the assumption built into these theories that assimilation is desirable. The theories tend to assume that migrant groups will, or should want to, give up their distinctive cultures to become fully integrated into the host society. They tend to neglect the possibility that both the immigrants and the hosts might value the cultural diversity of a multicultural society. The model also places most of the emphasis on the migrants changing and does not see the need for major changes in the host society. It can therefore be seen as ideologically biased in supporting the cultural domination of the majority ethnic group in a society.

3 Third, the immigrant-host model attaches little importance to the existence of racism as a cause of ethnic conflict and inequality. Many writers argue that, in Britain and elsewhere, ethnic conflict results from the deeply and widely held racist views of the host society. The hosts are far more than suspicious or cautious about the newcomers: they have been brought up to have stereotypical views and hostile attitudes. In Brixton, for example, it could be argued that the 'nicknames' and 'jocular remarks' described by Patterson were evidence of outright racism on the part of the white Londoners and were scarcely indicative of a 'live-and-let-live' attitude. (Racism is discussed in detail on pp. 237–49.)

4 Fourth, the immigrant-host model has been criticized by conflict theorists for assuming that there is a consensus in the host society. It hides divisions between males and females and different classes as well as between ethnic groups. It tends to ignore the cultural diversity and the wide variations in values that may already exist in the host society. For example, some groups may be very strongly opposed to immigration and hold entrenched racist views while other groups might welcome cultural diversity and be in favour of relaxing or removing immigration controls.

Conclusion

While processes of migration remain important, it can be argued that they are becoming less important in Britain. As discussed above (see p. 216), increasing proportions of the main ethnic minority groupings have been born in Britain and are not migrants. They can be seen as belonging to one of an increasingly diverse range of British cultures. It is no longer possible (if it ever was) to see Britain as possessing one dominant culture from which other cultures diverge. As will be discussed later, some sociologists see Britain as possessing a range of increasingly well-established new ethnicities (see pp. 272–6). These may be hybrids of different cultural traditions. They are too far removed from the process of migration to be seen in terms of an immigrant-host model.

Stephen Castles and Godula Kosack – a Marxist view of migration

In a 1973 study of migration to France, Germany, Britain and Switzerland, Castles and Kosack advanced a very different theory of migration from the immigrant-host model. Rather than seeing relations between immigrants and hosts in terms of cultural differences, they argued that migration had to be

Chapter 4

'Race', ethnicity and nationality

examined in the context of the international capitalist system.

They found that immigrants in the four countries studied had a number of similarities. These were a 'subordinate position on the labour market, concentration in run-down areas and poor housing, lack of educational opportunities, widespread prejudice, and discrimination from the subordinate populations and authorities'. Castles and Kosack argued that these similarities showed that the diverse immigrant groups 'had the same function and position in society, irrespective of their original backgrounds'.

Migration and the international economic system

Castles and Kosack regard migration as resulting from the development of the international economic system. According to them the richer European nations have exploited the poorer nations of the world causing their underdevelopment.

From colonial times onwards the Third World has been used as a source of cheap, easily exploited labour and cheap raw materials. The colonies were not allowed to develop, or in some cases even maintain, industries that competed with those of their European masters. Development has also been uneven in Europe, leaving potential migrants in some of the more impoverished rural areas of southern Europe. The poor in the Third World have then been used as a reserve army of labour by successful capitalist nations during periods of economic prosperity and high employment.

Migration tends to increase the inequalities between richer and poorer nations. Those who migrate are a valuable resource: they are usually young and vigorous. The society into which they were born has had to pay to maintain them during their childhood when they were not able to contribute to the wealth of their nation. Castles and Kosack therefore see 'migration as a form of development aid for the migration countries' which are able to take advantage of the labour which has cost them little or nothing to produce.

In the countries experiencing immigration the process of migration tends to benefit certain groups and to harm others. Although immigration to Western Europe has not been great enough to actually reduce wages, the extra supply of workers has helped to prevent wages rising as much as they might have done. The immigrants have increased competition for manual jobs. As a result:

> *workers are likely to lose from the tendency for immigration to restrain increases in the general wage rate. By the same token, capitalists gain, as profit rates are kept high.*
>
> Castles and Kosack, 1973

'Race prejudice' and the working class

As well as directly serving the interests of the ruling class by reducing its wage bills, immigration can also help to cement its power in capitalist societies. According to Castles and Kosack, prejudice against immigrants has three main functions:

1. First, it serves to 'conceal and legitimate the exploitation' of immigrant workers 'by alleging that they are congenitally inferior'. Injustice and discrimination that would otherwise be unacceptable are tolerated if they are directed at a supposedly inferior group.
2. Second, immigrant workers are often used as scapegoats for the problems created by the capitalist system. They are a convenient explanation for problems such as unemployment and housing shortages. In reality, though, such problems result from 'the deficiencies of capitalist society, which is unable to provide adequate living conditions and to guarantee security to the whole of the working population'.
3. Third, 'race prejudice' serves to divide the working class. Workers are persuaded to accept discriminatory measures against immigrant workers and this means that there is little prospect of the working class uniting to oppose capitalist power. Castles and Kosack argue:

> *The traditional class consciousness based on collective ideals and actions tends to be replaced by a sectional consciousness of the indigenous workers. Indeed, the change may go even further: the orientation towards collective action designed to improve the position of all workers may be replaced by aspirations for individual advancement, without any change in the non-egalitarian structure of society.*
>
> Castles and Kosack, 1973

Castles and Kosack conclude that immigration benefits the ruling class by reducing its labour costs and by preventing the working class from seeking to change the status quo which works to the advantage of the richest and most powerful members of society. (We discuss Marxist views on 'race' and ethnicity further on pp. 258–9.)

Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller – *The Age of Migration*

The increase in migration

In a more recent study published in 1993, Castles, writing with Mark Miller, has described the internationalization of migration since 1973. He was more optimistic in the later study about the effects of migration than he was in 1973.

Castles and Miller argue that migration has increased as Third World countries have become more and more involved in the world capitalist system. In Third World countries that are developing, there is considerable migration from rural to urban areas, and as this happens more people acquire 'the financial and cultural resources necessary for international migration'.

Rich capitalist countries have tried to restrict migration, but are unable to do so completely. There are considerable numbers of illegal immigrants to some richer countries, for example to the USA from Mexico. In any case most countries now have established ethnic minority populations so that 'even if migration were to stop tomorrow' cultural pluralism would affect the countries 'for generations'.

There are enormous pressures encouraging migration and, as a result, 'Most highly developed countries and many less-developed ones have become far more culturally diverse than they were even a generation ago.'

The consequences of cultural pluralism

Castles and Miller argue that many countries now have no choice but to come to terms with the existence of a variety of ethnic groups within their national boundaries. 'Marginalisation and isolation' of ethnic minority groups have served only to strengthen their ethnic identity and, for some minorities, their culture has become 'a mechanism of resistance'. Consequently, 'Even if serious attempts were made to end all forms of discrimination and racism, cultural and linguistic differences will persist for generations.'

Although the discrimination and exclusion of ethnic minority groups are undesirable in themselves, the cultural pluralism they engender opens up new possibilities. A new global culture develops, encouraged by the mass media, international travel and migration. People become more familiar with the cultures of different societies and ethnic groups. Therefore 'difference need no longer be a marker for strangeness and separation, but rather an opportunity for informed choice among a myriad of possibilities'. International migration might even, Castles and Miller suggest, 'give hope of increased unity in dealing with the pressing problems which beset our small planet'.

To Castles and Miller then, it is no longer possible for most countries to adopt the 'monocultural and assimilationist models' that were advocated by supporters of the immigrant-host theories.

However some countries have been relatively isolated from international migration for many years. With the break-up of the USSR and the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe, a number of countries have suddenly been exposed to enormous social changes. In such a situation 'narrow traditional cultures seem to offer a measure of defence' for those subject to these pressures. Hence exclusionary nationalism has led to civil war in areas such as the former Yugoslavia.

Ethnicity – the problem of classification

Like the immigrant-host model, sociological approaches based on the idea of ethnicity place great emphasis on culture. They distinguish human groups primarily according to the distinctiveness of their lifestyles. They tend to attach little importance to 'race' as a biological difference between humans, although they do recognize that it is important when groups of humans *believe* they belong to a particular 'race'.

However, unlike the immigrant-host model, approaches based around the idea of ethnicity do not assume that in the long term immigrant groups will assimilate by adopting the culture of the host society. The ethnicity approach implies that migrant groups will very often retain large elements of their original culture, although they may modify it in a new setting. In fact ethnicity studies are not just confined to migrant groups. Nation-states can contain distinctive ethnic groups without migration having taken place. These groups may or may not be thought of as 'races'.

In this section we will begin by discussing definitions of ethnicity and we will then examine a number of studies of ethnic groups in Britain. We will then evaluate the ethnicity approach.

Defining ethnicity

The origins of the term ethnicity

Thomas Hylland Eriksen (1993) points out that ethnicity derives from the Greek word *ethnos* which is itself derived from another Greek word *ethnikos*. This meant pagan or heathen. The term ethnic had this meaning in English until around the middle of the nineteenth century when it started being used as an alternative to 'race'. However, Eriksen argues that in modern anthropology and sociology an ethnic group is usually seen as being culturally rather than

physically distinctive. This is certainly reflected in the views of the next writer we will look at, J. Milton Yinger.

J. Milton Yinger – a definition of ethnicity

J. Milton Yinger (1981) argues that there is a difference between physically defined and socially defined 'races'. He argues that physically distinct 'races' may exist in theory but in practice the boundaries between physical 'races' have become so blurred that groups of humans with a distinct phenotype are difficult to distinguish.

Yinger says that biological 'races' are 'of relatively little interest to the social scientist', though they may be of some interest to 'the biologist and physical anthropologist'. Socially defined 'races' consist of ethnic groups who are seen by themselves or others as having distinct biological characteristics, whether or not they really do form a distinct biological group.

To Yinger an ethnic group (or as he calls it, an ethnie) exists in the 'fullest sense' when:

> *a segment of a larger society is seen by others to be different in some combination of the following characteristics – language, religion, race and ancestral homeland with its related culture; the members also perceive themselves in that way; and they participate in shared activities built around their (real or mythical) common origin or culture.*
>
> Yinger, 1981

Yinger's definition is a fairly broad one and essentially any group which believes itself to be an ethnic group and which acts in terms of that belief *is* an ethnic group.

Yinger says that 'phenomena on many different levels of generality' can be called ethnic groups. These can be of three main types:

1. First, he claims that an immigrant population sharing 'a common former citizenship' can be the basis for an ethnie. In America, Koreans, Filipinos and Vietnamese are examples of this type of ethnie.
2. Second, an ethnic group can also consist of 'a sub-societal group that clearly shares a common descent and cultural background'. He gives as examples native American groups such as the Oneida Indians and the Iroquois, Turkomans in Iran, and Albanians in the former Yugoslavia.
3. Third, an ethnie can be composed of:

> *pan-cultural groups of persons of widely different cultural and societal backgrounds who, however, can be identified as 'similar' on the basis of language, race or religion mixed with broadly similar statuses.*
>
> Yinger, 1981

In America, Hispanics from different Latin American countries are sometimes seen as forming one ethnic group. In Britain, Asians are sometimes seen in the same way, despite linguistic and religious differences and despite originating from different countries.

John Richardson – ethnicity and other classification systems

Richardson (1990) identifies three main classification systems:

1. 'race'
2. black/white
3. ethnicity.

He argues that there are some advantages in using ethnicity rather than 'race' and black/white. Like most sociologists he disputes the existence of clearcut biological groups in the population. He therefore rejects the use of the concept of 'race'. He also raises a number of problems with using the term black. It can be a confusing term since sometimes it is used to refer only to those of Afro-Caribbean origin, and sometimes in countries like Britain it is used more broadly to refer to disadvantaged minorities. However, when it is used in the latter sense, it is still not usually seen as appropriate to apply it to groups such as the Chinese, Cypriots and people from the Middle East, even though they are sometimes as disadvantaged in Western industrialized societies as groups who are commonly referred to as black.

Another problem is that many Asians do not regard themselves as 'black'.

In some ways then, Richardson sees ethnic groups as a more acceptable term than the available alternatives. He sees ethnicity as based upon cultural differences between groups and says:

> *This classificatory approach is attractive in so far as it highlights socio-cultural criteria (unlike the conventional 'race' systems) and it accommodates a potentially wide range of groups (unlike the two-category black/white model).*
>
> Richardson, 1990

Nevertheless, Richardson believes that there are serious problems with the idea of ethnicity as well. In particular it can be very difficult to distinguish clearly between ethnic groups. Many groups are themselves subdivided and they may overlap with other groups. Ethnic groups can be distinguished in different ways leading to different classifications. Thus, for example, territorial origin could lead to distinctions between Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and

Indians, whereas religious affiliation would lead to a distinction between Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. Linguistic criteria could produce a third system of classification.

Conclusion

Whatever these problems, it can be argued that the idea of ethnic groups is the least unsatisfactory way of dealing with the problem of classification. It is more flexible and adaptable than other approaches, and can accommodate changes in people's perceptions about the groups to which they belong. Groups such as the Irish in England can be accommodated within the ethnicity framework whereas they cannot under the other alternatives.

This approach is not limited to describing immigrant groups and different facets of ethnicity (such as language, religion and territorial origin), and can be used as the basis of classification as appropriate to the sociological issue or issues under consideration. Above all it recognizes that social divisions between such groups are created, maintained, altered and challenged by humans and that they are not the inevitable product of supposed biological differences.

The idea of 'race', though, remains a useful term when ethnic groups are *thought* by themselves or by others to be distinguished by phenotype.

Studies of ethnicity

Studies of ethnicity often take the form of ethnographic studies, that is studies of the lifestyles of groups of people. Such studies do not always focus on migrants and their descendants, but in Britain the main focus has been on people of Caribbean and South Asian origin.

Migrants from the Caribbean and from South Asia were the subject of a number of early studies. These studies usually compared the lifestyles of Afro-Caribbeans or South Asians in Britain with their lifestyles in their native lands in order to evaluate the extent to which the British context had affected their cultures.

Later studies, which have taken place since a second generation (and then later generations) of British-born Afro-Caribbeans and South Asians has become established, have tended to examine the extent to which traditional cultures have changed across the generations.

The studies we will look at are only a small sample of the numerous studies that have been undertaken, but they are fairly typical of the genre.

Roger and Catherine Ballard – Sikhs in the Punjab and in Leeds

Phases of development of South Asian communities

Between 1971 and 1974 the Ballards conducted research into the lifestyles of Sikhs in Leeds and in the Jullundur Doab area of the Punjab (Ballard and Ballard, 1977). Although their research was confined to studying Sikhs, they claim to identify four phases of development which are common to most South Asian communities in Britain:

1. The pioneer phase took place before the Second World War and involved a small number of early migrants establishing the first South Asian communities in Britain.
2. The second phase involved mass migration mainly by males in the post-war era.
3. The third phase started around 1960. During this phase increasing numbers of wives came to Britain, the communities became more established and some South Asians began to move into better housing. The Ballards call this the phase of family reunions.
4. The fourth stage involved a further consolidation and improvement in housing for some and the development of a substantial British-born second generation. For Sikhs in Leeds this stage started around 1970, but in the early 1970s Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups in Leeds were only just entering the third phase.

Pioneers

Many of the very earliest Sikh migrants were pedlars and hawkers from the Bhatra caste who arrived in Britain in the early 1920s. By the 1930s there were small communities of Punjabis in most large British cities.

For example, Darshan Singh was an important early settler in Leeds. In 1938 he had accumulated enough money to buy a shop/warehouse. Like other successful pioneer settlers he then acted as a sponsor, encouraging relatives to come and settle and helping them once they arrived. Darshan Singh came from the Ramgarhia caste of craft workers and his influence resulted in most of Leeds's Sikhs belonging to the same caste.

Muslims and Gujaratis also became established in Leeds. Ex-sailors were the most important pioneers in these communities.

Mass migration

Mass migration started in the 1950s. The pioneers provided a foundation for new migrants, often offering them hospitality and accommodation while

they looked for work. The Sikh migrants in this period did not think of themselves as permanent settlers. They tended to come from neither the poorest nor the most prosperous sections of Punjabi society. The poorest could not afford the fare to Britain, and the most prosperous had no reason to leave.

Living standards are relatively good in the Punjab but as families grow larger land is divided out and some people end up with holdings that are too small to sustain a family. Misfortune or a shortage of land could prompt one or more men to go abroad in search of earnings to help sustain their families back in the Punjab.

The first post-war migrants were almost exclusively male. According to the Ballards they 'regarded their villages of origin as the only meaningful arena of social interaction and tended to view Britain as a social vacuum, a cultural no-man's land'. The migrants wanted to live as cheaply as possible in order to maximize the amount of the money they could send home.

This led to the formation of all-male households, usually with 'a single landlord who assumed a kind of patriarchal authority over its members'. The landlords bought their houses as a temporary investment with no intention of staying in Britain. Large, cheap houses which accommodated a considerable number of tenants could generate a substantial income, and when they were sold they could provide the ex-landlord with a large lump sum to take back to the Punjab.

Family reunions

The Ballards identify a number of reasons why South Asian immigrants were reluctant to bring their families to Britain.

The migrants' original intention had not been to settle in Britain and many were worried about the influence British culture would have on their families if they joined them in Britain: British culture was seen as 'morally degenerate'. In any case new immigration laws could make family reunions problematic.

Furthermore, separation of husbands and wives was not as traumatic as it might be for Westerners. Sikh families, and South Asian families generally, do not place as much emphasis on the bond between wives and husbands as Western families do. The wives in Asia 'were still part of the joint household, under the care of the father or brother of the absent husband'. There has been a long tradition in the Punjab of men leaving their families for long periods, sometimes to work as soldiers.

However, 'male migrants were constantly homesick for their families and despite the quasi family ties of the all male household, life for the settler was ascetic'. Sikhs put less emphasis on purdah, or the seclusion of women, than Muslims, so Sikhs tended to be less worried about their wives coming to Britain. By 1971 the vast majority of Sikh men in Leeds were living with their wives whereas Muslim and Hindu all-male households were still quite common.

Many of the earliest male migrants had made little attempt to preserve traditional Sikh culture and values. Few took part in religious rituals and many did not bother wearing turbans or growing long hair and beards. Seeing their stay as temporary, and without having to worry about their family being corrupted by Western culture, they felt little need to try to protect themselves from Western influences. However, once they were joined by their families, Sikhs in Leeds became more concerned to ensure that their traditional family life and religion were preserved.

Far from encouraging assimilation, the establishment of a more permanent Sikh community led to a more distinctive ethnic identity. The Ballards comment:

> *Throughout the 1960s, the Sikhs set about recreating as many of the institutions of Punjab society as possible. This was a strong contrast to the earlier period where they merely utilised those cultural values which eased their survival.*
>
> Ballard and Ballard, 1977

For example, liaisons with white women by Sikh men began to be condemned more strongly, and regular attendance at Sikh temples became the norm.

As the Sikh community became more established and less money was sent home to the villages, it also became more prosperous. Standards of housing improved and many Sikhs set up their own businesses. The Punjabi population created an 'elaborate infra-structure of services and businesses' including goldsmiths, travel agents, cinemas and grocers' shops.

Although the Sikh community became increasingly entrenched and the likelihood of returning to Asia decreased, the belief in an eventual return (which has been called the myth of return) persisted. According to the Ballards, this provided a valuable justification for preserving Sikh culture. After all, the preservation of the culture would make the eventual return smoother. It also offered some psychological protection against racism since it was believed it would only have to be tolerated on a temporary basis pending the return to Asia. Thus the Ballards say that 'The importance of return as a real goal has gradually faded and instead it has become

a central charter for the maintenance of Sikh ethnicity in Britain.'

The second generation

As a second generation born in Britain became a feature of more and more Sikh families, changes in lifestyle began to take place. Many moved out of the inner city and bought houses in suburban areas north of Leeds. Parents became increasingly concerned about their children's education and more eager for them to stay on at school and obtain higher qualifications. More wives, including those with children, started taking paid employment.

Although the Sikhs adopted some aspects of Western materialism and came to value individual educational achievement, this did not undermine traditional values within the family. Nor did it prevent strong family networks extending across different households.

The second generation of British-born and British-educated children 'have been exposed to socialisation in two very different cultures at home and at school'. The Ballards suggest that many people believe that this leads to very strong tensions between parents and children and long-lasting conflict between the generations. Their research, however, found that the conflict was often only temporary. Children would start wearing British-style clothes, following contemporary fashions, and some would start to argue about the need to visit relatives and worship at the temples. A few would contemplate running away from their family.

However, these behaviours often represented little more than a temporary period of teenage rebellion. The research found that even in the case of the runaways:

> *almost all young Sikhs, as well as members of other South Asian groups, do eventually return to seek solutions within the context of their families. They have all been socialised into a deep-rooted loyalty to the family and they find the outside world alien and unsympathetic in comparison.*
>
> Ballard and Ballard, 1977

Generally the second generation have modified their parents' values to make them more applicable to a British context, but they have not abandoned them. Many young Sikhs become skilled at multiple presentations of self, changing their behaviour between the family and the outside world of work or education. The experience of racism makes Sikhs believe that 'however much they try to conform, they can never really be British because of the colour of their skins'. This encourages a strong sense of ethnic identity and leads many young Sikhs to be determined to bring up their own children with a strong 'sense of Punjabi identity'.

Conclusion

The Ballards claim that their account of Sikhs in Leeds is applicable to most groups of immigrants to Britain from rural areas of south-east Asia. They argue, though, that well-qualified professionals from urban areas adopted Western values and tried to assimilate into British society. However, they suggest that, faced with discrimination, these groups too have developed a greater ethnic consciousness. The Ballards say 'peasants and professionals are coming closer together'.

Nevertheless, the Ballards are critical of approaches to the sociology of ethnicity that place too much emphasis on racism and other external constraints in explaining the behaviour of ethnic minorities. Such approaches ignore 'the culturally determined preferences of the group concerned'. Both internal preferences and external constraints are important in shaping the lifestyle of ethnic minorities and neither should be ignored.

For example, Sikhs and other Asian groups have not maintained a distinctive ethnic identity just because they have been the victims of racism. The first generation had no intention of adopting Western lifestyles and this has had a strong bearing on the development of the communities.

While the first generation was more divided according to such factors as kinship, religion and caste, the second generation was somewhat different. Born in Britain and having experienced racism throughout their lives, they felt a greater sense of identity with other South Asians, whatever the differences between them. Thus, according to the Ballards, the second generation was, in the 1970s, 'moving towards the establishment of an over-arching South Asian ethnic group'. This ethnic identity may have been prompted by external hostility but was still actively being created through the choices being made by young Asians in Britain.

Roger Ballard – Sikhs and Mirpuri Muslims

Divisions in the Asian community

In an article published in 1990, Roger Ballard updated his earlier work and described changes in Asian communities in the late 1970s and 1980s. In the earlier study, he and Catherine Ballard had suggested that South Asians in Britain were being drawn closer together. In his later article, Ballard stresses that there are strong divisions between South Asian groups in Britain. He argues:

As it becomes increasingly obvious that settlers of different backgrounds are following varied, and often sharply contrasting social trajectories, so it is becoming steadily more difficult, and increasingly inappropriate, to make generalisations which are valid for all 'Asians' in Britain.

Ballard, 1990

He notes that there are divisions according to class, caste, region of origin, religion and different experiences of migration. In order to try to explain these divisions he compares the Sikhs who originated in Jullundur Doab in India (who are discussed above) with Muslims from the Mirpur District in Kashmir, Pakistan.

Differences between the Sikhs and Muslims

Both the Jullunduris and Mirpuris migrated to Britain from predominantly rural areas, and in both groups the main aim of the early migrants was to earn money to send back to Asia. However, after arrival in Britain they followed different paths.

The Sikhs were reunited with their families earlier than the Muslims and enjoyed more economic success. As described above, many Sikhs set up their own businesses, and others aspired to – and succeeded in gaining – middle-class jobs and statuses. By 1990 most had moved away from inner cities and their children were enjoying educational success comparable with that of middle-class white children.

Most of the Mirpuri Muslims became 'international commuters' during their early years as migrants. They would work for a time in Britain before returning home to spend some time with their families. They would then return to Britain to earn more money. A few set up their own businesses, although they were not as numerous nor as successful as those of the Sikhs. However, most relied upon unskilled or semi-skilled work in industries such as textiles and engineering. Their wages were comparatively low and from the 1970s onwards they were more likely to be hit by unemployment.

Even after being joined by their families most were unable to afford to buy homes away from the inner cities. Their children enjoyed less academic success than their Sikh counterparts.

Economic reasons for the differences

Having described the differences, Ballard then sets out to explain them. One important reason for the greater success of the Sikhs was the greater prosperity of their region of origin. Jullundur Doab is a relatively affluent agricultural area with fertile land and a good infrastructure. Mirpur also has fertile land but it has a higher population density so landholdings tend to be small, it is difficult to irrigate and the infrastructure is poor.

As a consequence of these differences, migrants from Jullundur Doab tended to have more craft and business skills and higher educational qualifications than the Mirpuris. They also tended to be more literate.

Relying on unskilled and semi-skilled work in traditional manufacturing industries made the Mirpuris much more likely to lose their jobs once recession hit Britain. However, Ballard does not believe that such differences in economic situation can, on their own, account for the contrasting fortunes of the two groups. He argues that cultural differences may also be part of the explanation.

Cultural reasons for the differences

Ballard is very cautious about attributing too much importance to cultural factors. He expresses concern about the possibility of resorting to 'sweeping and inevitably stereotypical assertions about the allegedly "conservative" or "liberal" characteristics of the two religious traditions'. Nevertheless, he does believe that differences in religion and in community and family life could partly explain differences in the fortunes of South Asian groups. Ballard identifies three important cultural differences:

1. Muslims are allowed to marry close kin and often do so, whereas it is not permitted for Sikhs and Hindus. This means that kinship networks for Muslims tend to be more close-knit and geographically limited in scope.
2. The tradition of purdah is stronger in Islam than in Sikhism and it places greater restrictions on women in public places. As a result, Muslim women in Pakistan are less likely to travel long distances or to take up paid employment outside the home than Sikh women in India.
3. Sikhs and Hindus cremate their dead whereas Muslims bury them. Consequently Muslims tend to develop stronger ties to a particular village or region where their ancestors are buried.

Together these factors make Muslim families less geographically mobile and more close-knit and even inward looking. As a result, the male Mirpuri immigrants were rather more cautious about bringing their wives and children to Britain than the Sikh men. As international commuters, sometimes for up to 15 years, the Muslim men used up a lot of their money on travel. Furthermore, a higher proportion of their income was sent back to Asia to be spent or invested there. By the time the men decided that their families should settle in Britain the administrative obstacles had become greater, slowing down family reunions even more.

Muslim families have therefore had less time to become established in Britain and improve their living standards than some other groups of Asians. Once in Britain, Muslim wives were less likely to take paid employment, thus limiting the earning-power of the family. Thus, although the differences in the economic success of the two groups have been influenced by economic factors and the structural features of society, cultural factors such as religion and kinship patterns have had a part to play as well.

Conclusion

Ballard stresses at the end of his article that his account is rather over-simplified. He points out that 'Sikhs' and 'Mirpuris' are not homogeneous groups. For example, members of different Sikh castes such as the Jat (peasant-farmers) and the Ramgarhia (craft workers) have followed rather different paths. Furthermore, not all Jullunduris are Sikh and many British Pakistanis come from regions other than Mirpur.

Nevertheless, Ballard's work does show that it may only become possible to explain inequalities between ethnic groups if sociologists can develop a sophisticated understanding of cultural differences, as well as examining wider structural forces.

Ken Pryce – West Indians in Bristol

The study

Between 1969 and 1974 Ken Pryce conducted a study of West Indians in Bristol (Pryce, 1979). He relied mainly upon participant observation to collect his data but supplemented this with other methods including interviewing. His study was based mainly on St Paul's, a poor inner-city area of Bristol with a large West Indian community. Most of the population studied were, like Pryce himself, of Jamaican origin.

Like Ballard, Pryce compared the behaviour of the ethnic minority in Britain with the lifestyle in the country of origin. Although most of his study is descriptive, he does make use of some Marxist concepts in explaining the behaviour of West Indians in Britain. Like most ethnographers of South Asians in Britain, Pryce found the ethnic group he studied to be far from homogeneous. However, he found that West Indians were not divided according to such factors as nationality, religion, language or region of origin, but were differentiated according to the subcultures they had adopted in Britain.

All West Indians in Britain faced a series of problems in adapting to life there. They tried to solve these problems by forming a number of distinctive subcultures which helped them cope in different ways with their situation.

Jamaican origins

Most of the original immigrants to Britain who settled in Bristol were poor, working-class Jamaicans. Modern Jamaica was originally established as a plantation society, ruled by Britain, where African slaves were put to work in the service of British economic interests. According to Pryce, the culture of slaves was very much shaped by the experience of slavery and was influenced much more by Western culture than by African. He says:

> *Not only was the African culture of the slaves destroyed, but the plantation economies, being dependent parts of the larger metropolitan economy, had the effect of extending British capitalist modes and ways of thinking to the Caribbean.*
>
> Pryce, 1979

African slaves lost both their religion and their patterns of family life: most were converted to Christianity, and under slavery it was impossible to maintain stable families. The slaves adopted the British language of their masters and, in Pryce's view, they internalized European values. He believes that Jamaican culture came to value all things European, particularly those that were British, while African culture was rejected and even despised. He says 'In Jamaica, the closer symbols, mannerisms, appearances and institutions approximate and conform to British standards, the higher their value and prestige.'

In modern Jamaica, family life among the lower classes is characterized by instability and by the comparative rarity of formal marriage. Although the higher classes generally adopt the 'monogamous nuclear family and Christian marriage', the same is not true of the poor. When men and women become partners and decide to live together, they do not usually get married immediately. Indeed many never get married because they tend to split up, with the wife returning to her mother, taking any children with her. If the couple stay together long enough, they may get married eventually, but this may be years after they have had their children.

To Pryce, the instability of marriage in Jamaica stems 'directly from the institution of slavery'. Although Jamaica is very largely Protestant it has incorporated other elements into its religion. An important feature of Jamaican religion is 'its cultic diversity and the recrudescence of non-Christian features, typically confined to the masses'.

Thus Pentecostalism, which is popular in Jamaica, is based upon a literal interpretation of the Bible but it also emphasizes the importance of possession by the Holy Spirit.

Rastafarianism is based largely upon the Old Testament. Founded by Marcus Garvey in the early

decades of the twentieth century, it preaches that black Africans living outside Africa will eventually return to their continent of origin and will be freed from the oppression and exploitation they have suffered at the hands of whites.

When in the 1950s a considerable number of Jamaicans emigrated and settled in Bristol, they brought with them religious beliefs and patterns of family life that were to have a strong influence on their lives in Britain.

Orientations and subcultures

From his study of Bristol, Pryce found two main orientations to society within the West Indian community. These were the expressive-disreputable orientation and the stable law-abiding orientation. The main difference between them was that those adhering to the former were unwilling to earn a living through regular work, whereas those adhering to the latter did seek regular employment.

All West Indians in Britain faced difficulty in finding well-paid, secure jobs and in affording comfortable accommodation. All faced problems of discrimination and rejection by white society, yet they responded in different ways:

1 Those who adopted the expressive-disreputable orientation rejected the society which rejected them.
2 Those who adopted the stable law-abiding orientation were more willing to accept or at least tolerate their situation and some adopted the values of white society wholeheartedly.

Within the expressive-disreputable orientation Pryce distinguished two subcultures:

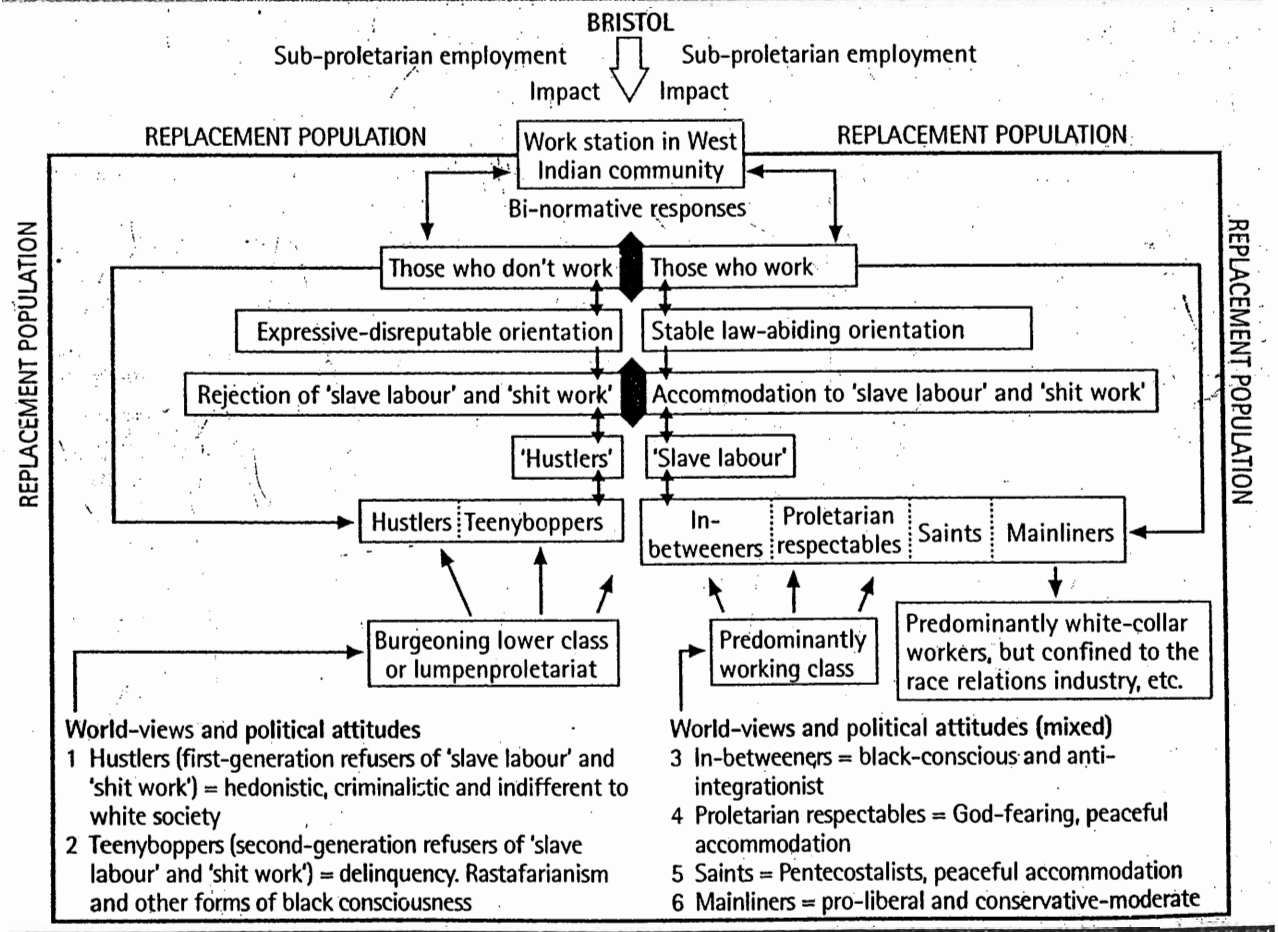
1 the hustlers
2 the teenyboppers.

Within the stable law-abiding orientation there were four subcultures:

1 the in-betweeners
2 the mainliners
3 the proletarian respectables
4 the saints.

We will now look at each of these subcultures. Pryce's overall theory is illustrated in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3 Ken Pryce's theory of subcultural adaptations amongst West Indians in Bristol



Source: K. Pryce (1979) *Endless Pressure*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, p. 271

Hustlers

Hustlers have conventional aspirations. They want to achieve material success. However, they have become disillusioned with trying to do so through conventional means. Many have experienced the 'humiliating effect of racial discrimination' and have become demoralized by the experience. Originally many of those who became hustlers wanted to work hard to earn enough to return home, but they found it impossible to get jobs doing anything other than 'white man's shit work'. They earned too little to save up money and they became increasingly resentful of their situation.

Pryce argues that slavery produced a strong antipathy amongst black Jamaicans to taking orders from white bosses. Being dominated by whites threatened the West Indian male's sense of masculinity. In Britain the response to discrimination has been to develop 'a dread of having to work as a menial' and 'abhorrence of having to take orders from a "cheeky white man" indifferent to him as an individual'.

Rejecting what they see as 'slave labour', they turn to hustles to earn a living. Most hustles are illegal. They involve selling drugs, acting as prostitutes' pimps, or 'conning others'. Some hustlers sell fake marijuana. Another earns a living by putting on dances, but he may sell tickets by claiming a famous reggae star is to appear when there is no chance of this happening. The odd hustler resorts to less subtle tactics by carrying out an armed robbery. Earning a living through hustles, rather than through more conventional means, 'restores the hustler's sense of pride and his feeling of mastery and autonomy'. He is reliant upon his own wits to make money and dependent on nobody.

Hustlers, and others of the expressive-disreputable orientation, believe it is very important to be strong and to be able to cope with pressure from difficult circumstances. Strength helps the hustler to avoid 'getting in a plight'. Pryce defines a plight as:

> *any form of misfortune or predicament involving loss of face – e.g. desertion by one's wife or husband, imprisonment, being crossed in a love affair, having the bailiff on one's front step, having to pawn one's clothes, going hungry, sexual impotence, losing a fight with one's friends watching.*
>
> Pryce, 1979

The pressure of avoiding these plights means that people have to let off steam. This often takes place at a 'blues dance' where hustlers gather with teenyboppers and others to listen to loud reggae and soul, drink, dance and smoke marijuana.

Teenyboppers

According to Pryce, a teenybopper is:

> *a West Indian youth in his teens or very early twenties, who is male, homeless, unemployed and who in the language of liberals and social workers, is 'at risk' in the community – that is, a young West Indian who is either already a delinquent or is in danger of becoming one.*
>
> Pryce, 1979

Teenyboppers are often a product of the unstable family life that is characteristic of lower classes in the West Indies, and which is also found in some families in Britain. During the early stages of migration to Britain, children were often left behind to be raised by relatives such as aunts or grandmothers, and this loosened attachments to parents. In Britain the frequent break-up of relationships, the absence of fathers in many homes, and the presence in some cases of the mother's new partner, combined with poverty, 'militate against family cohesion'.

Conflict between children and parents breaks out over issues such as how late children can stay out and who they choose as friends. The teenyboppers end up leaving home early in their lives. They find the outside world hostile, and experience racism when they try to find regular work. They suffer from drift and alienation and sooner or later come into conflict with the law.

Unlike hustlers, teenyboppers tend to be much more politically conscious. Some get involved with radical political organizations. The teenybopper has a 'schizoid orientation towards both his own Negro roots, which he despises, and the white bourgeois values which he had been indoctrinated to venerate as culturally and morally superior'. However, he is rejected by white society and he 'responds to rejection with rejection'. Some teenyboppers turn to Rastafarianism with its promise of salvation through a return to Africa, while others are influenced more by Marxism and 'a hodge-podge of the ideas and doctrines of all left-wing revolutionary positions'.

In-betweeners

As their name suggests, although Pryce sees members of this group as stable and law-abiding, he also sees them as having characteristics in common with the expressive-disreputable groups. In-betweeners are described as being aged 18–35 and ambitious for material success. They have steady jobs and are usually quite well educated and qualified. They have, or would like to have, a stable and conventional family life.

However, they want to achieve these things without abandoning their black roots. They believe in

the importance of 'black culture' and 'black pride'. They are against close integration with whites and many hope to return to the Caribbean to use their skills to improve society there. They mix with hustlers during their leisure time and may smoke marijuana, but generally they are not very involved in illegal activities.

Mainliners

Like in-betweeners, mainliners have conventional jobs, they aspire to material success and stable and conventional family lives. However, they have very different values. Mainliners are very law-abiding, politically conservative and in favour of integration with whites. Many work in jobs such as race relations officers, youth workers, and health visitors. A few have their own businesses or work as supervisors. They are 'mostly, literate, middle-aged, well established West Indian residents'. They have no desire to return to the West Indies, and they adapt to life in Britain by adopting the lifestyle and culture of the British middle class.

Mainliners are seen as traitors to blacks by in-betweeners, and are regarded with thinly disguised contempt by Pryce. He criticizes them for claiming to represent the West Indian community and becoming self-appointed leaders. He claims that they are 'not necessarily accepted as social equals by their white colleagues, who are almost always of a higher social class and better educated than they'. Pryce is particularly scathing when he says 'There is no doubt that many mainliners are nothing more than pretentious pen-pushers who are less concerned with achieving results than with gaining recognition for themselves as individuals.'

Proletarian respectables and saints

The final two groups, proletarian respectables and saints, are both working-class, hard-working, law-abiding and politically passive. Like other West Indians they suffer from discrimination but despite this they 'tenaciously pursue regular and stable employment'. The men usually have unskilled or semi-skilled manual jobs; the women have routine low-paid service jobs in areas such as catering or the NHS. Many of the first generation came to Britain with families, and their experience of work in the West Indies had led to them becoming accustomed to long hours, poor conditions and low pay. In Britain they may be slightly better off than they had been, so they struggle on despite hardship.

The saints are Pentecostalists. Their religion preaches that 'Sin is rebellion against the law of God' and that 'Salvation consists in deliverance from all sin and unrighteousness through faith and repentance, water baptisms, baptism of the spirit and continuance of a godly life.' These beliefs provide powerful sanctions against criminality and deviance, but the religion also offers comfort in a racist society. Saints devalue the significance of life in this world and look to salvation in life after death, making discrimination and hardship that much easier to bear.

Conclusion

Pryce concludes that all the subcultures are ways of dealing with the work situation that confronts West Indians in Britain. They are attempts to deal with or escape from 'pressures of poverty and race' which in turn have their origins in slavery and colonialism.

For centuries blacks have been exploited as a cheap 'reserve pool' of labour by British capitalism. In the West Indians, political consciousness resulted from the anti-colonial struggle for independence. Immigration to Britain resulted not only in the importation of the Westernized values adopted by the slaves, but also in the introduction of anti-colonial attitudes. This is reflected not only in the criminality of the hustlers, but also in the political consciousness of most teenyboppers and some in-betweeners.

Evaluation

Pryce's work demonstrates the value of ethnographic studies in revealing cultural differences within ethnic minority groups. However, like most studies, it is geographically limited. Although Pryce claims that his findings are probably applicable to most British towns and cities with a sizeable West Indian population, his study was confined to Bristol and wider generalizations may not be justified.

His study also concentrated very much on the men in the community. The cultures of West Indian women were discussed in much less detail and assumed much less significance in his overall theory.

Although Pryce tried to link his ethnographic study in Britain with a discussion of West Indian culture in the Caribbean, his attempt to do so has been criticized. Errol Lawrence (1982) argues that Pryce is quite wrong to claim that slavery destroyed African culture and that West Indians have almost completely adopted Western, European culture. Lawrence believes, for example, that African rituals and a belief in spirit possession have had a strong influence on West Indian culture, and that African languages have influenced the way West Indians speak English.

Furthermore, to Lawrence, slaves did not simply passively accept slavery and the attempt to destroy their culture. As well as maintaining African elements in their lifestyle some slaves rebelled or ran away from their owners.

All the studies examined in this section are somewhat dated. More recent studies of ethnicity in

Britain have tended to adopt a rather different approach. A number have argued that it is no longer possible to see sharp distinctions in the culture of ethnic minorities and the white majority in Britain. They stress that members of ethnic minorities are very diverse and that there is increasing overlap between different cultures. Many such studies are linked to new theoretical approaches in the study of 'race' and ethnicity, and some are linked to a new emphasis upon issues of identity. Most have drawn upon the insights provided by studies of racism. These newer approaches to British ethnicity will be examined later in the chapter, once some of the theoretical developments on which they are based have been considered.

James McKay – primordial and mobilizationist explanations of ethnicity

So far in this section we have examined how ethnicity can be defined and have considered some ethnographic studies of ethnicity. However, we have not yet dealt with explanations of how ethnic groups come to be formed in the first place. James McKay (1982) and others have identified two main types of explanation of how ethnic groups form: primordial and mobilizationist.

Primordial approaches

McKay notes that the primordial approach was first proposed by the American sociologist Shils in 1957. Shils claimed that people often had a primordial attachment to the territory in which they lived, or from which they originated, to their religion and to their kin. This attachment involved strong feelings of loyalty and, Shils said, 'a state of intense and comprehensive solidarity' (quoted in McKay, 1982).

Some writers see primordial attachments as a basic feature of social life and a natural and inevitable phenomenon in human groups. From this point of view humans always divide the world into groups of insiders and outsiders, 'us' and 'them', and have an emotional and intuitive bond with those who belong to their group. This comes either from socialization or from some basic psychocultural need for belonging.

Primordial ethnic attachments may persist for centuries or millennia, and can be the basis for intense conflict between ethnic groups over long periods.

McKay suggests that a strength of the primordial approach is that it can account for 'the emotional strength of ethnic bonds', but he is also critical of it. He claims that this approach tends to be 'deterministic and static':

1. It assumes that members of ethnic groups have little choice about their sense of attachment, whereas in reality ethnic attachments do vary in strength from individual to individual.
2. It tends to assume that all individuals will have an ethnic identity and thus offers no explanation for the existence of 'rootless cosmopolitans'.
3. The approach cannot easily deal with changes in ethnic identity amongst groups.
4. The primordial approach attaches so much importance to basic human emotions that it tends to 'talk as if ethnic and group identities existed in a political and economic vacuum'.

Mobilizationist perspectives

The mobilizationist approach suggests that there is nothing inevitable or natural about ethnicity. Ethnic identities are actively created, maintained and reinforced by individuals and groups 'in order to obtain access to social, political and material resources'. People use the symbols of ethnic identity to further their own ends, and ethnic groups tend to be formed when people believe they can gain some advantage by forming them.

For example, South Asians or Afro-Caribbeans in Britain might develop an ethnic identity because they believe that membership of an ethnic group offers practical and emotional support in a hostile, racist society. By forming ethnic groups it might be possible to achieve changes in the law or other political changes which strengthen their position.

McKay is perhaps slightly more sympathetic to this approach than the primordial model, but he still believes that it has its limitations. It tends to underestimate the emotional power of ethnic bonds and assumes that ethnicity is always related to common interests being pursued by the group. McKay argues that this is not always the case. He says 'the fact that some ethnic groups pursue political and economic interests does not mean that all ethnic groups have identical goals'.

Furthermore this approach sometimes confuses class and ethnic stratification, seeing the two as being little different. Ethnicity, though, involves more than class interests and can cut across class boundaries. In places such as Northern Ireland, South Africa and the Lebanon, ethnic conflicts have been stronger than conflict between classes and people have tended to identify with their ethnic group regardless of their social class.

Combining the approaches

McKay believes that the affective, emotional ties emphasized in the primordialist model and the instrumental ties stressed in the mobilizationist model tend to be interrelated and that both are 'manifestations' of

ethnicity. Rather than being irreconcilable opposites, the two theories can be combined. Ethnicity may be based primarily on mobilizationist, or primordialist, interests in different sets of circumstances. By producing a matrix based on combining the two, McKay is able to distinguish five types of ethnicity. These are illustrated in Figure 4.4.

Ethnic traditionalists

Groups of ethnic traditionalists are held together primarily by emotional ties. They often have a long history and their children are socialized to internalize their culture. They are not particularly concerned with pursuing social and economic interests but are more interested in maintaining a culture. They identify strongly with the ethnic group to which they belong. Examples include 'the Hutterite colonies of North America, and beleaguered minorities in the Middle East such as Armenians, Assyrians, Copts, Kurds, Shiites and Lebanese Christians'. These groups may have material interests but they have not been mobilized to pursue them collectively.

Ethnic militants

Both primordial and political and economic interests are strong amongst ethnic militants. For example, the Basques in Spain have their own language and their own cultural symbols such as flags. However, they also have a political movement which tries to gain greater autonomy or even independence from Spain.

Symbolic ethnics

Symbolic ethnics have quite weak ethnic attachments in terms of both primordial and political and economic factors. They have only token involvement in, or identification with, their ethnic group. In the USA, those of Scottish descent who sometimes attend a clan festival and the Irish who occasionally join a St Patrick's Day parade are examples of symbolic ethnics.

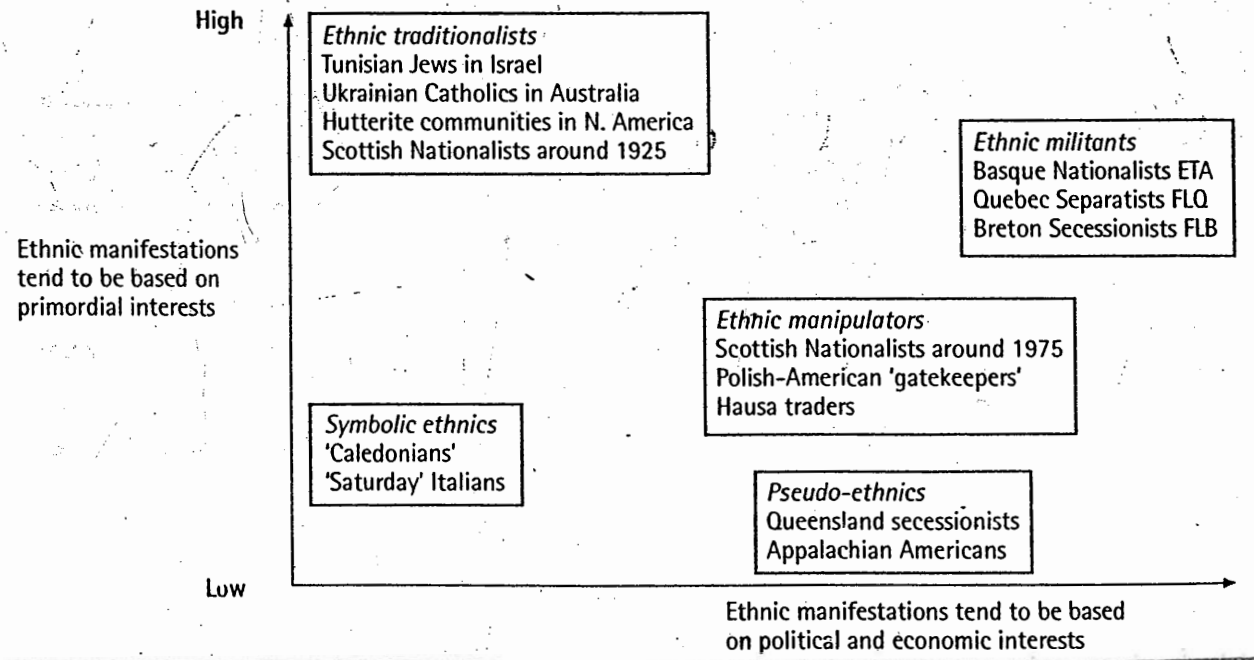
Ethnic manipulators

This type of group tries to promote its own political or economic interests but ethnic manipulators do not possess the same group solidarity and strong emotional ties as ethnic traditionalists and ethnic militants. Thus Scottish Nationalists in the 1970s were organized in a political party (the SNP), but its appeal was largely economic. It was not based upon an appeal to a distinctive Scottish culture but upon the claim that Scotland would be better off if it were ruled from Scotland rather than from Westminster.

Pseudo-ethnics

Pseudo-ethnics have the potential to become strong ethnic groups but that potential has not been realized. Leaders struggle to mobilize a sense of ethnic identity. Members of the group are more loyal to the state than to their ethnic group or potential ethnic group. For example, South Island secessionists in New Zealand want their part of the country to become independent,

Figure 4.4 Five types of ethnicity



Source: J. McKay (1982) 'An exploratory synthesis of primordial and mobilizationist approaches to ethnic phenomena', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 5, no. 4, p. 404

but they have a difficult task because those who live there do not have a strong sense of primordial attachment to the island. McKay says:

> *It could be said that ethnic militants and manipulators possess an ethnic trait which they utilize in order to obtain access to societal resources, whereas pseudo-ethnics try to make their pursuit of political and economic goals more legitimate by finding an ethnic foundation on which they can be based.*
>
> McKay, 1982

Conclusion

McKay admits that his matrix model approach is not fully developed. It does not explain why ethnicity takes one form or another, but he believes that further research could help to develop causal theories based upon his matrix. He argues that the matrix can be used to examine how ethnic groups change over time and move from one part of the matrix to another. It can also be used to distinguish factions within ethnic groups. For example, McKay says 'Orthodox Jews, members of Jewish "defence" organizations, and militant Zionists have different types and degrees of ethnic organization and identification.'

Michael E. Brown – the causes of ethnic conflict

Ethnic conflict and the 'New World Order'

Although McKay's work has implications for understanding ethnic conflict, it does not directly address this issue. Michael E. Brown has drawn upon the work of a number of other writers in trying to explain the existence of ethnic conflict in the contemporary world (Brown, 1997, first published 1993). He starts by noting that in the early 1990s there was considerable optimism in many quarters about the prospects for ethnic relationships. With the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, it was hoped that different states in the international community could work together to prevent or resolve conflict. For example, some people claimed that the international cooperation during the Gulf War – in which the USA and other countries (including Britain) repelled the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait – heralded the arrival of a 'New World Order'.

In the New World Order, states and ethnic groups would be reluctant to act in repressive or violent ways towards other states or ethnic groups because they would fear the consequences of the reaction from the international community. However, far from ushering in a new and more harmonious era, the end of the Cold War seems to have been followed by widespread and intense ethnic conflict. Brown points out that:

> *The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina has received the most attention in the West because of the intense coverage it has received from the Western media, but equally if not more horrific conflicts are under way in Afghanistan, Angola, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Burma, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Liberia, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Tajikstan. Other trouble spots abound – Bangladesh, Belgium, Bhutan, Burundi, Estonia, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Iraq, Latvia, Lebanon, Mali, South Africa, Spain, and Turkey, for example – and the prospects for ethnic conflict in Russia and China cannot be dismissed.*
>
> Brown, 1997, p. 80

Defining ethnicity

Brown tries to explain why such conflict has become prevalent, but first he tries to define ethnicity. He believes that six criteria must be met for a group of people to qualify as an ethnic group:

1. They must have a name that identifies them as a group.
2. They must 'believe in common ancestry'. It is not essential that this common ancestry is real or that genetic ties exist – it is the belief that matters.
3. They need to have shared beliefs about their collective past. These beliefs often take the form of myths.
4. They must have some degree of shared culture which is 'generally passed on through a combination of language, religion, laws, customs, institutions, dress, music, crafts, architecture, even food'.
5. The group has to have a sense of attachment to a specific territory.
6. Finally, members of the group must believe that they constitute an ethnic group.

Conflict between such groups can take a wide variety of forms. The conflict may take place through political processes with no violence involved. An example is the campaign of some French-Canadians to win autonomy for Quebec. On the other hand, the conflict may be very violent, as in the civil war in Bosnia. However, not all civil wars qualify as ethnic conflict. For example, the war between the Khmer Rouge and other groups in Cambodia is a war between political groups rather than ethnic ones. Nevertheless ethnic conflict is widespread.

The causes of ethnic conflict

Brown distinguishes between three main types of explanation for ethnic conflict, the systemic, the domestic and the perceptual.

Systemic explanations suggest that ethnic conflict results from 'the nature of the security systems in which ethnic groups operate'. An obvious systemic requirement before conflict is likely to occur is that the groups live close to one another. Brown suggests

that fewer than 20 of the 180 or so states in the world are ethnically homogeneous. This creates the potential for an enormous amount of conflict, but, fortunately, not all ethnic neighbours end up in conflict. Using the ideas of the political scientist Posen, Brown suggests that conflict will not break out when national, regional or international authorities are strong enough to prevent it by controlling the potentially opposing groups. Without this control, conflict can occur when a particular group believes it is in their interests to resort to violence. This can happen if they believe they will be more secure by launching a pre-emptive strike rather than waiting to be attacked.

Conflict can also result when it is difficult to distinguish between the offensive and defensive forces of a potential adversary. When empires, such as the Soviet Union, break up, ethnic groups may have to provide for their own defence for the first time. Lacking sophisticated military equipment, they usually have to rely largely on infantry. Although infantry may be intended for defensive purposes, they can easily be seen as a potentially offensive force and encourage a pre-emptive strike. Furthermore, the break-up of empires often produces a situation in which ethnic groups are surrounded by other groups who are potentially hostile. Some groups develop state structures faster than others, and the faster-organizing group may seek to take advantage of the situation by seizing land. Many of these conditions existed in Bosnia, with Serbs trying to seize land from the Croats and from the Muslims, who were in the weakest position of all.

Where a newly independent ethnic state has nuclear weapons it is less vulnerable to external attack, and ethnic conflict between new nation-states is unlikely. Larger, newly independent, former Soviet states with nuclear weapons have tended to face less external threat than those without such weapons.

Domestic explanations of ethnic conflict relate to factors such as 'the effectiveness of states in addressing the concerns of their constituents, the impact of nationalism on inter-ethnic relations, and the impact of democratization on inter-ethnic relations'.

Using the ideas of Jack Snyder, Brown suggests that nationalistic sentiments are aroused in situations where people feel vulnerable because they feel they lack a strong state to protect them. In parts of Eastern Europe and the former USSR some groups have felt vulnerable because the state has been weak, or because they have found themselves in a state dominated by another, possibly hostile, ethnic group. Some ethnic minorities have been blamed for economic failures by the majority population and have responded by trying to establish their own states. Ethnic nationalism involves trying to establish a nation-state based around a particular ethnic group. Such a state may not respect the rights of minorities and ethnic conflict is likely to result.

Drawing on a range of theories, Brown goes on to suggest that processes of democratization can produce problems in multi-ethnic societies. When an old regime has collapsed, and new arrangements are being discussed, there can be major problems if there are ethnic groups who feel they were mistreated under the previous regime. They may seek retribution for past wrongs or they may feel unable to work with members of other ethnic groups in a democratic system. Problems will be particularly acute where a powerful majority ethnic group rides roughshod over the wishes and interests of less powerful smaller groups. Politicians may seek to exploit ethnic differences to increase their support, and in doing so they will heighten people's consciousness of those differences and increase the significance they attach to them.

Perceptual explanations are concerned with the way in which ethnic groups perceive one another. Hostility can be increased through myths and false histories which distort and demonize members of another group. Brown uses the example of Serbs and Croats. He says:

> *Serbs, for example, see themselves as heroic defenders of Europe and they see Croats as belligerent thugs; Croats see themselves as valiant victims of oppression and Serbs as congenital oppressors. Under such circumstances, the slightest provocation from either side simply confirms deeply held systems of belief and provides the justification for a retaliatory response.*
>
> Brown, 1997, p. 88

Myths about other ethnic groups are particularly likely to develop where an authoritarian regime has suppressed the histories of ethnic minorities for a long time. Such regimes tend to suppress the critical examination of past history leaving little opportunity for myths to be challenged. It is not surprising therefore that Eastern Europe and the former USSR have seen high levels of conflict.

Conclusion

Brown concludes that ethnic conflict is most likely where ethnic groups are living in close proximity in an area where there is no strong central authority, particularly if the groups have hostile perceptions of one another based upon beliefs that they have been mistreated in the past. The end of the Cold War created such a situation in a number of regions, and no New World Order capable of limiting ethnic conflict has yet emerged.

However, Brown is not completely pessimistic. Conflict may lead to ethnic reconciliation. For example in Spain there has been a degree of reconciliation between the Spanish state and the Basques, Catalans and Galicians, who have all achieved some degree of autonomy. Peaceful separation sometimes takes place, an example being the separation of Czechoslovakia into Slovakia and the Czech Republic. However, there are also many situations in which different groups cannot agree on a constitutional settlement and ethnic war ensues. This may involve the slaughter of civilians and the creation of large numbers of refugees. Ethnic wars can also have chain-reaction effects. As new states are formed, a new problem can be created as another ethnic group finds itself in a minority in a new state. For example, when Georgia became independent from Russia the Ossetian minority began to seek their own state with other Ossetians in Russia.

Brown succeeds in identifying a number of reasons for the increase in ethnic conflict in areas of the world which have become politically unstable. His arguments are perhaps less convincing in explaining the revival of ethnic conflict and nationalism in some parts of the world (such as Western Europe) which have not experienced high levels of instability. Some commentators have linked such phenomena to a general process of globalization (see Chapter 9). Other explanations for ethnic conflict can be found in later sections on racism and nationalism (see pp. 254–62 and 263–8).

Ethnicity – an evaluation

The ethnicity approach certainly has some advantages over biological theories of 'race' and the immigrant-host model. Unlike the former it does not base its arguments upon physical distinctions, which modern genetics has found to be of little significance. Unlike the host-immigrant model, it does not assume that minority groups will assimilate by adopting the culture of the majority.

The ethnicity approach tends to be sympathetic to cultural diversity and to support multiculturalism – the belief that ethnic or cultural groups can peacefully co-exist in a society showing respect for one another's cultures. At least in theory, ethnographic studies allow the development of an insider's view of different cultures, and therefore facilitate a greater understanding of those cultures than is likely from other sociological approaches. Such studies also have the strength of recognizing the role that ethnic minorities have in shaping their own lives. They are not presented as the helpless captives of biology or the passive victims of racism. Ethnographic studies can reveal subtle variations and divisions within ethnic groups which are often lost in other approaches.

However, the ethnicity approach is far from perfect. Critics tend to argue that it places too much emphasis on the culture of ethnic minorities. While emphasizing how ethnic minorities shape their own lives, it sometimes neglects the wider forces which constrain members of ethnic minority groups. Racism and structural features of society – both of which may cause inequality – tend to be neglected. Writers like Pryce do mention colonialism and refer to social classes, but their arguments still centre on the culture of the groups being studied.

Marxists and other conflict theorists believe that the analysis of racism and inequalities stemming from the structure of society should be the starting point for an understanding of ethnic difference and inequality, and not a subsidiary theme. The ethnicity approach is sometimes criticized for offering unconvincing explanations of why people form ethnic groups in the first place. The racism approach and conflict theories claim to have superior explanations. We will examine racism and conflict approaches in the next sections.

The ethnicity approach has theoretical links to symbolic interactionism. Both tend to use participant observation as a research method and both emphasize the importance of seeing the social world from the actor's point of view. It is not surprising, then, that the ethnicity approach shares many of the limitations of symbolic interactionism. Not only does it tend to neglect social structure, but it also relies upon research methods that can be seen as subjective. The findings of participant observation studies depend very much upon the observer's interpretations and they are liable to be questioned.

For example, some sociologists question the view of researchers such as Pryce that West Indian family life is unstable and produces delinquency. Errol Lawrence (1982) attacks Pryce saying that he 'absolves the racist structures of the English education system by defining the Afro-Caribbean child's struggle against its racism as "maladjusted behaviour"'. Clearly Lawrence interprets the same behaviour very differently.

The ethnicity approach is often associated with multiculturalism. However, multiculturalism is not accepted as politically desirable by all sociologists. We will discuss the values underpinning multiculturalism in the final part of this chapter (see pp. 287–9).

Recently developing approaches have tended to question the belief that there are sharp dividing lines between ethnic groups. They see ethnic groups as in a constant state of flux with the boundaries between them shifting and the cultures intermingling. Theories of globalization suggest that the

differences between cultures will become less marked as time progresses. Nevertheless, the widespread conflict between ethnic groups suggests that many people do believe they belong to an ethnic group. For this reason it still seems to be worthwhile to study the cultural similarities and differences between groups of humans who feel they share a common ethnicity.

Racism

Introduction

Many of the ethnicity approaches discussed in the last section recognize the existence of racism and accept that racism influences the behaviour of ethnic minority groups. However, they place more emphasis on the choices made by members of ethnic minority groups than on the constraints that can result from the hostility and discrimination of the ethnic majority.

Sociological approaches that attach particular importance to racism emphasize the limitations imposed on ethnic minorities by such hostility and discrimination. The focus of attention is not the ethnic minority itself, but the wider society in which it is a minority group. There is more concern with the inequalities between ethnic groups than with cultural differences, and racism is therefore a particularly important concept in conflict approaches to 'race' and ethnicity.

In this section we will start by considering definitions of racism and related terms, before discussing the extent of racism. We will then examine explanations for the existence of racism.

Definitions

Prejudice and discrimination

The terms prejudice and discrimination are general ones that can be applied to many issues other than those to do with 'race' and ethnicity. For example, people may be prejudiced against people who are very short, or discriminate against other people because they are women.

In the *Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations* (1984) E.E. Cashmore defines prejudice as 'learned beliefs and values that lead an individual or group of individuals to be biased for or against members of particular groups'. Prejudice is therefore about what people think and is not necessarily translated into actions.

Discrimination, on the other hand, is about actions. Cashmore defines it as 'the unfavourable treatment of all persons socially assigned to a particular category'.

Both prejudice and discrimination are often based on stereotypes about particular groups of people. Stereotypes are over-simplified or untrue generalizations about social groups. For example, short people might be stereotyped as being unusually aggressive, and women as being weak and passive. When stereotypes imply negative or positive evaluations of social groups, they become a form of prejudice, and when they are acted on they become discrimination.

Early sociologists of 'race' and ethnicity often use the terms racial prejudice and racial discrimination to describe prejudice or discrimination directed at groups by virtue of their membership of a supposed racial or ethnic group. However, the use of these terms has become less common and racism has largely replaced them as the most widely used term.

Racism

Racism is a controversial term with no single, generally accepted definition. Robert Miles has discussed the origins of the term and identified a number of different ways in which it has been used (Miles, 1989, 1993).

According to Miles racism is a relatively new word. There was no entry for it in the *Oxford English Dictionary* of 1910. Its first use in English seems to date from the 1930s. At that time it was used as a description of the nineteenth-century theories which claimed that there were distinct, biologically differentiated 'races'. As scientists began to reject this view some termed their nineteenth-century counterparts who advocated it racists. Racism also came into use in the 1930s as a description of the beliefs of Hitler and the Nazi party in Germany.

This definition was an extremely narrow one. It meant that racism did not exist so long as it was not based upon a belief that there were biologically distinct races. The view that racism was a mistaken view about biological divisions between human groups was reflected in a definition used by UNESCO. During the 1950s and 1960s this organization arranged four conferences where experts from different countries came together to produce agreed

statements about 'race' that could be issued by the UN. The fourth statement defined racism for the first time saying, 'Racism falsely claims that there is a scientific basis for arranging groups hierarchically in terms of psychological and cultural characteristics that are immutable and innate' (quoted in Miles, 1989). While broadening the definition to include beliefs about psychological and cultural differences, this still retained the idea that racism had to be based upon supposedly scientific theories.

This view was rejected by the British Weberian sociologist John Rex. Rex specifically stated that racist theories did not have to be based upon a scientific justification. He defined racism as 'deterministic belief systems about the differences between the various ethnic groups, segments or strata'. Racist theories attributed characteristics to human groups which were determined by factors beyond their control, and which could not be changed. Rex said:

> *It doesn't really matter whether this is because of men's genes, because of the history to which their ancestors have been exposed, because of the nature of their culture or because of divine decree. Whichever is the case it might be argued that this man is an X and that, being an X, he is bound to have particular undesirable qualities.*
>
> Rex, 1986

Rex's description of racism retains the idea that the word refers to theories about the differences between groups and the desirability or undesirability of these differences. Many contemporary definitions of racism do not limit the meaning of the term so that it refers only to theories and beliefs. Some also use racism to refer to behaviour which is based upon such theories and beliefs.

John Solomos, for example, defines it as 'those ideologies and social processes which discriminate against others on the basis of their putatively different racial membership' (Solomos, 1993). It need not be based upon any specific theory about biological or cultural superiority because, to Solomos, 'racism is not a static phenomenon'. People may hold stereotypical views about those from different supposed racial groups and may discriminate against them without necessarily believing the group to be inferior.

Some sociologists have described a new racism which does not involve clearly articulated beliefs about the superiority or inferiority of particular groups (see p. 260 for details).

A broad definition such as Solomos's perhaps comes closest to the meaning attached to racism in everyday language. People may be described as racist when they discriminate against members of other 'races' or express derogatory or stereotypical beliefs about them, regardless of what sort of theory, if any, underlies their actions or beliefs.

Precise definitions of racism continue to vary between contemporary sociologists. We will examine these differences as this section of the chapter develops.

Cultural racism

Richardson defines cultural racism as 'a whole cluster of cultural ideas, beliefs and arguments which transmit mistaken notions about the attributes and capabilities of "racial groups"' (Richardson, 1990). This definition is in line with many definitions of racism – for example it has much in common with Rex's definition. However, cultural racism always refers to the attributes of a society's culture rather than the beliefs held by individuals. An individual might hold racist beliefs, but it would only be an example of cultural racism if those beliefs were widely shared.

The idea of cultural racism is similar to some definitions of institutional racism which we will discuss later.

Racialism

To add to the confusion, some sociologists distinguish between racism and racialism. John Rex, for example, describes racialism as 'unequal treatment of various racial groups', as opposed to racism which involves beliefs about racial groups. In other words racialism involves actions, whereas racism does not; it is only concerned with what people think.

This distinction is not usually made in everyday language and has not been adopted by all sociologists.

Institutional racism

The term institutional racism is perhaps even more controversial than racism. Not only is it used in widely varying ways, but some have questioned whether institutional racism actually exists.

According to Miles, the idea of institutional racism originated in the work of American Black Power activists in the 1960s. In 1968 Carmichael and Hamilton defined racism as 'the predication of decisions and policies on considerations of race for the purpose of *subordinating* a racial group and maintaining control over that group'. Racism could be individual and overt, where people consciously and openly discriminated against blacks. However, it could also take the form of institutional racism. This was often covert or hidden. It did not require conscious discrimination since it took place as a result of 'the active and pervasive operation of anti-black attitudes' (quoted in Miles, 1989).

the celebration of ethnic diversity and of new ethnicities is a positive and progressive development that allows the sociology of 'race' and ethnicity to move beyond the rather tired debates of the past.

Kenan Malik – a critique of postmodern theories

Kenan Malik is highly critical of postmodern approaches to 'race' and denies that modernity can be seen as responsible for racism. He does not deny that racism has been a powerful and corrosive force in modern societies, but he does not see racism as a product of modernity itself. Furthermore, he does not believe that the celebration of difference, which he sees as a key feature of postmodern thinking, is the way to undermine racism. Instead, he argues that racism can best be tackled by reviving some of the principles on which modernity is based. In particular he believes that the application of universal principles is preferable to acknowledging and celebrating variety in human groups. Before examining Malik's own viewpoint though, we will discuss his comments on the sorts of postmodern theories we have looked at in this section.

Criticisms of other theories

First, Malik criticizes Bauman's claim that the Holocaust was a product of modernity. For Malik, the Holocaust arose in specific historical circumstances rather than being a product of modernity in general. If blame for the Holocaust can be attributed to anything, it should be to capitalism rather than reason. Modernity involves a belief in reason and the application of science, while capitalism involves economic relationships based upon the pursuit of profit. The two are not the same; indeed, capitalism may make it difficult to achieve the equality that was the objective of many modern thinkers. The inequalities produced by capitalism may encourage people to think of other 'races' as inferior, but this is not the same as saying that racism is produced by science and reason. As Malik says, 'By conflating the social relations of capitalism with the intellectual and technical progress of 'modernity', the product of the former can be laid at the door of the latter.'

Malik is also critical of the claim that the Holocaust can be blamed on modernity simply because modernity provides the technological means to accomplish mass extermination. Modern technology has also been used to alleviate problems such as famine and material poverty. The existence of advanced technology in itself cannot be held responsible for the political decision to use technology to exterminate people by gassing. Malik says:

> *I find it odious that scholars can in all seriousness equate mass extermination with the production of McDonald's hamburgers or of Ford Escorts, or make a comparison between technology aimed at improving the material abundance of society and political decisions which annihilate whole peoples and destroy entire societies.*
>
> Malik, 1996, p. 244

Second, Malik also criticizes the work of Goldberg. He agrees with Goldberg that racism was not present in premodern societies, but does not believe that it developed as an inevitable consequence of modern rationalism. There was no necessary connection between a scientific method and belief in rationality and the categorization of people by 'race'. Malik says:

> *Belief in reason, espousal of the scientific method and a universalistic conviction do not of themselves imply a racial viewpoint. That in the nineteenth century science, reason and universalism came to be harnessed to a discourse of race is a development that has to be explained through historical analysis; it is not logically given by the nature of scientific or rational thought.*
>
> Malik, 1996, p. 41

In reality, Malik claims, Enlightenment philosophy introduced the idea that humans could be equal and, in theory at least, its aims were 'to set all human beings free'. To Malik, what needs to be explained is why such philosophies changed to accept the idea of different races. Malik's explanation for this will be examined shortly.

Third, Malik criticizes the claims of writers such as Goldberg and Said that racism can be understood in terms of the concept of the 'Other'. Malik does not believe that modernity causes people automatically to compare themselves to other people, and that as a result racism develops. Malik suggests that such claims are so sweeping as be seriously misleading. In his view, it cannot be assumed that, over many centuries, Westerners have seen all non-Westerners as the 'Other' in the same way. Western views of other people have been related to specific contexts and circumstances. For example, different meanings have been given to the possession of a black skin at different times and at different places in modern history. At one time most Westerners thought that is was acceptable to enslave people with black skins. That is no longer the case. The meaning of 'otherness' is often disputed and contentious, and not all modern, post-Enlightenment thinkers have been persuaded of the truth of racist beliefs.

The origins of racism

Malik himself explains racism in terms of a clash between Enlightenment ideas and the social relations

produced by capitalism. In the eighteenth century the universalistic Enlightenment idea that all humans were equal was widely held. For example, the French philosopher Rousseau, writing in 1770, distinguished between physical inequality (such as strength) and moral or political inequality. While the first type of inequality came from nature, the second type was created by humans and reflected both privilege and prejudice. In Rousseau's thinking – which was very much in line with the Enlightenment thinking from which modernity developed – there was no room for racism. There was prejudice against 'racial' groups in the eighteenth century, but liberals influenced by Enlightenment ideas were opposed, for example, to slavery.

Furthermore, a supposedly 'scientific' theory of racism only developed in the nineteenth century. Malik argues that this resulted from inequality within Western, capitalist society. While the Enlightenment had taught that people could be equal, people's experiences of society had shown them the development of a disadvantaged working class. These disadvantages seemed to be passed down from generation to generation, and this encouraged advantaged groups to believe that members of the working class were biologically inferior to themselves. This tendency was further encouraged by concern amongst the elite about the pace of social change, the apparent breakdown of traditional moral values and the danger of working-class unrest. In these circumstances it was the working class rather than non-Western others who were first seen as part of an inferior 'race'. Malik comments:

> *For the Victorians race was a description of social distinctions, not of colour differences. Indeed, as I have already argued, the view of non-Europeans as an inferior race was but an extension of the already existing view of the working class at home.*
>
> Malik, 1996, p. 91

A good example is the widespread view amongst the Victorian elite that the working-class Irish in the country were a biologically inferior group. It was the inability of capitalism to deliver the equality that modernity had promised that led to 'scientific' thinking becoming racist. It was only after the working class had begun to be thought of in racist terms that racial thinking began to be applied to non-European groups.

If Malik is right, then postmodernists have, at the very least, been too critical of modernity. There is no reason why rational modern thought cannot be turned against racism. It may be possible to combat racism in a more positive way than simply encouraging an acceptance of human diversity. For Malik, postmodernists have abandoned the struggle to produce greater equality in favour of unequal diversity. Malik regards this as an undesirable and unnecessary admission of defeat (see pp. 287–9 for a discussion of values in theories of 'race', ethnicity and nationality).

Ethnic minorities in the labour market and stratification system

There is considerable evidence that ethnic minorities are disadvantaged in the British labour market. As we will see elsewhere in the book, ethnic minorities are more likely to suffer from unemployment (see Chapter 10). Furthermore, earlier in this chapter we saw that in general terms those from ethnic minorities tend to get paid lower wages and have lower-status jobs (see pp. 249–50). Although there are differences between ethnic groups, most groups continue to suffer from disadvantages even when factors such as fluency in English and educational qualifications are taken into account.

Discrimination in the labour market

The most straightforward explanation of disadvantage suffered by ethnic minorities in employment is that it results from the racism and prejudice of employers. In other words, employers discriminate against ethnic minority groups by either refusing to employ them, employing them only in low-status and low-paid jobs, or refusing to promote them.

Evidence to support this point of view is provided from a study by Colin Brown and Pat Gay (1985) carried out in 1984–5. They conducted research in London, Birmingham and Manchester, in which bogus applications were made for a variety of jobs by letter and by telephone. The supposed applicants were identified as being from ethnic minorities by the use of Hindu names for 'Asian' applicants and a Jamaican educational background for 'West Indian' applicants. In telephone applications ethnic accents were used to differentiate ethnic minority applicants from 'white' applicants.

Brown and Gay found that positive responses were significantly less common to applications from those who were identified as being from ethnic minorities. Some 90 per cent of white applicants, but only 63

per cent of Asian and 63 per cent of West Indian applicants, received positive responses.

Brown and Gay compared their results with those of similar studies carried out in 1973–4 and 1977–9. They found that the level of discrimination had remained about the same in all three studies. They concluded that 'there is no evidence here to suggest that racial discrimination in job recruitment has fallen over the period covered by these studies'. Similar studies have been repeated during the 1990s in local areas. Reporting on the findings of such studies, Modood comments that 'Objective tests suggest that the proportion of white people who are likely to carry out the most basic acts of discrimination has been stable at about a third for several decades' (Modood, 1997).

In the Policy Studies Institute's *Third National Survey* Brown tried to measure the experience of racial discrimination by ethnic minorities (Brown, 1984). Of those who were currently in the job market or who had worked in the last ten years, 26 per cent of West Indian men and 23 per cent of West Indian women claimed they had been refused a job for racial reasons. For Asians the corresponding figures were 10 per cent for men and 8 per cent for women. There was less evidence of racism affecting promotion. Only 11 per cent of West Indian men and 3 per cent of women claimed they had been refused a better job because of their 'race' or colour.

In the PSI's *Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities* conducted in 1994, similar questions were repeated. The study found that 28 per cent of Caribbean people, 19 per cent of African Asians, 15 per cent of Indians, 7 per cent of Chinese, and 5 per cent of Pakistani/Bangladeshi people believed they had been refused a job for religious or racial reasons (Modood, 1997). Modood found a slight increase in reported discrimination of this type amongst Caribbeans, compared with the previous survey, but a slight decrease amongst South Asians.

These figures must be used with some caution. They rely upon the subjective beliefs of the respondents to the survey who might not be in a position to assess accurately whether they had been the victims of racial discrimination. Discrimination could be more common or less so than the figures indicate. However, the figures do suggest that at least some of the disadvantages experienced by ethnic minorities in the labour market could be the result of racism.

Ethnic minorities as an underclass

Some sociologists have tried to develop a more theoretical approach to explaining the position of ethnic minorities in the labour market and in society as a whole. Both British and American sociologists have suggested that ethnic minorities form an underclass. While some have defined an underclass in cultural terms, others have seen the underclass as a structural feature of society. The idea of an underclass is discussed in detail in other chapters (see pp. 91–6 for a discussion of the underclass in relation to stratification, and pp. 323–34 for a discussion of the underclass and poverty). In this section we will concentrate on the relationship between the concepts of underclass and ethnicity.

Charles Murray – *Losing Ground*

In his 1984 book, *Losing Ground*, Charles Murray argued that the USA had developed a black underclass. This underclass was distinguished by its behaviour. He claimed that increasing numbers of young blacks were withdrawing from the labour market: they were unwilling to work. At the same time there were increasing numbers of black single parents who had never been married.

Murray denied that such changes were the result of poverty and lack of opportunity. He argued that in the 1950s participation by blacks in the labour market was higher than in the 1960s, yet there was greater economic prosperity and lower unemployment in the 1960s than the 1950s.

To Murray the real reason for the changes in behaviour lay in welfare benefits. In his view Aid to Families with Dependent Children removed many of the incentives for men to work to support their families, and it enabled mothers to bring up their children on their own. The stigma of relying upon benefits had been reduced as more and more benefits were introduced for people with low incomes.

American critics of Murray have pointed out that the Aid to Families with Dependent Children was introduced some twenty years before the number of single-parent black families began to rise rapidly. Lydia Morris criticizes Murray for failing to explain the withdrawal of black youth from the labour market. The young unemployed have no automatic entitlement to benefit in the USA, so their behaviour cannot be explained in terms of the welfare system.

Some American sociologists have agreed with Murray that the USA has developed a black or ethnic minority underclass, but they have not agreed about the causes. They have attributed its development to structural forces rather than to the operation of the welfare system and the behaviour of welfare claimants. The most influential alternative view of the American underclass has been advanced by William Julius Wilson.

William Julius Wilson – *The Truly Disadvantaged*

In his 1987 book, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987), Wilson argues that blacks and Hispanics living in inner-city areas have come to form an underclass because of forces beyond their control. The disadvantages faced by urban blacks and Hispanics have historical roots and have created problems that continue to make it difficult to escape from the ghetto.

When poor blacks migrated from the rural south of the USA to the cities of the north, they faced the obstacle of racism when they tried to find work. The migrants had few skills and little prospect of career advancement. Their low levels of economic success encouraged whites to develop crude racial stereotypes which produced further problems for the ghetto poor. What work the blacks could find was largely unskilled and in manufacturing industry.

In the 1970s manufacturing industry began to decline, and the industry which survived the recession moved away from city centres. Service sector work increased but much of it required qualifications which ethnic minorities in the inner cities did not possess. Some blacks and Hispanics had enjoyed success, gained qualifications and secured well-paid jobs. However, these individuals moved out of the city centres to the suburbs, leaving behind the most disadvantaged. The poor had become trapped in areas where there were few opportunities to improve their lot. Wilson says:

> *the underclass exists mainly because of large scale and harmful changes in the labor market and its resulting spatial concentration as well as the isolation of such areas from the most affluent parts of the black community.*
>
> Wilson, 1987

In 1990, in an address to the American Sociological Association, Wilson abandoned the use of the term underclass (Wilson, 1991). Although he stuck by his analysis of the problems faced by ethnic minorities in the inner cities of the USA, he argued that the term underclass had become a liability. It had been adopted by right-wing commentators who had used it to indicate that the problems of the poor were of their own making. To Wilson the problems resulted more from impersonal economic forces, and the connotations the term had taken on were unfortunate. He therefore suggested that the groups he was describing should be called the ghetto poor rather than the underclass.

Some American critics have argued that Wilson underestimates the effects produced by racism. Their view is that the black middle class is small and that even those blacks with good jobs do less well than their white counterparts with similar qualifications. Problems for American blacks in the labour market are not confined to the poor.

The underclass in Britain

Some sociologists have argued that there is a British underclass composed mainly or exclusively of ethnic minorities. They have followed Wilson in arguing that the underclass has been created by structural forces, and have tended to be critical of sociologists such as Murray who see the underclass in cultural terms.

One of the most influential views of this type was advanced by Anthony Giddens (1973). Giddens argued that the underclass is composed of those with a disadvantaged position in the labour market. As well as lacking skills and qualifications, they may also have to face prejudice and discrimination. Women and ethnic minorities are most likely to suffer from these problems and are therefore most likely to be found in the underclass. As we saw in Chapter 2 (see p. 93), Giddens believes that migrants are very likely to end up in the underclass.

To Giddens, when ethnic minorities such as Asians and West Indians in Britain and Algerians in France are heavily concentrated in the lowest-paid jobs or are unemployed, then an underclass exists. When members of the underclass do have jobs they are mainly in the secondary labour market. (We discuss the concept of a secondary labour market in the next section.)

John Rex and Sally Tomlinson – the underclass in Birmingham

Giddens's ideas were further developed in a study of the Handsworth area of Birmingham conducted by John Rex and Sally Tomlinson and published in 1979. They argued that New Commonwealth immigrants to Britain largely went to Britain 'to fill the gaps in the less skilled and the less attractive jobs in manufacturing industry as well as in the less skilled jobs in the service industries'. During the 1950s and 1960s Britain experienced a shortage of labour, and immigration was encouraged to overcome the problem. The shortage was particularly acute in jobs requiring little skill, and immigrants were often employed in such jobs.

Rex and Tomlinson believe that there is not one but rather two distinctive labour markets in Britain. They support the dual labour market theory. This sees the primary labour market as consisting of jobs with high wages, good working conditions, job security and opportunities for on-the-job training and promotion. In contrast, the secondary labour market consists of jobs with low wages, poor working conditions, little job security and few

opportunities for on-the-job training and promotion. Highly skilled jobs are usually located in the primary sector of the labour market, and less skilled jobs in the secondary. Skilled workers are usually more crucial to a company's success than workers with few skills, and so their loyalty to their employer is encouraged with high wages and opportunities for promotion.

Asian and West Indian immigrants were usually recruited to jobs in the secondary labour market. Because such jobs offer few promotion prospects or opportunities for training, they have tended to remain in a disadvantaged position in the labour market. For this reason ethnic minorities form an underclass in Britain.

Rex and Tomlinson acknowledge that not all members of ethnic minorities work in the secondary labour market but they offer evidence to show that they are disproportionately represented in such jobs. For example, using data from the 1971 census they found that in the West Midlands only 1 in 8 West Indian men, 1 in 6 Pakistanis, and 1 in 20 Indians were employed in vehicle manufacture, an industry which paid high wages. On the other hand, 33 per cent of West Indian men, more than 50 per cent of Indians, nearly 50 per cent of Pakistanis and 30 per cent of East African Asians worked in metal or metal goods manufacture; jobs in the metal industries tended to be poorly paid and offered few promotion prospects.

Rex and Tomlinson also found differences in the employment of women in the West Midlands in different ethnic groups. They say 'whereas the white woman typically becomes a secretary or a shopworker the immigrant woman works in a factory, or in a hospital and rather less frequently in service industries'.

In 1976 Rex and Tomlinson carried out a survey in Handsworth, Birmingham, in which structured interviews were conducted with a sample of 1,100 people. They found that 30 per cent of whites in Handsworth had white-collar jobs but only 9.5 per cent of West Indians and 5.1 per cent of Asians; 27.4 per cent of whites were in unskilled or semi-skilled manual work compared to 38.7 per cent of Asians and 44.1 per cent of West Indians. On the basis of their research, Rex and Tomlinson argued that ethnic minority groups:

> *were systematically at a disadvantage compared with working-class whites and that, instead of identifying with working-class culture, community and politics, they formed their own organisations and became in effect a separate underprivileged class.*
>
> Rex and Tomlinson, 1979

In short, they formed an underclass which was perpetuated by the predominance of ethnic minorities in the secondary labour market.

Marxist approaches

Marxist sociologists agree with writers such as Giddens and Rex and Tomlinson (who use a broadly Weberian approach) that ethnic minorities are disadvantaged in capitalist societies. However, they do not agree that they form an underclass in Britain. They reject the importance attached to status in underclass theories and place more emphasis on the workings of the economy and the role of ethnic minorities in the economic system.

Stephen Castles and Godula Kosack – a reserve army of labour

In a study of immigrant workers in France, Germany, Switzerland and Britain, Stephen Castles and Godula Kosack found that the immigrants faced similar problems in the labour market to those identified in Handsworth by Rex and Tomlinson (Castles and Kosak, 1973). In these four European countries immigrants were found to be concentrated in low-paid jobs or in jobs with poor working conditions. Most were manual workers in unskilled or semi-skilled work and they suffered high rates of unemployment. Castles and Kosack claim that in Britain this situation is mainly due to discrimination. In France, Germany and Switzerland the migrant workers are foreigners in the country in which they are working and restrictive laws and regulations prevent them from gaining employment in the more desirable jobs.

Discrimination and restrictive regulations are, however, only the immediate causes of the plight of immigrants. The poor treatment of immigrants ultimately derives from the need in capitalist societies for a reserve army of labour: it is necessary to have a surplus of labour in order to keep wage costs down, since the greater the overall supply of labour, the weaker the bargaining position of workers. Furthermore, as Marxists, Castles and Kosack believe that capitalist economies are inherently unstable. They go through periods of boom and slump, and a reserve army of labour needs to be available to be hired and fired as the fluctuating fortunes of the economy dictate. After the Second World War capitalist societies exhausted their indigenous reserve army of labour; women, for example, were increasingly taking paid employment. Capitalist countries in Europe therefore turned to migrant labour and immigration to provide a reserve pool of cheap labour which could be profitably exploited.

Castles and Kosack do not believe that such workers form an underclass outside and below the main class structure. They regard them as being part of the working class. Like other workers they do not own the means of production and so share with them an interest in changing society. However, Castles and Kosack believe that immigrant and migrant workers are the most disadvantaged groups within the working class and as such they form a distinctive stratum. Thus Castles and Kosack believe that the working class is divided into two, with ethnic minorities constituting one working-class grouping and the indigenous white population the other.

This situation is beneficial to the ruling class in capitalist societies. Ethnic minorities are blamed for problems such as unemployment and housing shortages. Attention is diverted from the failings of the capitalist system. The working class is divided and cannot unite, develop class consciousness and challenge ruling-class dominance.

Annie Phizaklea and Robert Miles – class factions

Annie Phizaklea and Robert Miles (1980) have also advanced a Marxist analysis of the position of ethnic minorities in the labour market and class structure. On the basis of a study in South Brent, London, carried out in the mid-1970s, they agree with Castles and Kosack that migrant ethnic minority workers form a distinctive stratum within the working class. However, they deny that immigration and migrant labour have actually created divisions within the working class. They point out that the working class can also be seen as divided by gender and level of skill. Working-class women sell their labour for a wage in the same way as working-class men, but unlike working-class men they have unpaid domestic responsibilities. Skilled manual workers have always tried to defend their own interests and ensure that they enjoy higher wages than other manual workers.

To Phizaklea and Miles, the working class is not divided into two, but is split between a considerable number of class factions based upon gender, skill and ethnicity. Immigration did not divide a united working class; it added an extra dimension to existing divisions.

Andrew Pilkington – the underclass reconsidered

Despite the differences between the theories on ethnicity and employment examined so far, they share a good deal in common. Andrew Pilkington suggests:

> *there is agreement that black workers are employed in predominantly nonskilled work, that they are locked into such work with few chances of escape and that this tends to segregate them from the indigenous workforce.*
>
> Pilkington, 1993

Pilkington believes that the underclass and Marxist theories are not supported by empirical evidence. He quotes figures from the *Labour Force Survey* for 1989–91. These showed that:

1. among West Indians and Guyanese, 32 per cent of men and 63 per cent of women were in non-manual occupations;
2. among Indians the figures were 59 per cent for men and 62 per cent for women;
3. among Pakistanis/Bangladeshis they were 40 per cent for men and 64 per cent for women.

Thus for women there was little difference in the proportions of ethnic minority groups in non-manual jobs. Amongst men, Indians were more likely than whites to have non-manual work and very substantial minorities of men in the other ethnic groups did not have working-class jobs. Pilkington therefore rejects the view that ethnic minorities are overwhelmingly trapped in jobs offering few prospects.

Pilkington also denies that ethnic minorities are segregated from the white workforce. He quotes a study of the labour market in Peterborough, conducted by Blackburn and Mann, in which it was found that 'the majority of immigrants are sharing jobs with the nativeborn', and that 'although immigrants receive less on average their conditions overlap very considerably with that of British workers' (quoted in Pilkington, 1984).

Pilkington fully accepts that ethnic minorities are disadvantaged in the labour market, but he does not agree that they are so disadvantaged that they constitute an underclass or subordinate stratum or faction of the working class. On the other hand, he believes that the situation is different for migrant workers in some other European countries. In France and Germany, for example, migrant workers can be seen to occupy a distinctive group at the bottom of the stratification system because 'they are predominantly located in nonskilled work with relatively few political rights'.

Conclusion

Recent figures confirm Pilkington's claim that ethnic minorities are not overwhelmingly concentrated in an underclass. (See, for example, the findings of the PSI's *Fourth National Survey* reported above, pp. 249–51.) Indeed, certain ethnic groups such as the Chinese and African Asians have been extremely successful in the labour market. Writers such as Heidi

Mirza warn of the dangers of labelling ethnic minorities in the labour market and elsewhere. Mirza points out that women of Caribbean origin have enjoyed considerable success in British society (see Chapter 11). That does not mean that the relatively successful groups are immune from discrimination – they might have been even more successful if discrimination had been absent. However, any full explanation of inequalities in the labour market would need to take account of a range of factors other than discrimination. These would include gender, class, age and cultural differences.

Sociology, values and 'race' and ethnicity

Sociologists, like other members of society, are a product of their time and place. While sociologists may try to study society without being influenced by the commonsense beliefs of other members of society, they may find it difficult or even impossible to be completely objective. This was certainly true in the nineteenth century. Sociologists generally accepted the view of scientists and others that humanity was divided into distinct biological 'races', some of which were superior to others. Not surprisingly they tended to see themselves and their own 'race' as being at the top of the hierarchy.

Thus, to sociologists like Herbert Spencer (1971), white Europeans generally belonged to the most evolved 'races'. His beliefs did not stem from individual arrogance or ignorance. Colonialism undoubtedly contributed to persuading most Victorian English people that their 'race' was superior to the other 'races' that they and other European powers had conquered and ruled.

As large-scale migration between and within countries became more common, people from different 'races' increasingly lived close together. Sociologists supporting the immigrant-host model became less likely to claim that certain 'races' were superior to others. To them the problems of race relations were created by the difficulties encountered when immigrants or strangers settled in an established host society.

However, these views were still strongly influenced by the values of the sociologists who expressed them: it was always the 'immigrants' who were the problem, disrupting the harmony of the host society. The hosts were largely tolerant and some were even welcoming. Any fault lay with those who would not adapt to their new surroundings. From this point of view the hosts were generally willing to accept the strangers; they were not filled with racism or hatred.

The views associated with the immigrant-host model seem to remain common amongst British whites today. For example, as we saw earlier, Ellis Cashmore (1987) found that some people in Birmingham and the Midlands criticized 'immigrants' for not fitting in with British ways. They resented it when 'immigrants' wanted to preserve their traditional cultures.

However, sociologists had begun to reject the idea that the culture of ethnic minorities was inferior to that of the white majority, and no longer assumed that 'immigrants' needed to change their cultures. Scientists had already discredited the idea that distinct 'races' existed. The mood of the times was moving in favour of greater tolerance of diverse cultures. In the USA the civil rights and Black Power movements encouraged ethnic minorities to take pride in their distinctiveness. In Britain legislation outlawed discrimination and made open racism less respectable and acceptable. Rather than just expecting 'immigrants' to integrate, new approaches to issues of 'race' and ethnicity seemed necessary.

One approach was to emphasize the desirability of ethnic pluralism. This suggested that the cultures of ethnic minorities should not necessarily change to allow integration, but rather they should remain distinctive and separate. Studies of ethnicity were carried out to develop a greater understanding of the diverse ways of life of different ethnic groups.

This approach produced policies of multiculturalism. From this viewpoint, schools, for example, should accommodate all ethnic groups: the diet, religious practices, clothing, beliefs and values of different ethnic groups should all be catered for in the education system.

Radical critics of this approach tended to dismiss it. James Donald and Ali Rattansi call it the 'saris, samosas and steel-bands syndrome'. It focused on the 'superficial manifestations of culture' and did not really address the underlying problems faced by ethnic minorities. Donald and Rattansi argue that multiculturalism ignores the 'continuing hierarchies of power and legitimacy'. If ethnic minorities are allowed or encouraged to wear saris, eat samosas and play in steel bands, that does not necessarily mean that their cultures have the same power and legitimacy as white culture. Donald and Rattansi argue that the 'limits to this approach were cruelly exposed by intellectual as well as political responses to *The*

Satanic Verses affair in the late 1980s'. Politicians and writers alike tended to side with Salman Rushdie against the British Muslim community who called for the book to be banned for blasphemy.

According to some sociologists, the emphasis on culture in multiculturalism has its own dangers. The new racism identified by Solomos *et al.* (1982) (see p. 259) and the ethnic absolutism described by Gilroy (1987) are based on the idea that ethnic groups are incompatible because their cultures are incompatible. Repatriation, which used to be justified on the grounds of biological difference, was supported by politicians like Enoch Powell on cultural grounds. Rivers of blood would flow simply because very different cultures could not mix.

Sociologists who stress the importance of racism suggest that the problems of 'race' and ethnicity cannot be solved by encouraging tolerance of different cultures. To some, racism is deeply ingrained in the minds, culture and institutions of whites. Whites possess most of the power in the USA, Britain and similar countries, and racism ensures they keep their power. From this point of view ethnic minorities have to fight to gain power rather than relying on the tolerance of well-meaning liberals. The policies associated with this approach are often called anti-racism. They involve seeking out, exposing and destroying the open or hidden racism present in society and its institutions.

Burnage High School in South Manchester became a notorious example of anti-racism in 1986 when Ahmed Iqbal Ullah was murdered by a white boy in the school playground, despite the school's vigorous anti-racist policy. Children in the school were taught about the evils of racism but that did not prevent the murder. The school banned white children from attending the funeral.

While nearly all sociologists today condemn racism, some disagree with some of the policies of anti-racism. Paul Gilroy argues that anti-racism has sometimes practised moralistic excesses. It has 'drifted towards a belief in the absolute nature of ethnic categories' and has therefore fallen into the trap of emphasizing 'race' to the exclusion of everything else. It sees the world in terms of black and white. Whites are the oppressors, blacks are the oppressed. All whites are racist, as are their institutions. Gilroy says:

> *The anti-racism I am criticizing trivializes the struggle against racism and isolates it from other political antagonisms – from the contradiction between capital and labour, from the battle between men and women. It suggests that racism can be eliminated on its own because it is readily extricable from everything else.*
>
> Gilroy, 1987

To Gilroy the views of some anti-racists are no longer plausible. Not only are issues of 'race' and ethnicity bound up with other issues, but racial and ethnic identities and cultures themselves cannot be separated into distinct and neat categories. Like Stuart Hall (1992) Gilroy believes that in the modern world there has been so much intermingling of different cultures that it is no longer appropriate to treat different 'races' as discrete groups. He says:

> *The outcomes of this cultural and political interaction reconstruct and rework tradition as they pursue their particular utopia. A vision of a world in which 'race' will no longer be a meaningful device for the categorization of human beings, where work will no longer be servitude and law will be disassociated from domination.*
>
> Gilroy, 1987

Postmodernists tend to share Gilroy's view that new types of ethnic identity are developing as the cultures of different ethnic groups are mixed. However, postmodernists tend to support a type of radical multiculturalism rather than hoping for the virtual disappearance of 'racial' differences. For example, Goldberg advocates a 'shift from the fundamental public commitment to ignore difference and particularity in the name of universality to a public celebration of diversity and an openly acknowledged and constantly recreated politics of difference' (Goldberg, 1993). Rather than treating everybody the same and pretending that there are no differences, we should acknowledge the differences. We should create space for different voices to be heard. For example, black lesbian females should have as much chance to express their views as white heterosexual males. Different religions, age groups, classes, ethnic groups, and people with different sexualities must all have a voice in contemporary society. They all need to record their own history, to express how they experience society and to celebrate their own identities. Their differences should not be suppressed under an Enlightenment philosophy that all people are fundamentally the same.

Kenan Malik (1996) strongly opposes this approach. He says 'The philosophy of difference is the politics of defeat, born out of defeat. It is the product of disillusionment with the possibilities of social change and the acceptance of the inevitability of an unequal, fragmented world.' He accuses postmodern thinkers of accepting and even encouraging the oppression of ethnic minority groups. From Malik's point of view, postmodernists sometimes seem to want such groups to remain oppressed. This is so that they can articulate their experiences and maintain their distinctive identities which are partly based on their oppression. Malik believes that a

'social revolution' is necessary. What is needed is a revolution in which people refuse to accept defeat and start to believe again that it is possible to intervene to make society better. Racism can be defeated by an active struggle against it.

Most postmodernists would not accept that their views are based upon accepting racism. They see the acceptance of diversity as liberating. Whatever the differences between postmodernists and writers such as Malik, their views are clearly very different from those of nineteenth-century sociologists. The same is true of multicultural and anti-racist views. All of these approaches would have been almost unthinkable in the nineteenth century, when the doctrine that some 'races' were superior to others dominated beliefs in sociology and society alike. That in itself suggests that sociology can contribute to the constructive development of social thought.

Chapter 5

Poverty and social exclusion

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Poverty and social exclusion

Introduction

The word poverty implies an undesirable state. It suggests that individuals or groups who are in poverty need to be helped so that their situation can be changed. Poverty, in other words, is a social problem. As we shall see later, however, for some groups in society, poverty can be useful. Generally speaking, though, poverty is considered to be an undesirable social problem for which a solution should be found.

1 The first step in finding the solution is to identify the problem. This requires a definition.
2 The second step is to assess the size of the problem. This involves the construction of ways to measure it.
3 Once the problem has been identified, defined and measured, the next step is to discover what causes it.

Therefore, only after we have found answers to the questions 'What is poverty?', 'What is the extent of poverty?', and 'What are the causes of poverty?', can the question 'What are the solutions to poverty?' be asked.

In this chapter we are going to examine some of the answers that social scientists have given to these four questions.

The definition and measurement of poverty

Since the nineteenth century, when rigorous studies of poverty first began, researchers have tried to establish a fixed standard against which to measure poverty. There have been three main areas of controversy over the basic principles on which such a standard can be based.

Absolute and relative poverty

First, researchers have disputed whether poverty should be measured in absolute or relative terms. Some writers have argued that there is a common minimum standard that can be applied to all societies below which individuals can be said to be 'in poverty'.

Measures of absolute poverty are usually based upon the idea of subsistence. In other words, people are in poverty if they do not have the resources to maintain human life.

Supporters of the concept of relative poverty, however, tend to dismiss this view. They argue that a definition must relate to the standards of a particular society at a particular time. According to this view, the point at which the dividing line that separates the poor from other members of society is drawn will vary according to how affluent that society is.

Material and multiple deprivation and social exclusion

The second area of controversy concerns whether poverty can be defined purely in material terms, or whether the definition should be wider. Some sociologists assume that poverty consists of a lack of material resources – in British society, for instance, a shortage of the money required to buy those commodities judged to be necessary to maintain an acceptable standard of living.

Other commentators, though, believe that poverty involves more than material deprivation. They see poverty as a form of multiple deprivation that can have many facets. For example, some have argued that inadequate educational opportunities, unpleasant working conditions, or powerlessness can all be regarded as aspects of poverty. None of these conditions is necessarily directly related to the income of the individual. Each implies that broader changes than simply increasing the income of the worst-off members of society are necessary if poverty is to be eliminated. Some commentators now favour the use of the term social exclusion to refer to a situation in which multiple deprivation prevents individuals from participating in important areas of

society's activities. Thus the socially excluded might be unable to find work, take part in leisure activities or actively participate in a society's politics beyond voting at elections.

Inequality and poverty

The third area of controversy concerns the relationship between inequality and poverty. From one point of view, any society in which there is inequality is bound to have poverty. In other words, if all those individuals with below average incomes were defined as poor, then the only way that poverty could be eradicated would be to abolish all inequality in income. This is because if some people have higher than average incomes, inevitably others must fall below the average.

Most sociologists who adopt a relative definition of poverty accept that some reduction in inequality is necessary if poverty is to be reduced, but they do not believe it is necessary to abolish inequality altogether to solve this social problem. They argue that it is possible to establish a minimum standard, a poverty line, which might be below the average income. The poor within a society can then be defined as those whose income or resources fall so far short of the average that they do not have an acceptable standard of living. Thus it would be possible to have a society with some inequality where poverty no longer exists.

We will now look at these competing definitions and methods of measuring poverty, paying particular attention to the way that these definitions have been used, and the statistics they produce. The next section will therefore consider the questions, 'What is poverty?', and 'What is the extent of poverty?'

Absolute poverty

The concept of absolute poverty usually involves a judgement of basic human needs and is measured in terms of the resources required to maintain health and physical efficiency. Most measures of absolute poverty are concerned with establishing the quality and amount of food, clothing and shelter deemed necessary for a healthy life.

Absolute poverty is often known as subsistence poverty since it is based on assessments of minimum subsistence requirements. This means that those who use absolute measurements usually limit poverty to material deprivation.

Absolute poverty is generally measured by pricing the basic necessities of life, drawing a poverty line in terms of this price, and defining as poor those whose income falls below the line.

There have been many attempts to define and operationalize (put into a form which can be measured) the concept of absolute poverty. For example, in their 'Level of Living Index' Drewnowski and Scott (1966) define and operationalize basic physical needs in the following way:

1. nutrition, measured by factors such as intake of calories and protein;
2. shelter, measured by quality of dwelling and degree of overcrowding; and
3. health, measured by factors such as the rate of infant mortality and the quality of available medical facilities.

Some concepts of absolute poverty go beyond the notion of subsistence and material poverty by introducing the idea of basic cultural needs. This broadens the idea of basic human needs beyond the level of physical survival. Drewnowski and Scott include education, security, leisure and recreation in their category of basic cultural needs. The proportion of children enrolled at school is one indication of the level of educational provision; the number of violent deaths relative to the size of the population is one indication of security; and the amount of leisure relative to work time is one measure of the standard of leisure and recreation.

Criticisms of the concept of absolute poverty

The concept of absolute poverty has been widely criticized. It is based on the assumption that there are minimum basic needs for all people, in all societies. This is a difficult argument to defend, even in regard to subsistence poverty measured in terms of food, clothing and shelter. Such needs vary both between and within societies.

Thus Peter Townsend argues that 'it would be difficult to define nutritional needs without taking account of the kinds and demands of occupations and of leisure time pursuits in a society' (Townsend, 1970). For instance, the nutritional needs of the nomadic hunters and gatherers of the Kalahari Desert in Africa may well be very different from those of office workers in London. Within the same society, nutritional needs may vary widely, between, for example, the bank clerk sitting at a desk all day and the labourer working on a building site.

A similar criticism can be made of attempts to define absolute standards of shelter. Jack and Janet Roach give the following illustration:

> *City living, for example, requires that 'adequate' shelter not only protects one from the elements, but that it does not present a fire hazard to others and that attention be paid to water supplies, sewage, and garbage disposal. These problems are simply met in rural situations.*
>
> Roach and Roach, 1972

Thus, for instance, flush toilets, which may well be considered a necessary part of adequate shelter in the city, might not be considered essential fixtures in the dwellings of traditional hunting and gathering societies.

The concept of absolute poverty is even more difficult to defend when it is broadened to include the idea of basic cultural needs. Such 'needs' vary from time to time and from place to place, so that any attempt to establish absolute, fixed standards is bound to fail.

Drewnowski and Scott's basic cultural need for security is a case in point. In nineteenth-century England, younger relatives provided financial support for aged members of the working class, whereas today the same need is largely met by state old-age pensions and private insurance schemes. Increasing longevity, reductions in the size of families, and earlier retirement have altered the circumstances of the elderly. Definitions of adequate provision for old age have therefore changed since the last century. Thus, in terms of security, both the situation and expectations of the elderly in England have changed and are not strictly comparable over time.

A similar criticism can be made of attempts to apply absolute standards to two or more societies. For instance, recreational and leisure provision in the West may be measured in terms of the number of televisions, cinemas, parks and playing fields per head of the population. However, the concept of leisure on which this is based, and the items in terms of which it is measured, may be largely irrelevant for other societies: the Hopi and Zuñi Indians of the south-western USA, for example, have a rich ceremonial life and this forms the central theme of their leisure activities. Recreational needs are therefore largely determined by the culture of the particular society.

Any absolute standard of cultural needs is based in part on the values of the researchers which, in turn, reflect their particular cultures. Peter Townsend notes that when societies are compared in terms of recreational facilities, 'cinema attendance and ownership of radios take precedence over measures of direct participation in cultural events', such as religious rituals and other ceremonies (Townsend, 1970). This is a clear illustration of Western bias.

Budget standards and poverty

One common approach to measuring poverty is to use what has been called the budget standards approach. This involves calculating the cost of those purchases which are considered necessary to raise an individual or a family out of poverty. It has been used in some classic and contemporary studies of poverty in Britain. The British government used it in calculating the level at which to set the means-tested benefit National Assistance (now called Income Support) when it was introduced in 1948. It has also been used by the US government in setting benefit levels.

Some of the earliest and most famous studies of poverty were conducted by Seebohm Rowntree in York (Rowntree, 1901, 1941, and Rowntree and Lavers, 1951). In his early work, the budget standards approach was originally based upon something very close to an absolute definition of poverty. (In Rowntree's later work, and in contemporary sociology, budget standards have been based upon more relative definitions of poverty.)

Seebohm Rowntree – trends in poverty

Rowntree's original method of defining or measuring poverty comes closest to the use of an absolute and material or subsistence definition in Britain.

Rowntree conducted a study of poor families in York in 1899 and drew a poverty line in terms of a minimum weekly sum of money 'necessary to enable families ... to secure the necessaries of a healthy life' (quoted in Coates and Silburn, 1970). The money needed for this subsistence level of existence covered fuel and light, rent, food, clothing, household and personal items, and was adjusted according to family size. According to this measure, 33 per cent of the survey population lived in poverty.

Rowntree conducted two further studies of poverty in York, in 1936 and 1950, based largely on a similar methodology. However, in the later studies he included allowances for some items which were not strictly necessary for survival. These included newspapers, books, radios, beer, tobacco, holidays

Table 5.1 Rowntree's studies of York

Causes of poverty	Percentage of those in poverty 1899	1936	1950
Unemployment	2.31	28.6	–
Inadequate wages	51.96	42.3	1.0
Old age	5.11	14.7	68.1
Sickness		4.1	21.3
Death of chief wage earner	15.63	7.8	6.4
Miscellaneous (incl. large family)	24.99	2.5	3.2
Totals	100	100	100
Percentage of survey population in poverty	33	18	1.5

Source: Adapted from K. Coates and R. Silburn (1970) *Poverty: The Forgotten Englishmen*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, London, p. 46

and presents. Despite the inclusion of the extra items, he found that the percentage of his sample population in poverty had dropped to 18 per cent in 1936 and 1.5 per cent in 1950. He also found that the causes of poverty had changed considerably over half a century. For example, inadequate wages, a major factor in 1899 and 1936, were relatively insignificant by 1950. Table 5.1 summarizes the results of Rowntree's surveys.

By the 1950s it appeared that poverty was a minor problem. 'Pockets' remained (for example, among the elderly), but it was believed that increased welfare benefits would soon eradicate this lingering poverty. The conquest of poverty was put down to an expanding economy (the 1950s were the years of the 'affluent society'), to government policies of full employment and to the success of the welfare state. It was widely believed that the operation of the welfare state had redistributed wealth from rich to poor and significantly raised working-class living standards.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s researchers became increasingly dubious about the 'conquest of poverty'. Rowntree's concept of subsistence poverty, and the indicators he used to measure poverty, were strongly criticized. His measurement of adequate nutrition is a case in point. With the help of experts, Rowntree drew up a diet sheet that would provide the minimum adequate nutritional intake and, using this, he decided upon the minimum monies required for food. It was very unlikely, however, that this minimum budget would meet the needs of the poor. As Martin Rein argues, it was based on:

> *an unrealistic assumption of a no-waste budget, and extensive knowledge in marketing and cooking. An economical budget must be based on knowledge and skill which is least likely to be present in the low-income groups we are concerned with.*
>
> Rein, 1970

Rowntree's estimates further ignored the fact that most working-class people spent a smaller percentage of their income on food than his budget allowed. Nor did he allow for the fact that choice of food is based on the conventions of a person's social class and region, not upon a diet sheet drawn up by experts. Thus Peter Townsend argues that 'in relation to the budgets and customs of life of ordinary people, the make-up of the subsistence budget was unbalanced'.

Rowntree's selection of the 'necessaries of a healthy life' was based on his own opinions and those of the experts he consulted. In his original 1899 study, these necessities were very limited and genuinely included only the basic items necessary for living in an industrial society. However, as we saw earlier, in his later research he extended the range of what he considered necessities quite considerably. In the 1936 survey, he expanded the idea of 'human needs' to include personal items such as a radio, a holiday, books and travelling. These items were estimated to cost 5 shillings (25 pence).

In his later work then, Rowntree used a measure of poverty significantly above subsistence level. Furthermore, the inclusion of such items as holidays anticipated the views of some of the supporters of relative poverty. Despite these alterations, Rowntree's studies revealed a dramatic decline in the amount of poverty. Rising living standards and improvements in the state benefits available to those on low incomes seemed to have reduced the poor to a very small fraction of the British population. In the 1960s, though, poverty was 'rediscovered' as researchers developed and applied the concept of relative poverty.

Jonathan Bradshaw, Deborah Mitchell and Jane Morgan – the usefulness of budget standards

Bradshaw *et al.* (1987) admit that the budget standards approach, which prices the necessities needed to avoid poverty, has its limitations. For example, they accept that it 'inevitably involves judgements – judgements about what items should be included, about the quantity of items that are required and about the price that should be fixed to the items'.

Nevertheless, they feel that the budget standards approach is useful because it focuses attention on the amount paid in benefits to the recipients of welfare. It offers sociologists the chance to assess whether benefit levels can provide adequately for people's needs.

Bradshaw *et al.* accept the criticism of Rowntree's work which points out that it is unrealistic to expect people to have a no-waste budget. To overcome this problem, they base their research on how people actually spend their money, rather than on how experts feel they ought to spend it. Bradshaw *et al.* used data from the *Family Finances Survey* to estimate how families spent their money. They then calculated what the families could afford to buy if they were receiving 110 per cent of basic Supplementary Benefit levels in 1986. (Supplementary Benefit was the main means-tested benefit in Britain in 1986.) The figure of 110 per cent of benefit levels, rather than 100 per cent, was used to allow for extra sources of income such as gifts, borrowing and part-time work. In 1986, 110 per cent of Supplementary Benefit for a family with two children under 11 gave the family a weekly income of £74.88.

At this level of income, the family was found to have a very low standard of living. They could not

Table 5.2 Items included and excluded from the Family Budget Unit (FBU) budgets

Low-cost budget		Modest, but adequate budget	
Examples of items included	Examples of items excluded	Examples of items included	Examples of items excluded
Basic furniture, textiles and hardware	Antiques, handmade or precious household durables	Basic designs, mass manufactured furniture, textiles and hardware	Antiques, handmade or precious household durables
First aid kit and basic medicine	Prescription, dental and sight care charges	Prescription charges, dental care, sight test	Spectacles, private health care
Fridge, washing machine, lawn mower and vacuum cleaner	Freezer, tumble-dryer, shower, electric blankets, microwave, food-mixer	Fridge-freezer, washing machine, microwave, food-mixer, sewing machine	Tumble-dryer, shower, electric blankets
Basic clothing (cheapest prices in C&A)	Secondhand, designer and high-fashion clothing	Basic clothing, sensible designs	Secondhand, designer and high-fashion clothing
TV, video hire, cassette player, basic camera	Hi-fi, children's TVs, compact discs, camcorders	TV, video hire, basic music system and camera	Children's TVs, compact discs, camcorders
Public transport, children's bikes	Car, adult bikes, caravan, camping equipment	Secondhand five-year-old car, secondhand adult bike, new children's bikes	A second car, caravan, camping equipment mountain bikes
Clocks, watches	Jewellery	Basic jewellery, watch	Precious jewellery
Haircuts	Cosmetics	Basic cosmetics, haircuts	Perfume, hair perm
	Alcohol/smoking	Alcohol – men 14 units, women 10 units (two-thirds HEA safe limit)	Smoking
Day-trip to Blackpool	Annual holiday	One-week annual holiday	Holiday abroad
Cinema twice a year, visiting museums or historic buildings about twice a year	Concerts, panto, ballet, or music lessons for children	Walking, swimming, cycling, football, cinema, panto every two years, youth club, scouts/guides	Fishing, water sports, horse-riding, creative or educational adult classes, children's ballet/music lessons

Source: Household budgets and living standards in the United Kingdom, by Bradshaw

afford a holiday and could only have a single one-day outing once a year. They could not afford to go to the cinema, nor to buy books, magazines or bicycles. Running a car was too expensive, and they could afford only one haircut per year.

The researchers examined the weekly menu of a family with two children. They went to Tesco's supermarket in Barrow and bought the shopping found to be typical of families on benefit. Despite buying the cheapest lines and assuming that no food would be wasted, they still found the diet to be 6,500 calories short of what a family needed for the week. The children's diets had too little iron and calcium, and all family members were eating too little fibre and too much fat.

Bradshaw *et al.* argue that studies such as theirs illustrate how deprived people living on benefits are compared to other members of society. They claim:

> *It is possible that the resurrection of budget standards methodology in the analysis of living standards in the UK could lead to a more considered review of the way we treat the seven million people in the UK dependent on Supplementary Benefit.*
>
> Bradshaw *et al.*, 1987

In the 1990s, Bradshaw established the Family Budget Unit (FBU) to continue and develop this approach. The unit distinguished between two levels of income: that which would produce a 'modest but adequate budget', and a 'low-cost budget'. Table 5.2 shows the items included and excluded from these standards. As can be seen from the table, the latter standard reflects contemporary expectations and consumption patterns in Britain. It includes, for example, some provision for leisure such as video hire, but makes no provision for an annual holiday.

The modest but adequate budget is rather more generous but excludes luxury items. Carey Oppenheim and Lisa Harker have compared these findings with levels of income support in Britain. They found that in 1995 income support would meet just 34 per cent of a modest but adequate budget for a single man, 26 per cent for a couple, 40 per cent for a lone mother with two young children and 66 per cent for a couple with two young children (Oppenheim and Harker, 1996).

Evaluation

Pete Alcock (1997) argues that the budget standards approach either relies upon accepting the opinion of experts about what constitutes an adequate budget, or it assumes that 'anyone seeing the evidence of the inadequacy of the weekly budget will recognise the existence of poverty'. Such an assumption is unlikely to be justified. Some will see the budget levels chosen as too generous, others as too mean. The definition is therefore either 'tautological ... or one based only on the judgement of experts'. Paul Spicker (1993) also argues that the approach of Bradshaw *et al.* has its limitations. He points out that people's quality of life is not entirely determined by how they spend money. For example, living standards can be improved by the unpaid labour of family members. Furthermore, no clear poverty line is identified in Bradshaw's work. However, Spicker does support the collection of data on what people actually spend rather than what experts say they should spend. He concludes that 'if there is a way to identify patterns of deprivation as a matter of fact with levels of income, this seems to be it'.

Relative poverty and deprivation

In view of the problems associated with absolute and subsistence standards of poverty, many researchers have abandoned them. Instead, they have defined and measured poverty in terms of the standards specific to a particular place at a particular time. In this section we will consider those definitions.

In a rapidly changing world, definitions of poverty based on relative standards will be constantly changing. Thus Samuel Mencher writes:

> *The argument for relative standards rests on the assumption that for practical purposes standards become so fluid that no definition of need, no matter how broad, satisfies the ever changing expectations of modern life.*
>
> Mencher, 1972

In Western society, products and services such as hot and cold running water, refrigerators and washing machines, medical and dental care, full-time education and motor cars are moving or have moved from being luxuries, to comforts, to necessaries. Thus, in Peter Townsend's words, any definition of poverty must be 'related to the needs and demands of a changing society'.

Moreover, some sociologists have argued that it is necessary to discuss poverty in terms of lifestyles. It is not sufficient to see poverty simply as lack of material possessions and the facilities necessary for material well-being. In contrast, these sociologists believe poverty also exists where members of society are excluded from the lifestyle of the community to which they belong.

Peter Townsend – poverty as relative deprivation

Peter Townsend has carried out a number of studies of poverty, including one of the most detailed ever undertaken in Britain (Townsend, 1979). During the 1960s and 1970s, he played a major part in highlighting the continuing existence of poverty, and in forcing the issue back on to the political agenda. He has also been the leading supporter of defining poverty in terms of relative deprivation: he stresses that poverty should be defined in relation to the standards of a particular society at a particular time. Furthermore, he believes that poverty extends beyond a simple lack of material resources. Townsend identifies three ways of defining poverty, which we will now examine.

The state's standard

The first is the state's standard of poverty, on which official statistics used to be based. Townsend calculates these figures on the basic rate of supplementary benefit (now income support), with the addition of housing costs for different types of household. All those who fall below this level are held to be in poverty, while those receiving income between 100 per cent and 139 per cent of benefit levels are held to be on the margins of poverty. Townsend, however, dismisses this standard as 'neither social nor scientific'. He sees it as being arbitrarily determined by the government of the day, and points out that from year to year it varies in relation to the average income of the population.

The relative income standard of poverty

Townsend calls the second definition of poverty the relative income standard of poverty. This is based upon identifying those households whose income falls well below the average for households with the same composition (the same numbers of adults and children). He defines those who receive 50 per cent or less of the average as poor, and those receiving 80 per cent or less as being in the margins of poverty.

(The British government has now adopted a relative income standard of poverty.) This definition has the benefit of being truly relative. As average income changes, then clearly the poverty line will change as well.

However, Townsend does not accept this definition either:

1 Again, he points out that the point at which such a poverty line is drawn is arbitrary: 60 per cent, 70 per cent or 90 per cent could be taken as the dividing line with no less and no more justification.
2 Nor does he believe that inequality and poverty are the same thing. For example, he argues that you cannot simply define, say, the poorest 20 per cent of the population as poor, because how badly off they are will depend on, among other factors, how developed the welfare system is. They might be considerably better off in a society like Sweden, which has a more highly developed welfare system than a country such as the USA.
3 Furthermore, Townsend wants to extend the concept of poverty beyond material disadvantage. Poverty, in his terms, involves the lifestyles associated with material shortage, and not the material shortage itself.

Relative deprivation

Townsend asserts that 'poverty can be defined objectively and applied consistently only in terms of the concept of relative deprivation'. He justifies this claim on the grounds that society determines people's needs: for example, it determines and conditions even the need for food. It affects the amount of energy that 'different sections of the population habitually expend not only at work but in community and family pursuits'. Their individual obligations as parents, wives or husbands, friends or neighbours, as well as the work they have to do, influence how many calories they have to consume each day. Society also determines what types of foodstuff are available and influences patterns of food consumption through its culture. For instance, tea is closely tied up with British culture and lifestyles: members of British society are expected to be able to offer visitors to their homes a cup of tea, and many workers would be outraged if management threatened to remove their right to a mid-morning tea break. Tea, Townsend reminds us, is 'nutritionally worthless' but 'psychologically and socially essential' in Britain.

Townsend argues that the concept of relative deprivation should be thought of in terms of the resources available to individuals and households, and the styles of living that govern how those resources are used. He believes that concentrating exclusively on income to assess a household's material situation ignores other types of resources that might be available. It neglects capital assets (those who own their home may be better off than those who rent), and ignores occupational fringe benefits, gifts, and the value of public social services such as education and healthcare.

He also feels that it is necessary to move beyond consumption (the purchase of goods) to an examination of how resources affect participation in the lifestyle of the community. Townsend argues that poverty involves an inability to participate in approved social activities that are considered normal, such as visiting friends or relatives, having birthday parties for children, and going on holiday. The cost of such activities can vary greatly – a month on a Mediterranean cruise is considerably more expensive than a weekend's camping close to home – but, to Townsend, individuals suffer deprivation if they cannot afford even the cheapest form of such activities.

On the basis of these arguments Townsend defines poverty in the following way:

> *Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from the ordinary living patterns, customs and activities.*
>
> Townsend, 1979

Poverty in the United Kingdom

In *Poverty in the United Kingdom* (1979), Townsend used this definition to measure the extent of poverty in the UK. (He also collected figures on the basis of the other two definitions he had identified so that he could compare them with his own.) His research was based upon a social survey using questionnaires. In 1968–69, his researchers collected information on 2,052 households, containing 6,098 individuals, in 51 parliamentary constituencies in Britain.

The deprivation index

In order to put his definition of poverty into operation, Townsend devised a deprivation index This index covered a total of 60 specific types of deprivation relating to households, diets, fuel and lighting, clothing, household facilities, housing conditions and amenities, working conditions, health, education, the environment, family life, recreation and social activities. From this original list, he selected 12 items that he believed would be relevant to the whole of the population (and not just to certain sections of it), and calculated the percentage

Table 5.3 The deprivation index

	Characteristic	% of population
1	Has not had a week's holiday away from home in last 12 months	53.6
2	Adults only. Has not had a relative or friend to the home for a meal or snack in the last four weeks	33.4
3	Adults only. Has not been out in the last four weeks to a relative or friend for a meal or snack	45.1
4	Children only (under 15). Has not had a friend to play or to tea in the last four weeks	36.3
5	Children only. Did not have party on last birthday	56.6
6	Has not had an afternoon or evening out for entertainment in the last two weeks	47.0
7	Does not have fresh meat (including meals out) as many as four days a week	19.3
8	Has gone through one or more days in the past fortnight without a cooked meal	7.0
9	Has not had a cooked breakfast most days of the week	67.3
10	Household does not have a refrigerator	45.1
11	Household does not usually have a Sunday joint (three in four times)	25.9
12	Household does not have sole use of four amenities indoors (flush WC; sink or washbasin and cold-water tap; fixed bath or shower; and gas/electric cooker)	21.4

Source: P. Townsend (1979) *Poverty in the United Kingdom*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, p. 250.

of the population deprived of them. The results of his findings are shown in Table 5.3.

Each household was given a score on a deprivation index. The more a household was found to suffer deprivation, the higher its score. Townsend then calculated the average score for households with different levels of income expressed as a percentage of basic supplementary benefit levels. He claimed to find a threshold for levels of income below which the amount of deprivation suddenly increased rapidly. This threshold was found to be at about 150 per cent of basic supplementary benefit levels. He therefore decided to classify all households that did not have this level of resources as 'suffering from poverty'.

Townsend adjusted the income deemed necessary for each family according to the numbers in it, whether adults were working, the age of any children, and whether any members were disabled. Because of the procedures he had followed, he felt able to claim that his figures and definition were 'scientific' and 'objective'.

On the basis of these calculations, Townsend found that 22.9 per cent of the population (or 12.46 million people) were living in poverty in 1968–9. This compared with 6.1 per cent in poverty according to the state standard, or 9.2 per cent in poverty according to the relative income standard. Townsend found that poverty was much more widespread than other research had suggested.

Criticisms of Townsend's early research

Despite the enormous impact Townsend's early work has had on British poverty research, some writers have criticized it. David Piachaud (1981, 1987) argues that the index on which Townsend's statistics are based is inadequate. Piachaud writes, commenting on the items included in the index, that 'it is not clear what they have to do with poverty, nor how they were selected'. In particular, he questions the view that going without a Sunday joint and not eating fresh meat or cooked meals are necessarily associated with deprivation: it might reflect social and cultural differences. He claims that 'it is no indicator of deprivation if someone chooses to stay at home, eating salads and uncooked breakfasts'.

Dorothy Wedderburn (1974) also criticizes Townsend's index. She describes the decision to include certain items and exclude others as arbitrary. She would have preferred Townsend to carry out research into what was actually customary behaviour in society. As a result, she sees the index as reflecting Townsend's personal opinions: it is subjective and not an objective basis for measuring deprivation.

A problem that all researchers into poverty face is that of finding a point at which it is possible to draw a poverty line. Townsend claimed to have found such a point, below which deprivation starts to increase rapidly. Piachaud believes that the selection of this point (at 150 per cent of basic supplementary benefit levels) is as arbitrary as any other. He examined Townsend's data closely and disputed the view that deprivation starts to increase rapidly below this level of income. Other researchers, such as M. Desai (1986), have reanalysed Townsend's data, and have supported his claim that there is a poverty threshold.

Perhaps the most damaging criticism of Townsend advanced by Piachaud concerns the implications of his definition of poverty for measures designed to eradicate it. Using Townsend's deprivation index as a measure of poverty, all inequality of wealth and income could be removed from society, but poverty might still remain if people chose to become vegetarian or not to go on holiday. As Piachaud puts it, 'taken to its logical conclusion, only when everyone behaved identically would no one be defined as deprived'. To tackle what Townsend calls poverty would involve creating uniformity in people's behaviour, because Townsend did not attempt to discover whether it was choice or shortage of money which led to people in his survey scoring points on the deprivation index.

Amartya Sen (1981, 1985) argues that there is 'much to be said' for Townsend's concept of relative deprivation. However, Sen believes that relative deprivation, even including all its variants, cannot really be the only basis for the concept of poverty. He suggests that there is an:

> *irreducible core of absolute deprivation in our idea of poverty, which translates reports of starvation, malnutrition and visible hardship into a diagnosis of poverty without having to ascertain first the relative position.*
>
> Sen, 1985

Thus, if famine were very widespread in a society, it would make little sense to argue that there was no poverty on the grounds that there was little inequality since everybody was short of food.

Sen accepts that the resources needed to avoid absolute deprivation vary from society to society. The diet and shelter required in different circumstances will vary, but to him that does not prevent poverty researchers from determining when people have too little for their most basic needs. To Sen, then, 'the approach of relative deprivation supplements rather than supplants the analysis of poverty in terms of absolute dispossession'.

Townsend has defended himself against Sen. He has argued that Sen's concentration on absolute deprivation is politically dangerous. Potentially, at least, it gives governments in affluent societies an excuse to cut back their welfare states to an absolute bare minimum. Furthermore, Townsend claims that Sen offers no clear definition of absolute deprivation. Sen uses a variety of terms such as 'starvation', 'malnutrition' and 'hunger' to describe the situation where people's basic food needs are not being met. Yet 'starvation' and 'hunger' mean rather different things and Sen offers no clear criteria for determining when people's diets are inadequate and they are therefore in poverty.

More recently (Townsend, 1995), Townsend has continued to argue that an international poverty line can be based on a concept of relative deprivation. He claims that when absolute measures of poverty are used to compare nations, they tend to suggest that there is little poverty in richer countries. Since Townsend believes that poverty remains a substantial problem in countries such as the USA and Britain, he does not accept that absolute international poverty lines are adequate. Instead, he argues that international comparisons can be made by identifying a poverty threshold for each society, below which people start to suffer from relative deprivation. However, the problem remains that this still involves making comparisons on the basis of poverty lines that are unique to each country.

Despite Townsend's defence, Sen may have a point in arguing that different types of poverty should be distinguished. Most of Sen's research has been conducted in developing countries where absolute deprivation, however defined, remains a real problem. At least in terms of international comparisons, the idea of absolute deprivation as poverty may still be useful.

The London study

In his more recent research, Townsend has used slightly different research methods from those of his previous work (Townsend, Corrigan and Kowarzik, 1985). He has continued to define poverty in terms of relative deprivation, but he has amended the way the concept is operationalized.

In 1985–6, Townsend *et al.* used this new approach in a study of a sample of 2,703 Londoners. In this study, Townsend *et al.* (1987) distinguished between material deprivation and social deprivation.

Material deprivation covered dietary deprivation, clothing deprivation, housing deprivation, deprivation of home facilities, deprivation of environment, deprivation of location and deprivation at work.

Social deprivation covered lack of employment rights, deprivation of family activity, lack of integration into the community, lack of participation in social institutions, recreational deprivation and educational deprivation.

Initially, 77 items were included in the index to measure these different types of deprivation, but seven were excluded because the deprivation was found to affect more than 50 per cent of the population. In this way, Townsend *et al.* hoped to establish which activities in their index represented 'standard or majority norms, conventions and customs'.

Townsend *et al.* made greater allowances for variations in taste than was the case in Townsend's earlier study. For example, in measuring dietary deprivation different questions were used for meat-eaters and vegetarians. Scores from the material and social deprivation indexes were aggregated to produce an overall deprivation score for each household.

In the London research, Townsend *et al.* distinguished between objective and subjective deprivation. Objective deprivation was measured using the deprivation index. Subjective deprivation was measured by asking respondents the level of income their household required to escape poverty. Detailed information was also collected on the income received by each household.

The London findings

Townsend *et al.* followed Townsend's earlier study in trying to establish a threshold at which multiple deprivations began to increase. Table 5.4 shows the

level of income needed to prevent multiple deprivation in comparison to the basic level of means-tested benefit, excluding housing costs. The level proved to be rather greater than in the earlier study, ranging from 203 per cent of benefit levels for a single person under 60, to 150 per cent for a couple with three children.

Self-assessments of how much money households needed to escape poverty proved to be very similar to the estimates made by the researchers. For example, the respondents estimated that £110 per week was needed by a couple with two children, while the researchers estimated £109 per week. For single parents, the equivalent figures were £80 and £81, and for a single person under 60, £60 and £64. However, there was a more substantial difference for a couple under 60. Respondents estimated their needs to be £104, while the researchers estimated £75.

Nevertheless, Townsend *et al.* concluded that their estimate of the poverty threshold was broadly similar to that of the population in their sample. Both methods of determining a poverty threshold showed that benefit levels were inadequate, with Londoners themselves suggesting that an average 61 per cent more than basic benefit levels was needed to escape poverty.

Joanna Mack and Stewart Lansley – *Poor Britain*

In between Townsend's earlier and later research, London Weekend Television financed a study of poverty built on Townsend's methods (Mack and Lansley, 1985). It was conducted by Joanna Mack and Stewart Lansley, and took account of many of the methodological criticisms of Townsend made by sociologists such as Piachaud. Although Townsend's later study in London did modify the methods to some extent, it still used a deprivation index consisting of items chosen by the researchers, and it still made no attempt to measure why people were not participating in some activities.

Mack and Lansley followed Townsend in defining poverty in relative terms, and in attempting to measure directly the extent of deprivation. Unlike Townsend, however, they tried to distinguish between styles of living which people could not afford, and those which they chose not to follow.

Furthermore, Mack and Lansley devised a new way of determining what were the 'necessities' of life in modern Britain. They accepted the point made by Piachaud that taste might influence whether some people went without items on a deprivation index. In order to overcome this problem, they decided to

Table 5.4 Weekly income required to surmount deprivation, as a percentage of basic means-tested assistance scales

Household type	Weekly income required, after deduction of housing costs, as a percentage of basic means-tested assistance scales
Single person under 60	203
Couple under 60	157
Couple with two children	151
Couple with three children	150
Single parent with one child	168

Note: Assumptions have had to be made about the ages of children in order that basic rates could be estimated.

Source: P. Townsend (1993) *The International Analysis of Poverty*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, p. [illegible]

include in their research a question relating to each item that respondents said they lacked, asking them whether it was by choice, or through necessity, because of financial shortage. Those who said it was a matter of choice were not defined as being deprived of that item.

In addition, Mack and Lansley excluded some items from the index which groups with high income were as likely, or nearly as likely, to say they lacked by choice as groups on low incomes. They suggested that where these particular items were concerned, the cost of them depended to a significant extent on where people lived. (For example, the costs of a garden would be much greater for a resident in a fashionable and prosperous area of London than for a person living in an economically depressed northern town.) Lack of a television set was also ignored because the number who did not have this item was so small that no conclusions could be drawn from the data.

After the exclusion of such items, Mack and Lansley argued that their figures would accurately reflect the extent of involuntary deprivation.

Public perception of necessities

The second area in which this study tried to improve on Townsend's work was in the selection of items for inclusion in the index. Mack and Lansley wanted to avoid the accusation that their choice of items was purely arbitrary. They rejected Rowntree's use of experts to determine basic needs, and went beyond Townsend's subjective choices of what he thought was customary. They argued that it was possible to measure the standards of a society in order to provide a more objective basis for defining relative deprivation.

Table 5.5 The public's perception of necessities (% classing items as necessary)

	1990 %	1983 %	Change %		1990 %	1983 %	Change %
A damp-free home	98	96	+2	Hobby or leisure activity	67	64	+3
An inside toilet (not shared with another household)	97	96	+1	New, not secondhand, clothes	65	64	+1
Heating to warm living areas of the home if it's cold	97	97	0	A roast joint or its vegetarian equivalent once a week[3]	64	67	-3
Beds for everyone in the household	95	94	+1	Leisure equipment for children, e.g. sports equipment or bicycle[3]	61	57	+4
Bath, not shared with another household	95	94	+1	A television	58	51	+7
A decent state of decoration in the home[2]	92	-	-	Telephone	56	43	+13
Fridge	92	77	+15	An annual week's holiday away, not with relatives	54	63	-9
Warm waterproof coat	91	87	+4	A 'best outfit' for special occasions	54	48	+6
Three meals a day for children[1]	90	82	+8	An outing for children once a week[1]	53	40	+13
Two meals a day (for adults)[4]	90	64	+26	Children's friends round for tea/snack fortnightly[1]	52	37	+15
Insurance[2]	88	-	-	A dressing gown	42	38	+4
Fresh fruit[2]	88	-	-	A night out fortnightly	42	36	+6
Toys for children, e.g. dolls or models[1]	84	71	+13	Fares to visit friends in other parts of the country four times a year[2]	39	-	-
Separate bedrooms for every child over 10 of different sexes[1]	82	77	+5	Special lessons such as music, dance or sport[1, 2]	39	-	-
Carpets in living rooms and bedrooms in the home	78	70	+8	Friends/family for a meal monthly	37	32	+5
Meat or fish or vegetarian equivalent every other day[3]	77	63	+14	A car	26	22	+4
Celebrations on special occasions, such as Christmas	74	69	+5	Pack of cigarettes every other day	18	14	+4
Two pairs of all-weather shoes	74	78	-4	Restaurant meal monthly[2]	17	-	-
Washing machine	73	67	+6	Holidays abroad annually[2]	17	-	-
Presents for friends or family once a year	69	63	+6	A video[2]	13	-	-
Out of school activities, e.g. sports, orchestra, scouts[1, 2]	69	-	-	A home computer[2]	5	-	-
Regular savings of £10 a month for 'rainy days' or retirement[2]	68	-	-	A dishwasher[2]	4	-	-

Note: The descriptions of items have been abbreviated.
1 For families with children. 2 Not included in the 1983 survey. 3 Vegetarian option added in 1990. 4 Two a day in the 1983 survey.

Source: H. Frayman (1991) *Breadline Britain 1990s: The Findings of the Television Series*, London Weekend Television, London, p. 4.

Mack and Lansley asked respondents in their research what they considered to be necessities in contemporary Britain. Although the answers represented no more than the subjective opinions of members of society, they did at least give some indication of what the population considered to be customary, socially approved and of vital importance to social life. Furthermore, Mack and Lansley claimed to have discovered a large degree of consensus about what items were seen as necessities. Their findings, and those of a follow-up study (Mack and Lansley, 1992), are summarized in Table 5.5.

They decided to assume that an item became a necessity when it reached 50 per cent, because a majority of the population now classified it as one. The lack of a television, the lack of self-contained accommodation, the lack of a garden and the lack of money for public transport were excluded for reasons that have already been explained. This left them with a deprivation index of 22 items. Mack and Lansley went on to measure the extent of poverty, which they defined as 'an enforced lack of socially perceived necessities', on the basis of this index. Only those people who lacked three or more items were considered to be poor.

Mack and Lansley produced the following results, using a sample of 1,174 people who were questioned in February 1983. According to their calculations, there were 7.5 million people in poverty in Britain – 5 million adults and 2.5 million children – equivalent to 13.8 per cent of the population. Although this figure is substantially less than that reached by Townsend in 1968–9, it still shows that poverty remains a significant problem in contemporary Britain.

Because the figures were calculated on a different basis from those of Townsend, they were not strictly comparable, and did not therefore demonstrate that the amount of poverty had decreased. Indeed, Mack and Lansley thought that the amount of poverty had probably increased in the years preceding their study. They found that the share of national earnings from employment received by the poorest 40 per cent of the population had fallen from 15.6 per cent in 1965 to 10.2 per cent in 1976.

Mack and Lansley also pointed to a number of government decisions which had made the recipients of welfare payments worse off. In particular, they claimed that some policies of the Thatcher government would probably have increased the amount of poverty. Unemployment had risen, but the earnings-related supplement for the short-term unemployed had been abolished. Old-age pensions had risen more slowly than average wages, and there had been dramatic cuts in housing benefits after the autumn of 1983.

The follow-up study

Mack and Lansley carried out a follow-up study in 1990, using a sample of 1,800 people. Once again they conducted a survey to determine public perceptions of necessities. They found that these had changed. A weekly outing for children, children's friends round once a fortnight, a telephone and a best outfit for special occasions were all now seen as necessities by more than half the population. These were therefore added to the index. Televisions were also included.

Some new items were added which were also seen as necessities by the majority of respondents. These were:

1 a decent standard of decoration in the home
2 savings of at least £10 per week
3 home contents insurance
4 participation in out-of-school activities for children
5 fresh fruit and vegetables every day.

This produced an index of 32 items.

Changes between 1983 and 1990

The 1990 study found there had been a big increase in poverty. The numbers lacking three or more of the necessities, and therefore in poverty according to Mack and Lansley's definition, had risen from 7.5 million in 1983 to 11 million in 1990. The number in severe poverty, defined as lacking seven or more items, had gone up from 2.5 million in 1983 to 3.5 million in 1990.

Two-thirds of the poor in 1990 were found to be dependent on state benefits. Mack and Lansley argued that much of the increase in the numbers of poor resulted from specific changes in the benefits system:

1 Pensions were indexed to prices, rather than wages as in 1979, so that as wage earners became better off, pensioners became relatively poorer. Pensioners made up one-tenth of the poor in 1983, but one-fifth of the poor in 1990.
2 Invalidity benefit and income support (previously supplementary benefit) had also fallen well behind average earnings.
3 Two-thirds of single parents were found to be poor, compared to just under 50 per cent in 1983.
4 Many of the poor had been hit by the replacement of single payments with the social fund in 1988.

(We discuss these changes in benefits in more detail on pp. 343–4.)

Criticisms of Mack and Lansley

The inclusion of entirely new items in the 1990 index raises questions about the comparability of the data from the two studies. Obviously, the more items that

are included as necessities, the greater the number of people who will be found to be lacking three or more necessities. Thus, at least part of the increase in poverty found in comparing the two studies may have resulted from the changes in the surveys rather than from changes in society.

Use of a public opinion poll to determine what are considered necessities is an advance over Townsend's approach which relies largely on the judgements of the researcher. However, even Mack and Lansley's method is heavily influenced by the choices made by the researchers. They have to choose what items to question the public about before they can determine what is considered deprivation. Many other items apart from those chosen could have been included.

The researchers also shaped the findings by defining poverty as lacking three or more items. If they had settled on two or four items as the dividing line they would have produced a different estimate of the total number in poverty. As David Piachaud (1987) points out, Mack and Lansley's approach 'still requires expert involvement in defining questions and determining answers'.

Piachaud also points out that there is a problem with individuals who spend their money on items that are not considered necessities. For example, some people could not afford to pay for an adequate diet or adequate housing because they spent large amounts of money on cigarettes or leisure pursuits. To Piachaud there needs to be 'some judgement about what margin, if any, needs to be allowed for non-necessities'. Again, this involves the use of the opinion of 'experts' and further undermines the claim that the results of such studies are based upon definitions of poverty supported by the general public.

Robert Walker (1987) attempts to overcome the problem of expert judgement by trying to 'democratize' the process of determining what necessities are. He argues that Mack and Lansley's approach fails to do justice to the complexity of the problem. The survey data they use gives respondents no chance to determine what quality of goods and services people need. For example, is a threadbare carpet adequate, or should it be in better condition? Moreover, Mack and Lansley gave the respondents no opportunity to include items they were not asked about, nor any chance to discuss the issues involved and reflect in depth on the necessities of contemporary living.

Walker therefore proposes that basic needs should be determined not by groups of experts, nor by survey methods, but by panels of ordinary people who are given the opportunity to have in-depth discussions. These members of the public could then produce costed descriptions of the minimum acceptable basket of goods and services needed by different family types.

In this way, a definition of poverty could be based upon a genuine consensus among a sample of the population, rather than being based upon the majority voting system used in Mack and Lansley's survey research. So-called experts would no longer define poverty in their own terms.

Pete Alcock is one writer who supports this approach. He argues that other approaches are flawed because:

> *absolute definitions of poverty necessarily involve relative judgements to apply them to any particular society; and relative definitions require some absolute core in order to distinguish them from broader inequalities. Both it seems have major disadvantages, and in pure terms neither is acceptable or workable as a definition of poverty.*
>
> Alcock, 1997, p. 72

Alcock prefers Bradshaw's approach because he sees it as combining the strengths of absolute and relative definitions of poverty, and because the definitions reached are based upon a consensus that implies that the political will exists to tackle the poverty uncovered.

An obvious problem with Walker's approach is the assumption that a consensus would be reached. It is quite likely that the members of the public on the panel would disagree about a minimum acceptable living standard. Furthermore, there would be no guarantee that the same living standard would be agreed by a different panel. Once again, an objective or 'democratic' definition of poverty would prove elusive.

Social exclusion

In recent years, some commentators have tried to broaden the issues involved in thinking about the most deprived groups in society by using the term social exclusion rather than poverty. In some ways, this represents an extension of Townsend's idea of relative deprivation, as it goes beyond confining the question of deprivation to commodities that can be directly purchased. Carol and Alan Walker define poverty as 'a lack of the material resources, especially income, necessary to participate in British society'. For

them, social exclusion refers to the 'dynamic process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political and cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society' (Walker and Walker, 1997). Thus, for example, the socially excluded might include the unemployed who lack a role in the formal economic system; those who do not register to vote, who lack a role in the political system; and isolated elderly individuals who live alone and lack a role in the social system. Pete Alcock (1997) claims that the idea of social exclusion was first highlighted by the Child Poverty Action Group in Britain in the mid-1980s and has become an increasingly prominent issue in Europe. The EU's European Social Charter mentions the term 'social exclusion', and the EU also sponsored seminars on social exclusion during the 1990s. Alcock argues that:

> *what the EU commentators were doing in their discussion of the problem of social exclusion was attempting to broaden the debate and research on poverty and deprivation beyond the confines and experiences of the poor to encompass the reaction to poverty by other social agencies and individuals throughout society. In this sense, they argue that, rather than being a state of affairs – as poverty has often been conceived – social exclusion is really a process involving us all.*
>
> Alcock, 1997, p. 95

In other words, the idea of social exclusion forces us to consider the role of those who do the excluding (the comfortably-off majority), as well as those who are excluded. Brian Nolan and Christopher T. Whelan (1996) also stress that social exclusion is a dynamic concept. They say:

> *talking of social exclusion rather than poverty highlights the gap between those who are active members of society and those who are forced to the fringe, the increasing risks of social disintegration, and the fact that, for the persons concerned and for society, this is a process of change and not a fixed or static situation.*
>
> Nolan and Whelan, 1996

Adopting this focus has important consequences. For example, it implies policies that move beyond the '(re)distribution of resources to include the promotion of changes in social and economic structures' (Alcock, 1997). Better welfare payments on their own would not ensure that the excluded would receive the chance to participate in all areas of social, economic and political life. Roger Lawson (1995) describes social exclusion in Britain and America as becoming 'detached from the broader social and economic experiences of mainstream society'. He believes that social exclusion has been increasing because of the 'risks of family breakdown, reinforced gender inequalities ... more hostile and fearful relationships in local communities [and] the most disturbing of recent trends ... hardened racial cleavages and ... new forms of xenophobia and racism among the less privileged'. Tackling such problems would involve measures to deal with racism, to encourage a stronger sense of community, and to combat sex discrimination and other causes of gender inequality.

The term social exclusion was given further prominence in Britain when the Labour government launched a new Social Exclusion Unit in December 1997 to deal with social problems such as truancy and unemployment. In broad terms, its aims were to encourage social inclusion; in other words, to encourage people to participate in those areas of social life from which they were excluded. For example, it aimed to encourage truants to attend school, and unemployed people, particularly single parents and young people, to find employment.

Some problems with social exclusion

The concept of social exclusion plays a valuable role in broadening the debate about what constitutes a good quality of life to include more than purely material considerations. It also encourages policy-makers to coordinate a wide range of policies that try to improve the position of the disadvantaged. However, because of its breadth and because it is multi-dimensional, social exclusion is difficult to define precisely and measure reliably. As with relative poverty, there are even greater problems in using this concept to compare different societies which have different norms and patterns of social interaction. Tackling some aspects of social exclusion (for example, a decline in a sense of community) may be beyond the power of governments.

There is a risk that concern for the general notion of social exclusion might distract policy-makers from dealing with the specific material deprivation which is at the root of much social exclusion. Nolan and Whelan suggest that the EU may be keen on using the term social exclusion because it might be:

> *more palatable, and perhaps more effective in terms of EU decision-making, to talk in terms of the need to accompany the integration of economies with measures to promote social integration and combat social exclusion rather than to highlight the possibility that economic integration could result in poverty for some vulnerable people and areas.*
>
> Nolan and Whelan, 1996, p. 190

Social exclusion could thus be used to allow the EU to avoid doing anything directly about increased poverty that might be caused by a shift to Europe-wide free markets.

There is a related risk that the concept may be used to justify cutting welfare payments on the grounds that this will encourage the excluded to earn a living which will in turn lead to their greater involvement in society (see p. 346). It remains to be seen how successful such policies will be. Nolan and Whelan argue that social exclusion can be a useful concept because it 'may help to sensitize researchers and policy-makers to dynamics, processes, multiple disadvantages'. However, this does not mean that it can be used to replace the term poverty. Poverty still needs to be studied and highlighted because of its resonance in everyday language, because people feel they know what it means, and because, as an evaluative and emotive term, it encourages people to think something should be done about it. Thus they argue it would be undesirable to lose 'the spark that "poverty" ignites because of its everyday usage and evaluative content'.

Nevertheless, some sociologists have started making good use of the concept of social exclusion in explaining the causes of the predicament of the most disadvantaged in society. It also highlights important aspects of the problems faced by groups such as the disabled and ethnic minorities (see pp. 313–14).

Official statistics on poverty

Some countries use an official poverty line and produce regular statistics on poverty. The USA is an example. Other countries, such as Britain, do not have an official poverty line but do produce some statistics on low incomes.

Statistics on official poverty, or low incomes, are not necessarily based upon sophisticated sociological definitions of poverty. What is more, statistics from different countries are calculated in a variety of ways and therefore cannot always be compared.

Nevertheless, official statistics do provide valuable information about the extent of poverty, or at least low incomes. They also give some indication of how poverty is distributed between different social groups.

British statistics

Low Income Family statistics

Although Britain has never had an official poverty line it has published statistics on low incomes. Figures on Low Income Families were first produced by the then Department of Health and Social Security in the early 1970s. This set of figures was dropped by the Department of Social Security in 1988. However, the Institute for Fiscal Studies, an independent research institute, has continued to produce figures on Low Income Families since 1988 by extrapolating from official statistics.

Low Income Family statistics measure the numbers of families who are receiving different levels of income in relation to the main means-tested state benefit. They are calculated using figures from an annual government survey, the *Family Expenditure Survey*, and figures published by the Department of Social Security on benefits claimants. The basic state means-tested benefit was originally called national assistance, later supplementary benefit and is now called income support.

National assistance was first introduced in 1948 with the implementation of the Beveridge Report which laid the foundations of the welfare state. The level at which national assistance was first set was based upon the work of Seebohm Rowntree. Beveridge thought that Rowntree's 1899 poverty index was insufficiently generous and claimed to have based the initial benefit levels upon the 1936 index.

Frank Field (1982), however, argues that the benefits were set at a lower level than that which Rowntree's research indicated was necessary to raise people out of poverty. According to Field, for single men and women, benefits were set at 55 and 66 per cent of Rowntree's level respectively. Pensioners also received less than was necessary to raise them up to Rowntree's 1936 poverty line, but children were treated more generously.

National assistance and its later equivalents have been paid to those who can demonstrate that they have a low income. The benefit has been intended to provide a basic minimum income for those suffering material hardship. Figures have been produced by a number of different researchers on those receiving income at or below the level of these benefits and on those who receive 140 per cent or less of the basic benefit level.

As we saw earlier in this chapter, poverty researchers such as Townsend and Mack and Lansley argue that families need to be well above basic benefit levels to escape from poverty. The figures on both those receiving the same or less than basic benefit levels, and those receiving less than 140 per cent of basic levels, have been used by some commentators as a measure of poverty.

Advantages and disadvantages

When the Department of Social Security decided to discontinue publishing Low Income Family statistics it gave a number of reasons:

1 It argued that benefit levels were being used both to measure the extent of poverty and to alleviate poverty. This led to a paradox: if the government put benefit levels up, more people fell into the category Low Income Family, yet the poor were receiving more money. In other words, attempts to help the poor created more poverty.

2 It claimed that the use of the family as the unit of analysis overstated the extent of low income. Many households had more than one family living in them (for example, parents and married children), and the pooling of resources between family units could help to compensate for the low income of one unit.

3 140 per cent of benefit levels might be considered too generous as a measure of low income.

Christopher Giles and Steven Webb (1993) of the Institute for Fiscal Studies do not regard such criticisms as a justification for abandoning statistics on Low Income Families:

1 They point out that it is possible to adjust the figures to take account of the changes in the real value of benefit. They have produced such figures based on the 1979 benefit levels adjusted for inflation in later years (see below).

2 Giles and Webb see the second criticism as more serious, but any poverty figures are bound to run into the problem of the distribution of resources within households. Calculating the income of individuals, households or families as the basis for poverty statistics is problematic, whichever is used.

3 The third criticism is dismissed as unimportant. A 140 per cent of benefit levels does not have to be taken as the cut-off point between the poor and non-poor; 100, 110 or 120 per cent can be used as alternatives.

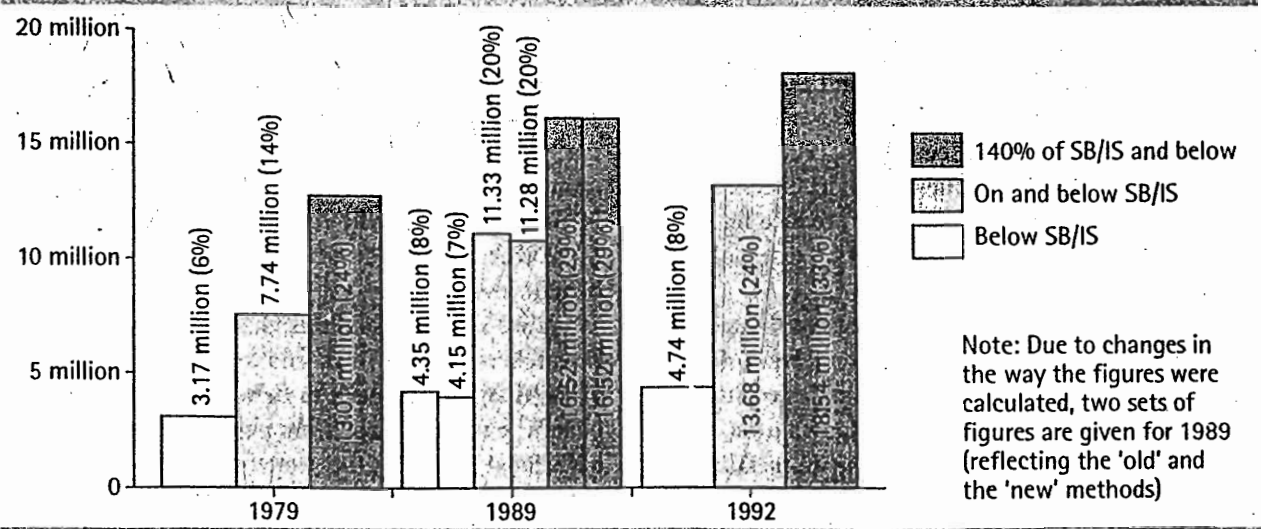
Some critics of the Conservative government have suggested that these figures were discontinued in 1988 for political reasons. If the Institute for Fiscal Studies had not carried on producing them, it would have been impossible to calculate changes in the numbers of 'poor', using official sources. Abandoning the figures could therefore be seen as a cynical attempt to hide an increase in poverty which had resulted from government policies.

Figures on Low Income Families do not correspond exactly to any sociological definition of poverty, but they do provide a rough guide to trends in poverty. Giles and Webb praise this measure for its simplicity and for the ease with which household size can be taken into account, since households with different compositions receive different levels of benefit. They also note that it is useful for determining the numbers of people who are slipping through the 'safety-net' of the welfare state, and receiving less than basic benefit levels.

Trends in Low Income Families

Figure 5.1 shows the numbers and percentages of the population with different levels of income in relation to benefit levels. There was a marked rise between 1979 and 1992 (the last available figure), with the percentage living at or below benefit levels rising from 14 to 24 per cent of the population. The percentage receiving less than 140 per cent of benefit levels rose from 24 to 33 per cent.

Figure 5.1 Numbers of people living in poverty in Britain in 1979, 1989 and 1992, defined by [illegible]



Source: C. Oppenheim and L. Harker (1996) Poverty: The Facts, Child Poverty Action Group, London, p. 28.

difficult for them to have the self-belief to get out of their situation.

4 Their lack of self-belief was compounded by what Blackman calls the 'fear of fall'. Although to an outsider they seemed to have little to lose, they did have strong support and friendship networks among the other young homeless people in the area. One of the homeless said:

> *If I could leave the world of the homeless, I'd do it today. Say if I leave, what happens if I don't make it again? I will end up having to move on. But if I stay homeless I have my friends, contacts, people I know. This is my world, why should I throw it away? It's all right for you, you've got other things. What I have may not seem much to you. It may not seem much to lose. But when you haven't got much – nothing really, then this seems a lot to lose.*
>
> Blackman, 1997

Some of them had made progress in the past by finding jobs or more secure accommodation, only to lose them and end up in an even worse situation. This was very dispiriting and discouraged them from taking a chance on the same happening again.

Surviving homelessness

The homeless in Brighton did engage in some types of behaviour which have been seen as being typical of the underclass. However, Blackman argues that such behaviour was a consequence of their homelessness, not a cause of it. It was a way of coping with their situation. For example, some of those studied did work illegally in the informal economy while claiming benefits. As we have seen above, though, this was hardly surprising given the lack of stable employment in the formal economy and the nature of the benefits system. In many cases, employers would only take them on if they did undeclared work. They were left with little choice other than to accept these jobs if they wanted to work at all.

Another example is that they would 'destruct a giro'. This involved going on a binge after receiving a giro cheque from the DSS. They would usually drink heavily, some took drugs, and they would spend all their money before they received their next payment.

Blackman found that some were ashamed of public drunkenness and other behaviour, but destructing a giro gave them a sense of autonomy and control that helped bolster their flagging self-esteem. For once they could consume products like other members of society. It was a particular source of pride if they could buy one of their friends a drink. Nevertheless, it could be self-defeating since it 'served to reinforce their feelings of social and economic dislocation, as they were cut free from the time discipline of the workplace or even their own more standard everyday routine'.

A few of the homeless did get involved in crime and prostitution, 'but such actions were not generally part of an organised activity and seemed more related to an individual's immediate economic circumstances'. When they were desperate their bodies were the last assets they had to exploit, so prostitution became their last resort. Few of them became involved in using hard drugs, and any drug dealing or property crime was haphazard rather than a systematic way of earning a living.

The homeless and the underclass

To outsiders the homeless in Brighton might have seemed dangerous, drunken and lazy. They appeared to be people who were making little effort to help themselves. Through his ethnographic research, Blackman was able to understand their behaviour from their point of view, and to see that it was largely a reaction to their situation rather than a way of life they chose. Blackman says, 'they were experiencing multiple problems in bleak cultural locations ... They had become submerged in a localised subculture with specific strategies for coping with the difficulties in their everyday lives.'

In contradiction of Charles Murray's and similar theories of the underclass, they did not reject society's values. What made them different was that they had no stake in society and they shared the stigma of being homeless. What they needed was not a different culture, but jobs and homes. A few individuals in the study did find reasonably secure homes and Blackman found that this soon 'gave young people greater confidence to use the telephone to respond to jobs and housing advertisements' and their mental health improved. Blackman therefore rejected the underclass theory, arguing that it is an ideological device used to deny society's responsibility to the disadvantaged by claiming that some people are undeserving of government support. At the same time, it is used as a weapon to warn the respectable working class of their likely fate if they stop conforming and working hard. Like a number of other writers, Blackman sees members of the so-called 'underclass' as victims of society whose behaviour changes when they are given genuine opportunities to improve their lot.

Conflict theories of poverty

The sociology of poverty has increasingly come to be studied within a conflict perspective. Those working within this perspective argue that it is the failure of society to allocate its resources fairly that explains the continued existence of poverty. Poverty is not held to be the responsibility of those who suffer from it. Instead they are seen as the 'victims'.

To some extent conflict theorists disagree about the reasons why society has failed to eradicate poverty:

1 Some regard poverty as primarily the consequence of the failings of the welfare state.
2 Others place more emphasis on the lack of power and weak bargaining position of the poor which places them at a disadvantage in the labour market. The poor are either unable to sell their labour, or are prevented from receiving sufficient rewards from it to lift themselves out of poverty.
3 Many conflict theorists relate the existence of poverty to wider structural forces in society, in particular the existence of a stratification system.
4 Marxists tend to believe poverty is an inherent and inevitable consequence of capitalism. They cannot envisage the defeat of poverty without the total transformation of society.

Thus, although there are broad similarities between the sociologists we will look at in the following sections, there are also some areas of disagreement.

Poverty and the welfare state

Recent studies of poverty have found that those who rely upon state benefits for their income are among the largest groups of the poor. If poverty is defined in relative terms, and the definition that is advanced means that benefit levels do not raise the recipient above the poverty line, then a great deal of poverty can simply be attributed to inadequate benefits.

Nevertheless, it might be argued that the welfare state still makes a major contribution to reducing poverty, or at least to improving the relative position of those who are poor. It is widely assumed that one effect of the welfare state is to redistribute resources from the rich to the poor as, at first sight, it appears that both taxation and welfare payments do this.

Taxation

This view has been challenged by some conflict sociologists. Some taxes are certainly progressive, that is, they lead to the better-off paying a greater proportion of their income to the government than the lower income groups pay. Direct taxes, such as income tax, are levied at different levels according to income, and those on very low pay may not even reach the threshold at which tax must be paid.

However, indirect taxation (taxes levied on the purchase of goods) tends to be regressive. Taxes such as VAT (Value Added Tax) and duties on alcohol and tobacco tend to take up a greater proportion of the income of poorer sections of the community than richer ones.

Since 1978–9, the tax burden on the low-paid has increased, while the burden on the high-paid has been reduced. Direct taxation has become less progressive, indirect taxation has increased, and the relative position of those on low incomes has worsened. Official statistics showed that between 1979 and 1993–4, the real income of the poorest 10 per cent of the population fell by 13 per cent after housing costs, whereas for the richest 10 per cent it increased by 65 per cent. For the population as a whole, average real income growth, after housing costs, was 40 per cent (quoted in Oppenheim, 1997).

Christopher Giles and Paul Johnson (1994) have examined the effects of tax changes between 1985 and 1995 in a study for the Institute for Fiscal Studies. Table 5.7 shows the results. It divides the population into tenths or 'deciles', decile 1 being the poorest and decile 10 the richest. It shows that as a

Table 5.7 Impact of tax changes 1985–95, by decile group

Decile	Percentage losing	Percentage gaining	Average gain/loss (£ per week)	Average gain/loss (% of real income)
1	66	7	-3.00	-2.9
2	44	13	-1.40	-1.4
3	47	23	-1.80	-1.5
4	43	40	-1.10	-0.8
5	37	50	0.70	0.4
6	33	57	1.60	0.7
7	29	64	3.10	1.2
8	25	69	4.40	1.5
9	23	72	6.30	1.8
10	20	76	31.30	5.8
All	37	47	4.10	1.7

Source: C. Giles and P. Johnson (1994) *Taxes Down, Taxes Up. The Effects of a Decade of Tax Changes*, The Institute for Fiscal Studies, London, p. 11.

result of tax changes the poorest decile has lost an average of £3 per week or 2.9 per cent of their income, while the richest decile has gained £31.30 or 5.5 per cent of their income.

The *Strategy of Equality*

Undoubtedly some welfare benefits primarily benefit those on the lowest incomes: income support, unemployment benefit and family credit are all directed at the poorest members of society. However, while they may prevent absolute poverty, some sociologists argue that welfare benefits do little to eradicate relative poverty.

Writing in 1982, Julian Le Grand suggested that the *Strategy of Equality* through the provision of social services had failed. From an examination of education, healthcare, housing and transport subsidies, he argued that the better-off members of British society had benefited considerably more than the poor. In education, the children of top income groups were more likely to stay on in education after the age of 16, and more likely to go to university. He calculated that the families in the top 20 per cent of income groups received nearly three times as much expenditure on their children's education as those in the bottom fifth.

In the field of healthcare, Le Grand claimed that those on higher incomes, again, benefit more from the services provided. The actual amounts spent on different income groups did not vary a great deal; however, lower socio-economic groups were more likely to suffer from illness, and therefore needed more medical care than the higher groups. It was this extra care that they did not receive. Le Grand found that 'the evidence suggests that the top socio-economic group receives 40 per cent more NHS expenditure per person reporting illness than the bottom one'.

The DHSS *Inequalities in Health Working Group Report*, better known as the *Black Report*, published in 1981, reached similar conclusions. It confirmed the inverse care law: those whose need is less get more resources, while those with a greater need tend to get less. For example, it found that doctors tend to spend more time with middle-class patients, and middle-class areas tend to have more doctors per head of the population than working-class areas.

Le Grand found a similar picture in relation to housing expenditure:

1 Poorer households received substantially greater benefits than richer ones from various forms of direct expenditure on housing. General subsidies on the supervision and maintenance of council housing and rent rebates and allowances (now replaced by housing benefits) favoured lower-income groups.
2 However, higher-income groups benefited considerably more from indirect expenditure. In particular, tax relief on mortgage interest payments provided a major saving for those homeowners who had mortgages.
3 Furthermore, capital gains tax was not charged on homes which were sold at a profit.
4 Improvement grants for houses were one form of direct expenditure which favoured the better-off.

Le Grand concluded that from housing policy, 'the richest group receives nearly twice as much as public subsidy per household as the poorest group'.

Writing in 1987, Le Grand argued that changes since the 1970s had done little to alter the overall picture:

1 Some changes resulted in improvements and services benefiting higher-income groups even more than they had done in the past: subsidies to council housing had been cut while mortgage tax relief had been expanded.
2 On the other hand, the replacement of rent rebates and allowances with housing benefits (which are means-tested) was likely to have benefited the poor.
3 The expansion of private education might also have cut state expenditure on the education of higher-income groups.

These changes more or less balanced each other out.

Le Grand reached a startling conclusion on the effects of expenditure on the social services, which is quite contrary to widely held assumptions. He said:

> *It has failed to achieve full equality of whatever kind for most of the services reviewed. In those areas where data are available it has failed to achieve greater equality over time; and, in some cases, it is likely that there would be greater equality if there was no public expenditure on the services concerned.*
>
> Le Grand, 1987

More recent changes in welfare

In recent years, some of the benefits enjoyed by the more wealthy have been removed or reduced. For example, privatization has limited the amount of subsidy paid by government and local authorities for public transport. Tax relief on mortgage interest payments was limited to the first £30,000 and the percentage relief was gradually reduced and eventually abolished. Taxation of company cars has been tightened up. In other areas, however, there is little evidence that changes have benefited the poor.

New ways have been introduced for the affluent to limit their tax bills. These took the form of TESSAs (Tax Exempt Special Savings Accounts) and PEPs (Personal Equity Plans), both of which are exempt from taxation. In 1999, the Labour government

replaced these two schemes with a single scheme – the ISA (Individual Savings Account) – which restricts tax-free savings to an investment of £5,000 per year. This does make access to tax-free savings easier for the less affluent since money can be withdrawn without the loss of tax-free status. However, this is of little use to those who are too poor to have any money to save anyway.

Writing in 1997, George Smith, Teresa Smith and Gemma Wright noted some inequalities in education spending. The Additional Educational Needs formula used by the government tries to allow for the extra needs of children in poor areas. This affected about 17 per cent of the budget for schools in 1996, a fall from 24 per cent in 1990. However, the formula seems to work in inconsistent ways. For example, according to the formula, Harrow (a prosperous London suburb) had greater needs than Barnsley (a relatively poor Yorkshire town). Furthermore, due to a cut in 1994 in the allowance for areas with a large ethnic minority population, inner-city areas received reduced levels of funding. The poor have also lost out because of cuts in the provision of school meals and because local authorities no longer have the discretion to give free school meals to poor children whose families do not receive income support. According to Smith *et al.*, the children of the poor are more likely to be excluded from school than other children.

Norman Ginsburg (1997) notes that recent housing policy has been designed to encourage home ownership. The consequence has been that spending on new council housing has been severely restricted, and by 1996 some 1.7 million council or housing association homes had been sold to their tenants. The Conservative governments between 1979 and 1997 also pushed for increases in council rents towards market levels. Rents rose 36 per cent in real terms between 1988–9 and 1993–4. This was designed to encourage private landlords to rent out properties as well as to increase public revenues. However, the result has been increasing expenditure on housing benefit as the government has had to help the poorest meet these increased costs. This is despite cuts in the level and scope of housing benefit. Ginsburg notes that 'the government has capped housing benefit for private tenants, thereby pushing some households below the poverty line and even making some households homeless'.

Michaela Benzeval (1997) has found a growing health gap between the rich and poor in Britain. She says that 'throughout the 1980s and 1990s a considerable body of evidence accumulated that showed the poor health experience in terms of premature mortality and excess morbidity of people living in disadvantaged circumstances'. She quotes a variety of studies showing these inequalities. She argues that Conservative government policies towards health focused on introducing 'market mechanisms' into the NHS and showed very little concern for health inequalities.

Overall, there is little reason to believe that government policies do any more now to redistribute resources to the poor than they did when Le Grand first discussed the failure of the *Strategy of Equality*. Indeed, Pete Alcock (1997) suggests that the Conservative governments of 1979–97 actively pursued a 'strategy of inequality'. They encouraged greater inequality between rich and poor. In doing so, they increased poverty and social exclusion. This was also reflected in changes in the labour market.

Poverty, the labour market and power

Not all of those who experience poverty in countries such as Britain and the USA rely on state benefits for their income. Nor can their poverty be primarily attributed to the failure of the social services to redistribute resources. A considerable proportion of the poor are employed, but receive wages that are so low that they are insufficient to meet their needs. In this section we examine the explanations that have been provided for some workers getting paid significantly less than even the average for manual work.

Market situation and poverty

In part the low wages of some groups can be explained in Weberian terms. Weber argued that a person's class position is dependent upon his or her market situation (Weber, 1947). It depends upon the ability of individuals and groups to influence the labour market in their own favour so as to maximize the rewards they receive.

The following explanations have been put forward to account for the market situation of the low-paid:

1. In advanced industrial societies, with increasing demand for specialized skills and training, the unemployed and underemployed tend to be unskilled with low educational qualifications. Liebow's 'streetcorner' men, with few skills or qualifications, can command little reward on the labour market.
2. With increasing mechanization and automation, the demand for unskilled labour is steadily contracting.
3. Competition from manufacturers in low-wage 'Third World' economies tends to force wages in Britain down.
4. Many, though by no means all, low-paid workers are employed either in declining and contracting industries or labour-intensive industries such as catering. It has been argued that the narrow profit margins of many such industries maintain low wage levels.

The dual labour market

Some sociologists and economists now argue that there are two labour markets. The dual labour market theory sees jobs in the primary labour market offering job security, promotion prospects, training opportunities and relatively high wages. By comparison, the secondary labour market offers little job security, few possibilities for promotion or training, and low wages.

The primary labour market tends to be found in large and prosperous corporations which to some extent can protect themselves against competition from smaller firms. The smaller companies may depend heavily on the corporations for business. They are in a weaker position and so cannot offer their employees the same advantages. Women and members of ethnic minority groups may be particularly concentrated in the secondary labour market and as a consequence are over-represented in low-paid jobs. (For further details and evaluation of the dual labour market theory see pp. 93–4 and 168–9.)

Changes in the labour market

Hartley Dean and Peter Taylor-Gooby (1992) argue that there were a number of changes in the labour market during the 1980s and early 1990s which made more people in Britain vulnerable to poverty:

1 Manufacturing industry declined. The proportion of GDP (gross domestic product – the total value of goods and services) produced by the manufacturing sector fell from 28 per cent in 1979 to 22 per cent in 1989. There was a corresponding increase in the service sector.

2 A considerable number of the new service sector jobs do not provide economic security. Many of the jobs are part-time and have low pay and little job security. Dean and Taylor-Gooby suggest that about one-third of the labour force was employed in 'peripheral' jobs in the mid-1980s. The idea of peripheral jobs is similar to the idea of jobs in the secondary labour market.

3 Economic change has affected particular parts of the country at different times, leading to regional unemployment and poverty. Unemployment rose in the North, Scotland, Wales, the Midlands and Northern Ireland in the early 1980s, but the South-East did not experience particular problems until the end of that decade and the start of the 1990s.

4 The decline of unionism has reduced the ability of workers to defend their rights and thereby ensure that their employment prevents them from falling into poverty. Union membership has declined, partly as a consequence of the increased employment of part-time workers who are less likely to be in unions. High unemployment and government legislation have also reduced union power. This is reflected in a fall in the number of days lost in strikes. (See Chapter 10 for a detailed discussion of unions in Britain.)

Dean and Taylor-Gooby sum up by saying that these changes have 'created a pattern of employment that increases the vulnerability to dependency on last-resort social welfare of those unable to gain access to secure and well-paid jobs'.

Post-Fordism, globalization and poverty

Writing about poverty in all advanced industrial countries, Enzo Mingione (1996) argues that increases in poverty are linked to changes in the world economic system. He argues that there has been a shift from Fordist to post-Fordist production in the world economy. This involves a decline in heavy industry and mass production, and a shift to the service sector and those companies making smaller production runs of more specialized products. This results in a reduction in the number of full-time staff with secure employment and an increase in casual, insecure and temporary employment. (See Chapter 10 for a full account of post-Fordism.)

Globalization involves a reduction in the importance of national boundaries, a willingness of companies to shift investment overseas in search of cheap labour and freer trade, and consequently greater international competition. At the same time, there has been an increase in the number of women working or seeking employment. Together, such changes have made growing numbers of people vulnerable to poverty. Fewer people rely upon keeping their jobs over many years. With more women working, the idea of the family wage – a man earning enough to support a whole family – has decreased in importance. More families today rely upon having two earners. Unskilled female workers generally find it easier than men to secure jobs in the growing service sector. Mingione comments that 'the balance between the loss of stable manufacturing jobs and the growth in services is having a serious negative impact, particularly in de-industrializing cities'.

Secure jobs have also become harder to find as a result of the privatization of many welfare services. Subcontractors are less likely than local authority employers to provide workers with permanent jobs, partly because they have no guarantee of keeping contracts indefinitely. The problems of those who are poor are worsened by welfare systems that were designed when the advanced economies provided more permanent jobs. They tend to be ineffective at ensuring that people avoid poverty and social exclusion when their circumstances change quickly. Mingione also argues that the fragility of marriage in many countries, and the 'weakening of kinship networks', have reduced the 'community solidarity' which in earlier times helped people through such periods of hardship.

Poverty and power

The question of the power of the poor was examined by Ralph Miliband in an article entitled 'Politics and Poverty' (Miliband, 1974). In it, he argued that, in terms of power, the poor are the weakest group competing for the scarce and valued resources in society. Miliband stated that 'the poor are part of the working class but they are largely excluded from the organizations which have developed to defend the interests of the working class'. There are no organizations with the power of trade unions to represent the interests of the unemployed, the aged, the chronically sick or single-parent families. Because of their lack of income the poor do not have the resources to form powerful groups and sustain pressure.

Even if they were able to finance well-organized interest groups, the poor lack the economic sanctions to bring pressure to bear. Apart from low-paid workers, the main groups in poverty cannot take strike action and so threaten the interests of the powerful.

Their bargaining position is weakened still further by their inability to mobilize widespread working-class support, since non-poor members of the working class tend not to see their interests and those of the poor as similar. In fact, there is a tendency for members of the working class to see certain groups in poverty, such as the unemployed, as 'scroungers' and 'layabouts'. Efforts by the poor to promote their interests and secure public support are weakened by the 'shame of poverty', a stigma which remains alive and well.

Compared to other interests in society which are represented by pressure groups such as employers' federations, trade unions, ratepayers' associations and motoring organizations, the poor are largely unseen and unheard. More often than not they have to rely on others championing their cause, for example, organizations such as Shelter and the Child Poverty Action Group.

Ralph Miliband concludes that the key to the weak bargaining position of the poor is simply their poverty. He states that 'economic deprivation is a source of political deprivation; and political deprivation in turn helps to maintain and confirm economic deprivation'.

Poverty and stratification

Most conflict theorists move beyond explaining why particular individuals and groups are poor in an attempt to relate poverty to the organization of society as a whole. They claim that poverty is rooted in the very structure of society. The key concept used in this explanation is that of class, but some conflict theorists see class and poverty as less closely connected than others.

Peter Townsend – poverty, class and status

In the conclusion to *Poverty in the United Kingdom* (Townsend, 1979), Peter Townsend states 'the theoretical approach developed in this book is one rooted in class relations'. In particular, he sees class as a major factor determining 'the production, distribution and redistribution of resources', or, in other words, who gets what. However, according to his definition, poverty is also related to the cultural patterns of a society, the lifestyles which govern 'the expectations attaching to membership of society'. The relationship between different classes is not a sufficient explanation of poverty because it does not entirely explain how lifestyles develop and certain types of social behaviour become expected.

Townsend's use of the word 'class' is closer to that of Weber than of Marx. He argues that the distribution of resources is not always directly related to the interests of capital and capitalists. Some agencies of the state, he claims, act in their own interests, or act as checks on the operations of capitalists, and not simply as committees for handling the affairs of the bourgeoisie. For example, the civil service might be more concerned with preserving its own status and power than with maximizing profits for capitalists. Agencies such as the Health and Safety Executive, which is concerned with implementing the legislation governing health and safety at work and elsewhere, may limit the behaviour that is allowed in the pursuit of profit. The labour market, Townsend points out, is not just influenced by individuals and groups competing for higher pay, but also by institutions such as the Equal Opportunities Commission. They therefore also have an effect on the extent of poverty.

Townsend uses the Weberian concept of status to explain the poverty of those reliant on state benefits. The poor are a group who, in addition to lacking wealth, lack prestige. To Townsend, the low-status groups include retired elderly people, the disabled, the chronically sick, one-parent families and the long-term unemployed. As a consequence of their low status, their opportunities for access to paid employment are severely restricted. (These views are similar to Frank Field's arguments about the underclass, which we discussed on pp. 328–9.)

The internationalization of poverty

In his more recent writing (Townsend, 1993), Townsend has stressed the international dimension of poverty. International agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund influence the distribution of resources in the world. The International Monetary Fund can impose conditions

on governments which borrow money from it, which affect the poor. For example, they can ask governments to cut public expenditure by reducing the welfare programmes on which the poor rely.

Although these institutions mainly affect the poor in the 'Third World', others, such as the EC, have an important impact on the poor in the First World. For example, European employment legislation affects the rights of low-paid and part-time workers in member countries.

Furthermore, the internationalization of industry affects poverty in the First and Third Worlds alike. Cheap labour in Third World countries may be paid poverty wages. This can also create poverty in the First World as jobs are transferred from the high-wage economies of Europe, North America and Japan to low-wage economies, and, as a result, unemployment rises in the First World. Alternatively, First World workers may be forced to take pay cuts as a consequence of competition from low-wage economies in Africa, Asia and South America. These pay cuts may push them into poverty.

Townsend argues, therefore, that poverty can no longer be explained or understood by examining any one country in isolation.

Marxism, class and poverty

Marxist theories of poverty place less emphasis than most on differentiating the poor from other members of the working class. Rather than seeing them as a separate group, Ralph Miliband (1974) believes they are simply the most disadvantaged section of the working class. Westergaard and Resler go further, claiming that concentrating on the special disadvantages of the poor 'diverts attention from the larger structure of inequality in which poverty is embedded' (Westergaard and Resler, 1976). Marxists would see Townsend as failing to emphasize these wider structures sufficiently. Miliband concludes:

> *The basic fact is that the poor are an integral part of the working class – its poorest and most disadvantaged stratum. They need to be seen as such, as part of a continuum, the more so as many workers who are not 'deprived' in the official sense live in permanent danger of entering the ranks of the deprived; and that they share in any case many of the disadvantages which afflict the deprived. Poverty is a class thing, closely linked to a general situation of class inequality.*
>
> Miliband, 1974

Poverty and the capitalist system

To many Marxists, poverty can be explained in terms of how it benefits the ruling class. Poverty exists because it serves the interests of those who own the means of production. It allows them to maintain the capitalist system and to maximize their profits.

Poverty and the labour market

Members of the subject class own only their labour which they must sell in return for wages on the open market. Capitalism requires a highly motivated workforce. Since the motivation to work is based primarily on monetary return, those whose services are not required by the economy, such as the aged and the unemployed, must receive a lower income than wage earners. If this were not the case, there would be little incentive to work.

The motivation of the workforce is also maintained by unequal rewards for work. Workers compete with each other as individuals and groups for income in a highly competitive society. In this respect, the low-wage sector forms the base of a competitive wage structure. Low wages help to reduce the wage demands of the workforce as a whole, since workers tend to assess their incomes in terms of the baseline provided by the low-paid. J.C. Kincaid argues that 'standards of pay and conditions of work at the bottom of the heap influence the pattern of wages farther up the scale' (Kincaid, 1973). He maintains that low wages are essential to a capitalist economy since:

> *from the point of view of capitalism, the low-wage sector helps to underpin and stabilize the whole structure of wages and the conditions of employment of the working class. The employers can tolerate no serious threat to the disciplines of the labour market and the competitive values which support the very existence of capitalism.*
>
> Kincaid, 1973

If the low-wage sector were abolished by an increase in the real value of the wages of the low-paid, several of the possible consequences would be harmful to the capitalist class:

1. The delicate balance of pay differentials would be shattered. Other groups of workers might well demand, and possibly receive, real increases in their wages. This would reduce profit margins.
2. Wages within the working class might become increasingly similar. This might tend to unite a working class, previously fragmented and divided by groups of workers competing against each other for higher wages. A move towards unity within the working class might well pose a threat to the capitalist class.
3. If the real value of the wages of the low-paid were increased, the pool of cheap labour, on which many labour-intensive capitalist industries depend for profit, might disappear.

Containment and the working class

Since, from a Marxist perspective, the state in capitalist society reflects the interests of the ruling class, government measures can be expected to do little except reduce the harsher effects of poverty. Thus Kincaid argues that 'it is not to be expected that any government whose main concern is with the efficiency of a capitalist economy is going to take effective steps to abolish the low-wage sector'.

Despite claims to the contrary, there is little evidence that the welfare state has led to a major redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor. Westergaard and Resler (1976) dismiss the theory that the welfare state, by using the power of the state to modify the workings of market forces, has created a more equal distribution of wealth. They argue that:

> *The state's social services are financed largely from the wages of those for whose security they are primarily designed. They make for little redistribution from capital and top salaries ... they reshuffle resources far more within classes – between earners and dependants, healthy people and the sick, households of different composition, from one point in the individual's life cycle to another – than they do between classes*
>
> Westergaard and Resler, 1976

The bulk of monies received by members of the working class have been paid or will be paid in the form of taxes by themselves or other members of that class.

Westergaard and Resler argue that the ruling class has responded to the demands of the labour movement by allowing the creation of the welfare state, but the system operates 'within a framework of institutions and assumptions that remain capitalist'. In their view, 'the keyword is "containment"'; the demands of the labour movement have been contained within the existing system. Westergaard and Resler argue that poverty exists because of the operation of a capitalist economic system which prevents the poor from obtaining the financial resources to become non-poor. In recent writing, John Westergaard argues that the welfare state continues to be subservient to the imperatives of a market economy. He argues that none of the changes that have been introduced to the welfare state in Britain 'have involved any breach of principle with the distributive logic of capitalism, and nor have they subverted the overall gearing of economic activity to property and labour market imperatives' (Westergaard, 1994). Indeed, from his point of view, the 1980s and early 1990s saw an intensification of the hold of market forces in Britain and a virtual abandonment of even the aim of redistributing wealth through the welfare state.

Kincaid summarizes the situation in the following way: 'It is not simply that there are rich and poor. It is rather that some are rich because some are poor.' Thus poverty can be understood only in terms of the operation of the class system as a whole since the question 'Why poverty?' is basically the same question as 'Why wealth?' Therefore, from a Marxist perspective, poverty, like wealth, is an inevitable consequence of a capitalist system.

Although the Marxist views of poverty discussed above were first advanced decades ago, they still provide one credible explanation for why poverty exists in capitalist societies. Indeed, with the increased emphasis on market forces in societies such as Britain, Westergaard may be right to assert that Marxist theories are more relevant than ever (Westergaard, 1994). However, they are less successful than other conflict approaches in explaining why particular groups and individuals become poor. They are not particularly sensitive to variations in income within the working class, and fail to differentiate clearly the poor from other members of the working class, or to provide an explanation for their poverty.

We have now outlined various responses to the first three questions posed at the beginning of this chapter. In the final section we will turn our attention to the fourth question: 'What are the solutions to poverty?'

Poverty and social exclusion – solutions and values

The culture of poverty and policies in the USA

Initially, we will consider government measures to deal with poverty and proposals to solve poverty, together with the ideologies that underlie them. First, the ideological aspects of the culture of poverty thesis will be examined. This theory provided the basis for US anti-poverty policies more than 30 years ago. However, the war on poverty that followed from it has some similarities with current 'New Labour' policies in Britain.

Like all members of society, sociologists see the world in terms of their own values and political beliefs, despite their attempts to be objective. This is particularly apparent in the area of poverty research.

Gans has suggested that 'perhaps the most significant fact about poverty research is that it is being carried out entirely by middle-class researchers who differ – in class, culture, and political power – from the people they are studying' (Gans, 1973).

Some observers argue that the picture of the poor presented by many social scientists is largely a reflection of middle-class value judgements. In particular, the idea of a culture of poverty has been strongly criticized as a product of middle-class prejudice. Charles A. Valentine in *Culture and Poverty*, a forceful attack on bias in poverty research, stated:

> *Scarcely a description can be found that does not dwell on the noxiousness, pathology, distortion, disorganization, instability or incompleteness of poverty culture as compared to the life of the middle classes.*
>
> Valentine, 1968

From this viewpoint, the poor themselves are a major obstacle to the removal of poverty. Therefore, it may be that at least a part of the solution to poverty is to change the poor, as, by implication, they are partly to blame for their situation. The direction in which the poor must be changed is also influenced by middle-class values: they must adopt middle-class norms and values. In short, as Valentine put it, 'the poor must become "middle class"'.

The war on poverty

Many observers argue that this line of reasoning formed the basis of the US government's policy towards poverty. In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a war on poverty with the passing of the Economic Opportunity Act and the formation of the Office of Economic Opportunity to coordinate measures to fight poverty. The comments of the American anthropologist Thomas Gladwin represent the verdict of many social scientists on this campaign:

> *The whole conception of the war on poverty rests upon a definition of poverty as a way of life. The intellectual climate in which it was nurtured was created by studies of the culture of poverty, notably those of Oscar Lewis ... [which] provide the basis for programs at the national level designed very explicitly to correct the social, occupational and psychological deficits of people born and raised to a life of poverty.*
>
> Gladwin, 1967

The Office of Economic Opportunity created a series of programmes designed to re-socialize the poor and remove their presumed deficiencies:

1. The Job Corps set up residential camps in wilderness areas for unemployed, inner-city youth with the aim of 'building character' and fostering initiative and determination.
2. Many 'work experience' programmes were developed to instil 'work habits'.
3. The Neighbourhood Youth Corps created part-time and holiday jobs for young people.
4. A multitude of job training schemes were started to encourage the 'work incentive' and provide the skills required for employment.

The aim of many of these schemes was to undo the presumed effect of the culture of poverty by fostering ambition, motivation and initiative.

To counter the culture of poverty at an earlier age, government money was pumped into schools in low-income districts with the aim of raising educational standards. Operation Head Start, begun in January 1965, was intended to nip the culture of poverty in the bud. It was an extensive programme of pre-school education for the children of low-income families.

Much of the effort of the Office of Economic Opportunity was directed towards community action, the idea of local community self-help. The Office encouraged and financed self-help organizations run by the poor which covered a range of projects from job training and community business ventures to legal services and youth clubs. The idea was for the poor, with help, to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps, to throw aside the culture of poverty and become enterprising and full of initiative like their middle-class mentors.

In comparison with the above programmes, direct aid in the form of cash payments to the poor received a low priority. Edward James, in *America Against Poverty*, a study of the 1960s war on poverty, states that direct aid was the 'least popular anti-poverty strategy in America' (James, 1970).

Why the war on poverty was lost

The war on poverty was not designed to eradicate poverty by providing the poor with sufficient income to raise them above the poverty line. By changing the poor it was hoped to provide them with the opportunity to become upwardly mobile.

The war on poverty was a typically American solution reflecting the values of American culture with its emphasis on individual achievement in the land of opportunity. As Walter B. Miller neatly put it, 'nothing could be more impeccably American than the concept of opportunity' (Miller, 1962). The poor must make their own way: they must achieve the status of being non-poor, they must seize the opportunities that are available like every other respectable American.

By the late 1960s, many social scientists felt that the war on poverty had failed, as did the poor if the following comment by a welfare recipient is typical: 'It's great stuff this war on poverty! Where do I surrender?' (quoted in James, 1970). The poor

remained stubbornly poor despite the energy and resolve of the Office of Economic Opportunity. Sociologists increasingly argued that solutions to poverty must be developed from stratification theory rather than the culture of poverty theory.

From this perspective, Miller and Roby argued that 'poverty programs should be recognized as efforts to engineer changes in the stratification profiles of the United States' (Miller and Roby, 1970). They and others argued that the very concept of poverty and the way in which it spotlights and isolates the poor disguised the true nature of inequality, and was counterproductive in providing solutions.

Once poverty is recognized as an aspect of inequality, and not merely a problem of the poor, solutions involve restructuring society as a whole. It can now be argued that the main obstacle to the eradication of poverty is not the behaviour of the poor but the self-interest of the rich.

Stratification and solutions to poverty

From the perspective of stratification theory, the solution to poverty involves a change in the stratification system. This war on poverty would be far harder to wage than the previous one since it would require considerable sacrifice by the rich and powerful.

The degree of change required is debatable and proposals reflect to some degree the values and political bias of the researchers. The suggestions put forward by Miller and Roby were rather vague. They advocated 'a re-allocation of American wealth to meet a reasonable set of priorities, a redistribution of goods and power to benefit the bottom half of the population'. However, they hastened to add 'we are not implicitly arguing the case for complete equality'.

Miller and Roby did not propose an alternative to the capitalist economic system. They assumed that the changes they proposed could take place within the context of American capitalism.

The war on poverty had its basis in traditional American liberalism.

1 It was American because of its insistence on individual initiative, its emphasis on opportunity and its distaste for direct provision of cash payments to the poor.

2 It was liberal because the reforms it attempted did not seek to alter the basic structure of society: American capitalism was taken for granted and any change in the situation of the poor must take place within its framework.

While the solutions to poverty proposed by American sociologists such as Miller and Roby were more radical and would involve modifications to the structure of society, they remain basically liberal. They would take place within the framework of capitalism and would not involve a fundamental change in the structure of society. Even so, they had little influence on the policies followed by Presidents Reagan, Bush and Clinton in the 1980s and 1990s.

The policies of Reagan, Bush and Clinton

According to Richard H. Ropers, the policies of Reagan and Bush involved drastic cuts in programmes for those on low incomes, increases in taxation for the low-paid and reductions for the wealthiest. James H. Johnson (1996) identifies four key aspects of these policies:

1 The government encouraged a laissez-faire business climate. This made it easier for businesses to shift production to different parts of the country or abroad. This led to the relocation of many jobs away from the inner cities leaving poor blacks and Hispanics in particular with few work opportunities.

2 There were very large cuts in federal aid to inner-city areas, particularly through cuts in resources allocated to community-based organizations. In Los Angeles, for example, aid was reduced from $370 million in 1977 to $60 million in 1990.

3 Criminal justice policy also disadvantaged the poor and socially excluded. Drastic sentences (such as a minimum five years in prison for using crack cocaine) and a crackdown on drug offences have led to more and more socially excluded people getting prison records. The records have only increased their exclusion as their chances of finding work have been further reduced.

4 A new emphasis on testing in the education system has led to increasing numbers of poor American children being put in special education classes. This has greatly increased the drop-out rate from education among those from poor backgrounds and so affected their long-term prospects. Again, black and Hispanic groups have been particularly badly affected.

Reagan and Bush's policies were based on New Right theories which were also influential in Britain. These are discussed in the next section. Reagan and Bush were both Republican Presidents, and Republicans are generally seen as more right wing and conservative than Democrats. In 1996, Bush was replaced by Bill Clinton of the Democratic Party, traditionally a party with greater sympathy for the poor. During his first presidential election campaign, Clinton pledged to 'end welfare as we know it' (quoted in Besharov, 1996) by giving the poor the training, education and childcare they needed to find work. However, during his 1996 campaign for re-election, he also promised 'an end to something for nothing' (quoted in Wattenburg, 1996) in the American welfare system.

By this he meant that families would receive government aid for two years only unless they went to work.

According to Lawrence M. Mead (1996), Clinton's approach embraces somewhat contradictory policies reflecting the values of American conservatives on the one hand and liberals on the other. He says 'conservatives would have the government *tell* the poor how to live, whereas liberals want to offer them the *chance* to get ahead'. Similar contradictions are also found in the policies of the 'New Labour' government of Tony Blair in Britain, which came to power in 1997.

Poverty and the expansion of welfare in Britain

In Britain, governments have not declared war on poverty. Between 1945 and 1979 successive governments were less averse than their American counterparts to providing cash payments to the poor, and to providing universal services (such as education and healthcare) to everyone regardless of ability to pay. Governments added to the provisions of the welfare state, partly with the aim of alleviating poverty. Critics argue that these developments were inadequate. According to Kincaid, benefits to the poor were 'pitifully low' and 'left millions in poverty' (Kincaid, 1973). The harsher edges of poverty may have been blunted by the welfare state, but poverty, at least in relative terms, remained. Welfare professionals may have cushioned some of the misery produced by poverty, but they had not solved the problem.

New Right solutions

After 1979, the Conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major followed a rather different course. Inspired by the ideas of the New Right, they decided to try to reduce welfare expenditure, move away from universal benefits and services, and target resources on the poor.

The intention was to free economic resources to create a more dynamic economy. As the economy grew, and living standards rose, economic success would 'trickle down' to those on low incomes so that their living standards would rise along with everyone else's. Reducing or replacing universal benefits would destroy the dependency culture which made people rely too heavily on state hand-outs. Means-tested benefits, such as income support, would go only to those who were not in a position to help themselves and who were in genuine need.

The welfare system was reformed in line with these policies in April 1987. Supplementary benefit was replaced by income support. Before 1987, the single-payments system allowed those on a low income to claim money for necessities such as household equipment, furniture, clothing and bedding, which they could not otherwise afford. This system was replaced by the social fund, under which loans rather than grants for such necessities became the norm. These loans had to be paid back out of benefits received. Only those who could afford to pay back the loans were offered them: some individuals were too poor to be given loans. The government argued that this system would make claimants more responsible and encourage them to plan ahead in managing household budgets. The government also cut the amount spent on housing benefit. Much of the money saved by the latter measure was spent on replacing family income supplement with family credit. Both were means-tested benefits designed to boost the incomes of those with low incomes, but family credit was more generous.

In September 1988, the Conservative government raised the age at which people became entitled to income support from 16 to 18. The intention was to prevent the young becoming victims of the dependency culture. In theory, all 16- and 17-year olds were guaranteed a place on a Youth Training Scheme that would provide them with an income.

Between 1992 and 1997 a whole range of further measures and changes were introduced. Marilyn Howard has outlined the main ones (Howard, 1997). In 1996, the Jobseeker's Allowance was introduced for the unemployed. Under this scheme, an unemployed person receives benefit only if they sign a Jobseeker's Agreement detailing how they intend to search for work. Those who do not comply can be instructed to undertake training schemes. The Jobseeker's Allowance lasts for only six months, whereas unemployment benefit could be claimed for a year. In 1995, Invalidity Benefit was replaced by Incapacity Benefit, designed to make it more difficult for people to claim that they are unfit for work and therefore eligible for the benefit. In 1990, full-time students lost their right to unemployment benefit and other means-tested benefits during their holidays. In 1994, a habitual residence test was introduced which has made it more difficult for people who have recently moved to Britain to receive benefit. Earnings-related elements, where benefits depend on previous earnings, have virtually disappeared from the benefits system. The Child Support Agency, introduced in 1993, has tried to shift the burden for supporting lone mothers from the state to absent fathers, who must now pay child maintenance. The government has also shifted much of the burden of responsibility for sickness benefits from themselves to employers. The Labour government has also increased its efforts to eradicate benefit fraud.

Criticisms of New Right policies

Critics argue that, far from reducing poverty, these measures increased it. Many of those reliant on welfare had their income cut. With the replacement of single payments by the social fund, some people were unable to buy necessities. The Child Poverty Action Group claimed that there were insufficient YTS places for all 16- and 17-year olds. Those who were not supported by their families and who could not find employment or a place on a training scheme could end up destitute and homeless.

The Conservative government claimed, however, that its policies benefited those on low incomes. According to government figures, the average income of the poorest 20 per cent of the population rose by 5.5 per cent in real terms between 1979 and 1985. This, the government claimed, supported its view that the benefits of economic growth would trickle down to those on low incomes.

However, the economist John Hills (1995) points out that the government's figures did not take account of changes in indirect taxes such as VAT and duties on petrol, alcohol and tobacco. Hills claims that when these are taken into account the real income of the poorest 20 per cent of households actually fell by 6 per cent between 1979 and 1986. Over the same period the richest 20 per cent of households saw their real income rise by 26 per cent. If his figures are correct, they seem to undermine the New Right's claim that prosperity will automatically solve the problem of poverty.

Most of the evidence contained in earlier sections of this chapter suggests that poverty increased from the late 1980s until 1997, again indicating that New Right policies may have added to the problem rather than solving it. Carey Oppenheim (1997) found no evidence of a 'trickle down' effect. In the introduction to the Child Poverty Action Group's 1997 book, *Britain Divided*, Alan Walker summarizes the effect of Conservative policies in the following way:

> *The fact is that many thousands of poor families can trace the start of their misfortune back to the recession of the early 1980s, a recession that was deepened and prolonged by government policies, and subsequent changes of administration have not improved their position but, rather, have been responsible for worsening it. As this book shows, poverty and social exclusion have increased remorselessly over the last 18 years and not one of the four Conservative Governments have had an explicit policy to combat them.*
>
> Walker and Walker, 1997, p. 1

The policies of the Labour government elected in 1997 will be examined on pp. 345–6

Welfare and redistribution as solutions to poverty

Some feel that the answer to poverty is to be found in improving welfare provisions. Mack and Lansley (1985) claimed that raising benefit levels can have a significant impact. To 'solve' the problem they estimated that supplementary benefit (now income support) would need to rise to 150 per cent of its then level, but the problem could be reduced by lower rises. On the basis of their opinion poll evidence they concluded 'People do accept that the problems of the poor should be tackled, and that the state has a responsibility to tackle them.'

Furthermore, the majority of the public declared themselves willing to make sacrifices to achieve this objective. Some 74 per cent said they would accept a 1 penny in the pound increase in income tax in order to help the poor. However, only 34 per cent were prepared to support a 5 pence in the pound increase for the same purpose, which would, according to Mack and Lansley, lift between one-third and one-half of the poor out of poverty. Mack and Lansley admit that poverty could not be eradicated in the lifetime of one parliament, but despite this they believe it is possible to make major inroads into the problem. There is enough public support for a policy to help the poor for a government to at least make a start without losing popularity.

Peter Townsend (1997) sees the solution to poverty resting on a wider range of measures. He argues that there is a need for a national plan to eradicate poverty. This would be in line with an agreement signed by the Conservative government at the United Nations Copenhagen Summit on Social Development in 1995. This agreement called for the signatories to eliminate absolute poverty, to greatly reduce relative poverty and to tackle the structural causes behind poverty.

Townsend believes that such a plan might ultimately require the development of a kind of international welfare state. With the progress of globalization it is increasingly difficult for individual countries to increase taxes and risk discouraging inward investment. Under such a framework national governments would then be able to:

1. Introduce limits on wealth and earnings and ensure that there were adequate benefits for the unemployed.
2. Ensure there was a link between benefit levels and average earnings to make sure that the relatively poor shared in increased prosperity.
3. Make sure that taxation was progressive, thus redistributing wealth from the rich to the poor.
4. Implement policies of job creation through the use of grants and by taking more government employees so that unemployment was greatly reduced.

Despite the radical nature of the changes he proposes, he stops short of suggesting revolutionary change. He says that 'it would be wrong to suggest that any of this is easy or even likely. The citadels of wealth and privilege are deeply entrenched and have shown a tenacious capacity to withstand assaults.'

Carol Walker and Alan Walker (1994) also argue for a wide range of measures to tackle poverty:

1 They criticize recent government emphasis in Britain on using means-tested benefit. They claim that such benefits as income support and housing benefit are difficult and costly to administer, tend to create disincentives to work and remain unclaimed by a sizeable minority of those who are entitled to them.
2 Walker and Walker would prefer a greater emphasis on universal benefits which, they claim, although expensive, are more effective at reducing poverty and encouraging people to escape from dependence on welfare.
3 To them, it is 'incomprehensible' that some people being paid benefits also have to pay tax. An integration of the tax and benefits systems could remove such anomalies and help ensure that everybody has the means to avoid poverty.
4 They would also like to see more policies aimed at preventing people from falling into poverty. In particular, they would like governments to have an 'active employment strategy' that would provide work for the unemployed and help to give disabled people and lone parents the opportunity to earn their own living.

Pete Alcock (1997) puts particular stress on the Walkers' final point in arguing that tackling poverty and social exclusion cannot be separated from governments' overall economic and social policies. He maintains that the purpose of the welfare state is not just to provide a safety net, or even to redistribute wealth. Rather, it is an integral part of maintaining the whole social and economic system. He says:

> *the introduction of state welfare is the product of the process of economic adjustment within capitalist society in which state intervention in the reproduction and maintenance of major services, such as health and education, has become a necessary means of ensuring the continuation of existing economic forces, just as much as a means of redistributing resources to the poor.*
>
> Alcock, 1997, p. 62

Capitalist societies such as Britain cannot do without welfare states, and the rich as well as the less fortunate benefit from the way the welfare state produces and reproduces workers. Those who see welfare simply as a way of redistributing wealth have missed the point that state policies can have a big impact by influencing the initial distribution of wealth. Thus policies on wealth, income, investment and employment can help to avoid the need for redistribution by preventing individuals from falling into poverty or suffering from social exclusion.

Marxist solutions

Given the sort of difficulties that Townsend mentions (see above), some Marxist sociologists do not accept that such changes are possible within a capitalist system. While capitalism remains, significant changes in the provisions of the welfare state are impossible. The 'walls of the citadels of wealth and privilege' will not be breached without a full-scale assault which seeks not merely to breach them, but to destroy them altogether. Because Marxists see poverty as simply one aspect of inequality, the solution to poverty does not involve reforms in the social security system, in the provision of additional payments or services to those defined as poor. Instead, it requires a radical change in the structure of society. Thus, Ralph Miliband argues that poverty will only be eradicated with the removal of inequality in general which 'requires the transformation of the economic structures in which it is embedded' (Miliband, 1974).

Westergaard and Resler (1976) take a similar view, maintaining that no substantial redistribution of wealth can occur until capitalism is replaced by a socialist society in which the forces of production are communally owned. As long as the free market system of capitalism determines the allocation of reward, they argue that inequality will remain largely unchanged.

Clearly Marxist views are ideologically based. Sociologists who adopt them are committed to the principles of socialism and equality. They regard capitalism as an exploitative system and condemn the inequality it generates. However, there seems little immediate prospect that the changes they propose will take place in Britain, the USA or other capitalist countries. A communist revolution does not seem imminent and neither former nor the few remaining communist countries have eradicated poverty altogether. Furthermore, the British Labour government elected in 1997 embarked on policies which are far removed from the radical proposals of Marxists.

'New Labour' – 'A hand up, not a hand-out'

The 'New Labour' government which took office in Britain in 1997 claimed that it had policies that would combat the problems of poverty and social exclusion. Tony Blair argued that what the poor needed was a 'hand up, not a hand-out'. In other

words, they needed to be given the support they required to help themselves rather than simply depending on state benefits. Among the early policies introduced were the following:

1 The launch of a Social Exclusion Unit designed to help the socially excluded reintegrate into society. According to Patrick Wintour and Nick Cohen, the unit was to try to tackle truancy, discourage drug dependency by withdrawing benefits for those who refused drug rehabilitation courses, and allow tenants more control over big estates (Wintour and Cohen, 1997).
2 The money from a 'Windfall Tax' on the profits of privatized utilities, such as gas and electricity companies, was spent on providing more training and job opportunities for the young unemployed. This 'Welfare to Work' scheme gave people under the age of 25 who had been unemployed for more than six months one of four options. These were, first, subsidized employment with businesses (the companies getting £60 a week and £750 for training). Second, for those without qualifications, up to 12 months' full-time study. Third, six months' employment with a voluntary sector employer. Fourth, six months' work with the environmental taskforce. Those unwilling to take part risked losing their entitlement to benefit.
3 A scheme was introduced to give lone parents, who wanted it, advice and guidance on how to get back to work.
4 Another scheme was the introduction of after-school homework clubs designed for children who found it difficult to study at home.

Evaluation of New Labour policies

While all these changes offered new opportunities for poor and socially excluded people, some contained an element of compulsion because of the threat of lost benefits. Furthermore, the Blair government, in its early years in office at least, showed little willingness to increase benefits to raise the living standards of the poor. Its most controversial early measure was to reduce the benefits available to single parents in line with a policy the Conservative government had intended to implement before it was voted out of office. 'New Labour' was elected promising that it would not exceed the previous government's spending plans and was therefore reluctant to commit itself to extra spending on the large welfare budget.

It was also elected promising there would be no increase in income tax rates. As a consequence it seems unlikely that the Labour government will initiate a significant redistribution of resources from rich to poor, or provide sufficient resources to lift those who remain dependent on welfare out of poverty. While some will benefit from improved opportunities, the success of policies such as those on unemployment may depend on whether the economy grows. In early 1998, Anthony Barnett and Patrick Wintour argued that, 'if the economy falters later this summer just as the New Deal starts, will the vacancies dry up? Only then will the entire experiment be truly put to the test' (Barnett and Wintour, 1998).

Whether or not the new policies will be successful remains to be seen. They do, however, seem to be based upon a mixture of ideological influences. On the one hand, Labour's policies appear to be based on the view that the poor and excluded need opportunities and that they will be willing to take advantage of these once they have the training, education, work experiences or childcare facilities they need. On the other hand, at least some claimants needed to be compelled to take advantage of the opportunities by the threat of lost benefit. While the former policies are associated with more left-wing sociologists, such as Peter Townsend, the latter are more typical of New Right theories and writers, such as Charles Murray.

If this novel mixture of contradictory ideologies produces policies that greatly reduce poverty and social exclusion, then it will have achieved more than the policies of the previous 30 years. However, if much of the research reviewed in this chapter is to be believed, it is difficult to see how these policies can be successful in achieving such aims without more resources being made available for those who, for one reason or another, are unable to work.

Chapter 6

Crime and deviance

verbal association are ultimately subjective and psychoanalysts do not agree on how to use them' (Jones, 1998). It is also difficult to make predictions on the basis of psychoanalytic theories, so the theories are difficult to test.

Despite the problems associated with psychological theories of crime, psychological processes are obviously involved in criminality. Thus the question marks surrounding them are more to do with whether the particular theories have correctly identified the psychological factors involved in crime, rather than whether psychology is important at all. Although Freudian theory is unfashionable in academic circles, individuals have found psychotherapy to be effective, and most people do now accept that there are unconscious parts of the mind. Nevertheless, psychological theories should be used very carefully. For example, theories such as Bowlby's can be used to justify the view that women with children should not go out to work. Psychoanalytic theories could be used to blame criminality on single-parent families. Biological and psychological theories risk portraying criminals as 'sick' and therefore in need of a cure. The suggested cures have ranged from psychoanalysis to castration – for sex offenders whose behaviour is blamed on hormones. Such 'treatments' tend to ignore the evidence that criminality is widespread in society, and not confined to small groups of people who have been convicted and who are deemed to be suffering from a sickness (see pp. 363–72 for a discussion of the extent of criminality).

Deviance – a functionalist perspective

The functions of deviance

Rather than starting with the individual, a functionalist analysis of deviance begins with society as a whole. It looks for the source of deviance in the nature of society rather than in the biological or psychological nature of the individual.

At first sight it seems strange that some functionalists should argue that deviance is a necessary part of all societies, and that it performs positive functions for social systems. After all, deviance breaks social norms and values. With the functionalist emphasis on the importance of shared norms and values as the basis of social order, it would appear that deviance is a threat to order and should therefore be seen as a threat to society. All functionalists agree that social control mechanisms, such as the police and the courts, are necessary to keep deviance in check and to protect social order. However, many argue that a certain amount of deviance has positive functions: that it even contributes to the maintenance and well-being of society.

Crime as inevitable

Emile Durkheim developed this argument with his discussion of crime in *The Rules of Sociological Method* (Durkheim, 1938, first published 1895). He argued that crime is an inevitable and normal aspect of social life. Crime is present in all types of society; indeed the crime rate is higher in the more advanced, industrialized countries. According to Durkheim, crime is 'an integral part of all healthy societies'. It is inevitable because not every member of society can be equally committed to the collective sentiments (the shared values and moral beliefs) of society. Since individuals are exposed to different influences and circumstances, it is 'impossible for all to be alike'. Therefore not everyone is equally reluctant to break the law.

Durkheim imagined a 'society of saints' populated by perfect individuals. In such a society there might be no murder or robbery, but there would still be deviance. The general standards of behaviour would be so high that the slightest slip would be regarded as a serious offence. Thus the individual who simply showed bad taste, or was merely impolite, would attract strong disapproval from other members of that society.

Crime as functional

Crime is not only inevitable, it can also be functional. Durkheim argued that it only becomes dysfunctional (harmful to society) when its rate is unusually high or low. He argued that all social change begins with some form of deviance. In order for change to occur, yesterday's deviance must become today's normality. Since a certain amount of change is healthy for society (so that it can progress rather than stagnate), so is deviance. If the collective sentiments are too strong, there will be little deviance, but neither will there be any change, nor any progress. Therefore, the collective sentiments must have only 'moderate energy' so that they do not crush originality: both the originality of the criminal, and the originality of the genius. In Durkheim's words:

> *to make progress individual originality must be able to express itself. In order that the originality of the idealist whose dreams transcend this century may find expression it is necessary that the originality of the criminal, who is below the level of his time, shall also be possible. One does not occur without the other.*
>
> Durkheim, 1938, p. 71

Thus the collective sentiments must not be too powerful to block the expression of people like Jesus, William Wilberforce (who was instrumental in the abolition of slavery), Martin Luther King (the American civil rights campaigner), Mother Theresa (who worked with the poor in India), Nelson Mandela (who helped remove apartheid in South Africa) or Princess Diana (in her campaign against land mines).

Durkheim regarded some crime as 'an anticipation of the morality of the future'. In this way, terrorists or freedom fighters may represent a future established order – consider the examples of Robert Mugabe, a freedom fighter who later became prime minister of Zimbabwe, and Nelson Mandela, an African National Congress leader who became president of post-apartheid South Africa.

If crime is inevitable, what is the function of punishment? Durkheim argued that its function was not to remove crime in society but to maintain the collective sentiments at their necessary level of strength. In Durkheim's words, punishment 'serves to heal the wounds done to the collective sentiments'. Without punishment, the collective sentiments would lose their power to control behaviour, and the crime rate would reach the point where it became dysfunctional. Thus, in Durkheim's view, a healthy society requires both crime and punishment; both are inevitable, both are functional.

The positive functions of deviance

Durkheim's views have been developed by a number of sociologists. Albert K. Cohen (1966) analysed two possible functions of deviance:

1. Deviance can be a safety valve, providing a relatively harmless expression of discontent. In this way social order is protected. For example, Cohen suggests that 'prostitution performs such a safety valve function without threatening the institution of the family'. It can provide a release from the stress and pressure of family life without undermining family stability, since relationships between prostitutes and their clients usually avoid strong emotional attachments.
2. Cohen also suggests that certain deviant acts are a useful warning device to indicate that an aspect of society is malfunctioning. This may draw attention to the problem and lead to measures to solve it. Thus, truants from school, deserters from the army, or runaways from young-offender institutions, may 'reveal unsuspected causes of discontent, and lead to changes that enhance efficiency and morale'.

Durkheim and Cohen have moved away from the picture of the deviant as psychologically or biologically abnormal. Durkheim suggested that society itself generates deviance for its own well-being. Cohen argues that certain forms of deviance are a natural and normal response to particular circumstances. However, Durkheim did believe that excessively high rates of crime did suggest that something had gone wrong with society. This view was taken up and developed by Robert K. Merton's famous work in the 1930s.

Robert K. Merton – social structure and anomie

Merton (1968, first published 1938) argued that deviance results not from 'pathological personalities' but from the culture and structure of society itself. He begins from the standard functionalist position of value consensus – that is, all members of society share the same values. However, since members of society are placed in different positions in the social structure (for example, they differ in terms of class position), they do not have the same opportunity of realizing the shared values. This situation can generate deviance. In Merton's words, 'the social and cultural structure generates pressure for socially deviant behaviour upon people variously located in that structure'.

Cultural goals and institutionalized means

Using the USA as an example, Merton outlined his theory as follows. Members of American society share the major values of American culture. In particular they share the goal of success, for which they all strive and which is largely measured in terms of wealth and material possessions. The 'American Dream' states that all members of society have an equal opportunity of achieving success, of owning a Cadillac, a Beverley Hills mansion and a substantial bank balance. In all societies there are institutionalized means of reaching culturally defined goals. In America, the accepted ways of achieving success are through educational qualifications, talent, hard work, drive, determination and ambition.

In a balanced society an equal emphasis is placed upon both cultural goals and institutionalized means, and members are satisfied with both. But in America great importance is attached to success, and relatively little importance is given to the accepted ways of achieving success. As such, American society is unstable and unbalanced. There is a tendency to

reject the 'rules of the game' and to strive for success by any available means. The situation becomes like a game of cards in which winning becomes so important that the rules are abandoned by some of the players. When rules cease to operate, a situation of normlessness or anomie results. In this situation of 'anything goes', norms no longer direct behaviour, and deviance is encouraged. However, individuals will respond to a situation of anomie in different ways. In particular, their reaction will be shaped by their position in the social structure.

Responses to cultural goals

Merton outlined five possible ways in which members of American society could respond to success goals:

1 The first and most common response is conformity. Members of society conform both to success goals and the normative means of reaching them. They strive for success by means of accepted channels.

2 A second response is innovation. This response rejects normative means of achieving success and turns to deviant means, in particular, crime. Merton argues that members of the lower social strata are most likely to select this route to success. They are least likely to succeed via conventional channels, and so there is greater pressure upon them to deviate. Their educational qualifications are usually low and their jobs provide little opportunity for advancement. In Merton's words, they have 'little access to conventional and legitimate means for becoming successful'. Since their way is blocked, they innovate, turning to crime which promises greater rewards than legitimate means.

   Merton stressed that membership of the lower strata is not, in itself, sufficient to produce deviance. In some more traditional European societies those at the bottom of the social structure are more likely to accept their position since they have not internalized mainstream success goals. Instead they have developed distinctive subcultures which define success in terms that differ from those of the wider society. (In Chapter 2, pp. 75–6, and Chapter 5, pp. 319–21, we discuss traditional working-class subculture and the 'culture of poverty'.) Only in societies such as the USA, where all members share the same success goals, does the pressure to innovate operate forcefully on the lower classes.

   Finally, Merton argues that those who innovate have been 'imperfectly socialized so that they abandon institutional means while retaining success-aspirations'.

3 Merton uses the term ritualism to describe the third possible response. Those who select this alternative are deviant because they have largely abandoned the commonly-held success goals. The pressure to adopt this alternative is greatest for members of the lower middle class. Their occupations provide less opportunity for success than those of other members of the middle class. (We analyse the market situation of the lower middle class in Chapter 2, pp. 66–9.) However, compared with members of the working class, they have been strongly socialized to conform to social norms. This prevents them from turning to crime. Unable to innovate, and with jobs that offer little opportunity for advancement, their only solution is to scale down or abandon their success goals. Merton paints the following picture of typical lower-middle-class 'ritualists'. They are low-grade bureaucrats, ultra-respectable but stuck in a rut. They are sticklers for the rules, follow the book to the letter, cling to red tape, conform to all the outward standards of middle-class respectability, but have given up striving for success. Ritualists are deviant because they have rejected the success goals held by most members of society.

4 Merton terms the fourth, and least common, response, retreatism. It applies to 'psychotics, autists, pariahs, outcasts, vagrants, vagabonds, tramps, chronic drunkards and drug addicts'. They have strongly internalized both the cultural goals and the institutionalized means, yet are unable to achieve success. They resolve the conflict of their situation by abandoning both the goals and the means of reaching them. They are unable to cope, and 'drop out' of society, defeated and resigned to their failure. They are deviant in two ways: they have rejected both the cultural goals and the institutionalized means. Merton does not relate retreatism to social-class position.

5 Rebellion forms the fifth and final response. It is a rejection of both the success goals and the institutionalized means, and it replaces them with different goals and means. Those who adopt this alternative wish to create a new society. Merton argues that 'it is typically members of a rising class rather than the most depressed strata who organize the resentful and rebellious into a revolutionary group'.

To summarize, Merton claimed that his analysis showed how the culture and structure of society generate deviance. The overemphasis upon cultural goals in American society, at the expense of institutionalized means, creates a tendency towards anomie. This tendency exerts pressure for deviance, a pressure which varies depending on a person's position in the class structure.

Evaluation of Merton

Critics have attacked Merton's work for neglecting the power relationships in society as a whole, within which deviance and conformity occur. Laurie Taylor argued:

> *It is as though individuals in society are playing a gigantic fruit machine, but the machine is rigged and only some players are consistently*

rewarded. The deprived ones either resort to using foreign coins or magnets to increase their chances of winning (innovation), or play on mindlessly (ritualism), give up the game (retreatism), or propose a new game altogether (rebellion). But in the analysis nobody appeared to ask who put the game there in the first place and who takes the profits.

Taylor, 1971

Thus Taylor criticized Merton for not carrying his analysis far enough: for failing to consider who makes the laws and who benefits from the laws. To continue Taylor's analogy, the whole game may have been rigged by the powerful with rules that guarantee their success. These rules may be the laws of society.

Merton has also been criticized for assuming that there is a value consensus in American society and that people only deviate as a result of structural strain. His theory has been attacked as being too deterministic because it fails to explain why some people who experience the effects of anomie do not become criminals or deviants. Some critics believe that Merton's theory over-predicts and exaggerates working-class crime, and under-predicts and underestimates middle-class or white-collar crime. Taylor, Walton and Young (1973) believe that Merton's theory cannot account for politically motivated criminals (such as freedom fighters) who break the law because of commitment to their cause rather than the effects of anomie.

However, some sociologists have defended Merton's theory. Robert Reiner (1984) points out that Merton himself has acknowledged that not all Americans accept the success goals of the American Dream. Nevertheless, such goals are sufficiently widespread in the lower strata to account for their deviance. Reiner also notes that 'Merton was well aware both of the extensiveness of white-collar crime in the suites, and of the way that official statistics disproportionately record crimes in the streets'. Merton explained white-collar crime by suggesting that American society placed no upper limit on success. However wealthy people were, they might still want more. Nevertheless, Reiner maintains that Merton's view that there was more working-class crime remains quite plausible, since those failing to become wealthy in legal ways will be under more pressure to find alternative routes to success. Reiner also believes that Merton's theory can be developed to accommodate most of the criticisms. Thus Taylor, Walton and Young's political criminals could be included in Merton's rebellion adaptation. Subculture theorists, whose work will be examined shortly, have also criticized Merton. However, as Reiner points out, their work represents an attempt to refine and develop Merton's theory rather than rejecting it altogether.

Despite the criticisms, Merton's theory remains one of the more plausible attempts to explain crime rates in whole societies. For example, it could be argued that the influence of Thatcherism and New Right thinking in Britain after 1979 encouraged a greater emphasis on individual success and therefore contributed to a rise in property crime. Similar arguments could be applied to former communist countries as they have changed to free market economies, stressing the importance of competition and individual success. Joachim J. Savelsberg (1995) argues that Merton's strain theory can help to explain the rapid rises in the crime rate in post-communist Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany and Russia. Poland is an example of how dramatic these rises sometimes were. Poland had its first free elections in 1989. Between 1989 and 1990 the official crime rate in Poland increased by no less than 69 per cent.

Merton's work, however, can hardly explain all crime. Since his original work, other sociologists have modified and built on his theory in order to try to develop more complete explanations for crime and delinquency.

Structural and subcultural theories of deviance

Structural theories of deviance are similar to Merton's theory. They explain the origins of deviance in terms of the position of individuals or groups in the social structure.

Subcultural theories explain deviance in terms of the subculture of a social group. They argue that certain groups develop norms and values which are to some extent different from those held by other members of society. For example, some groups of criminals or delinquents might develop norms that encourage and reward criminal activity. Other members of society may regard such activities as immoral, and strongly disapprove of them. Subcultural theories claim that deviance is the result of individuals conforming to the values and norms of the social group to which they belong. Members of subcultures are not completely different from other members of society: they may speak the same language, wear similar clothes, and attach the same value to family life. However, their subculture is

sufficiently different from the culture of society as a whole to lead to them committing acts that are generally regarded as deviant.

Often, structural and subcultural theories are combined, as in Albert Cohen's analysis of delinquency. The development of subcultures is explained in terms of the position of groups or individuals in the social structure.

Albert K. Cohen – the delinquent subculture

Cohen's work (1955) was a modification and development of Merton's position. From his studies of delinquency, he made two major criticisms of Merton's views on working-class deviance:

1 First, he argued that delinquency is a collective rather than an individual response. Whereas Merton sees individuals responding to their position in the class structure, Cohen saw individuals joining together in a collective response.
2 Second, Cohen argued that Merton failed to account for non-utilitarian crime – such as vandalism and joy-riding – which does not produce monetary reward. Cohen questioned whether such forms of delinquency were directly motivated by the success goals of the mainstream culture. He agreed, however, that Merton's theory was 'highly plausible as an explanation for adult professional crime and for the property delinquency of some older and semi-professional thieves'.

Cohen began his argument in a similar way to Merton. Lower-working-class boys hold the success goals of the mainstream culture, but, due largely to educational failure and the dead-end jobs that result from this, they have little opportunity to attain those goals. This failure can be explained by their position in the social structure. Cohen supported the view that cultural deprivation accounts for the lack of educational success of members of the lower working class. (We outline the theory of cultural deprivation in Chapter 11.)

Stuck at the bottom of the stratification system, with avenues to success blocked, many lower-working-class boys suffer from status frustration – that is, they are frustrated and dissatisfied with their low status in society. They resolve their frustration, not by turning to criminal paths to success, as Merton suggested, but by rejecting the success goals of the mainstream culture. They replace them with an alternative set of norms and values, in terms of which they can achieve success and gain prestige. The result is a delinquent subculture. It can be seen as a collective solution to the common problems of lower-working-class adolescents.

The delinquent subculture not only rejects the mainstream culture, it reverses it. In Cohen's words, 'the delinquent subculture takes its norms from the larger culture but turns them upside down'. Thus, a high value is placed on activities such as stealing, vandalism and truancy, which are condemned in the wider society. Cohen described the delinquent subculture in the following way: 'Throughout there is a kind of *malice* apparent, an enjoyment of the discomfiture of others, a delight in the defiance of taboos.' He illustrates this theme with the example of a boy defecating on the teacher's desk.

But the delinquent subculture is more than an act of defiance, a negative reaction to a society that has denied opportunity to some of its members. It also offers positive rewards. Those who perform successfully in terms of the values of the subculture gain recognition and prestige in the eyes of their peers. Thus stealing becomes, according to Cohen, not so much a means of achieving success in terms of mainstream goals, but 'a valued activity to which attaches glory, prowess and profound satisfaction'. Cohen argued that, in this way, lower-working-class boys solve the problem of status frustration. They reject mainstream values, which offer them little chance of success, and substitute deviant values, in terms of which they can be successful. Cohen thus provides an explanation for delinquent acts which do not appear to be motivated by monetary reward.

Like Merton, Cohen began from a structural perspective: because there is unequal access to opportunity, there is greater pressure on certain groups within the social structure to deviate. However, he parted company from Merton when he saw some delinquency as being a collective response directed by subcultural values. In this way he showed how pressure from the social structure to deviate was reinforced by pressure from the deviant subculture.

Evaluation of Cohen

Steven Box (1981) believed that Cohen's theory was only plausible for a small minority of delinquents. He questioned Cohen's view that most delinquent youths originally accepted the mainstream standards of success. Rather than experiencing shame and guilt at their own failure, Box argued, they feel resentment at being regarded as failures by teachers and middle-class youths whose values they do not share and cannot accept. They turn against those who look down on them; they will not tolerate the way they are insulted.

Cohen has also been criticized for his selective use of the idea of lower-class subculture. David Bordua (1962) argued that he used it to explain the educational failure of lower-working-class youngsters, with the notion of cultural deprivation,

but he did not use it to explain delinquency. Thus, whereas cultural deprivation is passed on from one generation to the next, this does not seem to happen with the delinquent subculture. It appears to be created anew by each generation reacting to its position in the social structure.

Despite such criticisms, Cohen's ideas continue to offer insights into delinquency. Even Cohen's critics would generally accept that the search for status remains an important factor in the formation of delinquent subcultures.

Richard A. Cloward and Lloyd E. Ohlin – *Delinquency and Opportunity*

In *Delinquency and Opportunity* the American sociologists Cloward and Ohlin combined and developed many of the insights of Merton and Cohen (Cloward and Ohlin, 1961). While largely accepting Merton's view of working-class criminal deviance, they argued that he had failed to explain the different forms that deviance takes. For example, why do some delinquent gangs concentrate on theft while others appear preoccupied with vandalism and violence?

Cloward and Ohlin argued that Merton had only dealt with half the picture. He had explained deviance in terms of the legitimate opportunity structure but he failed to consider the illegitimate opportunity structure. In other words, just as the opportunity to be successful by legitimate means varies, so does the opportunity for success by illegitimate means. For example, in one area there may be a thriving adult criminal subculture which may provide access for adolescents; in another area this subculture may not exist. Thus, in the first area, the adolescent has more opportunity to become a successful criminal.

By examining access to, and opportunity for entry into, illegitimate opportunity structures, Cloward and Ohlin provided an explanation for different forms of deviance.

They began their explanation of working-class delinquency from the same point as Merton: that is, there is greater pressure on members of the working class to deviate because they have less opportunity to succeed by legitimate means. Cloward and Ohlin then distinguished three possible responses to this situation: the 'criminal subculture', the 'conflict subculture' and the 'retreatist subculture'. The development of one or other of these responses by young people depends upon their access to, and performance in terms of, the illegitimate opportunity structure.

Structure and subculture

1 Criminal subcultures tend to emerge in areas where there is an established pattern of organized adult crime. In such areas a 'learning environment' is provided for the young: they are exposed to criminal skills and deviant values, and presented with criminal role models. Those who perform successfully in terms of these deviant values have the opportunity to rise in the professional criminal hierarchy. They have access to the illegitimate opportunity structure. Criminal subcultures are mainly concerned with utilitarian crime – crime which produces financial reward.

2 Conflict subcultures tend to develop in areas where adolescents have little opportunity for access to illegitimate opportunity structures. There is little organized adult crime to provide an 'apprenticeship' for the young criminals and opportunities for them to climb the illegitimate ladder to success. Such areas usually have a high turnover of population and lack unity and cohesiveness. This situation tends to prevent a stable criminal subculture from developing. Thus access to both legitimate and illegitimate opportunity structures is blocked. The response to this situation is often gang violence. This serves as a release for anger and frustration, and a means of obtaining prestige in terms of the values of the subculture.

3 Finally Cloward and Ohlin analysed Merton's retreatist response in terms of legitimate and illegitimate opportunity structures. They suggested that some lower-class adolescents form retreatist subcultures, organized mainly around illegal drug use, because they have failed to succeed in both the legitimate and illegitimate structures. In this sense they are double failures: they have failed to become successful by legitimate means and they have failed in terms of either criminal or conflict subcultures. As failed criminals or failed gang members, they retreat, tails between their legs, into retreatist subcultures.

Evaluation of Cloward and Ohlin

Cloward and Ohlin have produced the most sophisticated version of structural and subcultural theory. By combining the work of Merton and Cohen, and adding the notion of the illegitimate opportunity structure, they attempted to explain the variety of forms that deviance might take. Nevertheless, they may not have provided a convincing explanation for every type of deviant subculture.

Taylor, Walton and Young commented that 'It would be amusing, for instance, to conjecture what Cloward and Ohlin would have made of the Black Panthers or the hippies' (Taylor, Walton and Young, 1973). They argued that Merton, Cohen, and Cloward and Ohlin share one major fault in common: they all assume that everybody in America starts off by being committed to the success goal of achieving wealth. Taylor, Walton and Young believe that there is a much greater variety of goals which individuals pursue. A man or a woman, for example, may refuse to take a new job or accept a promotion which offers higher pay, because it would disrupt their family life,

reduce the amount of leisure time they enjoyed, or result in greater stress. Furthermore, Taylor, Walton and Young claimed that some groups, such as hippies, made a conscious choice to reject the goal of financial success; they did not simply react to their own failure.

Nevertheless, it is clear that some people in the USA, Britain and elsewhere place considerable emphasis on material success. The marketization of capitalist societies (see pp. 402–6 for a discussion of crime and marketization) may have made these theories increasingly relevant. For example, Cloward and Ohlin's analysis of illegitimate opportunity structures could be applied to the organization of the supply of illegal drugs in towns and cities. Nigel South (1997) believes that the British drug trade is largely based around disorganized crime (which can be compared to Cloward and Ohlin's conflict subcultures), although some of the trade is based around professional criminal organization (more akin to criminal subcultures). Some drug users themselves could be seen as part of a retreatist subculture. Thus, once again, it is possible to use classic theories to understand contemporary patterns of criminality.

Walter B. Miller – lower-class subculture

The final two theories to be examined in this section explain crime in terms of class-based subcultures. The first of these theories, that of Walter Miller, sees crime as a product of lower-class culture. The second sees it as a product of underclass culture.

Miller (1962) did not believe that a deviant subculture arose from the inability of the members of lower social strata to achieve success. Instead he explained crime in terms of the existence of a distinctive lower-class subculture.

Miller believed that members of the American lower class had long had their own cultural traditions which differed significantly from those of members of the higher strata. He claimed that their values and way of life, which are passed on from generation to generation, actively encourage lower-class men to break the law.

Focal concerns

This distinctive cultural system, which may be termed 'lower-class', includes a number of focal concerns – that is, major areas of interest and involvement. Included in these focal concerns are 'toughness', 'smartness' and 'excitement':

1 Toughness involves a concern for masculinity, and finds expression in courage in the face of physical threat and a rejection of timidity and weakness. In practice, this can lead to assault and battery in order to maintain a reputation for toughness.

2 Smartness involves the 'capacity to outsmart, outfox, outwit, dupe, "take", "con" another'. It is expressed in the repertoire of the hustler, the conman, the cardsharp, the pimp, the pickpocket and the petty thief.

3 Excitement involves the search for thrills, for emotional stimulus. In practice, it is sought in gambling, sexual adventures and alcohol, all of which can be combined in a night out on the town.

This 'heady mixture' can result in damage to limb, life and property.

Two factors tend to emphasize and exaggerate the focal concerns of lower-class subculture in the lives of adolescents: first, their tendency to belong to a peer group which demands close conformity to group norms; and second, the concern of young people with status, which is largely achieved in terms of peer group norms. Thus the status of a lower-working-class youth can depend on his reputation for toughness and smartness in the eyes of his friends.

Delinquency and focal concerns

Miller concluded that delinquency is simply the acting out, albeit in a somewhat exaggerated manner, of the focal concerns of lower-class subculture. It resulted from socialization into a subculture with 'a distinctive tradition, many centuries old with an integrity of its own'.

Although this subculture has a life of its own, Miller did give reasons for its origin and maintenance. It stems from, and is partly sustained by, the necessity for a pool of low-skilled labour. Low-skilled workers need to be able to endure routine, repetitive and boring activity, and to tolerate recurrent unemployment. Lower-class subculture enables these workers to live with this situation. Its focal concerns provide satisfactions outside work which offset the dissatisfaction produced by work: the emphasis on excitement in the subculture compensates for the boredom of work.

Evaluation of Miller

Miller presented a picture of members of the lower class living in a world of their own, totally insulated from the rest of society. They appear to pursue their focal concerns with no reference to the mainstream culture. Many sociologists would disagree with this view. In his criticism of Miller, David Bordua stated:

> *Miller seems to be saying that the involvements in lower-class culture are so deep and exclusive that contacts with agents of middle-class dominated institutions, especially the schools, have no impact.*
>
> Bordua, 1962

(We analyse the concept of lower-class subculture in more detail in Chapter 5, pp. 319–23, and Chapter 11.)

Some studies have found working-class cultures in Britain with values significantly at odds with those of the middle class and the criminal justice system. For example, Owen Gill's study of *Luke Street*, a working-class area of Liverpool, found that the local residents did not believe it was wrong to commit some crimes (Gill, 1977). Stealing from houses that were not occupied was thought to be acceptable, and provoking the local police in various ways was widely accepted. Some sociologists, though, deny that there are significant differences in the values of different classes, which relate to crime. John Braithwaite argues that 'predatory crimes', which involve direct harm to the victims, are seen as wrong in all classes in Western societies (Braithwaite, 1989). He points to studies of delinquency, such as those conducted by West (1982), which show that even parents who are themselves criminals tend to disapprove of criminal activity by their children.

The underclass and crime

Charles Murray – welfare, culture and criminality

Many contemporary sociologists have pointed to a shrinking demand for unskilled labour in contemporary capitalist societies. This suggests that the proportion of the population making up a lower class might be declining, and that the relevance of Miller's theory might be decreasing. Communities such as that described by Owen Gill may no longer exist, at least not in the same form. However, some sociologists have suggested that, as the lower class have declined in number, some of the unemployed and unemployable have come to constitute an underclass. Some accounts of the underclass, such as that of Charles Murray (1989), do not accept that the underclass share the same values as other members of society. They see the underclass as responsible for a high proportion of crime, and explain their criminality in terms of their rejection of mainstream values and norms. Murray largely attributes the development of such values to the generosity of welfare states. The payments provided by welfare states have made it possible for young women to become single parents and for young men to reject the idea that it is important to hold down a job (see pp. 91–6 and 323–8 for further details on Murray).

Inequality, the underclass and crime

Although not a supporter of Murray's theory, Stephen Jones argues that there is 'a growing underclass who inhabit the run-down areas found in most American cities' (Jones, 1998). He believes that this gives rise to rather different criminal activities to those found in the lower class in America in the 1950s. He says, 'Gangs are now divided far more on racial grounds and their major activities centre on drugs. Disputes over territory are based on seemingly rational economic grounds rather than expressions of male machismo' (Jones, 1998).

Ian Taylor (1997) also believes that an underclass exists in American and British cities. However, he does not explain either the existence of the underclass or any involvement in criminality in the same way as Murray. He argues that the marketization of American and British society, the declining demand for unskilled labour, and rising inequality are all responsible for the development of an underclass. Young, unskilled, working-class males have been particularly affected by the long-term effects of increasing inequality and declining job opportunities. Taylor describes the situation in Britain in the following way:

> *Many of the older industrial areas of England, Scotland, and Wales ... began to be plagued by quite unknown levels of theft and burglary, car stealing, interpersonal violence, and also by a crippling sense of fear and insecurity, which cuts thousands of their residents off from the pleasures of the broader consumer society and the compensations of friendship and neighbourhood.*
>
> Taylor, 1997, p. 285

To Taylor, then, underclass criminality is a consequence of material deprivation rather than an unacceptable culture.

Evaluation of underclass theories of crime

Underclass theories have been extensively criticized. In both Britain and America, some people have questioned the view that there is a distinctive underclass culture, and some that there is an underclass at all. Some sociologists have seen the idea of an underclass as far more applicable in the USA than in Britain. Others have accepted that an underclass may exist, but deny that it has an ethnic component (see pp. 91–6, 283–7 and 323–8). Perhaps the strongest arguments against underclass theories of criminality have been against the sort of theory espoused by Charles Murray. For example, Henrik Tham (1998) has compared welfare policies and official crime rates in Britain and Sweden in the 1980s and 1990s. In Sweden, compared to Britain, there was less increase in inequality and less use of imprisonment; and Sweden's generous welfare payments were maintained at a much higher level than in Britain. However, crime rates increased more rapidly in Britain than they did in Sweden. Tham argues that this evidence undermines Charles

Murray's claim that the generosity of welfare payments can be held responsible for underclass crime. Rather, Tham argues, crime is more closely related to increases in inequality. Tham himself recognizes that the use of official crime rates is open to criticism, but his work does offer more support for theories such as those of Ian Taylor, than for cultural interpretations of the underclass.

Further criticisms of Murray are to be found in the work of Jane Mooney (1998). Mooney has reviewed research in Britain in order to evaluate Murray's claim that single parenthood is associated with criminality. She finds that 'there is not a single substantial scrap of evidence' that such a link exists. She quotes a leaked cabinet paper which found no direct association between single parenthood and criminality, and points out that 'The five million crimes reported to the police every year, with another ten million or more unreported, cannot conceivably be blamed on that fraction of single mothers who are on income support and have adolescent sons.' Mooney accepts that poverty may be linked to criminality, and that many single parents are poor, but denies that single parenthood as such is important. She believes that such views are blaming the victims of social inequality for society's ills. According to her own research into single parenthood in London, single mothers tend to be victims of crime, not perpetrators. Thus, about one in five single mothers in her research had been violently attacked in the previous year – twice the average rate for all women in her study.

In this section we have considered subcultural and structural theories which tend to see deviant behaviour as produced by forces beyond an individual's control. Pressurized by their position in the social structure, by their membership of a deviant subculture, a lower class or underclass, or by their presence in an area of social disorganization, individuals stray from the path of convention. In the following section we will look at a very different theory of delinquency, which includes some important criticisms of and modifications to subcultural theories.

David Matza – delinquency and drift

The American sociologist David Matza (1964) attacked some of the assumptions on which subcultural and structural theories are based, and produced his own distinctive explanation of delinquency. His work suggests that many sociological theories of delinquency are misleading in two ways:

1 They make deviants appear more distinctive than they really are.
2 They present an over-deterministic view of the origins of deviance. (Determinism is the doctrine that states that people have little or no freedom to direct their own actions since they are controlled by external forces.) 'Trapped by circumstances', the individual is automatically propelled down the path of deviance. Matza believes that this view ignores the choices and alternatives which are always available for human action.

In contrast to subculture theories, Matza argues that male delinquents are not in opposition to society's norms and values. In fact, to a considerable extent, they are committed to the same norms and values as other members of society. Society has a strong moral hold over them and prevents them from engaging in delinquent activities for most of the time. Matza backs up this claim by noting that delinquents often express regret and remorse when faced with what they have done. Furthermore, his own research suggests that most delinquents in training school express disapproval of crimes such as mugging, armed robbery, fighting with weapons, and car theft. Far from being committed to crime, delinquents are only occasional, part-time law-breakers; they are 'casually, intermittently, and transiently immersed in a pattern of illegal activity'.

Techniques of neutralization

If delinquents are generally committed to conventional norms and values, then how is it possible for them to contemplate illegal acts? Matza claims that in certain circumstances they are able to 'neutralize' the moral bind of society: they are able to convince themselves that the law does not apply to them on this particular occasion. Deviance becomes possible when they use techniques of neutralization which temporarily release them from the hold that society has over them.

Techniques of neutralization include:

1 Denial of responsibility for a deviant act – the delinquents may remove responsibility from themselves by blaming their parents or the area in which they live.
2 Denial of injury resulting from the act – the delinquents may argue that joy-riding does not harm anyone, it is just a bit of mischief, and that they were borrowing rather than stealing the car.

3 Denial that the act was basically wrong – an assault on a homosexual or a robbery from an extortionate store-owner can be presented as a form of 'rough justice'.
4 Condemnation of those who enforce the rules – the police may be seen as corrupt, or teachers as unjust and hypocritical.
5 Appeal to higher loyalties – the delinquents may argue that they broke the law not out of self-interest but to help their family or friends.

Matza argues that the use of techniques of neutralization throws serious doubts on the idea of deviant subcultures:

1 Techniques of neutralization are evidence of guilt and shame which indicates at least a partial acceptance of mainstream norms and values. If there really were a delinquent subculture, there would be no need to resort to techniques of neutralization, since there would be no guilt to neutralize.
2 Techniques of neutralization often employ one set of mainstream norms to justify breaking others. Thus, assaulting homosexuals is justified since it supports mainstream norms of sexual behaviour. Again, this shows some degree of commitment to mainstream culture.

Subterranean values

Once potential delinquents have freed themselves from the normal constraints society exercises over them, delinquency becomes a possibility. They are in a state of drift and may or may not break the law. Whilst the state of drift explains why people can break the law, it does not explain why they should wish to.

Matza explains the attraction to deviance in terms of subterranean values. This set of values encourages enjoying yourself, acting on the spur of the moment, self-expression, being aggressive and seeking excitement. These values, according to Matza, exist throughout society, alongside formal values which encourage hard work and planning for the future. The 'respectable' member of society will only act in accordance with subterranean values during leisure activities, such as drinking in a bar, visiting the bowling alley, or playing football. Delinquents do not hold different values to other members of society; they simply express subterranean values at the wrong place and time. For example, they may seek excitement at school, or they could be aggressive while at work. Again, Matza stresses that delinquents share more in common with other members of society than earlier theories would suggest.

The mood of fatalism and the mood of humanism

So far, Matza has explained why delinquency is possible, and why it is attractive to some adolescents. This is not sufficient, however, to explain why they embark on delinquency. Before this is likely, some 'preparation' may be necessary: they may have to learn some of the skills they will require (such as those needed to break into a car) from more experienced delinquents. They also need a strong push to step over the dividing line between deviance and conformity for the first time. As they drift, they may be pushed towards or away from deviance, according to the circumstances.

The final decision to step over the line comes when adolescents experience the mood of fatalism. They feel powerless: other people are pushing them around, telling them what to do. To overcome this feeling, they need to take some action that will make things happen, and 'restore their mood of humanism'. They wish to stop feeling like a victim of circumstances, and to prove to themselves that they too are human beings who can influence events around them. Committing a delinquent act assures them of at least some response, even if it is a negative one. At the very least, they can expect their action to be noticed, and to lead to a police investigation. Once they have taken this step, it becomes easier to contemplate other delinquent acts, but Matza emphasizes that delinquency never becomes more than an occasional activity.

The subculture of delinquency

Matza uses the term subculture of delinquency, rather than delinquent subculture. Although he has done no more than reverse the order of the words, the concept he uses is quite different from the traditional view of a subculture:

1 The norms and values of the subculture of delinquency allow delinquent acts, but do not demand them of members of the group.
2 The conventional values of society have a considerable influence on the behaviour of the delinquent.
3 The subculture of delinquency is a loose-knit group of adolescents. Individuals frequently drift into and out of the group; they are not committed, full-time members.

Evaluation of Matza

Matza's work is radically different from previous explanations of delinquency. He rejects the view that delinquents are pathological, that they are different from other members of society, that they are sick. He denies that deterministic theories can explain human

behaviour. Instead he stresses the choices that are available to all human beings, including delinquents. His work is important in challenging the assumptions on which earlier theories were based. Nevertheless, Matza himself has been criticized.

Taylor, Walton, and Young (1973) raised doubts about the view that those who use the techniques of neutralization are never challenging the dominant values in society. They pointed out that denying your behaviour is wrong is quite different from explaining it away as the result of sickness or an accident. It may indeed represent a complete rejection of society's norms and values; 'A homosexual who says he cannot help being a homosexual because he is sick is very different from the homosexual who denies the fact of harm to the victim, who declares that "gay is 'good'".

Steven Box (1981) questioned the evidence that Matza used in support of his theory. Box suggested that it may not be possible to take the statements of delinquents at face value: when they express regret and remorse for their offences they may not be sincere; when they explain the reasons for their acts they may be attempting to justify themselves, rather than to provide an accurate account of their motives.

Stephen Jones (1998) believes that Matza's theory is quite good at explaining occasional delinquency that is not particularly serious. On the other hand, it is not particularly good at explaining violence. Jones says that Matza:

> *is nowadays considered to have had a somewhat romanticised view of crime. It is clear that, while everyone engaged in delinquency at some stages in their lives, there is a hard core who continue to commit serious offences on a regular basis, sometimes even lasting into adulthood.*
>
> Jones, 1998, p. 169

Despite these drawbacks, Matza's work has raised some important questions about deviance. In particular, it has questioned the view that deviants always hold quite untypical values, and it has tried to overcome the pitfalls of overly deterministic theories. Now we will consider the relationship between deviance and official statistics.

Deviance and official statistics

Many theories of deviance are based in part on official statistics provided by the police, the courts, and other government agencies involved in law enforcement. In countries such as Britain and the USA these statistics consistently show that some groups are more involved in crime than others. The working class, the young, males, and members of some ethnic minorities are all more likely to commit crimes than the middle class, the elderly, females, and whites – according to official data. Some sociologists have taken these figures at face value and have then proceeded to explain why such groups should be so criminal. Merton, Cohen, Cloward and Ohlin, and Miller (see pp. 354–60) all assume that working-class men are the main offenders, although they differ in their explanations as to why this should be so. If it could be shown that the reliability of the figures is open to question, it would raise serious doubts about their theories.

In Britain, official statistics on crime are published annually. They provide criminologists, the police, the courts, the media, and anyone else who is interested, with two main types of data:

1 They provide information on the total number of crimes 'known to the police'. This information is often taken as an accurate measure of the total amount of crime. The data allow comparisons to be made between crimes, and with previous years.

Often the figures receive widespread publicity through the media. The statistics often, though not always, show increases in crime over previous years, and they may lead to concern that the country is being engulfed in a crime wave.

Figure 6.1 shows long-term trends in crimes recorded by the police in Britain from 1876 to 1996. It shows that rates remained very low until the 1950s, but have increased rapidly in the period since then.

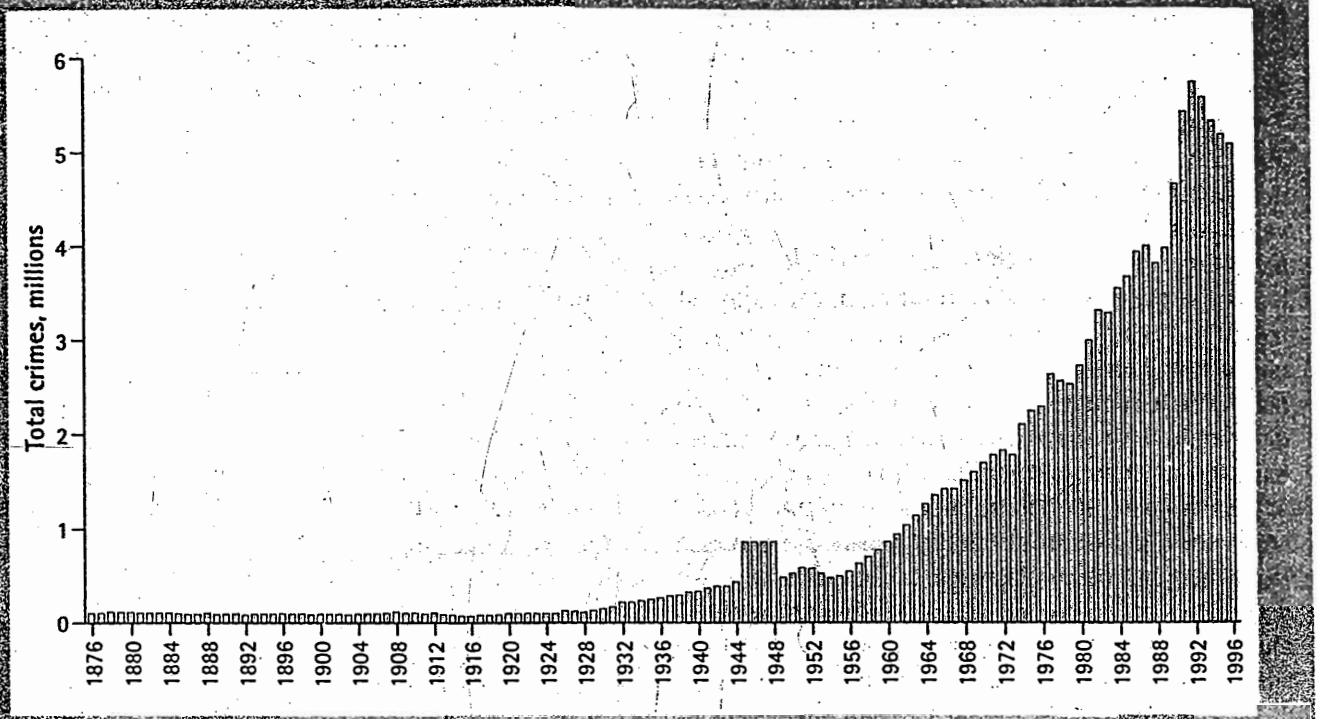
Figure 6.2 shows trends since 1971 in more detail. It shows that the crime rate appears to have increased rapidly for most of the period since 1971 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. However, it does show some decline in the mid-1990s, particularly in England and Wales.

Table 6.1 provides a detailed breakdown of notifiable offences recorded by English and Welsh police forces (for April to March periods) from 1993 to 1998. It also shows percentage changes from the previous year. It shows that overall violent crime rose over this period, but other types of crime declined.

2 The official statistics provide information on the social characteristics of those who have been convicted of offences, such as their age and gender. It is on these figures that a number of theories of crime have been based.

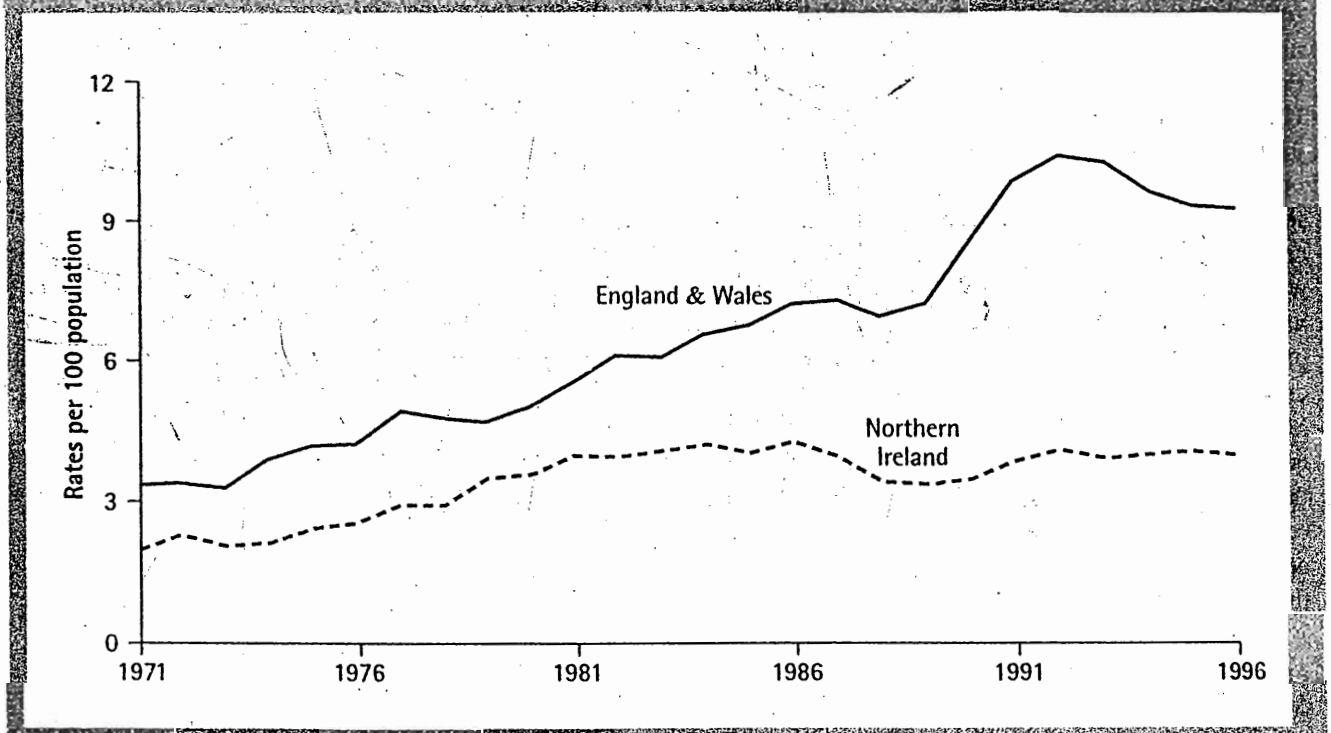
Each of these sets of figures will now be examined in detail.

Figure 6.1 Crimes recorded by the police, 1876–1996



Source: [illegible] Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 158.

Figure 6.2 Notifiable offences recorded by the police, 1971–1996



Notifiable offences up to and including 1979. Excluding offences of criminal damage of value £20 and under in England and Wales, includes possession of controlled drugs in Northern Ireland.
Source: *Social Trends* (1998) HMSO, London, p. 156.

only actually investigated six of the blindings. There were 302 fatal accidents at work in 1996.

John Braithwaite (1984) has studied corporate crimes committed by pharmaceutical companies and has discovered that they are alarmingly common.

The US Securities and Exchange Commission encouraged drug companies to reveal 'questionable payments' (or, in plainer language, bribery) in return for a promise that they would not be prosecuted. All the major companies had spent substantial amounts on such payments. American Hospital Supply had apparently spent $5.8 million on bribery. For example, it had bribed Mexican health inspectors not to enforce the Mexican Health Code at its plant in that country. Braithwaite found extensive negligence and fraud in the testing of drugs: test results were sometimes falsified, or results for tests that had never taken place were simply made up. There was a great deal of evidence of unsafe manufacturing practices being used, which could lead to faulty heart pacemakers or non-sterile medical products being distributed.

The most dramatic example of the possible effects of crimes like these is the 'thalidomide affair'. This drug was manufactured by Chemie Grunethal of Germany; it was used as a sleeping pill or tranquillizer. However, the use of the drug by pregnant women led to over 8,000 seriously deformed babies being born throughout the world. Despite numerous examples of adverse reactions from clinical tests, the drug was marketed with little delay, the advertising proclaiming that it was 'completely safe'. The company was slow to withdraw the product even when the drug's disastrous effects were known.

White-collar crimes involving politicians and state officials come to light from time to time. The 'Watergate' affair is one of the best-known examples. The US President Nixon was forced to leave office in 1974 as a result of his involvement in the break-in and attempted bugging of the offices of political opponents, and his involvement in using illegal sources of money to fund political campaigns. In another US political scandal, 'Irangate', government officials were found to have been involved in the exchange of arms for hostages with the government of Iran, which went against stated US policy.

In Britain, accusations have been made that members of the Thatcher government knowingly allowed companies to export products for military use, including parts for a 'supergun' to the government of Iraq. This contravened the British government's own ban on such exports during the Iran–Iraq war.

Another member of the Conservative government, Jonathan Aitken, was found to have accepted hospitality at the Paris Ritz from Mohammed Al Fayed in return for asking questions in Parliament. Aitken was later imprisoned for conspiracy to pervert the course of justice, as a result of trying to cover up what had happened.

Michael Woodiwiss (1993) claims that the US government has a history of promoting drug trafficking. During the Vietnam war, 'opponents charged that the CIA was knowingly financing its operations from opium money'. This was confirmed in a book written by Orrin DeForest, a senior investigations officer with the CIA. To raise more money, army officers allowed heroin to be smuggled back to America in the corpses of American soldiers. The bodies were cut open and had up to 25 kg of heroin concealed inside.

Gregg Barak (1994) accuses the US government of backing, at various times, repressive dictators in the Philippines, Brazil, South Korea, Cuba, Iran and Argentina; of helping to overthrow or undermine democratically elected governments in countries including Chile, Jamaica, Guatemala and Nicaragua; and of the use of illegal means to deal with domestic protest movements, such as the Black Panthers, the American Indian Movement, and anti-war movements during the 1960s.

More recently, in 1998, President Clinton ordered the bombing of a chemical factory in Sudan on the grounds that it was manufacturing chemical weapons. However, according to Ed Vulliamy and colleagues (1998), America's own tests could find no evidence that chemical weapons were being made there. The result was to destroy some of Sudan's capacity to produce desperately needed medicines.

British intelligence organizations have also been accused of engaging in illegal activities. For example, in his book *Spycatcher* (which the British government tried to suppress), Peter Wright claimed that during the period when Harold Wilson was prime minister the security services were involved in numerous unauthorized buggings and burglaries (Wright, 1987).

A number of factors combine to reduce the apparent extent and seriousness of white-collar crime:

1 It is difficult to detect: many white-collar crimes are 'crimes without victims'.

2 In cases of bribery and corruption, both parties involved may see themselves as gaining from the arrangement, both are liable to prosecution, and therefore neither is likely to report the offence.

3 In cases where the victim is the public at large (such as misrepresentation in advertising), few members of the public have the expertise to realize that they are being misled, or a knowledge of the legal procedure to redress the wrong. In such cases, detection and prosecution are often left to a government agency which rarely has the personnel or finances to bring more than a few cases to court in the hope of deterring the practice.

White-collar crimes, if detected, are rarely prosecuted. In the thalidomide affair no individual was ever found guilty of a criminal offence. Only one court case, in Canada, for compensation for one deformed baby, was ever completed. With their massive resources and skilled lawyers, the companies involved used delaying tactics to such an effect that every other case was settled out of court.

Often white-collar crimes are dealt with administratively by the various boards, and commissions and inspectorates are appointed to deal with them. 'Official warnings' rather than prosecutions are frequently the rule. In the case of professionals, their own associations usually deal with misconduct and, again, prosecution is rare. In extreme cases, doctors and lawyers may lose their licence to practise, but more often than not their professional associations simply hand down a reprimand.

The sociological study of white-collar crime provides some support for the view that there is one law for the rich and another for the poor. Edwin Sutherland (1960) argues that there is a consistent bias 'involved in the administration of criminal justice under laws which apply to business and the professions and which therefore involve only the upper socio-economic group'. The matter is neatly summarized by Willy Sutton, a professional bank robber, who stated:

> *Others accused of defrauding the government of hundreds of thousands of dollars merely get a letter from a committee in Washington asking them to come in and talk it over. Maybe it's justice but it's puzzling to a guy like me.*
>
> Quoted in Clinard, 1974, p. 266

Official statistics probably underestimate the extent of white-collar and corporate crime to a far greater degree than they underestimate the extent of crime in general. As a result, official statistics portray crime as predominantly working-class behaviour. Many sociological theories have seen social class as the key to explaining criminal deviance. This conclusion may not be justified in view of the nature of criminal statistics, which may give a misleading impression about the relationship between class and crime. Different classes may commit different types of crime, but it is not possible to be certain that lower classes are significantly more prone to crime than higher ones.

Statistics and theories of crime

All the theories of crime and deviance examined so far assume that criminals and deviants are a small minority of the population, and attempts have been made to explain crime in terms of the differences between the criminals and the remainder of the population. Thus criminals and deviants have particular biological characteristics, a defective upbringing, a particular place in the social structure, and so on.

However, studies of crimes that do not appear in the official statistics suggest that crime is very widespread in all social strata. In the USA, the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice found that 91 per cent of those questioned in a survey admitted to having committed crimes for which they could have been imprisoned (President's Commission, 1989).

Mike Maguire comments that:

> *Depending upon the age, sex, and other social characteristics of those questioned, as well as the wording of the questions, self-report studies have generally found that between 40 and almost 100 per cent will admit to having committed at least one criminal offence during their lifetimes.*
>
> Maguire, 1997, p. 175

Studies of a wide range of occupations and industries suggest that crime is a normal feature of working life, from managing directors to shop-floor workers.

If most members of society are deviant, at least occasionally, then new ways of looking at deviance, new questions about deviance, and perspectives which differ radically from those so far considered are needed. Accordingly we will now analyse an alternative perspective on crime and deviance.

Deviance – an interactionist perspective

The interactionist perspective differs from previous approaches in two ways:

1. First, it views deviance from a different theoretical perspective.
2. Second, it examines aspects of deviance which have been largely ignored by previous approaches. It directs attention away from deviants as such and the motivations, pressures and social forces which are supposed to direct their behaviour. Instead it focuses upon the interaction between deviants and those who define them as deviant. The interactionist perspective examines how and why particular individuals and groups are defined as deviant, and the effects of such a definition upon their future actions. For example, the interaction between the

deviant and various agents of social control, such as parents, teachers, doctors, police, judges and probation officers, may be analysed; and the effects upon the individual of being defined as a criminal or delinquent, or as mentally ill, or as an alcoholic, prostitute or homosexual may be examined.

The interactionist approach emphasizes the importance of the meanings the various actors bring to, and develop within, the interaction situation. Thus it may examine the picture of the 'typical delinquent' held by the police and note how this results in a tendency to define lower-class rather than middle-class law-breakers as delinquents.

Meanings are not, however, fixed and clearcut. They are modified and developed in the interaction process. Thus, from an interactionist perspective, the definition of deviance is negotiated in the interaction situation by the actors involved. For example, whether or not a person is defined as mentally ill will depend on a series of negotiations between him or her and a psychiatrist.

The approaches so far considered, with their emphasis on deviants simply reacting to external forces largely beyond their control, are close to a positivist position. Interactionists reject the positivist approach. They stress the importance of factors internal to the individual. Individuals do not react passively to external forces: they attach meanings to events before deciding how to respond.

Howard S. Becker – labelling theory

The definition of deviance

One of the most influential statements on deviance is contained in the following quotation from Howard S. Becker (1963), one of the early exponents of the interactionist approach. Becker argued:

> *social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labelling them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of the rules and sanctions to an 'offender'. The deviant is one to whom the label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label.*
>
> Becker, 1963, p. 9

Becker is suggesting that in one sense there is no such thing as a deviant act. An act only becomes deviant when others perceive and define it as such.

The act of nudity in Western society provides an illustration. Nudity in the bedroom, where the actors involved are husband and wife, is generally interpreted as normal behaviour. Should a stranger enter, however, nudity in his or her presence would usually be considered deviant. Yet, in particular contexts, such as nudist camps or certain holiday beaches, nudity in the presence of strangers would be seen as perfectly normal by the participants. A male spectator at a cricket match who 'streaked' across the pitch may be viewed as 'a bit of a lad' but, if he stood and exposed himself to the crowd, he might be regarded as 'some kind of a pervert'. Thus there is nothing intrinsically normal or deviant about the act of nudity. It only becomes deviant when others label it as such.

Whether or not the label is applied will depend on how the act is interpreted by the audience. This in turn will depend on who commits the act, when and where it is committed, who observes the act, and the negotiations between the various actors involved in the interaction situation.

Becker illustrated his views with the example of a brawl involving young people. In a low-income neighbourhood, it may be defined by the police as evidence of delinquency; in a wealthy neighbourhood as evidence of youthful high spirits. The acts are the same but the meanings given to them by the audience differ. In the same way, those who commit the act may view it in one way; those who observe it may define it in another. The brawl in the low-income area may involve a gang fighting to defend its 'turf' (territory). In Becker's words, they are only doing what they consider 'necessary and right, but teachers, social workers and police see it differently'.

If the agents of social control define the youngsters as delinquents and they are convicted for breaking the law, those youngsters then become deviant. They have been labelled as such by those who have the power to make the labels stick. Thus, Becker argued, 'Deviance is not a quality that lies in behavior itself, but in the interaction between the person who commits an act and those who respond to it.' From this point of view, deviance is produced by a process of interaction between the potential deviant and the agents of social control.

Possible effects of labelling

Becker then examined the possible effects upon an individual of being publicly labelled as deviant. A label defines an individual as a particular kind of person. A label is not neutral: it contains an evaluation of the person to whom it is applied. It is a master status in the sense that it colours all the other statuses possessed by an individual. If individuals are labelled as criminal, mentally ill or homosexual, such labels largely override their status as parent, worker, neighbour and friend. Others see them and respond to them in terms of the label, and tend to assume they

have the negative characteristics normally associated with such labels.

Since individuals' self-concepts are largely derived from the responses of others, they will tend to see themselves in terms of the label. This may produce a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby 'the deviant identification becomes the controlling one'. (We examine the self-fulfilling prophecy theory in more detail in Chapter 11.)

Becker outlined a number of possible stages in this process:

1 Initially the individual is publicly labelled as deviant. This may lead to rejection from many social groups. Regarded as a 'junkie', a 'queer', a 'nutter', a 'wino' or a 'tearaway', he or she may be rejected by family and friends, lose his or her job and be forced out of the neighbourhood.

2 This may encourage further deviance. For example, drug addicts may turn to crime to support their habit since 'respectable employers' refuse to give them a job.

3 The official treatment of deviance may have similar effects. Ex-convicts may have difficulty finding employment and be forced to return to crime for their livelihood. Becker argued:

> *the treatment of deviants denies them the ordinary means of carrying on the routines of everyday life open to most people. Because of this denial, the deviant must of necessity develop illegitimate routines.*
>
> Becker, 1963

4 The deviant career is completed when individuals join an organized deviant group. In this context they confirm and accept their deviant identity. They are surrounded by others in a similar situation who provide them with support and understanding.

5 Within the group, a deviant subculture develops. The subculture often includes beliefs and values which rationalize, justify and support deviant identities and activities. For example, Becker states that organized male homosexual groups provide the individual with a rationale for his deviance:

> *explaining to him why he is the way he is, that other people have also been that way, and why it is all right for him to be that way.*
>
> Becker, 1963

The subculture also provides ways of avoiding getting into trouble with conventional society. The young thief, socialized into a criminal subculture, can learn various ways of avoiding arrest, from older and more experienced members of the group. Becker argued that, once individuals join an organized deviant group, they are more likely than before to see themselves as deviants and to act in terms of this self-concept. In this context the deviant identification tends to become 'the controlling one'.

Jock Young – labelling and marijuana users

The value of Becker's approach to the labelling of deviance can be seen from its application by Jock Young (1971) in his study of 'hippie' marijuana users in Notting Hill in London. Young examined the meanings which coloured the police view of the hippies, how their reaction to the hippies was directed by these meanings, and the effects upon the hippies of this reaction. The police tend to see hippies as dirty, scruffy, idle, scrounging, promiscuous, depraved, unstable, immature, good-for-nothing drug addicts. Young argued that police reaction to the hippies in terms of these meanings can 'fundamentally alter and transform the social world of the marijuana smoker'. In particular, drug-taking, which begins as 'essentially a peripheral activity of hippie groups', becomes a central concern.

Police action against marijuana users tends to unite the latter and make them feel different. As such, they rationalize and accept their difference. In self-defence, they retreat into a small, closed group. They exclude 'straights', not only for reasons of security (secrecy about marijuana use is important to avoid arrest), but also because they develop a deviant self-concept which makes it more difficult to include members of conventional society.

In this context, deviant norms and values develop. Having been defined and treated as outsiders, the hippies tend to express and accentuate this difference. Hair is grown longer, clothes become more and more unconventional. Drug use becomes transformed from a peripheral to a central activity, especially as police react more strongly against the deviance they have helped to create.

Young argued that, because of increased police activity, 'drug taking in itself becomes of greater value to the group as a symbol of their difference, and of their defiance of perceived social injustices'. In this situation a deviant subculture evolves and deviant self-concepts are reinforced, all of which makes it increasingly difficult for the hippies to re-enter conventional society.

Howard Becker – the origins of 'deviant' activity

Howard Becker's approach stressed the importance of the public identification of a deviant. It suggested that a deviant label can lead to further deviance, and can even change individuals' self-concepts so that they come to regard themselves as deviant for the first time.

However, Becker argued that this process is by no means inevitable. Ex-convicts do get jobs and go 'straight'; drug addicts do sometimes give up their habit and re-enter conventional society.

Furthermore, Becker tried to explain how individuals get involved in deviant activities in the first place. He conducted his own study of marijuana smoking in order to explain how the habit could start, and noted that various conditions had to be met if the first experimentation with the drug was to lead to regular use.

As an interactionist, Becker emphasized the importance of the subjective meanings given to experiences. Thus the physical experiences that result from taking drugs are interpreted by the individual as he or she interacts with others. With regard to marijuana, Becker says, 'The user feels dizzy, thirsty; his scalp tingles, he misjudges time and distance.' These effects will not necessarily be defined as pleasurable: other experienced smokers will need to reassure the new user that the effects are indeed desirable, and should be sought again.

Unlike the other theories of crime and deviance that we have looked at in this chapter, Becker examined becoming deviant as a process. Merton (1968) identified a single cause of deviance (anomie) to explain deviance throughout a person's life; Becker stressed that the reasons for deviance might change as time passes and circumstances alter. Thus the reason why someone tries marijuana for the first time could be quite different from the reasons for continuing after being caught and labelled. Becker used what he calls a 'sequential' approach to the explanation of deviance, and at any stage in the sequence it is possible that the deviant will return to conformity.

Edwin M. Lemert – societal reaction – the 'cause' of deviance

Like Becker, Edwin M. Lemert (1972) emphasized the importance of societal reaction – the reaction of others to the deviant – in the explanation of deviance. Lemert distinguished between 'primary' and 'secondary' deviation.

Primary deviation

Primary deviation consists of deviant acts before they are publicly labelled. There are probably any number of causes of primary deviation and it is largely a fruitless exercise to inquire into them for the following reasons:

1 Samples of deviants are based upon those who have been labelled and are therefore unrepresentative. For example, it makes little sense to delve into the backgrounds of convicted criminals to find the cause of their deviance, without examining criminals who have not been caught.

2 Many so-called deviant acts may be so widespread as to be normal in statistical terms. Thus, most males may at some time commit a homosexual act, engage in delinquent activities, and so on.

In fact, Lemert suggested that the only thing that 'known' deviants probably have in common is the fact that they have been publicly labelled as such.

Not only is the search for the causes of primary deviation largely fruitless, but primary deviation itself is relatively unimportant. Lemert argued that it 'has only marginal implications for the status and the psychic structure of the person concerned'. Thus Lemert suggested that the odd deviant act has little effect on individuals' self-concepts and status in the community, and does not prevent them from continuing a normal and conventional life.

Secondary deviation

The important factor in 'producing' deviance is societal reaction – the public identification of the deviant, and the consequences of this for the individual concerned. Secondary deviation is the response of the individual or the group to societal reaction.

Lemert argued that studies of deviance should focus on secondary deviation, which has major consequences for the individual's self-concept, status in the community and future actions. In comparison, primary deviation has little significance. Lemert argued that 'In effect the original "causes" of the deviation recede and give way to the central importance of the disapproving, degradational, and isolating reactions of society.'

Thus, Lemert claimed that societal reaction can be seen as the major 'cause' of deviance. This view, he argued, 'gives a proper place to social control as a dynamic factor or "cause" of deviance'. In this way, Lemert neatly reverses traditional views of deviance: the blame for deviance lies with the agents of social control rather than with the deviant.

Stuttering and societal reaction

Lemert was particularly convincing in his paper entitled *'Stuttering among the North Pacific coastal Indians'*, which examines the relationship between societal reaction and deviance. Previous research had indicated a virtual absence of stuttering among North American Indians: indeed most tribes did not even have a word for this speech irregularity. However, Lemert's investigation of deviance in various tribes living in the North Pacific coastal area of British Columbia revealed evidence of stuttering both before and after contact with whites. In addition, the languages of these tribes contained clearly defined concepts of stutterers and stuttering. It is particularly significant that their inland neighbours, the Bannock and Shoshone, had no words for stuttering, and

research, using a large-scale sample of members of these tribes, found no evidence of actual stuttering.

The North Pacific coastal Indians had a rich ceremonial life, involving singing, dancing and speech-making. Their legends and stories were filled with references to famous orators and outstanding speeches. From an early age, children were initiated into ceremonial life, and parents stressed the importance of a faultless performance. There were rigorous and exacting standards to be met; rituals had to be performed exactly as they should be. If they did not meet these standards, children shamed their parents and suffered the ridicule of their peers. In particular, there was a highly developed sensitivity to any speech defect. Children and parents alike were anxious about any speech irregularity and responded to it with guilt and shame. Lemert concluded that stuttering was actually produced by societal reaction. The concern about, and the reaction to, speech irregularities actually created them. He argued that the culture, both past and present:

> *seems favorable to the development of stuttering, that stutterers were and still are socially penalized, that parents tended to be specifically concerned or anxious about the speech development of their children, that children were anxious about ritual performances involving solo verbal behavior.*
>
> Lemert, 1962

In other American Indian societies, where such concerns were largely absent, stuttering was unknown. Thus Lemert argued that societal reaction, prompted by a concern about particular forms of deviance, can actually produce those forms of deviance.

Erving Goffman – deviance and the institution

In general, interactionists view the various institutions for the treatment of deviance – the prisons, mental hospitals and reform schools – as a further set of links in a long chain of interactions which confirm the label of deviance, both for the individual so labelled and for society as a whole. In a series of trendsetting essays, Erving Goffman examined the treatment of mental patients in institutions (Goffman, 1968). He argued that, although the stated aim of such institutions is to cure and rehabilitate, a close examination of interaction patterns within the institutions reveals a very different picture.

Mortification

Goffman is particularly concerned with how, via a series of interactions, pressure is placed upon inmates to accept the institution's definition of themselves. Upon entry, 'he begins a series of abasements, degradations, humiliations, and profanities of self. His self is systematically, if often unintentionally, mortified.'

This mortification process strips inmates of the various supports which helped to maintain their former self-concepts. Often their clothes (an important symbol of identity) are removed. Their possessions (a further symbol of identity) may be taken away and stored for the duration of their stay. They may be washed, disinfected and their hair may be cut. They may then be issued with a new 'identity kit', such as regulation clothes and toilet articles. Such standardized items tend to remove individuality and define the inmate simply as a member of a uniform mass.

Once the entry phase is over, the inmate settles down to an endless round of mortifying experiences. Each day is strictly timetabled into a set of compulsory activities controlled by the staff. Inmates are allowed little freedom of movement, few opportunities to show initiative or take decisions. Throughout their stay, their actions are scrutinized and assessed by the staff in terms of the rules and standards which they have set. Many of these regulations can be degrading. For example, in some mental hospitals, a spoon is the only utensil provided for the patients to eat with.

Goffman summarized what mental hospitals, in particular, and treatment institutions, in general, 'say' to the inmates about themselves:

> *In the mental hospital, the setting and the house rules press home to the patient that he is, after all, a mental case who has suffered from some kind of social collapse on the outside, having failed in some over-all way, and that here he is of little social weight, being hardly capable of acting like a fully-fledged person at all.*
>
> Goffman, 1968

The effects

Not surprisingly, inmates in treatment institutions become anxious as their day of release approaches. At best, they have not been prepared for life on the outside; at worst, they have accepted the institution's definition of themselves as hopeless, hapless deviants. A small minority become institutionalized: they believe themselves unable to function in the outside world, cling to the security of the institution and go to great lengths to remain inside.

Despite this, Goffman argued that the effects of the institution upon the majority of inmates are not usually lasting. There is a period of temporary disculturation, which means that the former inmate must re-learn some of the basic 'recipes' for living in the

outside world. However, the most lasting and important consequence is the label 'ex-mental patient' or 'ex-convict'. This, rather than the experience of being inside, makes re-entry into conventional society difficult.

Goffman reached the rather pessimistic conclusion that many treatment institutions 'seem to function merely as storage dumps for inmates'. Like societal reaction in general, treatment institutions serve to reinforce rather than reduce deviance. He did, however, stress that some ex-patients were able to successfully fight against the label. They did not see themselves as mentally ill, and could convince others that they had returned to normality. They survive despite the handicap of their stay in the institution.

Goffman's research took place several decades ago, and may not be so applicable today. However, his work helped to produce some of the improvements that have taken place since he was writing.

Deviance and the interactionist perspective – policies, criticisms and evaluation

Labelling theory and social policies

Stephen Jones (1998) has reviewed the policy implications of interactionist and labelling theories. He argues that they have two main implications. First, they suggest that as many types of behaviour as possible should be decriminalized. Second, they imply that, when the law has to intervene, it should try to avoid giving people a self-concept in which they view themselves as criminals. This might involve trying to keep people out of prison or warning people rather than prosecuting them.

Both of these approaches have had some influence. For example, in Britain, *The Independent* newspaper started a campaign in 1997 to legalize cannabis. In countries such as the Netherlands some 'soft' drugs have been effectively legalized.

However, in Britain, the main impact of such thinking has probably been on juvenile justice. Jones suggests that there have been rather inconsistent policies in this area, but there have been some attempts to avoid stigmatizing young offenders. These have included using cautions rather than prosecutions, introducing separate juvenile courts (with the Children and Young Person's Act, 1993) and having anonymity for young offenders.

For adults, the only measure of this nature was contained in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, 1974. This allowed offenders to withhold from employers information about most offences, once a period of time (which depended on the offence) had elapsed. However, as Jones points out, such policies became less popular during the 1990s. In some quarters there has been a renewed emphasis on the public shaming of offenders in order to deter others. Examples of this include writing to men accused of kerb crawling, so that wives have a chance of learning of their offence, and the naming of paedophiles in local newspapers (starting with the *Bournemouth Evening Echo* in 1996). This suggests that, whatever the strengths and weaknesses of labelling theory, its influence declined in the 1990s.

Evaluation of the theory

In terms of sociological theory, in the 1960s the interactionist view of deviance enjoyed wide popularity. For many sociologists, the work of writers such as Becker, Lemert and Goffman became the accepted, orthodox perspective on deviance. Nevertheless, in the 1970s it began to provoke strong criticism. Interactionists rallied to the defence of their work and attempted to show that the criticisms were unjustified.

The definition of deviance

The first line of criticism attacked the interactionist definition of deviance. Becker and Lemert argued that deviance was created by the social groups who defined acts as deviant. Taylor, Walton and Young (1973), however, claimed that this view was mistaken. To them, most deviance can be defined in terms of the actions of those who break social rules, rather than in terms of the reaction of a social audience.

For example, it is true that in some circumstances deliberately killing another person may be regarded as justified: you may be acting in self-defence, or carrying out your duties as a soldier. But, whoever makes up the social audience, a 'premeditated killing for personal gain' will always be regarded as deviant in our society. As Taylor, Walton and Young put it, 'we do not live in a world of free social meanings': in many circumstances there will be little or no freedom of choice in determining whether an act is regarded as deviant or not.

The origins of deviance

A second, related criticism of interactionism is that it fails to explain why individuals commit deviant acts in the first place. Lemert claimed that it was not necessary to explain primary deviance, since it is very common and it has no impact on a person's self-concept. Many sociologists do not accept this claim.

Although most people do commit deviant acts from time to time, different individuals tend to turn to different types of deviance. One person might steal, another might break health and safety legisla-

tion, and a third might smoke marijuana. Clearly it is important to explain why individuals should choose to turn to one form of deviance rather than another.

Furthermore, it is clear that many deviants realize they are breaking the norms of society, whether or not they are caught and labelled. As Taylor, Walton and Young argue:

> *while marijuana smokers might regard their smoking as acceptable, normal behaviour in the company they move in, they are fully aware that this behaviour is regarded as deviant in the wider society.*
>
> Taylor, Walton and Young, 1973

Taylor, Walton and Young therefore suggest that it is necessary to explain why the marijuana smokers decide to take the drug despite their knowledge that it would be condemned by most other members of society.

It can also be argued that it is wrong to assume that primary deviance will have no effect on someone's self-concept. Even if people keep their deviance secret, they know that they are capable of breaking the law, and this could well affect both their opinion of themselves and their later actions.

Labelling as deterministic

The third major criticism of the interactionist perspective is that it is too deterministic. It assumes that, once a person has been labelled, their deviance will inevitably become worse. The labelled person has no option but to get more and more involved in deviant activities. Thus, Ronald Ackers stated:

> *One sometimes gets the impression from reading the literature that people go about minding their own business, and then – 'wham' – bad society comes along and slaps them with a stigmatized label. Forced into the role of deviant the individual has little choice but to be deviant.*
>
> Quoted in Gibbons and Jones, 1975, p. 131

Critics like Ackers are suggesting that individuals might simply choose to be deviant, regardless of whether they have been labelled. Thus, labelling does not cause most terrorists to turn to crime: they are motivated by their political beliefs to break the law.

As Alvin W. Gouldner notes in his critique of Becker (Gouldner, 1975), the interactionists tend to portray the deviant as someone who is passive and controlled by a 'man-on-his-back', rather than as an active 'man-fighting-back'. If individuals can choose to take part in deviance, they may also decide to ignore a label and to give up deviance 'despite' it.

The Swedish sociologist Johannes Knutssen (1977) argues that interactionists have not produced sufficient evidence to show that labelling will amplify deviance. Knutssen feels that labelling theorists have taken the effects of labels to be 'self-evident-truths', without producing the research findings necessary to support their case.

Labelling, laws and law enforcement

The final major criticism is that interactionists fail to explain why some people should be labelled rather than others, and why some activities are against the law and others are not. Why, to use Becker's example, should the police regard a brawl in a low-income neighbourhood as delinquency, and in a wealthy neighbourhood as no more than youthful high spirits? Why should laws against robbery be enforced strictly, when factory legislation is not? Why should it be illegal to smoke marijuana but not cigarettes? The critics of labelling theory claim that it does not provide satisfactory answers to these types of question.

A defence of interactionism

Interactionists have not taken this barrage of criticism lying down. In an article entitled 'Labelling theory reconsidered' (Becker, 1974), Becker attempted to defend himself against these attacks. In 1979, Ken Plummer advanced the claim that labelling theory had been 'misunderstood' and unfairly criticized.

Ken Plummer accepts the criticism that it is largely the nature of the act that defines deviance, while insisting that the reaction of a social audience to a deviant act is still important. He acknowledges that rule-breaking behaviour can be regarded as deviant whether or not it is discovered and labelled. He calls this form of deviance societal deviance. Plummer defines this as behaviour which breaks the laws of society, or which is commonly sensed by most of society's members to be deviant. For example, homosexuality is commonly regarded as deviant, and so by this definition a secret homosexual would be a deviant. Nevertheless, Plummer suggests that it is never certain whether a particular act or individual will be regarded as deviant by a social audience.

Situational deviance consists of those acts which others judge to be deviant, given the context in which they take place. A member of a rugby team who drinks heavily might be regarded as 'one of the lads', while in different situations others who actually drink less might be seen as alcoholics. Plummer therefore accepts that deviance depends partly on what you do, but, he reminds the critics, it also depends on the social reaction.

The second criticism – that interactionists ignore the initial causes of deviance – is dismissed by Plummer. He points out that, in practice, interactionists have devoted considerable attention to explaining

primary deviance. For example, Becker tries to explain how it is possible to get involved in marijuana smoking. Some versions of labelling theory start their account of deviance at the point when labelling first occurs, but many interactionists deal with the earlier stages of becoming deviant. Becker himself claimed that he regretted calling his approach 'labelling theory'; he preferred it to be seen as an interactionist approach which did not concentrate exclusively on labels.

Plummer finds it even more difficult to accept that interactionist theories of deviance are deterministic. He points out that the whole interactionist perspective places great stress on the choices open to individuals as they interpret what happens around them and decide how to respond. It is quite different from a positivist approach which sees people's behaviour as directed by external forces beyond their control. As Plummer puts it:

> *To take a theory that is sensitive to self, consciousness and intentionality and render it as a new determinism of societal reaction could only be possible if the theory were totally misunderstood in the first place.*
>
> Plummer, 1979

He notes that Goffman's mental patients provide an excellent example of labelled deviants who fight against and often overcome the labels that are thrust on them against their will (see pp. 376–7 for further details). Becker saw the deviant as passing through a series of stages in his or her deviant career. At no stage does he say that it is inevitable that a person will continue to be a deviant – indeed Becker stresses that a deviant career could be abandoned at any stage.

The final major criticism of labelling theory is also rejected by Plummer. He believes that the labelling perspective opened up the whole question of who had the power to make society's rules and apply them to particular individuals. It raised for the first time the very issues that critics claimed it ignored. Nevertheless, it can be argued that interactionists do not satisfactorily answer these questions. Because of their emphasis on social action, they are not particularly concerned with the distribution of power in society as a whole.

Whatever the limitations of the interactionist perspective on deviance, it has made an important contribution to this area of sociology. It has shown that the definition of deviance is not a simple process. It challenges the view of the deviant as an abnormal, pathological individual. It questions positivistic and deterministic theories of crime. Finally, it raises the issue of who has the power to label acts and individuals as deviant. As such, it had a considerable influence even on some later, radical, sociologists who rejected the interactionist approach to deviance. Furthermore, it was a major source of inspiration for more recent theories, such as new left realism (see pp. 391–9) which includes the response to deviant and criminal behaviour as an important component of its theory.

Deviance – a phenomenological perspective

Aaron V. Cicourel – the negotiation of justice

The phenomenological approach to deviance has some similarities to the interactionist perspective. Both phenomenology and interactionism:

1. emphasize the importance of the way that the law is enforced;
2. are concerned with the process of labelling individuals as deviant;
3. concentrate on studying the subjective states of individuals rather than the structure of society as a whole.

However, interactionists and phenomenologists approach the study of deviance in different ways. Phenomenologists do not claim to produce causal explanations; they seek to understand what a phenomenon is. Thus, phenomenologists attempt to discover what deviance is by examining the way in which some acts and individuals come to be defined or labelled as deviant. Unlike interactionists, they stop short of claiming that labelling causes people to commit more deviant acts.

Ethnomethodology is an American sociological perspective which attempts to apply the principles of phenomenology to the study of society. The work of the American ethnomethodologist Aaron V. Cicourel on the treatment of delinquency in two Californian cities provides a good example of how this perspective has been applied to the study of deviance (Cicourel, 1976).

Defining delinquency

The process of defining a young person as a delinquent is not simple, clearcut and unproblematic. It is complex, involving a series of interactions based

on sets of meanings held by the participants. These meanings can be modified during the interaction, so each stage in the process is negotiable.

The first stage is the decision by the police to stop and interrogate an individual. This decision is based on meanings held by the police of what is 'suspicious', 'strange', 'unusual' and 'wrong'. Such meanings are related to particular geographical areas. Inner-city, low-income areas are seen as 'bad areas' with a high crime rate; consequently behaviour in such areas is more likely to be viewed as suspicious. Interrogation need not lead to arrest. The process is negotiable but depends largely on the picture held by the police of the 'typical delinquent'. If the appearance, language and demeanour of the young person fit this picture, she or he is more likely to be arrested.

Once arrested, the young person is handed over to a juvenile officer (probation officer) who also has a picture of the 'typical delinquent'. If the suspect's background corresponds to this picture, she or he is more likely to be charged with an offence. Factors assumed to be associated with delinquency include 'coming from broken homes, exhibiting "bad attitudes" toward authority, poor school performance, ethnic group membership, low-income families and the like'.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Cicourel found a close relationship between social class and delinquency. Most young people convicted of offences had fathers who were manual workers. On a seven-class occupational scale, Cicourel found that one-third came from class 7.

Cicourel explained the preponderance of working-class delinquents by reference to the meanings held by the police and juvenile officers, and the interactions between them and the juveniles. When middle-class juveniles were arrested, there was less likelihood of them being charged with an offence: their background did not fit the standard picture of the delinquent. Their parents were better able to negotiate successfully on their behalf. Middle-class parents can present themselves as respectable and reasonable people from a nice neighbourhood, who look forward to a rosy future for their child. They promise cooperation with the juvenile officers, assuring them that their son or daughter is suitably remorseful.

As a result, the middle-class juvenile is often defined as ill rather than criminal, as accidentally straying from the path of righteousness rather than committed to wrongdoing, as cooperative rather than recalcitrant, as having a real chance of reforming rather than being a 'born loser'. He or she is typically 'counselled, warned and released'. Thus, in Cicourel's words, 'what ends up being called justice is negotiable'.

Cicourel based his research on two Californian cities, each with a population of around 100,000. The socio-economic characteristics of the two populations were similar. In terms of structural theories, the numbers of delinquents produced by the pressures of the social structure should be similar in each city. However, Cicourel found a significant difference in the numbers of delinquents arrested and charged. He argues that this difference can only be accounted for by the size, organization, policies and practices of the juvenile and police bureaus.

For example, the city with the highest rate of delinquency employed more juvenile officers and kept more detailed records on offenders. In the second city, the delinquency rate fluctuated sharply. Cicourel argues that in this city the response of the police to delinquency 'tends to be quite variable depending on publicity given to the case by the local paper, or the pressure generated by the mayor or chief or Captain of Detectives'. Thus, societal reaction can be seen to directly affect the rate of delinquency.

Cicourel argues that delinquents are produced by the agencies of social control. Certain individuals are selected, processed and labelled as deviant. Justice is the result of negotiation in the interaction process. The production of delinquents is also dependent on the ways in which police and juvenile bureaus are organized, their policies, and the pressures that are brought to bear on them from local media and politicians.

In view of these observations, Cicourel questions structural and subcultural theories of deviance which see deviance as a product of pressure from the social structure. He concludes:

> *The study challenges the conventional view which assumes 'delinquents' are 'natural' social types distributed in some ordered fashion and produced by a set of abstract 'pressures' from the 'social structures'.*
>
> Cicourel, 1976

Criticisms of Cicourel

Cicourel's study provides some useful insights into juvenile justice in the USA. He attempts to show how the meanings held by the various officials lead to some individuals being defined as delinquent.

However, critics such as Taylor, Walton and Young (1973) argue that he fails to explain how these meanings originate. He fails to show why, for instance, the police see the 'typical delinquent' as coming from a low-income family. In common with other phenomenologists and ethnomethodologists, he does not explain who has power in society, and how the possession of power might influence the definition of crime and deviance.

The same cannot be said of Marxists, whose theories on deviance we will now examine.

Gordon argues that the selective enforcement of the law serves to maintain ruling-class power and to reinforce ruling-class ideology. Further arguments in support of this view can be added to those he outlines:

1 The selective application of the law gives the impression that criminals are mainly located in the working class. This serves to divert attention from ruling-class crime.
2 It can also serve to divert the attention of members of the subject class from their exploitation and oppression.
3 It directs a part of the subject class's frustration and hostility (produced by this situation of exploitation) on to the criminals within their own class. The muggers, murderers and thieves can provide a scapegoat for the frustrations of the alienated masses.
4 This provides a safety valve, releasing aggression which might otherwise be directed against the ruling class.
5 It also serves to divide the subject class, particularly in low-income areas, where there is a tendency for people to see their enemies as the criminals within their own class.

Finally, what effect does selective law enforcement have upon crime itself? From his study of Seattle, William Chambliss reaches the following conclusion. Law enforcement agencies are:

> *not organized to reduce crime or to enforce public morality. They are organized rather to manage crime by cooperating with the most criminal groups and enforcing laws against those whose crimes are minimal. By cooperating with criminal groups law enforcement essentially produces more crime.*
>
> Chambliss, 1978

Criticisms of conventional Marxism

Marxist theories have come in for heavy criticism from a number of quarters:

1 Feminist sociologists have argued that Marxist theories put undue emphasis upon class inequality. From their point of view, Marxist theories ignore the role of patriarchy in influencing the way the criminal justice system operates. Marxists have also been accused of neglecting the importance of racism in the enforcement of laws.
2 Marxists have been criticized for assuming that a communist system could eradicate crime. Before the end of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries, crime had not been eradicated.
3 Stephen Jones (1998) points out that capitalism does not always produce high crime rates. For example, in Switzerland, which has long embraced a capitalist system, crime rates are very low.
4 Some Marxists have a rather simplistic view of the distribution of power in capitalist societies. While the group which Marxists define as a ruling class might have a disproportionate amount of power, it may be misleading to see them as monopolizing power. A range of non-Marxist theories suggest that the distribution of power is more complex than Marxists tend to believe (see Chapter 9). Stephen Jones points out that the activities of capitalists are sometimes criminalized. He gives the example of insider trading. If it were not illegal, capitalists would be free to make substantial profits out of their knowledge about proposed mergers and takeovers. The illegality of such activity suggests that capitalists cannot always get the laws they want.
5 'Left realists' tend to see Marxist theories as putting undue emphasis on corporate crime, at the expense of other types of crime. Left realists argue that crimes such as burglary, robbery and other violent crimes cause greater harm than Marxist theories seem to imply. The victims of such crimes are usually working-class, and the consequences can be devastating for them. To left realists, Marxism offers a rather one-sided view of crime and, in doing so, offers no way of dealing with the types of crimes which are of most concern to most members of the population. (We will discuss these views in more detail on pp. 391–9.)
6 Postmodern criminology rejects Marxist criminology as a 'metanarrative' which is neither believable nor defensible. These views will be examined later in the chapter (see pp. 423–7).

Conventional Marxist approaches have become rather unfashionable in sociology and criminology. Nevertheless, they have influenced a range of other approaches to the sociology of crime and deviance. Some of these will be examined in the next section.

There are a number of critical perspectives that have developed since the heyday of conventional Marxism. Some of these have drawn their inspiration in large measure from Marxism, despite using elements from other theories. These can be referred to as neo-Marxist approaches. Others owe rather less to Marxism and are perhaps better defined as radical theories of crime and deviance. Some feminist approaches (examined on p. 424) can also be seen as radical theories.

Deviance – neo-Marxist and radical perspectives

Neo-Marxism

Neo-Marxist sociologists of crime and deviance accept that society is characterized by competing groups with conflicting interests. Furthermore, they are all critical of existing capitalist societies, and they share a concern about the unequal distribution of power and wealth within such societies. However, none accept that there is a simple and straightforward relationship between the infrastructure of society and deviance. Although most of these sociologists (including Taylor, Walton and Young, Paul Gilroy, and Stuart Hall) have been strongly influenced by Marxism, their work differs in important respects from that of the Marxists we have examined so far. It can therefore be termed a neo-Marxist approach to deviance.

Ian Taylor, Paul Walton and Jock Young – *The New Criminology*

In 1973, Taylor, Walton and Young published *The New Criminology*. It was intended to provide a radical alternative to existing theories of crime and deviance. In some respects, Taylor, Walton and Young's views are similar to those of the Marxist writers who have just been examined:

1. They accept that the key to understanding crime lies in the 'material basis of society'. Like Marx, they see the economy as the most important part of any society.
2. They believe that capitalist societies are characterized by inequalities in wealth and power between individuals and that these inequalities lie at the root of crime.
3. They support a radical transformation of society: indeed, they suggest that sociological theories of crime are of little use unless they contribute in a practical way to the 'liberation of individuals from living under capitalism'.

However, in important respects they differ from more conventional Marxist approaches. As such, we can see *The New Criminology* as a neo-Marxist perspective on crime.

Crime, freedom and political action

Much of Taylor, Walton and Young's work is concerned with criticizing existing theories of crime. Marx himself is judged by them to have produced inadequate explanations of crime. He is criticized for coming close to providing an economically deterministic theory. Although they believe that economic determinism is untypical of Marx's work in general, they claim that, when he tried to explain crime, he saw the criminal as driven to crime by the poverty into which capitalism forced some sections of the population.

Taylor, Walton and Young insist that criminals choose to break the law. They reject all theories that see human behaviour as directed by external forces. They see the individual turning to crime 'as the meaningful attempt by the actor to construct and develop his own self-conception'.

The New Criminology denies that crime is caused by biology, by anomie, by being a member of a subculture, by living in areas of social disorganization, by labelling, or by poverty. It stresses that crimes are often deliberate and conscious acts with political motives. Thus the Women's Liberation Movement, the Black Power Movement and the Gay Liberation Front are all examples of 'people-fighting-back' against the injustices of capitalism.

Furthermore, many crimes against property involve the redistribution of wealth: if a poor resident of an inner-city area steals from a rich person, the former is helping to change society. Deviants are not just the passive victims of capitalism: they are actively struggling to alter capitalism.

Like conventional Marxists, Taylor, Walton and Young wish to see the overthrow of capitalism and its replacement with a different type of society. Unlike conventional Marxists, they refer to the type of society they wish to see as 'socialist' rather than 'communist'. They place greater emphasis than many Marxists on freedom in any future society. They wish to see a society in which groups which are now seen as deviant are tolerated. They believe that hippies, ethnic minorities, homosexuals, and perhaps even drug users, should simply be accepted in an ideal society, and not turned into criminals by persecution.

In capitalist society, people have severe restrictions placed upon their behaviour. Taylor, Walton and Young urge support and sympathy for groups who struggle to escape from the chains with which capitalism limits their freedom. Indeed, they conclude *The New Criminology* by saying that the purpose of criminology should be to create societies in which human diversity is tolerated without being seen as criminal.

A 'fully social theory of deviance'

In the final chapter of *The New Criminology*, Taylor, Walton and Young attempt to outline what they

believe would be a fully social theory of deviance. From their critical examination of earlier theories they conclude that deviance needs to be explained from a number of angles simultaneously. They claim that other writers, including Marxists, have tended to give incomplete, or one-sided explanations of crime. To Taylor, Walton and Young, a complete theory needs to examine both the way society as a whole is organized, and the way that individuals decide to carry out criminal acts. They identify seven aspects of crime and deviance which they believe should be studied:

1 The criminologist first needs to understand the way in which wealth and power are distributed in society.
2 He or she must consider the particular circumstances surrounding the decision of an individual to commit an act of deviance.
3 It is necessary to consider the deviant act itself, in order to discover its meaning for the person concerned. Was the individual, for example, showing contempt for the material values of capitalism by taking drugs? Was he or she 'kicking back' at society through an act of vandalism?
4 Taylor, Walton and Young propose that the criminologist should consider in what ways, and for what reasons, other members of society react to the deviance. How do the police or members of the deviant's family respond to the discovery of the deviance?
5 The reaction then needs to be explained in terms of the social structure. This means that the researcher should attempt to discover who has the power in society to make the rules, and explain why some deviant acts are treated much more severely than others.
6 Taylor, Walton and Young then turn to labelling theory. They accept that it is necessary to study the effects of deviant labels. However, they emphasize that labelling may have a variety of effects. The amplification of deviance is only one possible outcome. Deviants may not even accept that the labels are justified: they might see their actions as morally correct and ignore the label as far as possible.
7 Finally, Taylor, Walton and Young say that the relationship between these different aspects of deviance should be studied, so that they fuse together into a complete theory.

Evaluation of *The New Criminology*

The New Criminology has attracted criticism from a number of quarters:

1 Feminist sociologists have criticized it for concentrating on male crimes and ignoring gender as a factor in criminality.
2 Some 'new left realist' criminologists have accused *The New Criminology* of neglecting the impact of crime on the victims, of romanticizing working-class criminals (who in reality largely prey on poor people rather than stealing from the rich), and of failing to take street crimes seriously (see pp. 391–9 for a discussion of left realism).

In 1998, 25 years after *The New Criminology* was published, Paul Walton and Jock Young edited and contributed to a new book evaluating the impact of their earlier work. In general, the original authors defended their earlier work, although they admitted that some criticisms were justified.

Paul Walton argues that the main achievement of *The New Criminology* was to 'deconstruct previous theories and reveal their self-seeking or selfless character in an attempt to construct the elements of a social theory of deviance' (Walton, 1998). According to Walton, the central aim of *The New Criminology* was an attempt to undermine 'correctionalism' – that is, the belief that the sociology of crime and deviance should be used to try to get rid of deviant or criminal behaviour. Walton believes that such a desire merely reflects ideological bias. People want to get rid of behaviour which their own ideology says is wrong.

To Walton, many traditional theories of crime 'acted as little more than an academic justification for existing discriminatory practices in the penal and criminal justice system'. *The New Criminology* advocated greater tolerance of a wider variety of behaviour. Although Walton believes that traditional forms of correctionalist criminology have survived, *The New Criminology* did succeed in opening up a new, radical approach to criminology. He accepts that some of the newer approaches in criminology – such as feminism, left realism and postmodernism – have been somewhat critical of *The New Criminology* (see pp. 391–9 and 423–7). Furthermore, he accepts some of their criticism, such as the feminist view that *The New Criminology* neglected gender. However, he argues that even these more recent approaches were all built on foundations laid by *The New Criminology*. Walton says that 'realist criminology, feminist criminology and postmodern criminology are all committed to creating a more just and equitable society'. In that respect they are a continuation of the traditions of *The New Criminology*.

Jock Young is now a leading proponent of left realist criminology, which has been critical of *The New Criminology*. However, like Walton, he defends its role in attacking conventional theories of crime and deviance. He stresses that *The New Criminology* emphasized the importance of explaining both the actions of offenders and the workings of the criminal justice system. It did not, as some critics seem to believe, put sole emphasis on the way in which the state defines some people's behaviour as criminal and

ignores the crimes of others. In this respect he sees *The New Criminology* as a precursor to his later approach, new left realism (see pp. 391–9).

Young also believes that, in some respects, *The New Criminology* anticipated some of the arguments of postmodern sociology (see pp. 423–7). For example, it encouraged the acceptance of diversity, it acknowledged that crime and deviance took a variety of forms, which could not be explained by one overarching theory, and it recognized the creativity and originality of those who created different subcultures.

Like Walton, then, Young does not see *The New Criminology* as perfect, but he does see it as an advance on previous theories. Certainly it had some influence on the work of other sociologists. However, Taylor, Walton and Young had only sketched the main features of a theoretical approach to explaining crime and deviance. It was left to other sociologists to try to put their 'fully social theory of deviance' into practice.

Policing the Crisis – mugging, the state, and law and order

Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Brian Roberts have attempted to provide a detailed explanation of the crime of 'mugging' in Britain (Hall et al., 1979). Like Taylor, Walton and Young, their work is influenced by a Marxist perspective, yet differs from traditional Marxist views. *Policing the Crisis* comes close to providing what Taylor, Walton and Young called a 'fully social theory of deviance'. The wide-ranging argument presented in the book deals with the origins and nature of mugging, the social reaction to the crime, and the distribution of power in society as a whole. The only aspect of crime that is dealt with in less detail is the effect of labelling on the deviants themselves.

Hall *et al.* differ from Taylor, Walton and Young in two important ways:

1. They do not share their belief that most crimes are political acts, especially since most of the victims of street crime are 'people whose class position is hardly distinguishable from that of the criminals'. 'Muggers' rarely choose the rich as victims – rather they tend to rob from individuals who share their own disadvantaged position in society.
2. They are perhaps more heavily influenced by the work of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci than directly by the work of Marx himself. The influence of Gramsci will become increasingly apparent as this section develops.

'Mugging', the media and moral panic

In the 13 months between August 1972 and August 1973, 60 events were reported as 'muggings' in the national daily papers. Dramatic individual cases of such crimes were highlighted in the media. On 15 August 1972, Arthur Hills was stabbed to death near Waterloo Station in London. For the first time, a specific crime in Britain was labelled a 'mugging' in the press. On 5 November 1972, Robert Keenan was attacked by three youths in Birmingham. He was knocked to the ground, and had some keys, five cigarettes and 30p stolen. Two hours later, the youths returned to where he still lay, and they viciously kicked him and hit him with a brick.

It was stories such as these which highlighted an apparently new and frightening type of crime in Britain. Judges, politicians and the police lined up with the media in stressing the threat that this crime posed to society. Many commentators believed that the streets of Britain would soon become as dangerous as those of New York or Chicago. The Home Secretary in the House of Commons quoted an alarming figure of a 129 per cent increase in muggings in London in the previous four years.

Hall *et al.* argue that there was a 'moral panic' about crime. (A moral panic is an exaggerated outburst of public concern over the morality and behaviour of a group in society.) They try to explain why there should be such a strong reaction to, and widespread fear of, mugging. They reject the view that the panic was an inevitable and understandable reaction to a new and rapidly increasing form of violence. As far back as the nineteenth century, footpads and garrotters (who half-strangled their victims before robbing them) had committed violent street crimes similar to those of the modern mugger. Violent robberies were not, therefore, a new crime at all – indeed, as recently as 1968, an MP had been kicked and robbed in the street without the crime being labelled a 'mugging'.

Hall and his colleagues note that there is no legal crime called 'mugging'. Since legally there is no such crime, it was not possible for the Home Secretary to accurately measure its extent. They could find no basis in the criminal statistics for his figure of a 129 per cent rise over four years. From their own examination of the statistics there was no evidence that violent street crime was rising particularly fast in the period leading up to the panic. Using the nearest legal category to 'mugging' – robbery, or assault with intent to rob – the official statistics showed an annual rise of an average of 33.4 per cent between 1955 and 1965, but only a 14 per cent average annual increase from 1965 to 1972. This type of crime was growing more slowly at the time the panic took place than it had done in the previous decade.

For these reasons Hall *et al.* could not accept that the supposed novelty or rate of increase of the crime explained the moral panic over it. They argued that

both 'mugging' and the moral panic could only be explained in the context of the problems that were faced by British capitalism at the start of the 1970s.

Capitalism, crisis and crime

Economic problems produced part of the 'crisis'. Many Marxists believe that capitalism faces deeper and deeper crises as time passes. Marx believed that only labour power produced wealth. In capitalist societies labour was exploited because the bourgeoisie kept a proportion of the wealth created by the workforce in the form of profit or surplus value. In order to compete with other manufacturers, capitalists needed to invest in new and more efficient machinery. However, as this mechanization took place, less and less labour power would be needed to manufacture the same quantity of goods. Since surplus value was only created through labour power, the dwindling workforce needed to be increasingly exploited if profits were to be maintained. Eventually this problem would lead to a declining rate of profit, rising unemployment and falling wages. According to Hall et al., such a crisis hit Britain at the time of the mugging panic.

The crisis of British society, however, went beyond economic problems. It was also a crisis of 'hegemony', a term first used by Antonio Gramsci. Hegemony is the political leadership and ideological domination of society. (We discuss Gramsci and hegemony in more detail in Chapter 9.) According to Gramsci, the state tends to be dominated by parts of the ruling class. They attempt to win support for their policies and ideas from other groups in society. They try to persuade the working class that the authority of the state is being exercised fairly and justly in the interests of all. A crisis in hegemony takes place when the authority of the state and the ruling class is challenged.

In 1970–2 the British state faced both an economic crisis and a crisis of hegemony. From 1945 until about 1968 there had been what Hall *et al.* call an inter-class truce: there was little conflict between the ruling and subject class. Full employment, rising living standards, and the expansion of the welfare state secured support for the state and acceptance of its authority by the working class. As unemployment rose and living standards ceased to rise rapidly, the basis of the inter-class truce was undermined. It became more difficult for the ruling class to govern by consent.

Hall *et al.* provide a number of examples of the challenge to the authority – to the hegemony – of the state:

1 Northern Ireland degenerated into open warfare.
2 There was a growth in student militancy and increased activity from the Black Power movement.
3 The unions posed perhaps the biggest single threat: in 1972 there were more workdays lost because of strikes than in any year since 1919. The miners were able to win a large pay-rise by using flying pickets, which prevented coal reaching key industries and power stations.

Since the government was no longer able to govern by consent, it turned to the use of force to control the crisis. It was in this context that street crime became an issue. Mugging was presented as a key element in a breakdown of law and order. Violence was portrayed as a threat to the stability of society, and it was the black mugger who was to symbolize the threat of violence.

In this way the public could be persuaded that society's problems were caused by 'immigrants' rather than the faults of the capitalist system. The working class was effectively divided on racial grounds, since the white working class was encouraged to direct its frustrations towards the black working class.

Crisis and the control of crime

The government was also able to resort to the use of the law and direct force to suppress the groups that were challenging them. Force could be justified because of the general threat of violence. Special sections of the police began to take action against the 'mugger'. The British Transport Police was particularly concerned with this crime. In February 1972, six months before the 'mugging' panic began, it set up a special squad to deal with violent crime on the London Underground. Hall *et al.* claim that the police in general, and this special squad in particular, created much of the 'mugging' that was later to appear in the official statistics. Following the argument of interactionists, they suggest that the police amplified, or made worse, the deviance they were supposed to be controlling.

They give examples of police pouncing unannounced on black youths of whom they were suspicious. Often this would provoke a violent reaction in self-defence by the youths, who would then be arrested and tried for crimes of violence. Many of the 'muggers' who were convicted following incidents like these had only police evidence used against them at trial. 'Victims' of their crimes were not produced because, Hall *et al.* imply, there were no victims in some cases. The societal reaction to the threat of violence led to the labelling of large numbers of young blacks as deviants. Labelling helped to produce the figures that appeared to show rising levels of black crime, which in turn justified stronger police measures.

Hall *et al.* do not claim that the reactions to crime, 'mugging', and other 'violence' were the result of a conspiracy by the ruling class. The police, the

government, the courts and the media did not consciously plan to create a moral panic about street crime; the panic developed as they reacted to changing circumstances.

Neither were the media directly manipulated by the ruling class or the government: different newspapers included different stories, and reported 'mugging' in different ways. Nevertheless, there was a limited range of approaches to the issue in the press. Most stories were based on police statements or court cases, or were concerned with the general problem of the 'war' against crime. Statements by the police, judges and politicians were therefore important sources of material for the press. Consequently the newspapers tended to define the problem of 'mugging' in similar ways to their sources: criminal violence was seen as senseless and meaningless by most of the press. It was linked to other threats to society, such as strikes, and was seen as a crime which needed to be stamped out as quickly as possible.

A number of judges who stressed the need for deterrent sentences to turn back the tide of crime were quoted directly. Assistant Commissioner Woods of the Police Federation was widely quoted when he said that 'mugging' was a 'reflection of the present violent society', and declared that 'we are not going to let the thugs win'.

However, if the crisis in Britain produced the conditions in which a moral panic was likely, the media were largely responsible for 'orchestrating public opinion', and directing its attention and anger against the black mugger.

Black crime

Although *Policing the Crisis* concentrates on the moral panic about crime, Hall *et al.* also make some attempt to explain black criminality. Many immigrants to Britain from the Commonwealth arrived in the 1950s and early 1960s. They were actively encouraged to come to the country during a period of full employment and labour shortage. London Transport, for example, recruited large numbers of West Indians to fill low-paid jobs which might otherwise have remained vacant.

The recession in the early 1970s hit immigrant groups hard. They became a 'surplus labour force', many of whom were not required for employment. Thus, Hall *et al.* estimate that, at the time in question, black unemployment was twice the national average, and for school leavers it was four times higher than normal. Those who remained in employment often had to do menial and low-paid jobs, which some referred to as 'white man's shit work'. Some opted out of the employment market altogether. They turned to 'hustling' for money, using petty street crime, casual drugs dealing, and prostitution to earn a living. Hall *et al.* do not find it surprising that some of this surplus labour force became criminals. They claim:

> *a fraction of the black labouring class is engaged in the traditional activity of the wageless and the workless: doing nothing, filling out time, trying to survive. Against this background is it not too much to say that the question 'Why do they turn to crime?' is a practical obscenity?*
>
> Hall *et al.*, 1979

From this point of view, street crime is seen as a survival strategy employed by an unwanted reserve army of labour.

Policing the Crisis – an evaluation

Policing the Crisis provides a sophisticated analysis of the crime of 'mugging' from a neo-Marxist perspective:

1. It suggests that the moral panic about mugging was not a rational response to a new and rapidly growing crime, but a response to the economic crisis and the crisis of hegemony for the British state.
2. The societal reaction to this crime can only be understood as part of the shift by the dominant class from ruling the country by consent, towards ruling it by force.
3. One result of the increasingly repressive policies and the greater use of the law, was the labelling of black 'muggers', and the amplification of the crime.
4. The media focused public concern about violence on to black 'immigrants', and in doing so disguised the real reasons for the crisis.
5. The rise in black criminality was largely the result of police labelling, but some West Indians were forced into crime in order to survive, as unemployment left them little alternative.

Given the range of issues that this study deals with, it is not surprising that other sociologists have raised criticisms. David Downes and Paul Rock (1988) have identified two major weaknesses:

1. They argue that the book contradicts itself. It appears to claim simultaneously that black street crime was not rising quickly, that it was being amplified by police labelling, and that it was bound to rise as a result of unemployment. According to this criticism, Hall *et al.* are trying to have their cake and eat it. They change their view on whether these crimes were rising or not, according to how it fits their argument.
2. Downes and Rock believe that *Policing the Crisis* fails to show that the moral panic over 'mugging' was caused by a crisis of British capitalism. They point out that there have been numerous moral panics – for example, about the violence of teddy boys, and mods and rockers, and in 1979-80 about widespread strikes in the 'winter of discontent'.

Downes and Rock do not believe that each of these moral panics could be explained by a corresponding crisis in the British economy and society.

Jock Young (1993) has also been critical of *Policing the Crisis*. Young argues that the study provided no evidence that the public, as opposed to the media, were panicking about 'mugging', nor did it show that the public identified this crime with blacks. However, he also argues that it would have been quite rational if the public were concerned about 'mugging' and other types of street crime. As a new left realist, he claims that such crimes have been increasing and are a serious problem.

Having reviewed various Marxist and neo-Marxist perspectives on crime and deviance, we will now look at a perspective that developed more recently – that of left realism.

Left realism

Since the early 1980s, a number of sociologists have developed a perspective on crime and deviance usually referred to as left realism. Amongst the most prominent supporters of this perspective are Jock Young, John Lea, Roger Matthews and Richard Kinsey. Left realism originated in Britain but has begun to influence criminologists in other parts of the world, including Canada and Australia. Left realist criminologists are critical of perspectives which see longer sentences and more prisons as the solution to crime, but they also oppose the views of what they term 'left idealists'. In their view, this includes a variety of Marxists, neo-Marxists and radical feminists.

Politically, left realists tend to see their approach as being close to the position of the British Labour Party. Jock Young and John Lea (Lea and Young, 1984) describe themselves as 'socialists' and support the reform of society rather than the revolutionary change advocated by some Marxists. They argue that right-wing politicians in industrial capitalist societies have been particularly successful in presenting themselves as the parties representing the forces of law and order. Left idealists have not provided alternative policies on law and order, since they have suggested that social justice cannot be achieved without a radical transformation of society. Left realists have tried to counter the popularity of right-wing law-and-order policies by presenting what they see as realistic proposals for change, within the framework of existing societies, which address the concerns of ordinary people.

In Young's view, you have to be 'tough on crime' (Young, 1997), but this does not just mean being tough on criminals. It also means being tough in trying to change the social factors which have a long-term impact on crime rates, and being tough in trying to ensure that the criminal justice system really does promote social justice. Furthermore, you have to be tough on theories of crime. To Young, simplistic theories should be regarded with suspicion. The social world is complicated and constantly changing. What works now may not work in the future. What works for one type of crime, may not work for another. Left realists therefore set out to produce an overall theory which is sufficiently flexible to be able to deal with different aspects of crime and justice at different times and places.

The problem of crime

One of the basic tenets of left realism is that crimes other than white-collar crimes are a serious problem and they need to be explained and tackled. Left realists counter a number of arguments which criminologists have advanced to suggest that such crimes are not serious:

1. Jock Young (1993) argues that there has been a real and significant increase in street crime since the Second World War. According to this view, criminology has undergone an aetiological crisis (or crisis of explanation), resulting from the rapid increase in officially recorded street crimes in most democratic industrial societies. In Britain, the USA and most Western European countries, crime rates recorded by the police have risen alarmingly.

   Some sociologists have tried to deny that the apparent increase is real by pointing to the unreliable nature of criminal statistics. From this point of view, increased reporting of crime and changes in police recording of crime might account for the figures. However, Young believes that the rises have been so great that changes in reporting and recording cannot account for all of the increase. He points to evidence from the *British Crime Survey* (see pp. 366–8 for details) which shows that at least part of the rising tide of crime is real. There is more reporting of crimes, but there are also more victims.
2. Some sociologists have advanced the view that the chances of being the victim of street crime are minimal. Lea and Young (1984) point out that, while the average chances of being a victim are small,

particular groups face high risks. It is not the rich who are the usual targets of muggers or thieves, but the poor, the deprived, ethnic minorities or inner-city residents. For example, Lea and Young calculate that unskilled workers are twice as likely to be burgled as other workers. In some of the poorer areas of London, the chances of being mugged might be four times the average for the city as a whole. In the USA, figures indicate that black men and women are more likely to be murdered than to die in a road accident. Young (1997) has calculated that in the mid-1990s black Americans were 8.6 times as likely to be murdered as white Americans. It is the deprived groups in society who are most likely to be harmed by these crimes; it is also they who suffer most if they are the victims of some of these offences. Those with low incomes suffer more if they are robbed or burgled: crime adds to and compounds the other problems that they face.

3 Crime is widely perceived as a serious problem in urban areas and this perception has important consequences. Left realists have carried out a considerable number of victimization studies, examining such issues as the extent of crime and attitudes towards crime. These studies have been conducted in, amongst other places, Merseyside, Islington, Hammersmith and Fulham. In the *Second Islington Crime Survey*, no less than 80.5 per cent of those surveyed saw crime as a problem affecting their lives. Fear of crime was widespread. Some 35 per cent sometimes felt unsafe in their own homes. Many people altered their behaviour to avoid becoming victims of crime. This was particularly true of women. The authors said, 'women are not only less likely to go out after dark, but also stay in more than men because of fear of crime'.

4 Lea and Young (1984) attack the idea that offenders can sometimes be seen as promoting justice. For example, they attack the image of the criminal presented in parts of *The New Criminology* as a type of modern-day Robin Hood. They deny that muggers can be seen as stealing from the rich and redistributing income to the poor. As we saw earlier, most of the victims of crimes such as burglary and robbery are themselves poor.

5 Left realists do not deny the importance of white-collar and corporate crime. Recent victimization studies carried out by left realists have started including questions on such crimes, and they accept that they are commonplace and serious. However, left realists do argue that left idealist criminologists have concentrated on these types of crime too much and to the exclusion of other crimes.

6 Left realists also acknowledge the importance of other crimes which tend to be emphasized by left-wing and feminist criminologists, and perhaps neglected by the police. Thus they have also included questions in victim studies on crimes such as sexual assaults and sexual harassment, racially motivated attacks, and domestic violence. They do, though, accuse left idealists of holding inconsistent views about crime. Lea and Young say:

> *There is the story of a seminar in North London where one week the students, reeling from the impact of a description of the deplorable results of imprisonment on inmates, decide to abolish prisons. But then next week, after being, quite correctly, informed by a speaker from the Women's Movement of the viciousness of many anti-female offences, decided to rebuild them.*
>
> Lea and Young, 1984

Left realists claim to have redressed the balance by taking all types of crime equally seriously.

Ethnicity and crime

As well as attacking left idealists for denying the importance of street crimes, left realists also attack them for denying that certain types of crime are more common amongst ethnic minorities. Just as they believe that the official statistics on the rise in crime reflect a real change, they also believe that statistics on the ethnic background of offenders are not entirely fabricated.

Paul Gilroy (1983) is a particular target of Lea and Young. Gilroy argued that the disproportionate number of black males convicted of crimes in Britain was caused by police racism. He denied that it could be caused by a greater incidence of some types of crime amongst some ethnic groups. Lea and Young quote figures showing that 92 per cent of crimes known to the police are brought to their attention by the public, and only 8 per cent are uncovered by the police themselves. In such circumstances, they argue, it is difficult to believe that the preponderance of blacks in the official figures is entirely a consequence of discrimination by the police.

Lea and Young also make use of the work of the Home Office researchers, Stevens and Willis. They calculate that, to explain the differences between whites and blacks convicted of offences in 1975, it would have been necessary for the police to have arrested 66 per cent of all black offenders, but only 21 per cent of all white offenders. They argue that it is more likely that blacks do commit some crimes more often than whites.

They also point to a number of aspects of criminal statistics which cannot be explained by police racism alone. The recorded rate for crimes committed by whites is consistently slightly higher than that recorded for Asians. Lea and Young maintain that 'police racism would have to manifest itself very strangely indeed to be entirely responsible for such rates'.

Furthermore, in the 1960s the recorded rates for crimes committed by first-generation West Indian

Chapter 7

Religion

Introduction – definitions of religion

1 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' The God of Christianity is a supreme being, his word is the ultimate truth, his power is omnipotent. His followers worship him and praise him and live by his commandments.

2 The Dugum Dani live in the Highlands of New Guinea. They have no god, but their world is inhabited by a host of supernatural beings known as mogat. The mogat are the ghosts of the dead. They cause illness and death and control the wind and the rain. The Dugum Dani are not pious – they do not pray. Their rituals are not to honour or worship the mogat but to placate and appease them.

3 The Teton Sioux lived on the northern prairies of the USA. The worlds of nature, on which they were dependent, were controlled by the Wakan powers. The powers were stronger and more mysterious than those of people. They caused the seasons to change, the rains to fall, the plants to grow and the animals to multiply. In this way they cared for the Sioux. The Sioux did not worship the Wakan powers but invoked their aid: they appealed to the powers for assistance or protection.

Religious beliefs of one sort or another are present in every known society but their variety seems to be endless. Any definition of religion must encompass this variety. However, it is difficult to produce a definition broad enough to encompass this variety without incorporating phenomena that are not normally thought of as religions. Two main approaches have been adopted in tackling this issue: those that rely upon functional and those that use substantive definitions.

1 One way of defining religion is to see it in terms of the functions it performs for society or individuals. An example of this approach is provided by Yinger who defined religion as 'a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggles with the ultimate problems of human life' (quoted in Hamilton, 1995). However, Hamilton notes two main problems with such a definition. First, it allows the inclusion of a wide variety of belief systems in the category 'religion'. For example, by this definition communism could be regarded as a religion even though it explicitly rejects religious beliefs. Second, it is based upon assumptions about the roles and purposes of religion. However, these roles and purposes might vary between societies and it should be the job of sociology to uncover them by empirical investigation, not to assume what they are from the outset. Third, phrases such as 'the ultimate problems of human life' are open to varied interpretations. Hamilton points out that for some people the ultimate problems of life might be 'simply how to enjoy it as much as possible, how to avoid pain and ensure pleasure' (Hamilton, 1995). It is clear that many other aspects of social life, apart from religion, address such issues – for example, medicine and leisure.

2 Other approaches are based upon substantive definitions, that is they are concerned with the content of religion rather than its function or purpose. Substantive definitions can take a number of forms.

Durkheim (1961) defined religion in terms of a distinction between the sacred and the profane. Sacred objects produce a sense of awe, veneration and respect, whereas profane objects do not. However, as critics have pointed out, in some cases explicitly religious objects are not treated with respect.

A common approach to a substantive definition of religion is to define it in terms of supernatural beliefs. Thus Roland Robertson states that religion 'refers to the existence of supernatural beings that have a governing effect on life' (Robertson, 1970). A supernatural element is combined with institutional aspects of religion in Melford Spiro's definition of religion as 'an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings' (Spiro, 1965). However, as Hamilton points out, such definitions run into problems because certain belief systems which are commonly regarded as religions, such as Buddhism, do not contain a belief in supernatural beings.

All definitions emphasize certain aspects of religion and exclude others. Functional definitions tend to be too inclusive – it is too easy to qualify as a religion; while substantive ones tend to be too exclusive – it is too difficult to qualify as a religion. We will look at a variety of definitions throughout the chapter and it should be borne in mind that the definitions tend to reflect the theoretical assumptions and the specific arguments being advanced by individual sociologists. This is particularly evident in the debate on secularization (the question of whether religion has declined). Varying definitions allow the advocates and critics of the theory to include evidence that supports their case and exclude evidence that contradicts it.

The problems of definition should not, however, be exaggerated. The disputes tend to occur over phenomena that can be considered to be on the fringes of religion (such as New Age movements) and there is general agreement that such belief systems as Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Buddhism and Judaism are religions.

Religion – a functionalist perspective

The functionalist perspective examines religion in terms of society's needs. Functionalist analysis is primarily concerned with the contribution religion makes to meeting these needs. From this perspective, society requires a certain degree of social solidarity, value consensus, and harmony and integration between its parts. The function of religion is the contribution it makes to meeting such functional prerequisites – for example, its contribution to social solidarity.

Emile Durkheim

The sacred and the profane

In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, first published in 1912, Emile Durkheim presented what is probably the most influential interpretation of religion from a functionalist perspective (Durkheim, 1961). Durkheim argued that all societies divide the world into two categories: the sacred and the profane (the non-sacred). Religion is based upon this division. It is 'a unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things, that is to say things set apart and forbidden'.

It is important to realize that:

> *By sacred things one must not understand simply those personal things which are called gods or spirits; a rock, a tree, a spring, a pebble, a piece of wood, a house, in a word anything can be sacred.*
>
> Durkheim, 1961

There is nothing about the particular qualities of a pebble or a tree that makes them sacred. Therefore sacred things must be symbols, they must represent something. To understand the role of religion in society, the relationship between sacred symbols and what they represent must be established.

Totemism

Durkheim used the religion of various groups of Australian aboriginals to develop his argument. He saw their religion, which he called totemism, as the simplest and most basic form of religion.

Aboriginal society is divided into several clans. A clan is like a large extended family with its members sharing certain duties and obligations. For example, clans have a rule of exogamy – that is, members are not allowed to marry within the clan. Clan members have a duty to aid and assist each other: they join together to mourn the death of one of their number and to revenge a member who has been wronged by someone from another clan.

Each clan has a totem, usually an animal or a plant. This totem is then represented by drawings made on wood or stone. These drawings are called churingas. Usually churingas are at least as sacred as the species which they represent and sometimes more so. The totem is a symbol. It is the emblem of the clan, 'It is its flag; it is the sign by which each clan distinguishes itself from all others.' However, the totem is more than the churinga which represents it – it is the most sacred object in aborigine ritual. The totem is 'The outward and visible form of the totemic principle or god.'

Durkheim argued that if the totem 'Is at once the symbol of god and of the society, is that not because the god and the society are only one?' Thus he suggested that in worshipping god, people are in fact worshipping society. Society is the real object of religious veneration.

How does humanity come to worship society? Sacred things are 'considered superior in dignity and power to profane things and particularly to man'. In relation to the sacred, humans are inferior and dependent. This relationship between humanity and sacred things is exactly the relationship between humanity and society. Society is more important and

powerful than the individual. Durkheim argued that 'Primitive man comes to view society as something sacred because he is utterly dependent on it.'

But why does humanity not simply worship society itself? Why does it invent a sacred symbol like a totem? Because, Durkheim argued, it is easier for a person to 'visualize and direct his feelings of awe toward a symbol than towards so complex a thing as a clan'.

Religion and the 'collective conscience'

Durkheim believed that social life is impossible without the shared values and moral beliefs that form the collective conscience. In their absence, there would be no social order, social control, social solidarity or cooperation. In short, there would be no society. Religion reinforces the collective conscience. The worship of society strengthens the values and moral beliefs that form the basis of social life. By defining them as sacred, religion provides them with greater power to direct human action.

This attitude of respect towards the sacred is the same attitude applied to social duties and obligations. In worshipping society, people are, in effect, recognizing the importance of the social group and their dependence upon it. In this way religion strengthens the unity of the group: it promotes social solidarity.

Durkheim emphasized the importance of collective worship. The social group comes together in religious rituals full of drama and reverence. Together, its members express their faith in common values and beliefs. In this highly charged atmosphere of collective worship, the integration of society is strengthened. Members of society express, communicate and understand the moral bonds which unite them.

According to Durkheim, the belief in gods or spirits, which usually provide the focus for religious ceremonies, originated from belief in the ancestral spirits of dead relatives. The worship of gods is really the worship of ancestors' souls. Since Durkheim also believed that souls represent the presence of social values, the collective conscience is present in individuals. It is through individual souls that the collective conscience is realized. Since religious worship involves the worship of souls, Durkheim again concludes that religious worship is really the worship of the social group or society.

Criticisms of Durkheim

Durkheim's ideas are still influential today, although they have been criticized:

1 Critics have argued that Durkheim studied only a small number of Aboriginal groups which were somewhat untypical of other Aboriginal tribes. Is may therefore be misleading to generalize about Aboriginal beliefs from this sample, never mind generalizing about religion as a whole.

2 Most sociologists believe that Durkheim has overstated his case. While agreeing that religion is important for promoting social solidarity and reinforcing social values, they would not support his view that religion is the worship of society. Durkheim's views on religion are more relevant to small, non-literate societies, where there is a close integration of culture and social institutions, where work, leisure, education and family life tend to merge, and where members share a common belief and value system. His views are less relevant to modern societies, which have many subcultures, social and ethnic groups, specialized organizations, and a range of religious beliefs, practices and institutions. As Malcolm Hamilton puts it, 'The emergence of religious pluralism and diversity within a society is, of course, something that Durkheim's theory has great difficulty dealing with' (Hamilton, 1995).

3 Durkheim may also overstate the degree to which the collective conscience permeates and shapes the behaviour of individuals. Indeed, sometimes religious beliefs can be at odds with and override societal values. Malcolm Hamilton makes this point strongly:

> *The fact that our moral sense might make us go against the majority, the society, or authority, shows that we are not quite so dependent upon or creatures of society as Durkheim claims. Society, powerful as it is, does not have the primacy that Durkheim believes it has. Ironically, it often seems to be the case that religious beliefs can have a much greater influence upon and hold over the individual than society does since it is often out of religious convictions that individuals will fly in the face of society or attempt to withdraw from it, as in the case of many sectarian movements.*
>
> Hamilton, 1995, p. 105

Bronislaw Malinowski

Like Durkheim, Malinowski uses data from small-scale non-literate societies to develop his thesis on religion (Malinowski, 1954). Many of his examples are drawn from his fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands off the coast of New Guinea. Like Durkheim, Malinowski sees religion as reinforcing social norms and values and promoting social solidarity. Unlike Durkheim, however, he does not see religion as reflecting society as a whole, nor does he see religious ritual as the worship of society itself. Malinowski identifies specific areas of social life with which religion is concerned, and to which it is addressed. These are situations of emotional stress that threaten social solidarity.

Religion and life crises

Anxiety and tension tend to disrupt social life. Situations that produce these emotions include crises of life such as birth, puberty, marriage and death. Malinowski notes that in all societies these life crises are surrounded with religious ritual. He sees death as the most disruptive of these events and argues that:

> *The existence of strong personal attachments and the fact of death, which of all human events is the most upsetting and disorganizing to man's calculations, are perhaps the main sources of religious beliefs.*
>
> Malinowski, 1954

Religion deals with the problem of death in the following manner. A funeral ceremony expresses the belief in immortality, which denies the fact of death, and so comforts the bereaved. Other mourners support the bereaved by their presence at the ceremony. This comfort and support check the emotions which death produces, and control the stress and anxiety that might disrupt society. Death is socially destructive since it removes a member from society. At a funeral ceremony the social group unites to support the bereaved. This expression of social solidarity reintegrates society.

Religion, prediction and control

A second category of events – undertakings that cannot be fully controlled or predicted by practical means – also produces tension and anxiety. From his observations in the Trobriand Islands, Malinowski noted that such events were surrounded by ritual.

Fishing is an important subsistence practice in the Trobriands. Malinowski observed that in the calm waters of the lagoon 'fishing is done in an easy and absolutely reliable manner by the method of poisoning, yielding abundant results without danger and uncertainty'. However, beyond the barrier reef in the open sea there is danger and uncertainty: a storm may result in loss of life and the catch is dependent on the presence of a shoal of fish, which cannot be predicted. In the lagoon, 'where man can rely completely on his knowledge and skill', there are no rituals associated with fishing, whereas fishing in the open sea is preceded by rituals to ensure a good catch and protect the fishermen. Although Malinowski refers to these rituals as magic, others argue that it is reasonable to regard them as religious practices.

Again we see ritual used for specific situations that produce anxiety. Rituals reduce anxiety by providing confidence and a feeling of control. As with funeral ceremonies, fishing rituals are social events. The group unites to deal with situations of stress, and so the unity of the group is strengthened.

Therefore we can summarize by saying that Malinowski's distinctive contribution to the sociology of religion is his argument that religion promotes social solidarity by dealing with situations of emotional stress that threaten the stability of society.

Criticisms of Malinowski

Malinowski has been criticized for exaggerating the importance of religious rituals in helping people to cope with situations of stress and uncertainty. Tambiah (1990, discussed in Hamilton, 1995) points out, for example, that magic and elaborate rituals are associated with the cultivation of taro and yams on the Trobriand Islands. This is related to the fact that taro and yams are important because men must use them to make payments to their sisters' husbands. Men who fail to do so show that they are unable to fulfil significant social obligations. These rituals are therefore simply related to the maintenance of prestige in that society and have little to do with cementing solidarity or dealing with uncertainty and danger. A particular function or effect that religion sometimes has, has been mistaken for a feature of religion in general.

Talcott Parsons

Religion and value consensus

Talcott Parsons (1937, 1964, 1965a) argued that human action is directed and controlled by norms provided by the social system. The cultural system provides more general guidelines for action in the form of beliefs, values and systems of meaning. The norms which direct action are not merely isolated standards for behaviour; they are integrated and patterned by the values and beliefs provided by the cultural system. For example, many norms in Western society are expressions of the value of materialism. Religion is part of the cultural system. As such, religious beliefs provide guidelines for human action and standards against which people's conduct can be evaluated.

In a Christian society the Ten Commandments operate in this way. They demonstrate how many of the norms of the social system can be integrated by religious beliefs. For example, the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' integrates such diverse norms as the ways to drive a car, to settle an argument and to deal with the suffering of the aged. The norms that direct these areas of behaviour prohibit manslaughter, murder and euthanasia but they are all based on the same religious commandment.

In this way, religion provides general guidelines for conduct which are expressed in a variety of norms. By establishing general principles and moral

beliefs, religion helps to provide the consensus which Parsons believes is necessary for order and stability in society.

Religion and social order

Parsons, like Malinowski, sees religion as being addressed to particular problems that occur in all societies. He argues that in everyday life, people 'go about their business without particular strain'. If life were always like this, 'religion would certainly not have the significance that it does'. However, life does not always follow this smooth pattern. The problems that disrupt it fall into two categories:

1 The first 'consists in the fact that individuals are "hit" by events which they cannot foresee and prepare for, or control, or both'. One such event is death, particularly premature death. Like Malinowski, and for similar reasons, Parsons sees religion as a mechanism for adjustment to such events and as a means of restoring the normal pattern of life.
2 The second problem area is that of 'uncertainty'. This refers to endeavours in which a great deal of effort and skill have been invested, but where unknown or uncontrollable factors can threaten a successful outcome. One example is humanity's inability to predict or control the effect of weather upon agriculture. Again, following Malinowski, Parsons argues that religion provides a means of adjusting and coming to terms with such situations through rituals which act as 'a tonic to self-confidence'.

In this way, religion maintains social stability by relieving the tension and frustration that could disrupt social order.

Religion and meaning

As a part of the cultural system, religious beliefs give meaning to life; they answer, in Parsons's rather sexist words, 'man's questions about himself and the world he lives in'. This function of religion is particularly important in relation to the frustrations we discussed in the last section, which threaten to shatter beliefs about the meaning of life and so make human existence meaningless. Why should a premature death occur? It is not something people expect to happen or feel ought to happen. Social life is full of contradictions that threaten the meanings people place on life. Parsons argues that one of the major functions of religion is to 'make sense' of all experiences, no matter how meaningless or contradictory they appear.

A good example of this is the question of suffering: 'Why must men endure deprivation and pain and so unequally and haphazardly, if indeed at all?' Religion provides a range of answers: suffering is imposed by God to test a person's faith; it is a punishment for sins; and suffering with fortitude will bring its reward in Heaven. Suffering thus becomes meaningful.

Similarly, the problem of evil is common to all societies. It is particularly disconcerting when people profit through evil actions. Religion solves this contradiction by stating that evil will receive its just deserts in the afterlife.

Parsons (1965a) therefore sees a major function of religion as the provision of meaning to events that people do not expect, or feel ought not, to happen – events that are frustrating and contradictory. Religion 'makes sense' of these events in terms of an integrated and consistent pattern of meaning. This allows intellectual and emotional adjustment. On a more general level, this adjustment promotes order and stability in society.

Criticisms of the functionalist approach

The functionalist perspective emphasizes the positive contributions of religion to society and tends to ignore its dysfunctional aspects. With its preoccupation with harmony, integration and solidarity, functionalism neglects the many instances where religion can be seen as a divisive and disruptive force. It bypasses the frequent examples of internal divisions within a community over questions of religious dogma and worship – divisions that can lead to open conflict. It gives little consideration to hostility between different religious groups within the same society, such as Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland or Hindus and Muslims in India. In such cases religion can be seen as a direct threat to social order. As Charles Glock and Rodney Stark state in their criticism of functionalist views on religion:

> *We find it difficult to reconcile the general theory with considerable evidence of religious conflict. On every side it would seem that religion threatens social integration as readily as it contributes to it. The history of Christianity, with its many schisms, manifests the great power of religion not merely to bind but to divide.*
>
> Glock and Stark, 1965

The Marxist perspective on religion, which we are going to consider next, provides an interesting contrast to functionalist views.

Religion – a Marxist perspective

In Marx's vision of the ideal society, exploitation and alienation are things of the past. The means of production are communally owned, which results in the disappearance of social classes. Members of society are fulfilled as human beings: they control their own destinies and work together for the common good. Religion does not exist in this communist utopia because the social conditions that produce it have disappeared.

To Marx, religion is an illusion which eases the pain produced by exploitation and oppression. It is a series of myths that justify and legitimate the subordination of the subject class and the domination and privilege of the ruling class. It is a distortion of reality which provides many of the deceptions that form the basis of ruling-class ideology and false class consciousness.

Religion as 'the opium of the people'

In Marx's words, 'Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people' (Marx, in Bottomore and Rubel, 1963). Religion acts as an opiate to dull the pain produced by oppression. It is both 'an expression of real suffering and a protest against suffering', but it does little to solve the problem because it helps to make life more bearable and therefore dilutes demands for change. As such, religion merely stupefies its adherents rather than bringing them true happiness and fulfilment.

Similarly, Lenin argued 'Religion is a kind of spiritual gin in which the slaves of capital drown their human shape and their claims to any decent life' (cited in Lane, 1970).

From a Marxist perspective, religion can dull the pain of oppression in the following ways:

1 It promises a paradise of eternal bliss in life after death. Engels argued that the appeal of Christianity to oppressed classes lies in its promise of 'salvation from bondage and misery' in the afterlife. The Christian vision of heaven can make life on earth more bearable by giving people something to look forward to.

2 Some religions make a virtue of the suffering produced by oppression. In particular, those who bear the deprivations of poverty with dignity and humility will be rewarded for their virtue. This view is contained in the well-known biblical quotation, 'It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.' Religion thus makes poverty more tolerable by offering a reward for suffering and promising compensation for injustice in the afterlife.

3 Religion can offer the hope of supernatural intervention to solve the problems on earth. Members of religious groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses live in anticipation of the day when the supernatural powers will descend from on high and create heaven on earth. Anticipation of this future can make the present more acceptable.

4 Religion often justifies the social order and a person's position within it. God can be seen as creating and ordaining the social structure, as in the following verse from the Victorian hymn 'All things bright and beautiful':

> The rich man in his castle,
> The poor man at his gate,
> God made them high and lowly,
> And ordered their estate.

In this way, social arrangements appear inevitable. This can help those at the bottom of the stratification system to accept and come to terms with their situation. In the same way, poverty and misfortune in general have often been seen as divinely ordained as a punishment for sin. Again, the situation is defined as immutable and unchangeable. This can make life more bearable by encouraging people to accept their situation philosophically.

Religion and social control

From a Marxist viewpoint, religion does not simply cushion the effects of oppression, it is also an instrument of that oppression. It acts as a mechanism of social control, maintaining the existing system of exploitation and reinforcing class relationships. Put simply, it keeps people in their place. By making unsatisfactory lives bearable, religion tends to discourage people from attempting to change their situation. By offering an illusion of hope in a hopeless situation, it prevents thoughts of overthrowing the system. By providing explanations and justifications for social situations, religion distorts reality. It helps to produce a false class consciousness that blinds members of the subject class to their true situation and their real interests. In this way it diverts people's attention from the real source of their oppression and so helps to maintain ruling-class power.

Religion is not, however, solely the province of oppressed groups. From a Marxist perspective, ruling classes adopt religious beliefs to justify their position both to themselves and to others. The lines 'God made them high and lowly/And ordered their estate' show clearly how religion can be used to justify

social inequality, not simply to the poor, but also to the rich. Religion is often directly supported by the ruling classes to further their interests. In the words of Marx and Engels, 'the parson has ever gone hand in hand with the landlord'. In feudal England the lord of the manor's power was frequently legitimated by pronouncements from the pulpit. In return for this support, landlords would often richly endow the established church.

Evidence to support Marxism

There is considerable evidence to support the Marxist view of the role of religion in society.

The caste system of traditional India was justified by Hindu religious beliefs. In medieval Europe, kings and queens ruled by divine right. The Egyptian Pharaohs went one step further by combining both god and king in the same person. Slave-owners in the southern states of America often approved of the conversion of slaves to Christianity, believing it to be a controlling and gentling influence. It has been argued that in the early days of the Industrial Revolution in England, employers used religion as a means of controlling the masses and encouraging them to remain sober and to work hard.

A more recent example which can be used to support Marxism has been discussed by Steve Bruce (1988). He has pointed out that, in the USA, conservative Protestants – the 'New Christian Right' – consistently support right-wing political candidates in the Republican Party, and attack more liberal candidates in the Democratic Party. In 1980 they 'targeted' 27 liberal candidates for attack; 23 of them lost. The New Christian Right supported Ronald Reagan in his successful campaign for the presidency in 1984. In the 1988 presidential campaign, however, Reagan was unsuccessfully challenged for the Republican nomination for president by a member of the New Christian Right, Pat Robertson. Robertson is one of a number of television evangelists who have tried to gain new converts to their brand of Christianity and who spread their political and moral messages through preaching on television.

According to Bruce, the New Christian Right have supported 'a more aggressive anti-communist foreign policy, more military spending, less central government interference, less welfare spending, and fewer restraints on free enterprise'. Although Bruce emphasizes that they have had a limited influence on American politics, it is clear that they have tended to defend the interests of the rich and powerful at the expense of other groups in the population.

The limitations of Marxism

Conflicting evidence suggests that religion does not always legitimate power; it is not simply a justification of alienation or a justification of privilege, and it can sometimes provide an impetus for change. Although this is not reflected in Marx's own writing, nor in much of Engels's earlier work, it is reflected in Engels's later work and in the perspectives on religion advanced by more recent neo-Marxists. We will examine these views after the next section, which considers the relationship between religion and communism.

Furthermore, the fact that religion sometimes acts as an ideological force in the way suggested by Marx, does not explain the existence of religion. As Malcolm Hamilton points out:

> *To say, however, that religion can be turned into an instrument of manipulation is no more to explain it than saying that because art or drama can be utilised for ideological purposes this explains art or drama.*
>
> Hamilton, 1995, p. 84

In contrast, approaches such as those used by Stark and Bainbridge (1985) do try to find an explanation for the almost universal presence of religion in society in basic human needs. Their views will be examined shortly (see pp. 445–6).

Religion and communism

Marx stated that 'Religion is only the illusory sun which revolves round man as long as he does not revolve round himself' (Marx and Engels, 1957). In a truly socialist society individuals revolve around themselves, and religion – along with all other illusions and distortions of reality – disappears.

Whatever the merits of this prophecy, it certainly does not reflect the situation in the socialist Israeli kibbutzim. Many kibbutzim are fervently religious and their members appear to experience no contradiction between religion and socialism.

In the USSR under communism the strength of religion was harder to gauge. After the revolution of 1917 the communist state placed limits on religious activity and at times persecuted religious people. Soviet law restricted religious worship to designated churches and other places of prayer. Religious instruction of children was banned. Geoffrey Hosking estimated that there were more than 50,000 Russian Orthodox churches before the 1917 revolution, but by 1939 only about 4,000 remained (Hosking, 1988). Writing in 1970, David Lane claimed that there were about 20,000 Russian Orthodox churches in 1960, but nearly half of these had been closed by 1965 due to the policies of Khrushchev.

On the surface such figures suggest that religion had declined, but this may have been due to the activities of the ruling elite rather than to a loss of faith by the population. Lane claimed that religion

probably had little hold over the population, but it had, nevertheless, shown a certain resilience to communism. This resilience was reflected in one estimate which placed the number of baptized Orthodox Christians in the period 1947–57 at 90 million, which is roughly the same as in 1914. In 1988, Geoffrey Hoskins argued that 'The Soviet Union is already a much more "religious" country than Britain or most of Western Europe.'

When President Gorbachov instituted a policy of *glasnost*, or openness, restrictions on religion were relaxed. In 1989 and 1990, unrest in a number of Soviet republics suggested the continued strength of religious belief. The Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania was one source of demands for independence. In 1990, conflict between Soviet Muslims in Azerbaijan and Soviet Christians in Armenia led to troops being deployed to restore order.

When the USSR began to divide and Communist Party rule was abandoned, religious convictions became even more evident. In 1991, David Martin described how church bells were used to summon millions of people to link arms around the Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. In other former communist countries there were 'enormous gatherings in Poland to celebrate the feast of the Assumption and the passionate pilgrimages of the Serbs to monastic shrines at Kosova' (Martin, 1991b).

Opinion poll figures suggest that religion remained important to large proportions of the population during the communist eras in the USSR and Eastern Europe, and that religion has become stronger since the demise of communism. Quoting data from the International Social Survey Program, Andrew Greeley notes that, in 1991, 47 per cent of the Russian population claimed to believe in God (Greeley, 1994). The strength of the religious revival is revealed by the fact that 22 per cent of the population were former non-believers who had converted to a belief in God. Similarly, Mikl[ó]s Tomka found that, in 1978, 44.3 per cent of the population of Hungary claimed to be religious, and that this had risen to 76.8 per cent by August 1993 (Tomka, 1995).

One society which has retained communism throughout the 1990s is Fidel Castro's Cuba. However, even such a staunch communist as Castro was forced to acknowledge the continuing appeal of religion when he invited Pope John Paul to Cuba in January 1998. The Pope addressed large and enthusiastic crowds, suggesting that Roman Catholicism remained strong despite some 40 years in which the communist state had discouraged religious participation and belief.

These examples suggest that there is more to religion than a set of beliefs and practices which develop in societies based on the private ownership of the means of production. (See Chapter 15 for an analysis of religion within the general framework of Marxist theory.)

Engels and neo-Marxists – religion as a radical force

Engels – Christianity and social change

Roger O'Toole, commenting on the Marxist sociology of religion, argues that 'Beginning with the work of Engels, Marxists have undoubtedly recognized the active role that may be played by religion in effecting revolutionary social change' (O'Toole, 1984). Thus, in *On the History of Early Christianity*, Engels compared some of the early Christian sects that opposed Roman rule to communist and socialist political movements (Marx and Engels, 1957). He said, 'Christianity got hold of the masses exactly as modern socialism does, under the shape of a variety of sects.' While Christianity originated as a way of coping with exploitation among oppressed groups, it could become a source of resistance to the oppressors and thus a force for change.

Otto Maduro – the relative autonomy of religion

Maduro is a contemporary neo-Marxist. While accepting many aspects of Marx's analysis of religion, he places greater emphasis on the idea that religion has some independence, or 'relative autonomy', from the economic system of the bourgeoisie (Maduro, 1982). He denies that religion is always a conservative force and, indeed, claims that it can be revolutionary. He says, 'Religion is not necessarily a functional, reproductive or conservative factor in society; it often is one of the main (and sometimes the only) available channel to bring about a social revolution.'

Maduro claims that, up until recently, Catholicism in Latin America tended to support the bourgeoisie and right-wing military dictatorships which have represented its interests. The Catholic Church has tended to deny the existence of social conflicts between oppressive and oppressed classes. It has recognized some injustices, such as poverty and illiteracy, but has suggested that the solution lies with those who already have power. The Catholic Church has also supported members of the clergy who have assisted private enterprise and government projects; it has celebrated military victories but failed to support unions, strikes, and opposition political parties.

On the other hand, more recently, Catholic priests have increasingly demonstrated their autonomy from the bourgeoisie by criticizing them and acting against their interests. Maduro believes that members of the

clergy can develop revolutionary potential where oppressed members of the population have no outlet for their grievances. They pressurize priests to take up their cause, and theological disagreements within a church can provide interpretations of a religion that are critical of the rich and powerful.

All of these conditions have been met in Latin America and have led to the development of liberation theology (for further details of liberation theology see p. 451).

Bryan S. Turner – a materialist theory of religion

Bryan Turner (1983) follows Marx in arguing that religion rises from a material base: that is, he agrees that religion relates to the physical and economic aspects of social life. Unlike Marx, however, Turner does not believe that religion has a universal role in society, nor does he believe that religion is always an important part of ruling-class ideological control. He questions the belief that religion has always been a powerful force persuading subject classes to accept the status quo.

Religion and feudalism

Marxists have tended to assume that, in the feudal period, religion (in particular, Roman Catholicism in Europe) was a belief system that played a fundamental part in integrating society. Turner rejects the view that religion was as important for serfs and peasants as it was for feudal lords. On the basis of historical evidence he claims that the peasantry were largely indifferent to religion: their main concern was simply survival.

By comparison, religion played an important part in the lives of the ruling class, the feudal lords. In feudalism, wealth consisted of, and power derived from, the ownership of land by private individuals. For the ruling class to maintain its dominance it had to pass on property to an heir. Usually a system of primogeniture was used: the eldest son of a landowner inherited all his father's land. This prevented the splitting-up of estates, which would have reduced the concentration of power in the hands of particular individuals. It was therefore vital to the workings of feudalism and the maintenance of a dominant class that there was a legitimate male heir for each landowner. Premarital promiscuity and adultery both jeopardized the production of such an heir. Marriage and the legitimacy of children were propped up and defended by the church. Thus, in Turner's words, 'religion has the function of controlling the sexuality of the body in order to secure regular transmission of property via the family'. Without religion it would have been difficult to ensure there were recognized legitimate heirs who could retain concentrated landholdings in their family's possession.

A secondary function of religion under feudalism also stemmed from primogeniture. There was a surplus of younger sons who did not inherit land. In military feudalism, sons might meet an early death, so it was necessary to have a number of heirs in case one or more were killed. But those who did not receive an inheritance had to have some means of support. Monasteries provided one solution to the problem of the surplus males.

Religion and capitalism

Turner believes that, in modern capitalism, religion has lost the one vital function that it had for the ruling class. Today, he claims, individual and family property is much less important for the maintenance of ruling-class power. Property has become depersonalized – most wealth is concentrated in the hands of organizations (such as banks, pension funds and multinational corporations) rather than in the hands of individuals. In these circumstances, religion is no more than an optional extra for modern capitalist societies. Since the transmission of property via the family is no longer vital to the system, society can tolerate, and the church can accept, divorce and illegitimacy.

Turner's views on religion are similar to the more general views on the dominant ideology thesis advanced by Abercrombie, Hill and Turner (1980). They believe that modern capitalist societies do not possess a widely-accepted ruling-class ideology, and that such an ideology is not necessary for the continuance of capitalist domination: the ruling class use coercion and naked economic power to maintain their position. Abercrombie *et al.* therefore question Marx's beliefs about the importance of religion in producing false class consciousness in capitalist societies. (For more details on the dominant ideology thesis see Chapter 9.)

Having discussed Marxist and materialist views on religion, we will now turn to a consideration of the relationship between gender and religion. Some feminist theories of religion have similarities with Marxist theories.

Gender, feminism and religion

Introduction

Feminist theories of religion follow Marxist theories in arguing that religion can be an instrument of domination and oppression. However, unlike Marxism, they tend to see religion as a product of patriarchy (see pp. 150–6 for a discussion of patriarchy) rather than as a product of capitalism. They see religion as serving the interests of men rather than those of a capitalist class. Indeed, such a view of religion is not confined to female and feminist sociologists. For example, Anthony Giddens argues that:

> *The Christian religion is a resolutely male affair in its symbolism as well as its hierarchy. While Mary, the mother of Jesus, may sometimes be treated as if she had divine qualities, God is the father, a male figure, and Jesus took the human shape of a man. Woman is portrayed as created from a rib taken from a man.*
>
> Giddens, 1997, p. 449

The secondary and often subordinate role of women in Christian doctrine is also typical of most other religions. Karen Armstrong argues that 'None of the major religions has been particularly good to women. They have usually become male affairs and women have been relegated to a marginal position' (Armstrong, 1993). Although women may have made significant advances in many areas of life, their gains in most religions have been very limited.

Women continue to be excluded from key roles in many religions (although the Church of England finally allowed the ordination of women priests in 1992). This is despite the fact that women often participate more in organized religion (when they are allowed to) than men. Steve Bruce points out that, according to the 1991 *British Social Attitudes Survey*, 65 per cent of regular church attenders in Britain and Northern Ireland were women, compared to 35 per cent who were men.

Feminist writers are therefore interested in how women came to be subservient within most religions and how religion has been used to cement patriarchal power. More recently, some sociologists have examined how women have begun to try to reduce the imbalance between males and females within religion.

Gender inequality in religion

The origins of gender inequality

A number of writers have noted that, historically, women have not always been subordinate within most religions. Karen Armstrong, for example, argues that in early history 'women were considered central to the spiritual quest' (Armstrong, 1993). In the Middle East, Asia and Europe, archaeologists have uncovered numerous symbols of the Great Mother Goddess. She was pictured as a naked pregnant woman and seems to represent the mysteries of fertility and life. As Armstrong puts it:

> *The Earth produced plants and nourished them in rather the same way as a woman gave birth to a child and fed it from her own body. The magical power of the earth seemed vitally interconnected with the mysterious creativity of the female sex.*
>
> Armstrong, 1993, p. 8

There were very few early effigies of gods as men. As societies developed religious beliefs in which there were held to be many different gods and goddesses, the Mother Goddess still played a crucial role. Armstrong says she was:

> *absorbed into the pantheons of deities and remained a powerful figure. She was called Inanna in Sumner, in ancient Mesopotamia, Ishtar in Babylon, Anat or Asherah in Canaan, Isis in Egypt and Aphrodite in Greece. In all these cultures people told remarkably similar stories about her to express her role in their spiritual lives. She was still revered as the source of fertility.*
>
> Armstrong, 1993, p. 9

Not surprisingly, since they had goddesses, these societies also had female priests.

However, the position of women in religion began to decline as a result of invasions. Armstrong says:

> *In Mesopotamia, Egypt and India, Semitic and Aryan invaders from the north brought with them a male-orientated mythology which replaced the Goddess with more powerful masculine deities. These invasions had begun as early as the fourth millennium but became more and more devastating.*
>
> Armstrong, 1993, p. 21

Armstrong argues that an Amorite myth dating from about 1750 BC marked the start of the eventual decline of the goddess. In it the goddess Tiamat, the goddess of the sea, is replaced by the male god of Babylon, Marduk. Male gods such as the Hebrew Yahweh became increasingly important and they introduced a 'more martial and aggressive spirituality'.

The final death knell of goddesses came with the acceptance of monotheism – belief in a single god rather than many. This originated with Yahweh, the

god of Abraham. Furthermore, this 'God of Israel would later become the God of the Christians and the Muslims, who all regard themselves as the spiritual offspring of Abraham, the father of all believers'.

Jean Holm – inequality in major religions

Jean Holm has reviewed some of the ways in which women are subordinate or exploited in contemporary religions and devalued by different religious beliefs (Holm, 1994). She argues that, while the classical teachings of many religions have stressed equality between men and women, in practice women have usually been far from equal. She says, 'Women do, of course, have a part to play in many religions, but it is almost always subordinate to the role of men, and it is likely to be in the private rather than the public sphere.' She gives a number of examples.

In Japanese folk religions women are responsible for organizing public rituals, but only men can take part in the public performances. In Chinese popular religion women are associated with Yin and men with Yang. However, Yang spirits are more important and powerful. In Buddhism, both men and women can have a religious role as monks and nuns respectively. However, all monks are seen as senior to all nuns. Orthodox Judaism only allows males to take a full part in ceremonies. In Islam, in some regions, women are not allowed to enter mosques for worship, and men have made all the legal rulings. Christianity has also been male-dominated. Holm says:

> *Many of the most influential ideas were worked out by (celibate) men in the first five centuries of the church's history, and the significant developments of the medieval Church and the Reformation were also shaped by men.*
>
> Holm, 1994, p.xiii

In Hinduism only men can become Brahmanic priests. Sikhism is perhaps the most egalitarian of the major religions since all offices are equally open to men and women. However, even in Sikhism, only a small minority of women have significant positions within the religion.

Women's second-class status is often related to female sexuality. Holm comments that 'Menstruation and childbirth are almost universally regarded as polluting. In many traditions women are forbidden to enter sacred places or touch sacred objects during the menstrual period.' For example, Hindu women are prohibited from approaching family shrines when pregnant or menstruating. Muslim women are not allowed to touch the Koran, go into a mosque or pray during menstruation.

Despite documenting these inequalities, Holm is not entirely pessimistic. As we will see later, she does detect evidence of changes in which the inequality between men and women in religion is being slowly reduced (see below, p. 443).

Feminist perspectives on religion

Simone de Beauvoir – religion and *The Second Sex*

Jean Holm describes some of the inequalities between males and females within different religions. However, she goes into little detail about why such inequalities exist. The French feminist Simone de Beauvoir provides such an explanation in her pioneering feminist book *The Second Sex* (1953, first published 1949). To Beauvoir, religion acts for women in very similar ways to those in which Marx suggested religion could act for oppressed classes. De Beauvoir says, 'There must be a religion for women as there must be one for the common people, and for exactly the same reasons.' Religion can be used by the oppressors (men) to control the oppressed group (women) and it also serves as a way of compensating women for their second-class status.

De Beauvoir notes that men have generally exercised control over religious beliefs. She says, 'Man enjoys the great advantage of having a God endorse the code he writes.' That code uses divine authority to support male dominance. As de Beauvoir says, 'For the Jews, Mohammedans, and Christians, among others, man is master by divine right; the fear of God will therefore repress any impulse towards revolt in the downtrodden female.'

However, in modern societies, 'religion seems much less an instrument of constraint than an instrument of deception'. Women are deceived by religion into thinking of themselves as equal to men despite their evident inequality. In some ways women are portrayed by religion as being closer to God than men, even if they are unlikely to hold positions of power within religions. As mothers, women have a key religious role: 'a mother not only engenders the flesh, she produces a soul for God.' Women are taught to be relatively passive, but in some ways this makes them appear more godly than the men whose 'agitation for this and that is more than absurd, it is blameworthy: why remodel this world which God himself created.'

Like Marx's proletariat, religion gives women the false belief that they will be compensated for their sufferings on earth by equality in heaven. In these ways the subjugation of women through religion helps to maintain a status quo in which women are unequal. Women are also vital to religion because it is they who do much of the work for religious organizations and introduce children to religious beliefs. Thus, de Beauvoir concludes:

Religion sanctions woman's self-love; it gives her the guide, father, lover, divine guardian she longs for nostalgically; it feeds her day-dreams; it fills her empty hours. But, above all, it confirms the social order, it justifies her resignation, by giving hope of a better future in a sexless heaven. This is why women today are still a powerful trump in the hand of the Church; it is why the Church is notably hostile to all measures likely to help in women's emancipation. There must be religion for women; and there must be women, 'true women' to perpetuate religion.

de Beauvoir, 1953, p. 591

Nawal El Saadawi – *The Hidden Face of Eve*

Patriarchy, Islam and the limited role of religion

Simone de Beauvoir writes from the perspective of a Western, Christian woman. Nawal El Saadawi is an Egyptian feminist writer and a leading advocate of women's rights in the Arab world. She was sacked from her post as Egypt's Director of Public Health by the then ruler Sadat, and has been imprisoned for her political activities. In *The Hidden Face of Eve* (1980), she discusses female oppression in the Arab world and elsewhere and considers the importance of religion in creating and perpetuating oppression.

El Saadawi recounts some of her personal experience of oppression. For example, she describes in chilling terms her terror as a young girl when her parents forced her, without warning or explanation, to undergo 'female circumcision', where part of her clitoris was amputated. She argues that Arab girls are often victims of sexual aggression by men (often their fathers, brothers or other relations). She also discusses prostitution, slavery and abortion and argues that all of these areas provide evidence of patriarchal dominance of Arab men over Arab women.

She notes that oppressive practices such as female circumcision have often been attributed to the influence of Islam. However, El Saadawi denies that the oppression of women is directly caused by religion in general, or Islam in particular. Female circumcision has been practised in a considerable number of countries, not all of them Islamic. Authentic religious beliefs tend to be opposed to any such practices because, 'if religion comes from God, how can it order man to cut off an organ created by Him as long as that organ is not diseased or deformed?' Authentic religion aims at 'truth, equality, justice, love and a healthy wholesome life for all people, whether men or women'.

Furthermore, other religions are often more oppressive than Islam. She says, 'If we study Christianity it is easy to see that this religion is much more rigid and orthodox where women are concerned than Islam.' To El Saadawi, the oppression of women is caused by 'the patriarchal system which came into being when society had reached a certain stage of development'. Nevertheless, she does see religion as playing a role in women's oppression. Men do distort religion to serve their own interests, to help justify or legitimate the oppression of women.

The origins of oppressive religion

El Saadawi argues that religion started to become patriarchal through the misinterpretation of religious beliefs by men. She cites the Greek mythological story of Isis and Osiris. The male Osiris is overpowered by the evil Touphoun. His body is cut into small pieces and dispersed in the sea, and his sexual organ is eaten by fish. Despite this, Isis (who is female) is able to reassemble Osiris's body. To El Saadawi, this story clearly implies female superiority, but it has been interpreted quite differently by men. They have emphasized the superiority of Osiris because he was created from the head of the god Zeus, who was greater than Osiris, according to Homer and other writers, because he was more knowledgeable. In reality, El Saadawi says, all the male gods were created by, or given the ability to move by, the greatest deity of them all, the goddess Isis.

Similar distortions have entered the story of Adam and Eve, which is accepted by both Christians and Muslims as part of the story of creation. Eve is usually portrayed by males as a temptress who created sin in the world, but was created from Adam's spare rib. However:

if we read the original story as described in the Old Testament, it is easy for us to see clearly that Eve was gifted with knowledge, intelligence and superior mental capacities, whereas Adam was only one of her instruments, utilized by her to increase her knowledge and give shape to her creativity.

El Saadawi, 1980, pp. 105–6

Like other writers, El Saadawi argues that forms of religion that were oppressive to women developed as monotheistic religions (believing in a single god) became predominant. Such religions 'drew inspiration and guidance from the values of the patriarchal and class societies prevalent at the time' (El Saadawi, 1980). For example, the Jewish religion drew upon the patriarchal power of Abraham to produce a situation in which 'A Hebrew household was embodied in the patriarchal family, under the uncontested and undivided authority of the father.'

Islamic society also developed in a patriarchal way through the dominance of a male minority who

owned herds of horses, camels and sheep. As a consequence, 'Authority in Islam belonged to the man as head of the family, to the supreme ruler, or the Khalifa (political ruler), or Imran (religious leader).' Although the Koran stipulated that both men and women could be stoned to death for adultery, this fate was very unlikely to befall men. This was because men were permitted several wives (but women were not permitted several husbands) and because men could divorce their wives instantaneously. There was therefore little need for men to commit adultery. Even today in countries such as Egypt women are still subject to extremely restrictive marriage laws.

El Saadawi describes Christ as a revolutionary leader who opposed oppression. Early Christianity had stricter moral codes than other religions, and codes which treated the sexes fairly equally. Nevertheless, at a later stage:

> *the religious hierarchies that grew and fattened on the teachings of Christ allowed the system of concubinage to creep in once more. Despite the limitations placed by Christianity on man's sexual freedom, woman was maintained in her inferior underprivileged status as compared with him. The patriarchal system still reigned supreme and grew even more ferocious with the gradual shift to a feudal system.*
>
> El Saadawi, 1980, p. 119

In the fourteenth century, for example, the Catholic Church declared that women who treated illnesses, without special training, could be executed as witches.

Conclusion

El Saadawi concludes that female oppression is not essentially due to religion but due to the patriarchal system that has long been dominant. Religion, though, has played its part. She says:

> *The great religions of the world uphold similar principles in so far as the submission of women to men is concerned. They also agree in the attribution of masculine characteristics to their God. Islam and Christianity have both constituted important stages in the evolution of humanity. Nevertheless, where the cause of women was concerned, they added a new load to their already heavy chains.*
>
> El Saadawi, 1980, p. 211

The only way for women to improve their lot is to struggle for their own liberation. Arab women have been doing this for longer than their Western counterparts. As early as fourteen centuries ago Arab women successfully campaigned against the universal use of the male gender when referring to people in general in the Koran. El Saadawi believes that any recent gains in the position of Arab women have been due to a combination of social, economic and political changes and their own struggles. She argues that women have benefited from socialist revolutions wherever they have taken place. Revolutions will further the cause of women even more if the positive aspects of the Koran can be emphasized and the patriarchal misinterpretations abandoned. Thus El Saadawi is not hostile to religion itself, but only to the domination of religion by patriarchal ideology.

Women and resistance to religious oppression

Signs of hope

Apart from El Saadawi, the theorists examined above have tended to portray women as the passive victims of religious oppression, and religions themselves as being universally oppressive. Increasingly, however, sociologists have come to acknowledge that women can no longer be seen as being so passive. Jean Holm (1994), acting as editor of a book dealing with women and different religious traditions, sees 'signs of hope' in the religious situation of women. Rita Gross (1994) detects that there are signs that a 'post-patriarchal' Buddhism might be developing in Western countries.

Leila Badawi (1994) notes aspects of Islam that are positive for women. Unlike Christian women, Islamic women keep their own family name when they get married. Muslims also have considerable choice over which interpretation of Islam, or school of law, they give their allegiance to. Some schools of law have much more positive attitudes to women than others.

Alexandra Wright notes that Reform Judaism has allowed women to become rabbis since 1972 (Wright, 1994). Holm notes that even in 1994 there were already three female Anglican bishops. Some Christian religions, particularly Quakerism, have never been oppressive to women. Kanwaljit Kaur-Singh points out that 'Sikh Gurus pleaded the cause of the emancipation of Indian womanhood and did their best to ameliorate the sordid condition of women' (Kaur-Singh, 1994).

Thus it should not be assumed that all religions are, and always have been, equally oppressive to women. Furthermore, even apparently oppressive practices may be open to varied interpretations. One example is the veiling of Islamic women.

Helen Watson – the meaning of veiling

Perspectives on veiling

Helen Watson argues that 'For non-Muslim writers, the veil is variously depicted as a tangible symbol of women's oppression, a constraining and restricting form of dress, and a form of social control, religiously sanctioning women's invisibility and subordinate socio-political status' (Watson, 1994). However, this is not the viewpoint of many Muslim women and writers. To them, hijab, or religious modesty, actually has advantages for women, which can reduce, or allow them to cope with, male oppression.

The veil has the potential both to constrain and to liberate. Watson accepts that Islamic interpretations of the Koran's advocacy of modesty have been interpreted differently for men and women. Primary emphasis has been placed upon the need for women to be modest because their seductiveness might lead men astray. Furthermore, some Islamic feminists argue that the Koran makes no clear statement of the need for women to wear a veil in the presence of men who are not relatives. Rather, the practice is based upon a misinterpretation of the Koran by those who wanted to maintain patriarchal relationships that predated Islam. To some the practice is 'at odds with the reforming and egalitarian inspiration and ethos of Islam'.

Nevertheless, by examining three personal responses to veiling by different women, Watson maintains that wearing veils can be used in a positive way by Islamic women in a globalized world. As Western culture tries to influence Islamic countries, and more Muslims live in the Western world, the veil can take on new meanings for women.

The experience of veiling

The first example studied by Watson was Nadia, a second-generation British-Asian woman studying medicine at university. Nadia chose herself to start wearing a veil when she was 16. She was proud of her religion and wanted others to know that she was Muslim. She felt that 'It is liberating to have the freedom of movement to be able to communicate with people without being on show. It's what you say that's important, not what you look like.' She found that, far from making her invisible, wearing a veil made her stand out, yet it also helped her to avoid 'lecherous stares or worse' from men.

The second woman, Maryam, was a middle-aged, lower-class Algerian living in France, who had migrated there ten years earlier with her husband. When she was growing up in Algiers her relatives wore Western-style clothes. Maryam thought that times had changed and it was now appropriate for her to wear a veil. She thought, 'It is difficult enough to live in a big foreign city without having the extra burden of being molested in the street because you are a woman.' Her husband was happy with her decision because it made him worry about her less when she was going to work. Maryam was also keen to wear a veil because she wanted to follow the example of women in Iran. She described the 1979 Islamic revolution there as 'the people's struggle to throw out their corrupt ruler, rid the country of the ill effects of Western influences and make a better society'. She continued, 'These things all had the result of making me more aware of the importance of Islam and my conduct and duty as a mother and a wife for the future of the next generation.'

The third woman interviewed by Watson, Fatima, was a vegetable seller in Cairo. She was in her late seventies. She took a less positive view of the trend towards wearing veils amongst Egyptian women. She thought it was 'just a trend'. When Fatima was a young woman, women still took the idea of modesty seriously without feeling the need to dress so traditionally. Fatima did not think that 'this new veiling is a religious duty. A woman's modest conduct is more important than what she wears.' She was in favour of an increased emphasis on morality amongst Islamic women, though, and was happy for people to turn against some of the less desirable Western values. However, she thought that the issue of whether to wear a veil should always be a matter of choice rather than of law.

Conclusion and evaluation

Watson concludes that veiling is often a reaction against an increasingly pervasive Western culture. Some Muslim men too have begun to reject Western-style clothes – for example, by refusing to wear ties. All this can be seen as '"a sign of the times" which entails the assertion of independence, separate identity and a rejection of western cultural imperialism'. Rather than seeing the veil as a sign of male oppression, it has become 'a reaction against the secular feminism of the West, and as part of the search for an indigenous Islamic form of protest against male power and dominance in public society'.

Watson's work serves as a caution to sociologists who interpret in simplistic terms the practices of religions which are not their own. It shows that the meaning of religion needs to be carefully interpreted. In studies of religion, account needs to be taken of the meaning of religion to its believers; it is not just based upon reading holy texts and observing religious practices. Watson's work suggests that practices that may appear oppressive can take on a variety of meanings. Nevertheless, her conclusions

should be treated with some caution. Her observations are based upon studying only three women. She appears to have made no attempt to find Muslim women who felt they were forced into wearing the veil against their will by men or patriarchal society. Attempts by women to subvert patriarchy by changing the meaning of traditional practices may not always succeed in liberating women from domination through religion. There is always a danger that they might have the opposite effect.

Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge – religion and compensators

Unlike functionalist sociologists such as Durkheim, the American sociologists Stark and Bainbridge see religion as meeting the needs of individuals rather than those of society as a whole (Stark and Bainbridge, 1985). Unlike Marx, they see religion as meeting universal human needs rather than those that stem from class inequality and exploitation. Unlike feminists, they do not see religion as primarily serving the interests of men rather than women. Furthermore, they reject the view, shared by the classic sociologists of religion, that the development of industrial capitalist societies would, one way or another, ultimately undermine religion (see p. 486). Stark and Bainbridge claim that religion helps to meet universal human needs. As such, changes in society cannot diminish its appeal.

Human desires

They start with the basic premise that 'Humans seek what they perceive to be rewards and try to avoid what they perceive to be costs.' In short, people do what they believe will be good for them. This provides quite a straightforward basis for human decision making but individuals may still face problems:

1. Many of the things that people desire, for example wealth and status, are scarce and cannot be attained by everyone.
2. Some things that people strongly desire may not be available at all. One such desire, and one that is crucial for their theory, is a desire for life after death. Even without convincing evidence that eternal life is possible, people continue to want it, and it is here that the roots of religion lie.

Compensators

Stark and Bainbridge recognize that religion might not actually provide people with eternal life, but what it does offer is a 'compensator'. A compensator is 'the belief that a reward will be obtained in the distant future or in some other context which cannot be verified'. They are a type of IOU – if individuals act in a particular way they will eventually be rewarded. In the absence of immediate rewards people are liable to turn to compensators.

Some political activists would like society to be transformed. If there is little evidence that the transformation is likely, they may develop the belief in a future revolution as a compensator. Similarly, a compensator is exchanged for a reward when a parent persuades a child that working hard now will eventually lead to fame and riches. Some compensators are quite specific – for example, the promise of a cured wart; others are more general. The promise of eternal life is an example of a general compensator.

Compensators and the supernatural

Sometimes individuals want rewards that are so great and so remote from everyday experience that the possibility of gaining them can only be contemplated alongside a belief in the supernatural. Stark and Bainbridge say:

> *Since time immemorial humans have desired to know the meaning of existence. Why are we here? What is the purpose of life? Where will it all end? Moreover, people have not just wanted answers to these questions; they have desired particular kinds of answers – that life has meaning. But for life to have a great design, for there to be intention behind history, one must posit the existence of a designer or intender of such power, duration, and scale as to be outside the natural world of our senses.*
>
> Stark and Bainbridge, 1985

Only belief in a god allows us to have answers to our most fundamental questions. According to this viewpoint, religion consists of organizations which offer 'general compensators based on supernatural assumptions'.

Religious pluralism and secularization

Since religion answers universal questions, and it offers compensators that meet universal human needs, religion can neither disappear nor seriously decline. If churches compromise their beliefs in the supernatural they become less appealing as a source of compensators. Thus 'for religious organizations to move markedly in the direction of non-supernaturalism is to pursue the path to ruin'. If this happens,

people turn to different religious organizations, and particularly to new sects and cults that have a greater emphasis on the supernatural. (We will discuss sects and cults later, see pp. 460–2.)

According to Stark and Bainbridge, American society has become characterized by religious pluralism as people have sought new sources of compensators. They quote J. George Melton's 1978 *Encyclopedia of American Religions* which listed no fewer than 1,200 different religious groups. Stark and Bainbridge deny that there are many people who lack beliefs and they do not believe that secularization has taken place or will take place in the future. (In general terms secularization means the decline of religion. For a detailed definition of secularization see pp. 469–70.) They claim that 'the majority of people who say they have no religious affiliation express considerable belief in the mystical and supernatural'. In other words, they have not lost their need for supernatural compensators. Furthermore, Stark and Bainbridge quote survey evidence which suggests that 60 per cent of those whose parents had no religious affiliation claim a religious affiliation for themselves. Where agnosticism or atheism existed, they were not passed on to succeeding generations.

Stark and Bainbridge – an evaluation

Stark and Bainbridge have provided an original and comprehensive attempt to develop a sociological perspective on religion. Their work has provided a number of insights into religious organizations and religious change. However, it has not been without critics.

Roy Wallis and Steve Bruce argue that the available evidence contradicts their theory (Wallis and Bruce, 1986). New religious movements have not gained sufficient recruits to replace those lost from more established religions. (The evidence for and against the theory of secularization is examined in detail on pp. 470–93.)

Wallis and Bruce also criticize Stark and Bainbridge for ignoring social and cultural influences on the questions that individuals ask and the rewards they seek. It is by no means inevitable that people seek the kinds of reward for which religion offers compensators. Society, culture and socialization might create the need for religion rather than universal human desires. Wallis and Bruce say:

> *since most people are born into a social world in which religious beliefs already exist, belief in another world with supernatural characteristics opens up the possibility of wanting things there as well as rather than instead of here.*
>
> Wallis and Bruce, 1986

By reducing their explanation of religion to supposedly universal needs, Stark and Bainbridge neglect the social factors that help to create and sustain religion. For example, they neglect the possibility that religion might be related to sustaining the power and dominance of men. This possibility was examined in the previous section on gender.

Religion and social change

There are a number of possible relationships between religion and social change. Religion may be a factor that impedes social change, or it may help to produce it. Another possibility is that religion itself has no influence on changes in society, but that there is nevertheless a causal relationship between the two. From this point of view, it is social change in society as a whole that leads to changes in religion.

Religion as a conservative force

Functionalists and Marxists have generally dismissed the possibility that religion can cause changes in society. They believe that religion acts as a conservative force and that it is changes in society that shape religion, not vice versa.

Religion can be seen as a 'conservative force' in two senses, depending on the meaning attached to the word 'conservative'. The phrase conservative force is usually used to refer to religion as preventing change and maintaining the status quo. Functionalists have claimed that it acts in this way because it promotes integration and social solidarity. As we discovered in previous sections, from a functionalist perspective, religion provides shared beliefs, norms and values, and helps individuals to cope with stresses that might disrupt social life. In these ways it facilitates the continued existence of society in its present form. Marx had similar views, although he saw religion as maintaining the status quo in the interests of the ruling class rather than those of society as a whole.

'Conservative' may, however, be used in another way: it can refer to traditional beliefs and customs. Usually if religion helps to maintain the status quo it will also maintain traditional customs and beliefs. For

example, the stance of successive popes against the use of contraception has restricted the growth of artificial methods of birth control in Roman Catholic countries. But in some circumstances religion can support social change while at the same time promoting traditional values. This often occurs when there is a revival in fundamentalist religious beliefs.

Conservatism, fundamentalism and social change

Recent years have seen the rise of fundamentalist religious beliefs in different parts of the world. Donald Taylor (1987) defines fundamentalism as involving the following:

1 A group of people perceive a challenge to an ultimate authority, usually a god, in which they believe.
2 These people decide that the challenge cannot be tolerated.
3 They reaffirm their belief in the authority that is being challenged.
4 They oppose those who have challenged the established beliefs, and often they use political means to further their cause.

According to this view, fundamentalism involves the reassertion of traditional moral and religious values against changes that have taken place and those who support the changes. If fundamentalists are successful, they succeed in defending traditional values, but at the same time they change society by reversing innovations that have taken place.

However, it should be borne in mind that religions are usually open to many different interpretations. Those claiming to be returning to the original teachings of a religion may well disagree with one another. Thus Fred Halliday, commenting on Islamic fundamentalism, says that 'no such essential Islam exists: as one Iranian thinker puts it, Islam is a sea in which it is possible to catch almost any fish one wants' (Halliday, 1994). In other words, each particular fundamentalist interpretation of a religion is only one amongst many.

In a book of articles edited by Lionel Caplan (1987), fundamentalism was identified among a wide variety of religious groups throughout the world. These included Sikh fundamentalists in the Punjab, Hindu fundamentalism amongst Sri Lankans in Britain, and Islamic fundamentalism in Turkey. Steve Bruce has analysed fundamentalism amongst Protestant groups in Northern Ireland, Scotland and the USA (Bruce 1985, 1986, 1988).

However, perhaps the most dramatic example of fundamentalism causing social change through the imposition of a return to traditional values has been in Iran. Under the last Shah, Iranian society underwent a process of change. One aspect of this change was the liberalization of traditional Islamic attitudes to women. In 1979 the Iranian revolution, which was partly inspired by Islamic fundamentalism, took place and these changes were reversed. In this case, it can be argued, religious beliefs contributed to producing revolutionary change. Religion did not therefore act as a conservative force in one sense of the word. Nevertheless, in terms of supporting traditional values, it did act as a conservative force. The two meanings of the word conservative should therefore be distinguished.

Changes in society and religion

Most sociologists agree that changes in society lead to changes in religion:

1 Talcott Parsons (1937, 1964, 1965a), for example, believed that, as society developed, religion lost some of its functions (for further details, see pp. 434–5).
2 Marx believed that a change in the infrastructure of society would lead to changes in the superstructure, including religion. Thus Marx anticipated that, when a classless society was established, religion would disappear (Marx and Engels, 1957).
3 Bryan Turner (1983) claims that religion lost its function of facilitating the smooth transfer of property from generation to generation when feudalism gave way to capitalism.
4 As later sections of this chapter will show, supporters of the secularization theory think that industrialization has led to profound changes that have progressively reduced the importance of religion in society (see pp. 469–93).
5 A number of sociologists have claimed that changes involved in the advent of postmodernism and globalization have produced changes in religion (see pp. 493–500).

So far, then, it appears to be generally agreed that, first, religion helps to maintain the status quo, and that, second, changes in religion result from changes in the wider society. Some sociologists, however, have argued that religion can cause social change.

Max Weber – *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

Both functionalists and Marxists emphasize the role of religion in promoting social integration and impeding social change. In contrast, Weber (1958, first published in English 1930) argued that in some circumstances religion can lead to social change: although shared religious beliefs might integrate a social group, those same beliefs may have repercussions which in the long term can produce changes in society.

Marx is generally regarded as a materialist. He believed that the material world (and particularly people's involvement with nature as they worked to secure their own survival) shaped their beliefs. Thus, to Marx, the economic system largely determined the beliefs that were held by individuals. In Marxist terms, the mode of production determined the type of religion that would be dominant in any society.

Unlike Marx, Weber rejected the view that religion is always shaped by economic factors. He did not deny that, at certain times and in certain places, religion may be largely shaped by economic forces, but he denied that this is always the case. Under certain conditions the reverse can occur, that is, religious beliefs can be a major influence on economic behaviour.

Weber's social action theory argues that human action is directed by meanings and motives. (See Chapter 15 for a discussion of Weber's general theory.) From this perspective, action can only be understood by appreciating the world view – the image or picture of the world held by members of society. From their world view, individuals obtain meanings, purposes and motives that direct their actions. Religion is often an important component of a world view. In certain places and times, religious meaning and purposes can direct action in a wide range of contexts. In particular, religious beliefs can direct economic action.

Capitalism and ascetic Protestantism

In his most famous book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1958), Weber examines the relationship between the rise of certain forms of Protestantism and the development of Western industrial capitalism. In the first part of his argument Weber tries to demonstrate that a particular form of Protestantism, ascetic Calvinist Protestantism, preceded the development of capitalism. He also tries to show that capitalism developed initially in areas where this religion was influential. Other areas of the world possessed many of the necessary prerequisites yet they were not amongst the first areas to develop capitalism. For example, India and China had technological knowledge, labour to be hired, and individuals engaged in making money. What they lacked, according to Weber, was a religion that encouraged and facilitated the development of capitalism. The first capitalist nations emerged among the countries of Western Europe and North America that had Calvinist religious groups. Furthermore, most of the earliest capitalist entrepreneurs in these areas came from the ranks of Calvinists.

Having established a relationship – a correlation between Calvinism and capitalism – by comparing religion and economic development in different parts of the world, Weber goes on to explain how and why this type of religion was linked to capitalism.

Calvinist Protestantism originated in the beliefs of John Calvin in the seventeenth century. Calvin thought that there was a distinct group of the elect – those chosen to go to heaven – and that they had been chosen by God even before they were born. Those who were not among the elect could never gain a place in heaven however well they behaved on earth.

Other versions of Christianity derived from the beliefs of Martin Luther. Luther believed that individual Christians could affect their chances of reaching heaven by the way that they behaved on earth. It was very important for Christians to develop faith in God, and to act out God's will on earth. In order to do this they had to be dedicated to their calling in life. Whatever position in society God had given them, they must conscientiously carry out the appropriate duties.

At first sight, Lutheranism seems the doctrine more likely to produce capitalism. However, it encouraged people to produce or earn no more than was necessary for their material needs. It attached more importance to piety and faith than to the accumulation of great wealth.

The doctrine of predestination advocated by Calvin seems less likely to produce capitalism. If certain individuals were destined for heaven regardless of their earthly behaviour – and the rest were equally unable to overcome their damnation – there would be little point in hard work on earth.

Weber points out, though, that Calvinists had a psychological problem: they did not know whether they were amongst the elect. They suffered from a kind of inner loneliness or uncertainty about their status, and their behaviour was not an attempt to earn a place in heaven, but rather to convince themselves that they had been chosen to go there. They reasoned that only the chosen people of God would be able to live a good life on earth. If their behaviour was exemplary they could feel confident that they would go to heaven after death.

Therefore, the interpretation that the Calvinists put on the doctrine of predestination contributed to them becoming the first capitalists.

The Protestant ethic

The Protestant ethic which Weber describes (and which enabled Calvinists to convince themselves that they were amongst the elect) developed first in seventeenth-century Western Europe. The ethic was ascetic, encouraging abstinence from life's pleasures, an austere lifestyle and rigorous self-discipline. It produced individuals who worked hard in their careers or callings, in a single-minded manner. Making money was a concrete indication of success

in one's calling, and success in one's calling meant that the individual had not lost grace in God's sight.

John Wesley, a leader of the great Methodist revival that preceded the expansion of English industry at the close of the eighteenth century, wrote:

> *For religion must necessarily produce industry and frugality, and these cannot but produce riches. We must exhort all Christians to gain what they can and to save all they can; that is, in effect to grow rich.*
>
> Quoted in Weber, 1958, p. 175

These riches could not be spent on luxuries, fine clothes, lavish houses and frivolous entertainment, but in the glory of God. In effect, this meant being even more successful in terms of one's calling, which in practice meant reinvesting profits in the business.

The Protestants attacked time-wasting, laziness, idle gossip and more sleep than was necessary – six to eight hours a day at the most. They frowned on sexual pleasures; sexual intercourse should remain within marriage and then only for the procreation of children (a vegetable diet and cold baths were sometimes recommended to remove temptation). Sport and recreation were accepted only for improving fitness and health, and condemned if pursued for entertainment. The impulsive fun and enjoyment of the pub, dance hall, theatre and gaming house were prohibited to ascetic Protestants. In fact anything that might divert or distract people from their calling was condemned. Living life in terms of these guidelines was an indication that the individual had not lost grace and favour in the sight of God.

The spirit of capitalism

Weber claimed that the origins of the spirit of capitalism were to be found in the ethic of ascetic Protestantism. Throughout history there had been no shortage of those who sought money and profit: pirates, prostitutes and money lenders in every corner of the world had always pursued wealth. However, according to Weber, both the manner and purpose of their pursuit of money were at odds with the spirit of capitalism.

Traditionally, money seekers engaged in speculative projects: they gambled in order to gain rewards. If successful they tended to spend money frivolously on personal consumption. Furthermore, they were not dedicated to making money for its own sake. Weber argued that labourers who had earned enough for their family to live comfortably, and merchants who had secured the luxuries they desired, would feel no need to push themselves harder to make more money. Instead, they sought free time for leisure.

The ascetic Protestant had a quite different attitude to wealth, and Weber believed that this attitude was characteristic of capitalism. He argued that the essence of capitalism is 'the pursuit of profit and forever renewed profit'.

Capitalist enterprises are organized on rational bureaucratic lines. Business transactions are conducted in a systematic and rational manner with costs and projected profits being carefully assessed. (We examine Weber's views on rational action in detail in Chapter 15, and in this chapter, pp. 450–1.)

Underlying the practice of capitalism is the spirit of capitalism – a set of ideas, ethics and values. Weber illustrates the spirit of capitalism with quotes from two books by Benjamin Franklin, *Necessary Hints to Those that Would be Rich* (1736) and *Advice to a Young Tradesman* (1748). Franklin writes 'Remember that time is money.' Time-wasting, idleness and diversion lose money. 'Remember that credit is money.' A reputation for 'prudence and honesty' will bring credit, as will paying debts on time. Business people should behave with 'industry and frugality', and 'punctuality and justice' in all their dealings.

Weber argued that this spirit of capitalism is not simply a way of making money, but a way of life which has ethics, duties and obligations. He claimed that ascetic Protestantism was a vital influence in the creation and development of the spirit and practice of capitalism: a methodical and single-minded pursuit of a calling encourages rational capitalism. Weber wrote that 'restless, continuous, systematic work in a worldly calling must have been the most powerful conceivable lever for the expansion of the spirit of capitalism'. Making money became both a religious and a business ethic. The Protestant 'interpretation of profit-making justified the activities of the businessman'.

Weber claimed that two major features of capitalist industry – the standardization of production and the specialized division of labour – were encouraged by Protestantism. The Protestant 'uniformity of life immensely aids the capitalist in the standardization of production'. The emphasis on the 'importance of a fixed calling provided an ethical justification for this modern specialized division of labour'.

Finally, Weber noted the importance of the creation of wealth and the restrictions on spending it, which encouraged saving and reinvestment:

> *When the limitation of consumption is combined with this release of acquisitive activity, the inevitable result is obvious: accumulation of capital through an ascetic compulsion to save. The restraints that were imposed on the consumption of wealth naturally served to increase it, by making possible the productive investment of capital.*
>
> Weber, 1958

The ascetic Protestant way of life led to the accumulation of capital, investment and reinvestment. It produced the early businesses that expanded to create capitalist society.

Materialism and Weber's theory

Weber, then, believed that he had discovered and demonstrated that religious beliefs could cause economic change. He claimed that he had found a weakness in Marx's materialism which implied that the economic system always shaped ideas.

However, it should be stressed that Weber did not discount the importance of the economy and material factors. He said, 'It is, of course, not my aim to substitute for a one-sided materialistic an equally one-sided spiritualistic causal interpretation of culture and of history.' Capitalism was made possible not just by Calvinist Protestantism, but also by the technology and economic system of the countries in which it developed. Material factors were as important as ideas in its development; neither could be ignored in any explanation.

Religion, modernity and rationality

As well as proposing an explanation for the origins of capitalism, Weber also had a good deal to say about the likely consequences of the changes produced by the development of Protestantism. His theories have had a tremendous influence on general ideas about changes in Western societies, and in particular on the concepts of modernity and secularization. Modernity refers to both a historical period and a type of society which is often seen as developing along with industrialization, science and capitalism (see p. 8). Secularization refers to the decline of religion (see below, pp. 469–70). Robert Holton and Bryan Turner (1989), for example, argue that the central themes of all of Weber's sociology were 'the problems of modernization and modernity, and that we should regard rationalization as the process which produced modernism'.

As we have seen above, in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* Weber argued that ascetic Protestantism helped to produce modern capitalism. With that went an emphasis on rational calculation since pursuing the maximum possible profit required an appraisal of the profits that would be produced by following different lines of action. The capitalist would then follow whatever path would produce the greatest profit. Weber distinguished between formal rationality and substantive rationality (Weber, 1964). Formal rationality involved calculating the best means to achieve a given end, and the calculations had to be in a numerical form. Substantive rationality involved action designed to meet some ultimate goal, such as justice, equality or human happiness. Capitalist behaviour put primary emphasis upon the formal rationality of accounting in the pursuit of profit maximization. Substantive rationality, including the morality provided by religious beliefs, tended to fade into the background in capitalist societies.

To Weber, rationality would not be confined to capitalist enterprise in the modern world. As Holton and Turner point out, it would also involve 'a rational legal system, the separation of the home and the work-place, rational financial management, and the emergence of a rational system of administration'. Weber's ideas on bureaucracy are a good example of his belief that modern societies would be increasingly characterized by rationality (see Chapter 15). However, to Weber, and to many later sociologists, rationality can be at odds with the faith that is required by religion.

Religions do not expect their followers to try to test their beliefs scientifically, nor do they expect religious beliefs to be based upon weighing up the costs and benefits of joining a religious group. Followers should simply believe in the truth of their religion. In the rationalized modern world, though, Weber thought that it would be increasingly difficult for followers of religion to maintain their faith. Discussing Protestant sects in the USA, Weber said, 'closer scrutiny revealed the steady progress of the characteristic process of "secularization" to which all phenomena that originated in religious conceptions succumb' (Weber in Gerth and Mills (eds), 1948). In short, ascetic Protestantism would contribute to the development of capitalism, which required a rational approach to social life, which would in turn undermine religion. Protestant religions therefore contained the seeds of their own destruction. As Malcolm Hamilton puts it:

> *Once on its way, the modern economic system was able to support itself without the need of the religious ethic of ascetic Protestantism which in many ways could not help but sow the seeds of secularization in modern society by its own promotion of worldly activity and consequent expansion of wealth and material well-being. Calvinistic Protestantism was its own gravedigger.*
>
> Hamilton, 1995, p. 152

Weber – an evaluation

The ideas of Weber and other sociologists on modernity, rationality and secularization will be discussed later in the chapter. The following discussion therefore concentrates on his specific ideas relating to *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

Since its publication Weber's book has received both criticism and support from researchers:

1 Sombart (1907), an early critic, argued that Weber was mistaken about the beliefs held by Calvinists. According to Sombart, Calvinism was against greed and the pursuit of money for its own sake.

   Weber himself countered this argument. He pointed out that it was not the beliefs of Calvinists that were important in themselves. The doctrine of predestination was not intended to produce the rational pursuit of profit, but nevertheless that was one of its unintentional consequences and the evidence was in the way that ascetic Protestants actually behaved.

2 A second criticism points to parts of the world where Calvinism was strong, but capitalism did not develop until much later. For example, Switzerland, Scotland, Hungary and parts of the Netherlands all contained large Calvinist populations but were not among the first capitalist countries.

   Gordon Marshall (1982) dismisses this criticism. He argues that the critics demonstrate a lack of understanding of Weber's theory. Weber did not claim that Calvinism was the only factor necessary for the development of capitalism. His theory cannot therefore be disproved simply by finding Calvinist countries that failed to become capitalist comparatively early. In his own study of Scotland, Marshall found that the Scottish had a capitalist mentality but were held back by a lack of skilled labour and capital for investment, and by government policies that did not stimulate the development of industry.

3 A potentially more damaging criticism of Weber's theory originates from Marxist critics such as Kautsky (1953). Kautsky argues that early capitalism preceded and largely determined Protestantism. He sees Calvinism as developing in cities where commerce and early forms of industrialization were already established. In his view Protestantism became the ideology capitalists used to legitimate their position.

   This is a chicken and egg question – which came first: Calvinism or capitalism? The answer depends upon how capitalism is defined. To Weber, pre-capitalist money-making ventures were not organized rationally to ensure continued profit.

   Marshall (1982) disputes this. He suggests that the medieval merchant classes behaved quite rationally considering the conditions of the time. It was not their psychological attitude that encouraged them to make what Weber saw as risky investments, but the situation they faced. In England the risks involved in trading were balanced by investments in land. Buying landed estates was not an example of conspicuous consumption, but of the prudent spreading of investments. In the Netherlands too, the business classes spread their risks but more money went into merchant trading because of the price of land. Even so, defenders of Weber insist that a distinctive rational capitalist entrepreneur did not emerge until after Calvinism.

4 A fourth criticism of Weber does not deny that Calvinism was an important factor which helped lead to capitalism, but questions the view that it was the religious beliefs of Calvinists that led to them becoming business people. According to this view, non-conformist Calvinists devoted themselves to business because they were excluded from holding public office and joining certain professions by law. Like the Jews in Eastern and central Europe, they tried to become economically successful in order to overcome their political persecution.

   In reply to this criticism, supporters of the Protestant ethic thesis argue that only Calvinist minorities developed the distinctive patterns of capitalist behaviour which involved rational planning for slow but sure capital growth; only they could develop capitalist businesses before capitalism was established.

Despite the considerable effort devoted to discussing Weber's theory by historians and sociologists alike, no agreement has been reached about its accuracy. Nevertheless, whatever the merits of this particular study, Weber does successfully highlight the theoretical point that ideas – in this case religious ideas – can conceivably lead to economic change.

Religion and social change – conclusion

Many sociologists do now accept that religion can be a force for change. Despite the examples that can be used to support the functionalist and Marxist view that religion promotes stability, other examples contradict their claims.

G.K. Nelson (1986) points to a number of cases where religion has undermined stability or promoted change:

1 In Northern Ireland, Roman Catholicism has long been associated with Irish Republicanism.

2 In the USA in the 1960s the Reverend Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Council played a leading role in establishing civil rights and securing legislation intended to reduce racial discrimination.

3 Also in the 1960s, a number of radical and revolutionary groups emerged within the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America. They preached liberation theology, arguing that it was the duty of church members to fight against unjust and oppressive right-wing dictatorships. Thus, in 1979, Catholic revolutionaries supported the Sandinistas when they seized control in Nicaragua.

4 In Iran, Islamic fundamentalism played a part in the 1979 revolution, led by the Ayatollah Khomeini.

5 Poland provides another example of religion stimulating change. The Roman Catholic Church

opposed the communist state in Poland, and it supported the attempts of the free trade union Solidarity to achieve changes in Polish society. In 1989 the communist monopoly on power was broken when Solidarity was allowed to contest and win many seats in the Polish parliament.

6 In South Africa, Archbishop Tutu was a prominent opponent of apartheid.

Examples such as these lead Nelson to conclude that 'far from encouraging people to accept their place, religion can spearhead resistance and revolution'. In many cases when religion has been a force for change in society, the society that results may be strongly influenced by that religion.

Engels (Marx and Engels, 1957), unlike Marx, did realize that in some circumstances religion could be a force for change. He argued that groups which turned to religion as a way of coping with oppression could develop into political movements which sought change on earth rather than salvation in heaven. Some contemporary neo-Marxists have followed Engels and developed this view (see pp. 438–9 for further details).

Religion and revolutionary movements

Leland W. Robinson (1987) argues that in some circumstances revolutionary movements deliberately try to use religion in their attempts to change society. He claims that three things are necessary if this is to happen:

1 The classes with the potential to become revolutionary need to have a predominantly religious world view. In the Third World this is often the case, particularly in Latin America, the Near East and South Asia. Europe is less religious and revolutionary movements have not usually tried to use religion. There are, however, exceptions, such as the role of the Roman Catholic Church in undermining the communist state in Poland.

2 The main religion needs to have a theology that can be interpreted in such a way that it can be used against those in power. Buddhism tends to stress the separation of religion and society into different spheres. Christianity and Hinduism have more revolutionary potential. For example, Gandhi used the Hindu concept of Sarvodaya (the welfare of all) to attack British colonial rule and to inspire rural peasants and the urban poor to turn against the British.

3 It is also necessary for the clergy and the revolutionary classes to have close contacts. Robinson argues that in countries such as Paraguay the clergy usually come from and remain in close contact with local communities. Here they have opposed the repressive regime of Stroessner. In Cuba the Catholic Church was so remote from ordinary people that it did not support Castro's communist revolution of 1956–9. A 1957 survey of 4,000 agricultural workers in Cuba found that only 7.8 per cent said that they had had any dealings with the Catholic clergy.

Where the above three factors are present, revolutionaries are able to make use of religion. This becomes even more likely in situations where the revolutionary classes all share the same religion, where this is different to the religion of those in power, and where there are no alternative organizations available through which to express dissent. In many countries in South America, such as Guatemala, Chile and El Salvador, where the police and military have been used to crush other organizations such as trade unions, religion is the only remaining outlet for dissent.

Conservative or radical religion?

Merideth B. McGuire (1981) also examines the factors which influence the type of role that religion plays in society, commenting 'The question is no longer "Does religion promote social change?" but rather, "In what way and under what conditions does it promote rather than inhibit change?"' Unlike Leland, McGuire does not concentrate exclusively on the revolutionary potential of religion. She identifies four main factors that determine the potential of religion to change society:

1 The first factor is the beliefs of the particular religion. Religions that emphasize adherence to strong moral codes are more likely to produce members who are critical of society and who seek to change it. If a religion stresses concern with this world, it is more likely to result in actions by its members which produce change than a religion which confines itself to a concern with sacred and spiritual matters. Thus Protestantism can have more impact on social change than Buddhism.

2 The second factor is the culture of the society in which a religion exists. In societies where religious beliefs are central to the culture (such as in Latin America), anyone wishing to produce change tends to use a religious legitimation for their actions. In Britain, however, religion plays a less central role in societal culture, so it tends to play a less important role in justifying changes in society.

3 What McGuire describes as the social location of religion is the third important factor. This concerns the part that religion plays in the social structure. Again, the greater the importance of religion, the greater its potential to play a part in producing change. Where an established church or other religious organization plays a major role in political and economic life, there is considerable scope for religion having an impact on processes of change.

4 The final factor is the internal organization of religious institutions. According to McGuire, religions with a strong, centralized source of authority have more chance of affecting events. On the other hand, the central authority might try to restrain the actions of parts of the organization. For example, in 1978 at the Puebla Conference in Mexico, the Pope clashed with Latin American Roman Catholic bishops who were advocating liberation theology.

McGuire provides only a sketchy outline of the factors determining whether religion acts as a conservative force maintaining the status quo or as a force for change. Nevertheless she does provide a starting point for analysing the relationship between religion and social change.

In the next section we will examine different types of religious organization and the wide variety of ideologies that have been supported by different organizations. We will also discover that conservative and radical ideologies tend to be associated with different types of religious organization.

Religious organizations

Individuals may have their own religious beliefs without belonging to any particular organization: they may form their own personal and unique relationship with a god or some source of spiritual power. However, many members of society express their religious beliefs through organizations, and the organizations tend to shape those beliefs. Social factors influence the types of organization that are created, who joins them and how they develop. At the same time, religious organizations may themselves influence society.

Before we examine these issues, it is necessary for us to distinguish between the different types of religious organization. There have been a number of attempts to categorize them, but no system fits perfectly the infinite variety of such organizations that have existed throughout the world. Nevertheless, it is possible broadly to distinguish some main types of religious organization.

The church

Ernst Troeltsch in 1931 was one of the first writers to try to distinguish different types of religious organization. Troeltsch used the term church to refer to a large religious organization. Individuals do not have to demonstrate their faith to become members of a church – indeed, often they are born into it. In some churches the practice of baptism ensures that all the children of members are automatically recruited before they are old enough to understand the faith.

In principle a church might try to be universal – to embrace all members of society – but in practice there might be substantial minorities who do not belong. Because of its size, members of a church are drawn from all classes in society, but the upper classes are particularly likely to join. This is because, in Troeltsch's words, a church usually 'stabilizes and determines the political order' (Troeltsch, 1981).

Churches are sometimes closely related to the state. For example, the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages had important political, educational and social functions. Even in contemporary Britain the Queen is both head of the Church of England and head of state. Churches are likely to be ideologically conservative and support the status quo: an opinion poll in 1988 found that 63 per cent of active lay members of the Church of England supported the Conservative Party, which received only 43 per cent of the total votes in the 1987 election (quoted in Davie, 1989).

This type of organization accepts and affirms life in this world: members can play a full part in social life and are not expected to withdraw from society. In many circumstances a church will jealously guard its monopoly on religious truth, and will not tolerate challenges to its religious authority. For example, the Roman Catholic Church at one time used the Inquisition to stamp out heresy. Churches are formal organizations with a hierarchy of professional, paid officials.

Steve Bruce argues that the concept of a church is primarily useful in describing pre-modern Christian societies. He says, 'The notion of the church derives its force from the growth of Christianity and the historic forms of Catholic, Orthodox, and Coptic churches. These bodies sought to be co-extensive with their societies' (Bruce, 1996). However, in 1517 Martin Luther, a German priest, began to question some of the teachings and practices of the medieval church. This led to the Reformation in which competing religious views developed, including the Protestant Church of England established by Henry VIII. A plurality of sects with competing doctrines also developed. To Bruce, the development of religious pluralism in societies undermines the maintenance of the church type of religious organization. He says, 'when a population becomes divided

between a number of organizations, that fragmentation undermines the conditions for the church form' (Bruce, 1995). This is because it becomes more difficult for the state to lend exclusive support to one religion, and because a single set of religious beliefs is no longer taken for granted and reinforced by all groups in society. Thus, for Bruce, churches, in the sense meant by Troeltsch, are essentially historical phenomena which cannot continue to exist in modern societies. Indeed, Bruce sees the Church of England as a denomination rather than a church.

A number of examples can illustrate Bruce's point. A variety of organizations, which call themselves churches or which could be seen as churches, do not conform to the characteristics outlined by Troeltsch:

1 The percentage of the population who are members of a church can vary widely. For example, according to the *UK Christian Handbook*, in Britain in 1995 just 1,785,273 people were members of Anglican churches. Some 82 per cent of these were in the Church of England.
2 Many churches today do not claim a monopoly of the religious truth – other religions are tolerated. In Britain there is a growing diversity of religious groupings that are tolerated by the Church of England.
3 Furthermore, the ecumenical movement, which seeks unity between varying Christian religious groups, demonstrates the extent to which churches are now willing to compromise their beliefs.
4 Churches are not always ideologically conservative and they do not always support the dominant groups in a society: the General Synod of the Church of England clashed with the British Conservative government in the 1980s and 1990s over issues such as poverty and conditions in Britain's inner cities. Davie claims that there is a growing gap within the Church of England between lay members, who tend to be conservative, and senior officials such as bishops, who tend to be more radical (Davie, 1989).
5 In some circumstances the churches are not connected to the state, and may even act as a focus of opposition to it. Before the overthrow of communism in Poland the Roman Catholic Church opposed the communist government, and in many parts of Latin America liberation theology has also led to conflict between the Catholic Church and the state.

Roland Robertson argues that throughout the world there has been an increase in church–state tensions (Robertson, 1987). Far from identifying closely with the state, churches are increasingly distancing themselves from it. Robertson notes tensions between the state and Shiite fundamentalists in the Middle East, Coptic Christians in Egypt, Maronite Christians in Lebanon, Sikhs in India and Islamic fundamentalists in Pakistan, Indonesia and the Philippines. He points out that many churches are transnational organizations, their activities are not confined to a single country. He argues that, in the modern 'world system', nation-states interact with each other by pursuing non-religious, secular national interests. In international trade and diplomacy there is little room for the consideration of theological issues. Consequently national governments tend to come into conflict with the moral concerns of domestic churches and transnational religious organizations.

There are some ways in which contemporary churches retain some of their traditional characteristics, at least in some societies. Churches in industrial societies tend to be larger and more conservative than other religious groups. Some industrialized societies have retained fairly strong churches that continue to conform to most of the characteristics outlined by Troeltsch. Roy Wallis and Steve Bruce claim, of the Roman Catholic Church, 'In those places where it is dominant, e.g. Spain, Portugal and the Republic of Ireland, it acts as a universal church, claiming authority over the society as a whole' (Wallis and Bruce, 1986). In the Republic of Ireland the bishops continue to receive state support for the moral teachings of Catholicism, and as recently as 1983 they were able to denounce a well-established Pentecostal Protestant religious group as a dangerous cult which should not be tolerated.

In other countries, though, the Catholic Church is not in a position to act in such ways and has to co-exist peacefully with a plurality of other religions, making no special claims on the state. Similarly, in Iran there is close identification between Islam and the state, but in countries such as Turkey the Muslim religion has much less influence on the state and politics.

Denominations

Troeltsch's original categorization of religious organizations included only churches and sects. It did not include 'denominations'. As Troeltsch based his work on an analysis of religion in sixteenth-century Europe, his classification was not capable of describing the variety of religions in the USA, or for that matter in modern Britain. According to Stark and Bainbridge (1985), the term denomination is usually used to refer to an organization that shares several but not all of the supposed features of a church. It is often seen as a kind of watered-down church which has some similarities to a sect (we will discuss sects in the next section).

In a study of religion in the USA, H.R. Niebuhr (1929) was the first sociologist to differentiate clearly

the denomination from the church. A denomination has been seen as having the following features:

1 Unlike a church, a denomination does not have a universal appeal in society. For example, in Britain in 1995 Methodists could claim 401,087 members, and there were 195,200 Baptists.
2 Like churches, denominations draw members from all strata in society, but, unlike churches, they are not usually so closely identified with the upper classes. Often a considerable number of denominations exist within a particular society. In the USA there is no established church, but a large range of denominations.
3 Unlike a church, a denomination does not identify with the state and approves the separation of church and state.
4 Denominations do not claim a monopoly of the religious truth. They are prepared to tolerate and cooperate with other religious organizations.
5 Denominations are usually conservative: members generally accept the norms and values of society, although they may have marginally different values from those of the wider society. Some denominations place minor restrictions on their members. For instance, Methodists are discouraged from drinking and gambling, but drinking in moderation is tolerated, and drinkers are not excluded from the denomination.
6 In other respects, denominations have the same characteristics as churches: new members are freely admitted and they have a hierarchy of paid officials.

Steve Bruce (1995) sees the lack of a claim to a monopoly of the religious truth as the defining feature of denominations. Furthermore, he sees them as increasingly important. He says:

> *The last two hundred years has seen gradual evolution of churches and sects into denominations. The church form has been made untenable by the gradual increase in cultural pluralism and by the unwillingness of the state to continue to force reluctant people into the state church.*
>
> Bruce, 1995, p. 9

The blurring of boundaries between religious organizations as they change has made the concept of the denomination no less problematic than the concept of the church. It covers a wide range of organizations from Jehovah's Witnesses to Methodists, from Pentecostalists to Baptists. Some organizations are classified as sects by some sociologists but as denominations by others.

Stark and Bainbridge (1985) are highly critical of the concept of a denomination. They argue that the addition of denominations to the distinction between church and sect only 'renders fluid and uncertain an intellectual scheme that was supposed to be a solid basis for analysis'. Indeed, they claim that the division of religious organizations into discrete types obscures rather than clarifies the differences between them (see pp. 460–2 for further details of their argument).

Sects

According to Troeltsch, sects have characteristics that are almost diametrically opposed to those of churches:

1 They are both smaller and more strongly integrated than other religious organizations.
2 Rather than drawing members from all sections of society and being closely connected to the state, Troeltsch claimed that sects are 'connected with the lower classes, or at least with those elements in Society which are opposed to the State and Society'.
3 Far from being conservative and accepting the norms and values of society, sects are 'in opposition to the world'. They reject the values of the world that surrounds them, and their detachment may be 'expressed in the refusal to use the law, to swear in a court of justice, to own property, to exercise dominion over others, or to take part in war'.
4 Sect members may be expected to withdraw from life outside the sect, but at the same time they may wish ultimately to see changes take place in the wider society.
5 Members of a sect are expected to be deeply committed to its beliefs. They may be excluded from the sect if they fail to demonstrate such a commitment.
6 Young children cannot usually enter the sect by being baptized if they are not old enough to understand the significance of the ceremony. They must join voluntarily as adults, and willingly adopt the lifestyle and beliefs of the sect. In particular they must sacrifice 'worldly pleasures' in order to devote themselves to their religious life. In this sense, sects exercise a stronger control over individuals' lives than, for example, the modern Church of England. Sects share this characteristic with religions such as Islam in countries where religious beliefs still have a strong hold over social life.
7 Like churches such as the Roman Catholic Church in Europe in the Middle Ages, sects tend to believe that they possess a monopoly of the religious truth.
8 Unlike churches, though, they are not organized through a hierarchy of paid officials. If central authority exists within a sect, it usually rests with a single charismatic leader, whose personality and perceived special qualities persuade the followers to adhere to his or her teachings.

Sects were originally groups which broke away from the dominant religion in a society because of a

disagreement over the interpretation of the religion. Steve Bruce describes the process of sect formation in the following way:

> *From time to time the church would face dissent or revolt. People would protest against ecclesiastical pomp and wealth or would seek to live out a more radical form of the faith. Those who could not be contained within the church – for example, as a religious order – broke away to form 'sects'. As they often challenged the state as much as the church, they were met with repression. For this, if for no other reason, sects were normally small.*
>
> Bruce, 1995, p. 3

To Bruce, the original sects were a product of the 'upheavals of the reformation' (Bruce 1996) but, as noted above, some of them developed to become denominations which were tolerated as religious diversity became more accepted. However, Bruce also acknowledges that sects can prosper in modern societies where people have more opportunity to form their own subcultures. Even with the greater toleration of contemporary societies, though, some sects may come into serious conflict with the wider society and its values.

One example was the People's Temple, an American sect of the 1970s. When this sect came to an end it had just 900 members. It was founded in California by the Reverend Jim Jones and, although it recruited a considerable number of relatively affluent whites, it had a particular appeal to black ghetto dwellers of northern California.

The sect had a radical ideology: it claimed to be based upon a Marxist philosophy and it strongly opposed prejudice and discrimination. Many members withdrew from participation in the outside world in the early stages of the sect's development, giving over their homes and property to Reverend Jones. Some continued to work outside, but eventually the sect became completely isolated as its members moved to set up a commune at 'Jonestown' in the rainforests of Guyana.

The degree of integration within the group was tragically illustrated when in 1978 the entire membership died after taking cyanide. Some committed suicide on the orders of their leader; others were murdered by being tricked into taking the poison.

In common with many other sects, members were expected to demonstrate their faith – in this case by such acts as signing confessions to crimes they had not committed, suffering public humiliations if Jones believed they had done something wrong, and drinking unidentified liquids of an unpleasant colour. Jones exercised strict control over his followers. His charismatic leadership was strengthened by fraudulent attempts to demonstrate his religious powers. 'Miracle healings' would take place where followers would pretend to have been instantly cured of cancer by spitting out pieces of chicken liver they had concealed in their mouth. Careful scrutiny of members' dustbins allowed Jones to claim divine fortune-telling powers.

In the 1990s there were a number of religious movements in which there were deaths of some of the followers in violent circumstances. Perhaps the best-known example of this was the Branch Davidians. Founded by their charismatic leader, David Koresh, they established a commune at Waco in Texas. Koresh demanded absolute loyalty from members. In February 1993 the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms attempted to search their premises only to be met by gunfire. Four AFT agents were killed and 16 were wounded. After a lengthy siege the FBI attempted to arrest those inside using armoured vehicles. A fire started, resulting in the deaths of more than 80 Branch Davidians including 22 children. A subsequent investigation found that sect members had started the fire themselves, although survivors insist that this was not the case.

Although the People's Temple and the Branch Davidians are extreme examples of sects, many other religious organizations display similar characteristics. But there are also numerous exceptions. It is possible to find sects of vastly different sizes, with a wide variety of ideologies, contrasting attitudes to the outside world, varying degrees of control over their membership, and with or without a professional clergy and a charismatic leader.

Bryan Wilson (1982) accepts that Troeltsch's description of sects may have been accurate in relation to European countries, until quite recently. However, it does not account for or adequately describe the proliferation of sectarian groups in Europe and the USA in recent decades. Some of the new religious movements, which come close to Troeltsch's description of sects, will be examined shortly.

Cults

According to Steve Bruce (1995), Troeltsch mentioned 'mysticism' as another tradition within Christianity in addition to the church and sect. Bruce describes it in this way, 'Unlike the other forms, this was a highly individualistic expression, varying with personal experiences and interpretations.' To Bruce, this corresponds to the idea of a cult, which he sees as a 'loosely knit group organised around some common themes and interests but lacking any sharply defined and exclusive belief system.' A cult tends to be more individualistic than other organized forms of religion because it lacks a fixed doctrine. Cults tolerate other beliefs and indeed their own beliefs are often so

vague that they have no conception of heresy. Cults often have customers rather than members and these customers may have relatively little involvement with any organization once they have learnt the rudiments of the beliefs around which the cult is based.

This rather general description corresponds fairly closely to one type of new religious movement identified by Wallis (1984) – the World-Affirming Movement (see pp. 459–60). It is rather different from the definition of cult advanced by Stark and Bainbridge (1985) (see pp. 460–2). Many aspects of the New Age movement are based around cults (see below, pp. 466–9). The different ways in which the word cult is used will be explored in greater depth in the next sections.

New religious movements, sects and cults

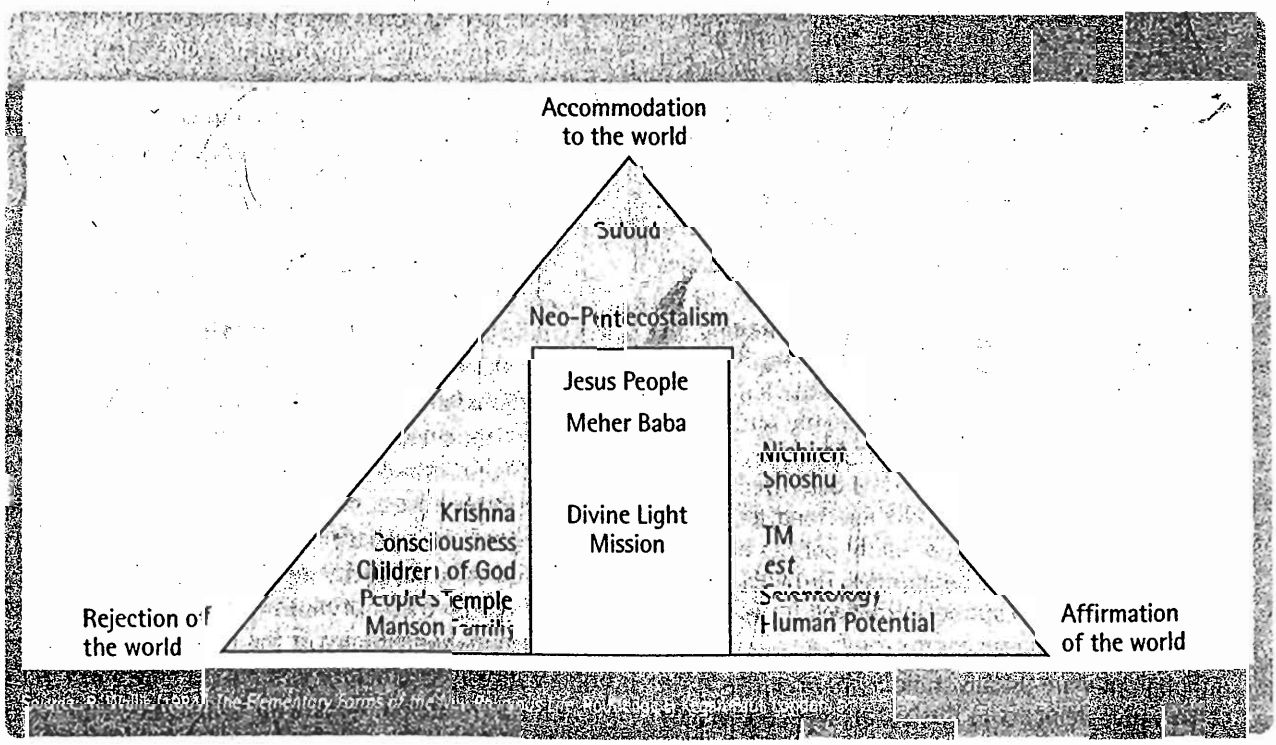
There have been numerous attempts to refine the basic distinctions between church, denomination, sect and cult in the light of the wide variety of small religious, spiritual or mystical groups that have sprung up since the 1960s. Eileen Barker (1985) suggests that they could be classified according to the religious tradition from which they originate. For example, Hari Krishna and the disciples of Bhagwan Rajneesh take their inspiration from the Hindu religion, Zen groups from Buddhism, and the Children of God from Christianity. The Unification Church (better known as the Moonies) combines elements from Taoism, Confucianism, Spiritualism and Buddhism, although it is based primarily around the Bible. Other groups have an occult, pagan or witchcraft source. Some groups have little connection with previous religions but are part of what Barker calls the Human Potential Movement, which attempts to liberate human potential through some technique – Primal Therapy, for example, uses screaming.

However, Barker also points out that some groups 'are so idiosyncratic that they would appear to defy any classification'. She cites a Japanese group who regarded Thomas Edison (the American inventor) as a minor god, and the Kennedy Worshippers who numbered around 2,000 and saw the assassinated president of the USA, John F. Kennedy, as a god.

Barker suggests that another way of classifying new religious movements is according to the degree of commitment shown by their members. The People's Temple (see p. 456) is at one extreme, while some other movements, such as Transcendental Meditation (see p. 459), require little more of their members than to attend a short course. Eileen Barker puts forward these classification schemes as no more than tentative suggestions. Other sociologists, such as Roy Wallis, have developed much more detailed systems of classification.

Roy Wallis – *The Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life*

The development of a range of new religions and the revival of some old ones, in the 1970s, led Roy Wallis to categorize these new religious movements (Wallis, 1984). His views are illustrated in Figure 7.1. He divides new religious movements into three main groups. Like Troeltsch, the principal criterion he uses to categorize religious organizations is their relation-



ship to the outside world. He therefore distinguishes between them according to whether the movement and its members reject, accommodate or affirm the world. He represents his typology with a triangle, and notes the existence of some groups (those in the central box) which do not fit neatly into any single category.

World-rejecting new religious movements

The world-rejecting new religious movements have most of the characteristics of a sect described by Troeltsch:

1 They are usually a clearly religious organization with a definite conception of God. For example, the Unification Church, better known as the 'Moonies' – after their leader Reverend Sun Myung Moon – pray in a conventional way to a 'Heavenly Father'.

2 In other respects, though, such groups are far from conventional. Their ideology is invariably highly critical of the outside world, and the movement expects or actively seeks change.

3 Some groups are millenarian: they expect God's intervention to change the world. The Nation of Islam in the USA are a case in point. They prophesy that in the year 2000 Allah will destroy the whites and their religion.

4 In order to achieve salvation, members are expected to have a sharp break from their conventional life when they join the movement. Organizations of this type act as total institutions, controlling every aspect of their members' lives. (For more details on total institutions see pp. 475–6.) As a result, they often develop a reputation for 'brainwashing' their members, since families and friends find it hard to understand the change that has taken place in a member.

5 Limited contact with the outside world might be allowed, to facilitate fund-raising. Moonies in San Francisco help to support the group by selling flowers, and members of other movements distribute literature or sell records for the same purpose. Sometimes they simply beg for money, claiming to be collecting for charity.

6 The leadership of the groups may be quite prepared to have contacts with the outside world in an attempt to try to change society without waiting for divine intervention. Jim Jones, leader of the ill-fated People's Temple, had close contacts with Californian politicians. Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam, became heavily involved in US politics. In particular, Farrakhan supported the black Democratic Party presidential candidate, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, in his attempts to promote policies designed to benefit disadvantaged minorities. Farrakhan himself, though, was strongly criticized for making apparently anti-Semitic comments.

7 Although they are usually radical, there can be conservative elements in the beliefs and actions of such organizations. The Unification Church is strongly anti-communist, and has supported South Korean military dictatorships. Many of the movements are morally puritanical, forbidding sex outside marriage, for example. The 'Moonies' are particularly strict about restricting sex to monogamous marriage.

8 World-rejecting new religious movements vary enormously in size: the 'Moonies' have an international following while other groups are small and locally based.

9 Most of them tend to be based around some form of communal lifestyle, and as such develop unconventional ways of living. The commune of the ill-fated Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas is a case in point.

Thus, despite the variations within these groups, none of them are content with the world as it is.

Wallis sees most world-rejecting new religious movements as sects. He defines sects as groups that claim to be uniquely legitimate and which advocate religious doctrines that are widely regarded as deviant. They have 'an authoritative locus for the attribution of heresy' and are hostile to the state and non-members.

World-accommodating new religious movements

The world-accommodating new religious movements are usually offshoots of an existing major church or denomination. For example, neo-Pentecostalist groups are variants of Protestant or Roman Catholic religions, while Subud is a world-accommodating Muslim group.

Typically these groups neither accept nor reject the world as it is, they simply live within it. They are primarily concerned with religious rather than worldly questions. As Wallis puts it:

> *The world-accommodating new religion draws a distinction between the spiritual and the worldly in a way quite uncharacteristic of the other two types. Religion is not constructed as a primarily social matter; rather it provides solace or stimulation to personal interior life.*
>
> Wallis, 1984, p. 35

The religious beliefs of followers might help them to cope with their non-religious social roles, but the aim of the religion is not to create a new society nor to improve the believers' chances of success in their lives. Instead, world-accommodating sects seek to restore the spiritual purity to a religion, which it believes has been lost in more conventional churches and denominations. Many of the members of these organizations were, before joining, members of churches or denominations with which they had

become disillusioned. Pentecostalists hold that the belief in the Holy Spirit has been lost in other Christian religions. The Holy Spirit speaks through Pentecostalists, giving them the gift of 'speaking in tongues'.

It is the spiritual and religious aspects of world-accommodating groups that differentiate them from other religious organizations, but they can still be seen as denominations. According to Wallis, denominations have a 'respectable' set of religious beliefs and are tolerant of the existence of other religions. Most of the members of world-accommodating groups live conventional and conforming lives outside their religious activities.

This is demonstrated by Ken Pryce's study of West Indians in the St Paul's district of Bristol. He found that Pentecostalists lived respectable lives. They usually had, or wished to have, normal jobs. Unlike some members of the local community, they did not earn their living from prostitution or by selling drugs, and they did not belong to radical political movements.

World-affirming new religious movements

The world-affirming new religious movements are very different from all other religious groups, and may indeed lack some of the features normally thought to be central to a religion. Wallis says that such a group 'may have no "church", no collective ritual of worship, it may lack any developed theology or ethics' (Wallis, 1984). However, these groups do claim to be able to provide access to spiritual or supernatural powers, and in that sense can be regarded as religions.

Rather than rejecting existing society or existing religions, world-affirming groups accept the world as it is and they are not particularly critical of other religions. What they offer the follower is the potential to be successful in terms of the dominant values of society by unlocking spiritual powers present in the individual. Salvation is seen as a personal achievement and as a solution to personal problems such as unhappiness, suffering or disability. Individuals usually overcome such problems by adopting some technique that heightens their awareness or abilities.

World-affirming movements are not exclusive groups: they seek as wide a membership as possible. Rather than trying to convert people as such, they try to sell them a service commercially. Followers carry on their normal lives except when undergoing training; often courses are held at weekends or at other convenient times so as not to cause disruption. There is little social control over the members, or customers, and they are not normally excluded from the group if they fail to act in accordance with its beliefs.

An example of a world-affirming new religious movement is provided by Transcendental Meditation or TM. TM is based upon the Hindu religion, but during at least some periods of its development the religious elements have been played down. First introduced to the West in the late 1950s, it achieved prominence in 1968 when the Beatles met its leading proponent, the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

TM involves a meditational technique whereby a follower is given a personal mantra on which to concentrate for 20 minutes in the morning and evening. It is claimed that this technique can provide 'unbounded awareness' which can have beneficial effects for individuals and for society. Some followers of TM claim that in areas where as little as 1 per cent of the population have been initiated, crime, accidents and sickness are all reduced. Initiation is a simple matter and can take place in just a couple of hours with further follow-up sessions lasting just a few hours more. An advanced course in the powers of TM, the Siddi programme, claims to provide occult powers such as the ability to levitate. In the USA, the course costs several thousand dollars.

As with some other new religious movements, there have been attempts to make deliberate use of TM's teachings to solve social problems. Teachers have been dispatched to areas of civil unrest in the hope of converting local leaders who, it was hoped, would in turn use their new powers to overcome the area's problems. In the 1992 and 1997 British general elections, hundreds of followers of TM stood for parliament as representatives of the Natural Law Party, offering the voters harmonious rule in line with the natural laws of the universe as discovered by the Maharishi.

Within some world-affirming groups there is an inner-core of followers who attach great significance to the teachings of the movement and start to live more as members of a world-rejecting movement. TM, for instance, has developed an exclusive inner-group of members trained in advanced techniques who have characteristics a little closer to those of world-rejecting sects.

In addition, other world-affirming groups may think that their beliefs have a potential beyond helping individuals achieve success. They may believe that their training, if sufficiently widespread, could contribute to solving problems such as racial conflict, or even world hunger. Such political aims are not, however, the main concern of world-affirming new religious movements – they are merely a possible by-product of their teachings.

According to Steve Bruce, who has developed Wallis's views, there are two main types of world-affirming new religious movement. There are 'those which add a spiritual dimension to what had been a

western secular psychotherapy and those which tailor an initially oriental product for Western sensibilities' (Bruce, 1995). TM is a good example of the latter type. Bruce uses Insight as an example of the former type. Insight involves taking training courses which allow individuals to discover a 'centre' within themselves that contains the answer to all our questions and the solution to our problems. It enables individuals to free themselves from guilt and anxiety, to think positively about themselves and to live fulfilling lives.

To Wallis, most world-affirming new religious movements are cults. Cults are like sects in that they have religious beliefs that are widely regarded as deviant, but, unlike sects, cults tolerate the existence of other religions. Cults are 'loosely structured, tolerant, and non-exclusive'. They have a rapid turnover in membership and are relatively undemanding on their followers.

The 'middle ground'

Wallis realizes that no religious group will conform exactly to the categories he outlines. He says 'all actual new religious movements are likely to combine elements of each type to some extent' (Wallis, 1984). Indeed, he points to a number of groups that occupy an intermediate position, such as the Healthy Happy Holy Organization (3HO), and the Divine Light Mission. Comparing them to the three main groups, he says 'They combine in various degrees all three types, and more particularly elements of the conventional society and the counter-culture.'

3HO, for example, is similar to world-accommodating new religious movements in that it is an offshoot of an established religion, in this case Sikhism. As in world-affirming movements, it employs techniques that it is claimed will bring personal benefits such as happiness and good health. In common with TM, 3HO hopes that its teachings will have spin-offs for the outside world: in fact, nothing less than world unity. 3HO is not exclusive. Classes are provided for those who are not full members so that they can receive benefits from the teachings. Even fully committed members are expected to have conventional marriages and to hold down conventional jobs.

On the other hand, 3HO does have some characteristics in common with world-rejecting movements. The organization has a clear concept of God. Members dress unconventionally in white clothing and turbans. They live in communes or ashrams, but the ashrams do not involve total sharing: individuals pay for their own room and board. Some restrictions are placed on behaviour: members of 3HO are vegetarians and abstain from alcohol, tobacco and mind-altering drugs.

Occupying as it does the middle ground, 3HO allows its followers to combine elements of an alternative lifestyle with conventional marriage and employment.

Roy Wallis – an evaluation

James A. Beckford (1985) commends Wallis's scheme for recognizing that new religious movements do not always fit neatly into one category or another, and for outlining the differences in the types of individuals recruited by different types of movement (we outline Wallis's views on recruitment on pp. 462–3). However, Beckford also offers some criticisms of Wallis:

1. He argues that Wallis's categories are difficult to apply. It is not made clear whether the teachings of the movement or the beliefs and outlooks of the individual members distinguish the different orientations to the world.
2. Beckford feels that Wallis pays insufficient attention to the diversity of views that often exists within a sect or cult.
3. Beckford also questions the worth of defining some groups as 'world-rejecting'. In his view, no group can afford to reject the world altogether since they rely upon contacts with the wider economic system for their very survival.

Nevertheless Beckford does not deny that a typology, or list of types, of new religious movements is useful. In contrast, Stark and Bainbridge, whose views we examine next, reject the idea of using a typology to distinguish new religions.

Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge – un-ideal types

The problems of typologies

According to Stark and Bainbridge (1985), none of the typologies of new religious movements, sects, churches and denominations developed by other sociologists is a sound basis for categorization. All of them consist of lists of characteristics that each type is likely to have. However, these characteristics are not found in every religious organization placed in each category. Not all churches try to convert all members of society and not all sects are exclusive.

Such characteristics used to distinguish organizations are correlates – sets of characteristics that tend to be found together in the same organizations. They are not however attributes – characteristics that an organization must have if it is to be defined as a church, denomination, sect or cult. Defining types of organization in terms of correlates tends to lead to

confusion since most organizations are in some ways exceptions to the rule.

Stark and Bainbridge therefore argue that typologies of religious organization should be abandoned altogether. Instead, they adopt the ideas of Benton Johnson, an earlier sociologist of religion. Johnson argued that religious organizations could be compared in terms of a single attribute and could be placed at any point on a continuum in terms of this attribute. Johnson said:

> *A church is a religious group that accepts the social environment in which it exists. A sect is a religious organisation that rejects the social environment in which it exists.*
>
> Quoted in Stark and Bainbridge, 1985, p. 23

Thus they claim that religious groups can be compared in terms of the degree of conflict that exists between them and the wider society. The use of such a definition allows clear comparisons. For example, the Catholic Church in the USA is nearer to the sect end of the continuum than the Catholic Church in the Republic of Ireland. It also allows changes over time to be clearly described: organizations might change and become more, or less, in tension with the social environment.

Sects and cults

Stark and Bainbridge then go on to argue that there are different kinds (they are careful to avoid using the word types) of religious movement in a high degree of tension with their social environment:

1 Sects are groups that are formed as an offshoot of an existing religion as a result of division or schism within that religion.

2 Cults, on the other hand, are new religions, or at least they are new in a particular society. Some result from cultural importation, where a religion from other societies is introduced into a society in which it had not previously been practised. Thus, Eastern religions introduced into the USA are examples of imported cults. Some cults, though, are entirely new. These result from cultural innovation; they are unconnected to existing religions.

Stark and Bainbridge go on to suggest that cults exhibit different degrees of organization and can be divided into three types:

1 Audience cults are the least organized and involve little face-to-face interaction. Contacts are often maintained through the mass media and the occasional conference. Many of the members of the audience for such cults may not know each other. Astrology is an example of an audience cult, as is the belief in UFOs.

2 Client cults are more organized and usually offer services to their followers. In the past they tended to offer 'medical miracles, forecasts of the future, or contact with the dead', though more recently they have 'specialised in personal adjustment'. Scientology, for example, offers its clients the opportunity to clear 'engrams' (repressed memories of painful experiences) from the brain, while the Reich Foundation offers the promise of the 'monumental orgasm'.

3 Cult movements involve followers much more. They try to satisfy all the religious needs of their members and, unlike client and audience cults, membership of other faiths is not permitted. They do, however, vary considerably in their power. Some require little more than occasional attendance at meetings and acceptance of the cult's beliefs, but others shape the whole of a person's life. The Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church is an example of a cult movement. Many client cults become cult movements for their most dedicated followers – for example, practitioners of TM who take the Siddi programme (see p. 459 for a short description of TM).

A well-publicized example that would probably fit Stark and Bainbridge's definition of a cult movement was the Heaven's Gate cult. They were a doomsday cult with an interest in computer technology and science fiction. They started in the mid-1970s and required members to refrain from sex, drugs and alcohol. The leader, Marshall Applewhite, who liked to be addressed as 'Do' or 'The Representative' even had himself castrated so that he did not become distracted by physical pleasures. The group believed that the earth was about to be recycled to become a garden for some future generation. The leader told his followers that they needed to leave their earthly bodies so as to get closer to heaven. When the comet Hale-Bopp passed close to earth in 1997, the cult members committed suicide, believing that their spirits would ascend to a spacecraft which was following close behind the comet.

Cults and compensators

Stark and Bainbridge argue that different types of cult offer different types of rewards and compensators for their followers. In line with their general theory of religion (discussed on pp. 445–6), they believe that religious organizations exist to meet the needs of individuals.

Audience cults offer very weak compensators which may provide 'no more than a mild vicarious thrill or social entertainment'. Watching Uri Geller allegedly bend a spoon through psychic power does not promise the audience any great improvement in their lives.

Client cults, on the other hand, offer more valuable specific compensators. Stark and Bainbridge

say 'If astrologers really could improve our life chances by telling us the right day to make investments, get married, or stay away from the office, those would indeed be valuable rewards.'

However, these cults do not offer general compensators such as an explanation of the meaning of life or the promise of life after death. General compensators are provided by cult movements.

Conclusion

Stark and Bainbridge offer a different, and they would claim superior, method of distinguishing religious organizations to that of Wallis. They make some useful distinctions between different types of cult; however, in doing so, they contradict themselves. They develop their own typology and fail to notice that some groups will not conform to all the characteristics they attribute to audience cults, client cults or cult movements

Reasons for the growth of sects, cults and new religious movements

Religious sects and cults are not a new phenomenon: they have existed for centuries. Steve Bruce traces the emergence of the first sects to the Reformation of the church in the sixteenth century and the upheavals that accompanied it (Bruce, 1995). Despite this, most existing sects and cults originated in the twentieth century, and the 1960s in particular saw the appearance of many new organizations. Table 7.1 shows the date of origin of the 417 native-born sects and 501 cults uncovered in the early 1980s in the USA by Stark and Bainbridge.

Although it is widely believed that these types of religious movement are more common in the USA than in Europe, Stark and Bainbridge uncovered

Table 7.1 [illegible] American sects and cults formed [illegible] marginal [illegible]

Historical period	Sects (405)*	Cults (484)*
1899 and before	19	7
1900–1929	22	8
1930–1949	23	10
1950–1959	16	14
1960–1969	14	38
1970–1977	3	23
	100	100

*No date of founding known for 12 sects and for 17 cults.

Source: R. Stark and W.S. Bainbridge (1985) *The Future of Religion*, University of California Press, Berkeley, p. 18.

evidence that there were proportionately more in some European countries. For example, they claimed that in the late 1970s in the USA there were 2.3 cult movements per million inhabitants, compared to 3.2 per million in England and Wales. In England and Wales they found no fewer than 153 different cult movements.

The growth of sects and cults can be explained either in terms of why particular individuals choose to join, or in terms of wider social changes. In reality these reasons are closely linked, since social changes affect the number of people available as potential recruits.

Marginality

Max Weber provided one of the earliest explanations for the growth of sects (Weber, 1963). He argued that they were likely to arise within groups that were marginal in society: members of groups outside the mainstream of social life often feel that they are not receiving the prestige and/or the economic rewards they deserve. One solution to this problem is a sect based on what Weber called 'a theodicy of disprivilege' (a theodicy is a religious explanation and justification). Such sects contain an explanation for the disprivilege of their members and promise them a 'sense of honour' either in the afterlife or in a future 'new world' on earth.

Bryan Wilson (1970) has pointed out that a variety of situations could lead to the marginalization of groups in society, which in turn could provide fertile ground for the development of sects. These situations include defeat in war, natural disaster or economic collapse. Radical and undesirable changes such as these are not the only circumstances that can encourage sect development.

In part, the growth of sects in the USA in the 1960s was accomplished through the recruitment of marginal and disadvantaged groups. The Black Muslims, for example, aimed to recruit 'the negro in the mud', and the sect seemed to offer hope for some of the most desperate blacks.

However, for the most part, in the 1960s and 1970s the membership of the world-rejecting new religious movements was drawn from amongst the ranks of young, white, middle-class Americans and Europeans. Wallis (1984) does not believe that this contradicts the theory that marginal members of society join world-rejecting sects. He argues that many of the recruits had already become marginal to society. Despite their middle-class backgrounds, they were usually 'hippies, drop-outs, surfers, LSD and marijuana users'. Their marginality may have been further increased by arrests for drug use or activities involved with radical politics. They were attracted to the communal lifestyle which the sect offered.

Relative deprivation

However, this does not explain why quite affluent middle-class youth should become marginal members of society in the first place. The concept of 'relative deprivation' can be used to explain their actions. Relative deprivation refers to subjectively perceived deprivation: that which people actually feel. In objective terms the poor are more deprived than the middle class, but in subjective terms certain members of the middle class may feel more deprived than the poor. They do not lack material wealth, but feel spiritually deprived in a world they see as too materialistic, lonely and impersonal. According to Wallis (1984), they therefore seek salvation in the sense of community offered by the sect.

Stark and Bainbridge (1985) also employ the concept of relative deprivation in explaining the origin of sects. They define sects as organizations which break away from an established church, and they believe that it is the relatively deprived who are likely to break away. Splits take place when churches begin to compromise their beliefs. When the more successful members of a religion try to reduce the amount of tension between that religion and the outside world, the less successful resent it and break away.

Social change

A number of sociologists, such as Bryan Wilson (1970), argue that sects arise during periods of rapid social change when traditional norms are disrupted, social relationships come to lack consistent and coherent meaning, and the traditional universe of meaning is undermined.

Wilson uses the example of the early Methodist movement, which had the characteristics of a sect. He sees the rise of Methodism as the response of the urban working class to the 'chaos and uncertainty of life in the newly settled industrial areas'. He claims that they had to evolve 'new patterns of religious belief to accommodate themselves to their new situation'. In a situation of change and uncertainty, the sect offers the support of a close-knit community organization, well-defined and strongly sanctioned norms and values, and a promise of salvation. It provides a new and stable universe of meaning which is legitimated by its religious beliefs.

More generally, Steve Bruce (1995, 1996) attributes the development of a range of religious institutions including sects and cults to a general process of modernization and secularization. He believes that the weakness of more conventional institutionalized religions has encouraged some people to consider less traditional alternatives. In the Middle Ages the church form of organization was dominant. With the Reformation, splits within the church led to the creation of the new sects.

As modern societies developed and faith in traditional sources of authority (such as churches) declined, religious pluralism and diversity were increasingly tolerated. The denomination became the characteristic form of religion – a watered-down version of the intolerant beliefs of churches and sects which believed that only they knew the truth. More recently, in what Bruce believes is a more secular world in which people are less likely to hold strong commitments, cults have become more popular. These require fewer sacrifices and less commitment than churches and sects and are therefore more tolerable to a modern clientele. However, a small number of people are willing to join the stricter sects. Bruce's views on specific types of new religious movement will be examined below.

The growth of new religious movements

Wallis (1984) has pointed to a number of social changes which he believes accounted for the growth of new religious movements in the 1960s. Some of these had important effects on youth in particular:

1. The growth of higher education and the gradual lengthening of time spent in education created an extended period of transition between childhood and adulthood. Youth culture developed because there was an increasing number of young people who had considerable freedom but little in the way of family or work responsibilities.
2. At the same time there was a belief that developing technology would herald the end of poverty and economic scarcity.
3. Radical political movements were also growing in the 1960s, providing an alternative to dominant social norms and values.

Wallis claims that in these circumstances world-rejecting new religious movements were attractive because of the potential they seemed to offer for 'A more idealistic, spiritual and caring way of life, in the context of more personal and loving social relationships.' It has also been suggested that the growth of such movements was related to secularization. In general terms secularization means a decline in the importance of religion in society. (For details of the relationship between sects and secularization see pp. 485–6.)

Steve Bruce (1995) sees world-rejecting movements as having a particular appeal to the young. Many had become disillusioned by the failure of the counter-culture in the 1960s to radically change the world. The hippie culture and the commune movement had disintegrated largely because of drugs and exploitation of the movement. The disillusioned young people sought another path to salvation through religion rather than peace and love.

Wallis (1984) provides only a very sketchy explanation of recruitment to world-accommodating religious movements. He claims that those with a substantial stake in society, but who nevertheless have reasons for being dissatisfied with existing religions, tend to join them.

World-affirming new religions, as we saw earlier, are very different from the other types. They do not involve a radical break with a conventional lifestyle, they do not strongly restrict the behaviour of members, and they offer material and practical advantages to their followers. For all of these reasons they might be expected to appeal to different groups in society, and to develop in different circumstances.

World-affirming new religious movements usually develop after world-rejecting ones, and more of them have survived longer. Research suggests that members of groups such as Erhard's Seminar Training have members with above-average incomes and education who are somewhat older than members of world-rejecting groups. To Wallis, what they offer is a 'means of coping with a sense of inadequacy among social groups which are, by the more obvious indicators, among the world's more successful and highly rewarded individuals'. It is primarily the emphasis placed upon individual success in terms of status, income and social mobility that stimulates these 'religions' to develop.

Actually achieving success may in another sense motivate individuals to join these groups. Individuals may feel that in the successful performance of their social roles (such as their jobs) they lose sight of their real selves. A world-affirming religious movement might allow the rediscovery of this real 'self'.

Bryan Wilson (1976) has argued that these religions offer immediate gratification for those who take part. Wallis suggests that those who are socialized into being dedicated to their work, and who have internalized the Protestant work ethic, find it hard to enjoy their leisure activities while feeling free from guilt. In an increasingly leisure- and consumer-orientated society, Wallis believes that world-affirming organizations offer a path to guilt-free spontaneously-enjoyed leisure.

Steve Bruce (1995, 1996) believes that world-affirming new religious movements are predominantly a response to the rationalization of the modern world. Because of rationalization, 'Modern life is so fragmented that many people find it increasingly difficult to draw on their public roles for a satisfying and fulfilling sense of identity' (Bruce, 1995). Jobs, for example, are simply a means to an end, to earn a living, and offer little sense of satisfaction or fulfilment. People no longer have a sense of calling to their work and may not identify strongly with their workmates. People have, however, been encouraged to value achievement, yet many lack the opportunities to be as successful as they would like. World-affirming movements can offer a solution. They provide a technique which claims to be able to bring people both success and a spiritual element to their lives.

The explanations provided above offer some general reasons why world-affirming movements should be popular in advanced industrial societies, but do not explain why particular individuals should join, nor why they are popular at particular periods of time. More specific theories have been devised to account for what Wallis calls movements of the middle ground.

Several sociologists studying these movements have claimed that they help to reintegrate people into society, while allowing them to retain some elements of an alternative lifestyle. These movements appeal to those members of the counter-culture or world-rejecting religious movements who have become disillusioned, or feel they need to earn a living in a conventional way. They offer a stepping-stone back towards respectability. Thus Mauss and Peterson describe the members of one such group, the Jesus Freaks, as 'penitent young prodigals' (quoted in Wallis, 1984, p. 75).

These middle-ground groups were particularly successful from the mid-1970s onwards, when economic recession and the decline in the numbers of people willing to adopt alternative lifestyles provided a large pool from which recruitment might take place.

The development of sects

Sects as short-lived organizations

In 1929, H.R. Niebuhr made a number of observations about the way in which religious sects changed over time. He argued that sects could not survive as sects beyond a single generation. Either they would change their characteristics, compromise and become denominations, or they would disappear altogether. He advanced the following arguments to support this view:

1. Sect membership was based upon voluntary adult commitment: members chose to dedicate themselves to the organization and its religion. Once the first generation started to have children, though, the latter would be admitted as new members when they were too young to understand the teachings of the religion. These new members would not be able to sustain the fervour of the first generation. Consequently the sect might become a denomination.
2. Sects that relied upon a charismatic leader would tend to disappear if the leader died. Alternatively, the nature of the leadership would change: no

longer would the charisma of an individual hold the sect together. This would allow the bureaucratic structure of a denomination with its hierarchy of paid officials to emerge.

3 Niebuhr argued that the ideology of many sects contained the seeds of their own destruction. Sects with an ascetic creed would encourage their members to work hard and save their money. As a result the membership would be upwardly socially mobile, and would no longer wish to belong to a religious group which catered for marginal members of society. Once again the sect would have to change or die: either becoming a denomination or losing its membership.

According to Niebuhr, then, there was no possibility of a sect surviving for long periods of time without losing its extreme teachings and rejection of society. One example that illustrates this well is that of the Methodists before they became a denomination: as the Methodist membership rose in status in the nineteenth century, the strict disciplines of the sect and its rejection of society were dropped, and it gradually came to be recognized as a denomination. A number of sects have also disappeared because of the mass suicide (or murder) of their members. The examples of the People's Temple and the Branch Davidians have been discussed above (see p. 456).

The life cycle of sects

However, Bryan Wilson (1966) rejects Niebuhr's view that sects are inevitably short-lived. He points out that some sects do survive for a long time without becoming denominations. To Wilson, the crucial factor is the way the sect answers the question 'What shall we do to be saved?' Sects can be classified in terms of how they answer this question. Only one type, the conversionist sect, is likely to develop into a denomination. Examples include the evangelical sects, typical of the USA, which aim to convert as many people as possible by means of revivalist preaching. Becoming a denomination does not necessarily compromise its position. It can still save souls.

The other types of sect cannot maintain their basic position in a denominational form. Adventist sects, such as the Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses, provide an example of the reason why. Adventist sects await the Second Coming of Christ, who will judge humanity and establish a new world order. Only sect membership will guarantee a place in the new order. The rich and powerful and those who follow conventional religions will be excluded from Christ's kingdom on earth. Adventists sects are founded on the principle of separation from the world in the expectation of the Second Coming. To become a denomination they would have to change this basic premiss. Separation from the world and denominationalism are not compatible.

Thus Wilson concludes that a sect's prescription for salvation is a major factor in determining whether or not it becomes a denomination.

Internal ideology and the wider society

Roy Wallis (1984) takes a more complex view of the paths followed by sects: he feels the chances of sects surviving, changing or disappearing are affected both by the internal ideology of the sect and by external social circumstances.

Since Wallis distinguishes a variety of different types of sect, he argues that they are likely to follow different paths. According to him, the development of sects may involve them changing from one type of sect to another, rather than becoming denominations. Wallis does not believe that there is any single or inevitable path that any type of sect will follow, and he suggests that the changes that do take place may be specific to a particular historical period.

World-rejecting sects do often change their stance as time passes. Like Niebuhr, Wallis sees the possibility that such groups may soften their opposition to society and become more world-accommodating. This seems to have been particularly common in the 1970s when economic recession discouraged some members from dropping-out and rejecting society altogether. The Children of God, for example, weakened their opposition to other religions and no longer thought of non-members as servants of Satan.

Wallis accepts that charismatic leaders have difficulty in retaining personal control over a religious movement indefinitely, and that this may also result in changes. If the organization grows, a process which Weber described as the routinization of charisma can take place. A more bureaucratic organization develops so that some of the leader's personal authority becomes vested in his (or untypically her) officials or representatives. Nevertheless the changes may stop well short of denominationalization.

Wallis also recognizes that sects can disappear. World-rejecting sects may actually be destroyed by the charismatic leader, as in the case of Jim Jones's People's Temple. Social changes may lead to the members becoming less marginal in society, so threatening the base on which the sect was founded. However, as new groups in society become marginal, new sects will arise.

According to Wallis, then, world-rejecting sects do tend to be unstable, but new ones emerge, and those that do survive may become more world-accommodating while continuing to exist as sects.

World-affirming movements are less likely than world-rejecting ones to be based on a charismatic

leader or to have members who are marginal or deprived. They also require less sacrifice and commitment from members, and for this reason are not so likely to disappear. Instead, since their services are often sold as a commodity, they are vulnerable to a loss of support from their consumers. To the extent that they sell themselves in the market-place, they are subject to the same problems as a retailer. If the public no longer needs, or gains benefits from, their services, they will lose customers. To Wallis, though, world-affirming movements are more likely to change to attract a new clientele than to cease to exist.

Transcendental Meditation (TM), for example, initially emphasized its spiritual elements, and in the second half of the 1960s it succeeded by identifying closely with the counter-culture. In the 1970s the counter-culture declined and TM tried to broaden its appeal by emphasizing the practical benefits – the worldly success – that the meditation claimed to offer.

Wallis points out that consumers might tire of a product that fails to deliver its promises. One response is to try to gain an inner-core of committed followers. TM did just this through the Siddi programme and perhaps in this way helped to guarantee a permanent following.

Wallis believes that world-affirming movements are flexible and they can change relatively easily as they seek to survive and prosper. In some circumstances they can also become more religious and spiritual (like world-rejecting movements) for at least an inner-core of followers.

The position of the movements of the middle ground is by its very nature more precarious. Since they are in an intermediate position they are likely to shift between being world-rejecting and world-affirming, depending upon circumstances and the needs and wishes of the membership. This can lead to splits within the movements or the establishment of rival organizations. One British movement of this type, the Process, was founded in 1963 and split into two separate groups in 1973. If these splits do not take place it is likely that such movements fluctuate between the two extremes, continuing in one form or another, but not establishing a clear and permanent ideology and identity.

Wallis says little about how world-accommodating movements develop, but these seem the most stable of the new religious movements. Indeed, some are not particularly new: Pentecostalism has survived little-changed since the early years of the twentieth century. As Wallis points out, this type of 'new' religious movement has most in common with denominations.

Thus, although Wallis does not agree with Niebuhr that sects inevitably disappear or become denominations, his work does suggest that there may be tendencies in these directions. Those religious movements that are most similar to denominations are the likeliest to remain stable. World-rejecting movements, which have most in common with the type of sects Niebuhr described, are the least likely to survive for long periods in their original form.

The New Age

Examples of the New Age

The New Age is a term that has been applied to a range of ideas which started to become prominent in the 1980s. Although some of these beliefs were organized as new religious movements (particularly as world-affirming new religious movements) and as cults of various types (particularly client cults and audience cults), in many cases they were not closely attached to particular organizations (Heelas, 1996, Bruce 1995). Rather, New Age ideas were spread through aspects of the culture of particular societies in films, shops, seminars, meetings, music, television programmes, public lectures and so on.

Examples of New Age beliefs include interest in clairvoyance, contacting aliens, belief in 'spirit guides' and 'spirit masters', various types of meditation and psychotherapy, beliefs in paganism, magic, tarot cards, ouija, astrology and witchcraft, an interest in self-healing and natural or traditional remedies for ill health (for example, yoga, aromatherapy, reflexology), spiritually inclined ecology such as a belief in Gaia (the Greek goddess who has been used to represent the sacred and interconnected nature of all life), and so on. Manifestations of the New Age can be found in places such as the annual Mind, Body and Spirit Convention, which has been held in London since 1977; in publications on topics such as Feng Shui, mysticism and Shamanism; in the music of groups such as Kula Shaker; in shops that sell tapes of sounds from nature which can be used for relaxation or meditation; in communes such as the Findhorn community in Scotland (which grew vegetables with the help of plant spirits rather than fertilizers); and in more conventionally organized groups such as the Scientologists and some Buddhist groups.

The themes of the New Age

What have such a diverse range of activities and beliefs got in common? Paul Heelas (1996) believes that the central feature of the New Age is a belief in self-spirituality. People with such beliefs have turned away from traditional religious organizations in the search for the spiritual and instead have begun to look inside themselves. The New Age 'explains why life – as conventionally experienced – is not what it should be; it provides an account of what it is to find

perfection; and it provides the means for obtaining salvation'. However, that salvation does not come from being accepted by an external god, it comes from discovering and perfecting yourself. Often this means going beyond your conscious self to discover hidden spiritual depths. Heelas says:

> *Perfection can be found only by moving beyond the socialized self – widely known as the 'ego' but also as the 'lower self', 'intellect' or the 'mind' – thereby encountering a new realm of being. It is what we are by nature.*
>
> Heelas, 1996, p.19

In this process we find our spiritual core. New Agers tell people that 'You are Gods and Goddesses in exile' who only need to cast off the cloaks that hide this to uncover their true potential. There are many different ways to (in the word of a Doors song) 'break on through to the other side'. These include 'psychotherapies, physical labour, dance, shamanic practices, magic, or for that matter, fire-walking, sex, tennis, taking drugs or using virtual-reality equipment'.

According to Heelas, the New Age values personal experience above 'truths' provided by scientists or conventional religious leaders. In this respect detraditionalization is a key feature of the New Age: it rejects the authority that comes from traditional sources and sees individuals and their sense of who they are as the only genuine source of truth or understanding. A good example of this attitude was a notice above the door of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh's Ashram (commune) at Puna, which said 'Leave your minds and shoes here.'

The New Age stresses that you can become responsible for your own actions, you do not need to be governed by preconceived ideas. It also emphasizes freedom to discover your own truth and discover your own way to the truth. Although many aspects of the New Age draw on traditional mystical and religious teachings, these are seen as ways of getting in touch with your own spirituality rather than as doctrines that must be rigidly followed. They allow the discovery of truth as an abstract concept, as an inner and spiritual phenomenon, rather than revealing a particular and specific version of the truth. According to Heelas, the movement believes that 'the same wisdom can be found at the heart of all religious traditions'.

Variations within the New Age

Although Heelas detects many common themes in the New Age, as outlined above, he also discerns some variations in New Age beliefs. Following Roy Wallis's typology of new religious movements (see pp. 457–60), Heelas distinguishes between aspects of the New Age which tend towards the world-affirming and those which are more world-rejecting. The former type stress how the New Age can help you experience the best of the outer world. For example, New Age teachings might help you to be successful in business. Harper Collins (the publishers of this book) in the 1990s ran company-wide courses following the New Age 'Values and Vision' training of Tishi. Transcendental Meditation now has its own University of Management in Holland. There are numerous other examples and all claim to be able to help companies to become more profitable and individuals more successful.

World-rejecting aspects of New Age stress how to experience the best of the inner world, how to achieve inner spirituality and turn away from any concern with worldly success.

Most New Age beliefs, though, offer the best of both worlds, claiming that you can become both successful and spiritually fulfilled. Not surprisingly, then, the radicalism of different New Age beliefs differs considerably. While some almost celebrate capitalism, others are strongly opposed to aspects of it. This is particularly true of ecologically inclined parts of the movement. Nevertheless, Steve Bruce believes that even these types are less radical than some of the new religious movements of earlier decades. Bruce says of environmentalism:

> *it is critical of aspects of the modern world, especially those such as pollution that can be seen as side-effects of greed and over-consumption, and in that sense the New Age is 'alternative', but there is little of the blanket condemnation of the present world found in out-and-out world-rejecting new religions.*
>
> Bruce, 1995, p. 109

Heelas also detects differences between those aspects of the New Age which stress that you make your own truth through experience and those which believe that there is some external cosmic order which can be discovered, or that you need the help of 'gurus, masters, facilitators or trainers'.

The appeal of the New Age

Both Steve Bruce and Paul Heelas agree that the New Age can best be explained as a development of modernity. In other words they agree that the key characteristics of the New Age are derived from, or at least closely related to, what they see as the most recent stages of the development of Western societies (see Chapter 15 for a discussion of modernity).

Steve Bruce claims that the New Age appeals most to affluent members of society, particularly the 'university-educated middle classes working in the "expressive professions": social workers, counsellors, actors, writers, artists, and others whose education

and work causes them to have an articulate interest in human potential'. They may have experienced personal development themselves and therefore find it plausible to believe that there is the potential for further development for themselves or others. These are also the sorts of people who have been most exposed to a belief in individualism, which is characteristic of modern societies. Modern societies are relatively egalitarian and democratic so the views and beliefs of individuals are given more credence than was once the case, whereas the views of experts and traditional authorities are regarded with more scepticism. Bruce says:

> *This is the importance of the New Age. It illustrates the zenith of individualism. Individualism used to mean the right to act as one wished provided it did not harm others and the right to hold views radically at odds with the consensus. It has now shifted up in abstraction from a behavioural and ethical principle to an epistemological claim [a claim about how you know what is true and what is not]. It is now asserted as the right to decide what is and what is not true.*
>
> Bruce, 1995, p. 122

The New Age is a symptom of the extreme relativism of knowledge; that is, what you believe comes to depend simply on your subjective point of view and is not based upon general acceptance of definite claims by scientists and experts. It is also, in Bruce's eyes, a symptom of the decline of traditional religion. If people have little faith in the claims of scientists, they have even less in those of traditional religious leaders.

Paul Heelas (1996) reaches broadly similar conclusions. He sees the main appeal of the New Age as stemming from aspects of mainstream culture. However, it provides a more critical, radicalized and more religious, sacrilized version of mainstream culture. On the surface it appears to reject mainstream culture but in fact it is based on an extreme emphasis on the individualism that is typical of modernity. This individualism leads to people becoming 'disembedded, desituated or detraditionalized selves'. People have no roots in the locality where they were born or brought up. They no longer have unquestioning faith in political, moral or religious codes, or in the leaders who espouse them. People are thrown back on their own resources to make sense of the world and to create their own identity.

The individualism of modernity takes two forms:

1. Utilitarian individualism encourages people to seek to maximize their own happiness and material success. This is linked both to the desire for consumer goods and to those aspects of the New Age which aim to provide people with techniques to make them more successful in business or in their careers.
2. Expressive individualism emphasizes the importance of being yourself, discovering your authentic or true self. This links to those aspects of the New Age which are more inner-directed.

Heelas examines four more specific ways in which modernity might link to the appeal of the New Age:

1. Modernity gives people a 'multiplicity-of-roles'. For example, they have work roles, family roles, roles as consumers, as members of various organizations, as friends and so on. In the modern world there may be little overlap between these roles; people are unlikely to live close to, and socialize primarily with, their workmates, or to live in the same community all their lives, or to work with members of their family. Because of this, people may end up with a fragmented identity – they have no central, core concept of who they are. The New Age offers ways of finding an identity.
2. Consumer culture encourages people to try to become the perfect person by, for example, wearing the right clothes, using the best make-up, having the healthiest diet, etc. This creates a 'climate of discontent' as people fail to achieve the perfection portrayed by the advertisers. This encourages people to try new ways of gaining perfection, including those offered by the New Age.
3. Following Bryan Wilson (see p. 463), Heelas suggests that periods of rapid social change, in which traditional norms and values are disrupted, might lead people to seek certainty and security in religious or spiritual beliefs.
4. The decline of conventional religion, particularly Christianity, leaves people without strong spiritual alternatives to the New Age when they are seeking solutions to the problems created by modernity.

Heelas sees the last of these explanations as the least important. However, he believes that all may have some role to play in explaining the appeal of the New Age. All are linked to modernity, but people experience modernity in very different ways. Some people experience modernity as (in a phrase used by Weber) an 'iron cage'. They feel trapped by the power of bureaucracies, the routines of work and the demands of success in capitalist societies. Yet, for all its demands, modernity does not offer most people a satisfying sense of identity – of who they are and why they exist. The New Age offers a solution.

Others experience modernity as a 'crumbling cage' where they have too much freedom, too few guidelines about how to behave. Again, the New Age offers possible solutions for people prepared to look within themselves for the answers.

Of course there are other ways of dealing with the dilemmas of modernity. As Heelas acknowledges, some people – for example, Christian fundamentalists in the USA – turn to traditional religion. Others

might throw themselves into their work or become entranced by consumer culture. Nevertheless, the popularity of the New Age is only made possible by the nature of modernity. Heelas concludes:

> *Basically, the appeal of the New Age has to do with the culturally stimulated interest in the self, its values, capacities and problems. Whereas traditionalized religiosity, with its hierarchical organization, is well-suited for the community, detraditionalized spirituality is well-suited for the individual. The New Age is 'of' the self in that it facilitates celebration of what it is to be and to become; and 'for' the self in that by differing from much of the mainstream, it is positioned to handle identity problems generated by conventional forms of life.*
>
> Heelas, 1996, pp. 173–4

The New Age – conclusion

On the surface the New Age seems to contradict the views of sociologists such as Weber that the modern world would become increasingly rational. There seems to be little rationality in the claim by the New Ager Shirley Maclaine that she is responsible for the birth of her parents (quoted in Heelas, 1996), or that spirit guides, astrology or messages from 'an energy personality essence no longer focused in physical reality' (quoted in Bruce, 1995) can help us to live our lives better. But if Bruce and Heelas are correct, then the rationality of modernity also brought with it an individualism in which apparently non-rational beliefs could flourish.

Some writers disagree with Bruce and Heelas, seeing the existence of such beliefs as evidence that we have moved beyond modernity into an era of postmodernity (see pp. 495–500 on postmodernity and religion). There is no agreement either on whether the New Age is evidence of the resurgence of spiritual belief or a manifestation of secularization (see pp. 499–500). But Bruce and Heelas seem to be on strong ground in arguing that the New Age is related to a decline in traditional beliefs and that it is closely linked with other social and cultural developments in modern societies.

Secularization

Support for the secularization thesis

Although sociologists have disputed whether religion encourages or inhibits social change, most agree that changes in society will lead to changes in religion. Furthermore, many have claimed that social change would lead to the weakening or even disappearance of religion.

In the nineteenth century it was widely believed that industrialization and the growth of scientific knowledge would lead to secularization, which very broadly can be defined as the process of religious decline. August Comte (1986), the French functionalist sociologist, believed that human history passed through three stages. Each stage was characterized by a different set of intellectual beliefs:

1. In the first, theological stage, religious and superstitious beliefs would be dominant.
2. These would be weakened as society passed into the second, metaphysical stage, during which philosophy would become more important.
3. Religious belief would disappear altogether in the final, positive stage, in which science alone would dominate human thinking and direct human behaviour.

Durkheim did not agree that religion was doomed to total obsolescence. He once commented that there was 'something eternal in religion' (Durkheim, 1961). Nevertheless, he did anticipate that religion would be of declining social significance. In an industrial society in which there was a highly specialized division of labour, religion would lose some of its importance as a force for integrating society. Social solidarity would increasingly be provided by the education system rather than the sort of religious rituals associated with the more simple societies.

Weber too anticipated a progressive reduction in the importance of religion. He thought that in general people would act less in terms of emotions and in line with tradition, and more in terms of the rational pursuit of goals. Rationalization would gradually erode religious influence (Weber, 1958, 1963, Gerth and Mills, 1954) (for further details see Chapter 15).

Marx did not believe that industrial capitalism as such would herald the decline of religion, but he did believe that it would set in motion a chain of events that would eventually lead to its disappearance (Marx, 1950). Religion, according to Marx, was needed to legitimate inequality in class societies, but capitalism would eventually be replaced by classless communism, and religion would cease to have any social purpose.

Many contemporary sociologists have followed in the footsteps of the founders of the subject. They have argued that science and rationality, the decline of traditional values, and the increasingly specialized division of labour, would tend to undermine religion in particular and faith and non-rational beliefs in

general. These views are largely based upon an analysis of the nature of modernity.

Modern societies are seen to be incompatible with the retention of a central role for religion. That is not to say that supporters of the secularization thesis necessarily believe that religion will disappear completely. Instead they argue that in some sense religion will decline in significance. For example, Bryan Wilson – for over thirty years a leading advocate of secularization – defines secularization as 'the process whereby religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social significance' (Wilson, 1966).

Problems with the secularization thesis

Despite widespread support for the theory of secularization, a number of doubts have been raised:

1 Some sociologists have questioned the belief that religion was as important in the past as has been widely assumed. If pre-industrial societies were not truly religious, then religion may have declined little, if at all.

2 The role of religion in different modern societies varies considerably. It is possible that secularization is a feature of the development of some modern societies, but not of others. For example, religion appears to be much more influential in the USA than it is in the UK. There are also disagreements about how far you might expect the process of secularization to have spread. For example, would you expect Asian, African, and Latin American countries to have experienced secularization, or would you expect it to be limited to North America and Western Europe? The crucial question here is which countries are perceived to be 'modern'.

3 The concepts of religiosity and secularization are not given the same meanings by different sociologists. Problems arise in evaluating the theory of secularization because of the absence of a generally agreed definition. Glock and Stark argue that 'Perhaps the most important attribute of those who perceive secularization to be going on is their commitment to a particular view of what religion means' (Glock and Stark, 1969). Thus one researcher might see the essential characteristic of religion as worship in a religious institution. As a result she or he may see a decline in church attendance as evidence of secularization. Another might emphasize religious belief, which is seen as having nothing necessarily to do with attending a religious institution. A third might see the issue in terms of the role religion plays in shaping public life, for example politics and education; while a fourth might see it in terms of the extent to which religious teaching has influenced the moral values of a society.

4 Even if modernity does lead to secularization, you cannot necessarily conclude that contemporary societies will become increasingly secular. Some advocates of the theory of postmodernism argue that, in moving beyond modernity, societies will also move beyond the secular. Faith and religion will be rediscovered in a world in which the achievements of science and rationality have less appeal than they once had (see Chapter 15 for a discussion of modernity and postmodernity).

The question of secularization will now be discussed in terms of some of the varying definitions of the concept that have been used, before returning to a more general discussion of the issues raised by this concept.

Institutional religion – participation

Statistical evidence

Some researchers have seen religious institutions and the activity associated with them as the key element in religious behaviour. From this viewpoint they have measured the importance of religion in society in terms of factors such as church attendance, church membership and participation in ceremonies such as marriages which are performed in church.

In these respects, a good deal of the statistical evidence does seem to point towards secularization. However, the evidence needs to be examined carefully: some of it does not appear to support the secularization thesis; the evidence varies between countries; and the reliability and validity of many of the statistics are open to question. (For an explanation of the terms validity and reliability see Chapter 14.)

We will now examine the statistics relating to different types of participation in institutional religion.

Church attendance in Britain

Some of the strongest evidence for the secularization thesis as applied to Britain seems to come from church attendance statistics. Figure 7.2 shows long-term trends in church attendance in England and Wales and Scotland according to a variety of surveys and studies, some of which are discussed below.

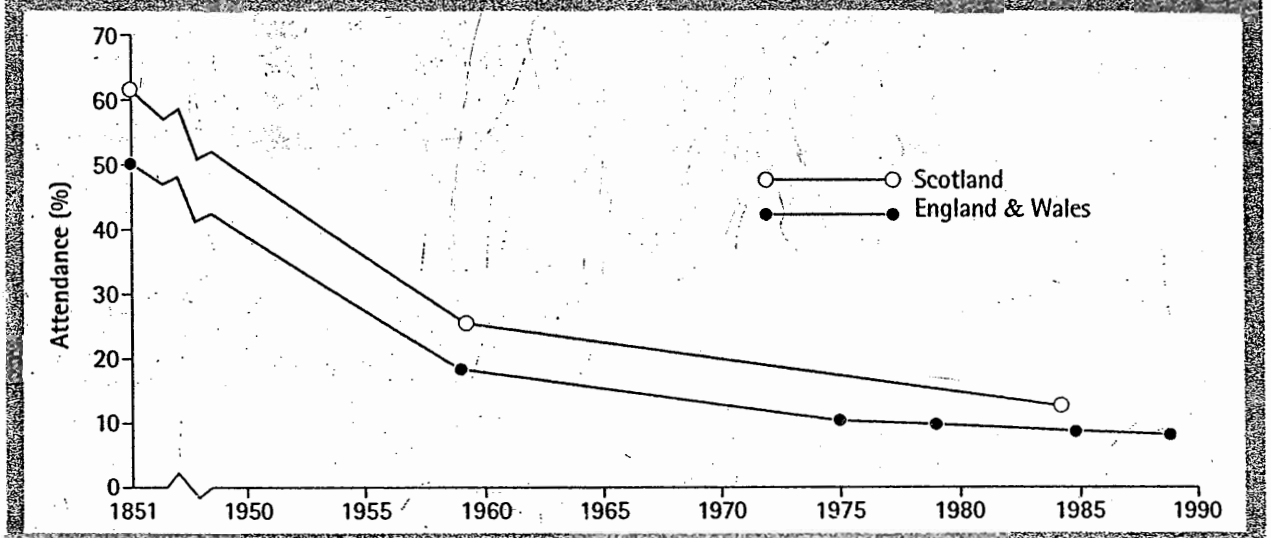
The earliest available survey statistics on church attendance originate from the 1851 'Census of Religion'. This found just under 40 per cent of the adult population attending church. In England and Wales the figures dropped to 35 per cent by the turn of the century and 20 per cent in 1950.

In 1979 and 1989 two new Church Censuses were carried out. In both of these, clergy were asked to make comparisons with five years earlier and estimate changes in the size of their congregations. The 1979 census was based on average attendance during the month of November. The 1989 census was based upon an attempt to collect information from

every Christian church in England on Sunday 15 October of that year. A church was defined as 'a body of people meeting on a Sunday in the same premises primarily for the purposes of public worship at regular intervals'. 'Church' was used in a very wide sense – the study included figures on Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Orthodox religions, Christian denominations and the House Church movement (in which small groups get together to pray in each others' homes or in other buildings that are not normally used for religious purposes). Altogether 390,000 'churches' were discovered, 70 per cent of which returned the questionnaires on which the statistics were based (Brierley, 1991). Using these surveys and estimates provided by individual religious organizations, estimates have been produced in the *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 1998/99* (Brierley, ed., 1997) for adult church attendance between 1980 and 1995 in England. The results are given in Table 7.2 and include estimates for the year 2000 based on previous trends.

The overall attendance figures are repeated along with membership figures in graph form in Figure 7.3. These figures show a continuing drop in church

Figure 7.2 Adult church attendance in Britain, 1851–1989



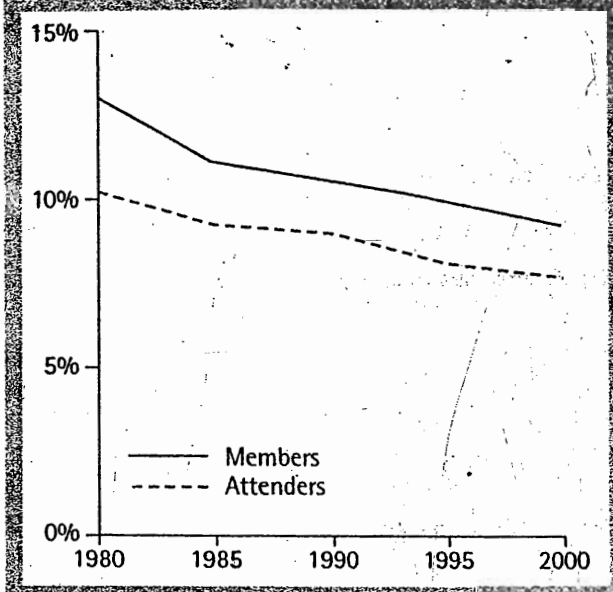
Source: P. Brierley (ed.) (1998) *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 1998/99*, London: Christian Research, p. 24

Table 7.2 Adult church attendance in England, 1980–2000

England	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000
Anglican	968,000	920,900	917,600	854,000	831,800
Baptist	201,300	196,200	197,700	195,200	192,000
Catholic	1,601,400	1,424,200	1,346,400	1,100,800	972,700
Independent	164,200	176,500	179,700	184,900	190,000
Methodist	437,900	420,800	395,200	350,500	321,800
New churches	50,300	81,000	114,200	156,100	198,000
Orthodox	7,200	8,400	9,600	10,800	12,000
Pentecostal	147,200	152,400	164,700	171,900	179,000
United Reformed	139,000	121,400	104,100	97,900	91,500
Other churches	97,700	81,400	83,000	75,700	73,000
TOTAL	3,814,200	3,583,200	3,512,200	3,197,800	3,061,800
% of adult population	*10.2%*	*9.3%*	*9.0%*	*8.1%*	*7.7%*

Source: P. Brierley (ed.) (1998) *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 1998/99*, London: Christian Research, p. 24

Figure 7.3 Church membership and attendance in England, 1980–2000



Source: P. Brierley (ed.) (1998) *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 1998/99*. Christian Research, p. 212.

attendance overall, particularly among Anglican, Baptist, Catholic and United Reformed churches. This appears to indicate a sustained process of secularization. Table 7.3 shows total adult attendance in Great Britain from 1980 to 2000. Again, the figure for 2000 is based on projections. This shows a drop in attendance from 10.9 per cent of the population in 1980 to 8.7 per cent in 1995.

Attendance at special Christian ceremonies such as baptisms and marriages has also declined. In 1900, 65 per cent of children born alive in England were baptized. By 1970 it was down to 47 per cent and in 1993 had fallen as low as 27 per cent (Bruce, 1996). There has also been a noticeable drop in the number of marriages conducted in church. According to Bruce, nearly 70 per cent of English couples were married in the Church of England at the start of the twentieth century. By 1990 it had fallen to 53 per cent. According to the *UK Christian Handbook*, 47 per cent of marriages in England and Wales in 1995 took place in a religious building.

Table 7.3 Total adult church attendance in Great Britain, 1980–2000

Great Britain	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000
TOTAL (millions)	4.77	4.51	4.38	3.98	3.79
	10.9%	10.1%	9.6%	8.7%	8.2%

Source: P. Brierley (ed.) (1998) *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 1998/99*. Christian Research, p. 212.

Church membership in Britain

Tables 7.4 to 7.8 show the number of church members, the number of separate congregations or churches, and the number of ministers in the UK and its constituent countries from 1980 to 1990. Figures 7.4 to 7.7 show some of these statistics in graph form. Both the tables and graphs include projections to the year 2000. The data reveals substantial falls in the membership of Anglican, Roman Catholic and Presbyterian churches, although membership of Orthodox churches has risen. Overall membership of these churches fell by nearly 1.2 million between 1980 and 1995, or by around 19 per cent.

According to the *UK Christian Handbook*, by 1995 only 10.8 per cent of the UK adult population were members of Anglican, Catholic, Orthodox or Presbyterian churches. In England the figure was just 7.5 per cent, compared to 8.8 per cent in Wales, 25.3 per cent in Scotland and 72.9 per cent in Northern Ireland.

Table 7.4 Total institutional churches

Membership	England	Wales	Scotland	N Ireland	Total UK
1980	3,749,987	289,038	1,358,679	879,747	6,277,451
1985	3,309,455	262,056	1,259,759	891,801	5,725,071
1990	3,101,081	239,515	1,175,601	892,624	5,408,821
1995	2,934,360	206,593	1,053,542	894,342	5,088,837
2000[1]	2,632,510	184,521	960,885	897,340	4,675,256
Churches	England	Wales	Scotland	N Ireland	Total UK
1980	21,885	3,241	3,021	1,504	29,651
1985	21,638	3,118	2,923	1,482	29,161
1990	21,478	2,996	2,863	1,537	28,874
1995	21,392	2,840	2,757	1,517	28,426
2000[1]	21,212	2,729	2,650	1,533	28,124
Ministers	England	Wales	Scotland	N Ireland	Total UK
1980	19,246	1,406	3,108	1,523	25,283
1985	18,637	1,290	2,847	1,501	24,275
1990	18,378	1,197	2,748	1,452	23,775
1995	17,015	1,150	2,573	1,434	22,172
2000[1]	16,183	1,103	2,370	1,457	21,113

[1] Estimate.

Source: P. Brierley (ed.) (1998) *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 1998/99*. Christian Research, p. 28.

The above figures do not include Free churches such as Baptist, Methodist and Pentecostal churches. Here the pattern of changes in membership is more variable. There have been rises in membership of new churches and Pentecostal churches but falls in the membership of Baptist, Independent, Methodist and other 'other' Free churches. The figures are given in Tables 7.9–7.15. Overall, Free Church membership declined slightly between 1980 and 1995, falling by around 3,400 or by just under 0.3 per cent.

Membership of some non-Christian churches and other religious organizations has been increasing. Table 7.16 shows members and congregations of non-Trinitarian religions. This shows a significant increase in membership from over 350,000 in 1980 to over 520,000 in 1995 – an increase of around 47 per cent. Much of this increase is accounted for by the rises in the numbers of Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons and Scientologists. (Scientologists are sometimes classified as a cult.) Some other groups, including Theosophists, Unitarian churches and Spiritualists, have declined.

Table 7.17 provides statistics on major religions other than Christianity in the UK. This shows substantial increases in membership of some non-Christian religions. The number of Muslims has increased by 274,000, Sikhs by 200,000, Hindus by 35,000 and Buddhists by 28,000. There have been declines in some groups – for example, Jews – but overall membership of these religions has increased by some 545,000, or over 70 per cent. While much of this increase may be explained by births to parents following these religions, and by immigration, some has been due to conversions. For example, some people from a Christian background have converted to Buddhism.

New religious movements, which take the form of sects or cults, involve much smaller numbers than the major non-Christian religions. The *UK Christian Handbook* lists 18 such movements and has estimated

Table 7.5 Anglican membership, churches and ministers

	England	Wales	Scotland	N Ireland	Total UK
Membership					
1980	1,817,290	131,553	67,655	162,960	**2,179,458**
1985	1,553,446	116,976	62,756	162,765	**1,895,943**
1990	1,398,863	108,365	58,619	162,130	**1,727,977**
1995	1,472,627	95,985	55,136	161,525	**1,785,273**
2000[2]	1,286,310	87,150	49,800	160,830	**1,584,090**
Churches					
1980	16,927	1,698	312	462	**19,399**
1985	16,629	1,639	317	440	**19,025**
1990	16,440	1,595	313	476	**18,824**
1995	16,362	1,540	320	452	**18,674**
2000[2]	16,227	1,503	316	459	**18,505**
Ministers					
1980	11,101	802	237	332	**12,472**
1985	10,796	752	244	366	**12,158**
1990	11,130	700	240	304	**12,374**
1995	10,577	710	244	250	**11,781**
2000[2]	10,191	691	242	283	**11,407**

[1] These figures are more than just the Church of England, although in 1995 the Church of England membership was 92 per cent of the total.
[2] Estimate

Source: P. Brierley (ed.) (1998) *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 1998/99*. Christian Research, p. 2.8

Table 7.6 Roman Catholic mass attendance, churches and priests

	England	Wales	Scotland	N Ireland	Total UK
Mass attendance					
1980	1,601,365	56,956	296,329	502,403	**2,457,053**
1985	1,424,235	58,169	285,031	513,905	**2,281,340**
1990	1,346,416	54,819	283,899	515,710	**2,200,844**
1995	1,100,845	47,387	249,180	518,005	**1,915,417**
2000[1]	972,705	46,356	243,260	521,510	**1,783,831**
Churches					
1980	3,016	209	476	459	**4,160**
1985	3,109	217	478	464	**4,268**
1990	3,174	213	485	467	**4,339**
1995	3,147	205	464	470	**4,286**
2000[1]	3,140	206	464	472	**4,282**
Priests					
1980	6,788	340	1,175	707	**9,010**
1985	6,427	332	1,111	647	**8,517**
1990	6,083	311	1,050	643	**8,087**
1995	5,490	279	936	720	**7,425**
2000[1]	5,133	265	876	700	**6,974**

[1] Estimate

Source: P. Brierley (ed.) (1998) *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 1998/99*. Christian Research, p. 2.8

Table 7.7 Orthodox membership, congregations and priests

Membership	England	Wales	Scotland	N Ireland	Total UK
1980	187,227	9,409	6,366	163	203,165
1985	203,280	8,686	11,585	190	223,741
1990	240,281	8,512	16,950	225	265,968
1995	258,466	6,093	23,732	269	288,560
2000[1]	285,450	5,615	29,055	300	320,420

Congregations	England	Wales	Scotland	N Ireland	Total UK
1980	160	4	5	2	171
1985	185	5	8	2	200
1990	203	6	10	2	221
1995	243	7	15	3	268
2000[1]	268	7	18	3	296

Priests	England	Wales	Scotland	N Ireland	Total UK
1980	162	4	2	0	168
1985	180	3	4	0	187
1990	182	3	7	0	192
1995	201	2	11	0	214
2000[1]	217	2	13	0	232

Source: P. Brierley (ed.) (1998) *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 1999/1999*, Christian Research, p. 28.

Table 7.8 Presbyterian membership, churches and ministers

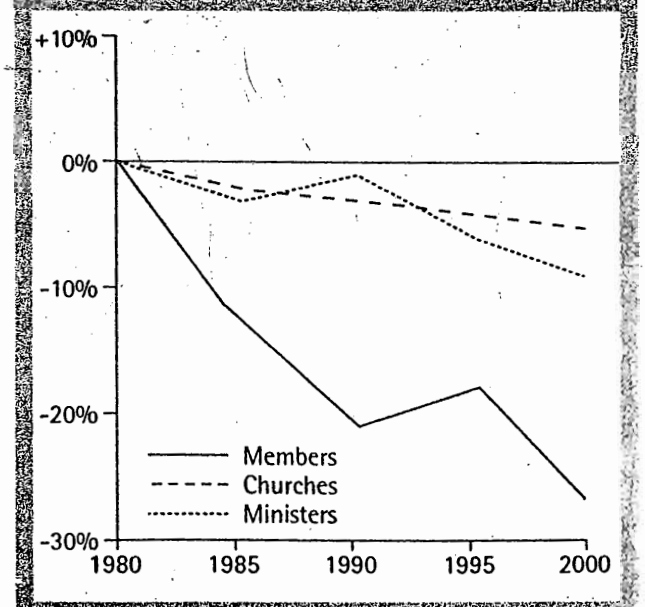
Membership	England	Wales	Scotland	N Ireland	Total UK
1980	144,105	91,120	988,329	214,221	1,437,775
1985	128,494	78,225	900,387	214,941	1,322,047
1990	115,521	67,819	816,133	214,559	1,214,032
1995	102,422	57,128	725,494	214,543	1,099,587
2000[1]	88,045	45,400	638,770	214,700	986,915

Churches	England	Wales	Scotland	N Ireland	Total UK
1980	1,782	1,330	2,228	581	5,921
1985	1,715	1,257	2,120	576	5,668
1990	1,661	1,182	2,055	592	5,490
1995	1,640	1,088	1,958	592	5,278
2000[1]	1,577	1,013	1,852	599	5,041

Ministers	England	Wales	Scotland	N Ireland	Total UK
1980	1,195	260	1,694	484	3,633
1985	1,234	203	1,488	488	3,413
1990	983	183	1,451	505	3,122
1995	747	159	1,382	464	2,752
2000[1]	642	145	1,239	474	2,500

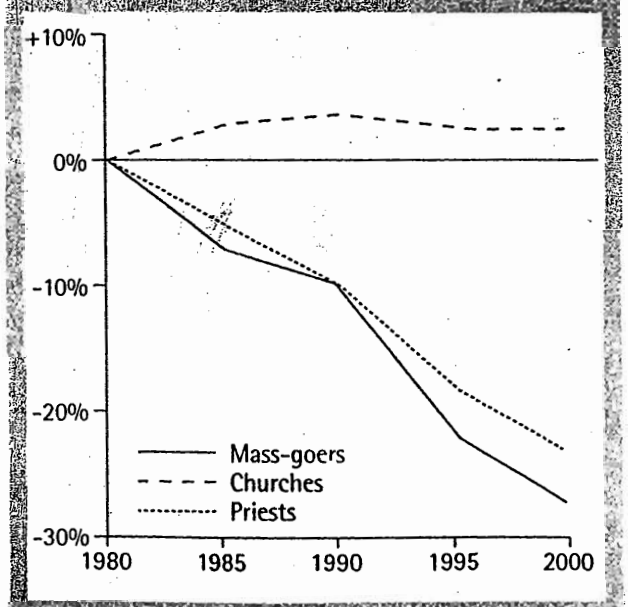
Source: P. Brierley (ed.) (1998) *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 1999/1999*, Christian Research, p. 28.

Figure 7.4 Percentage changes since 1980 in the Anglican Church



Source: P. Brierley (ed.) (1998) *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 1999/1999*, Christian Research, p. 29.

Figure 7.5 Percentage changes since 1980 in the Roman Catholic Church



Source: P. Brierley (ed.) (1998) *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 1998/1999*, Christian Research, p. 29.

Figure 7.6 Percentage changes since 1980 in the Orthodox Church

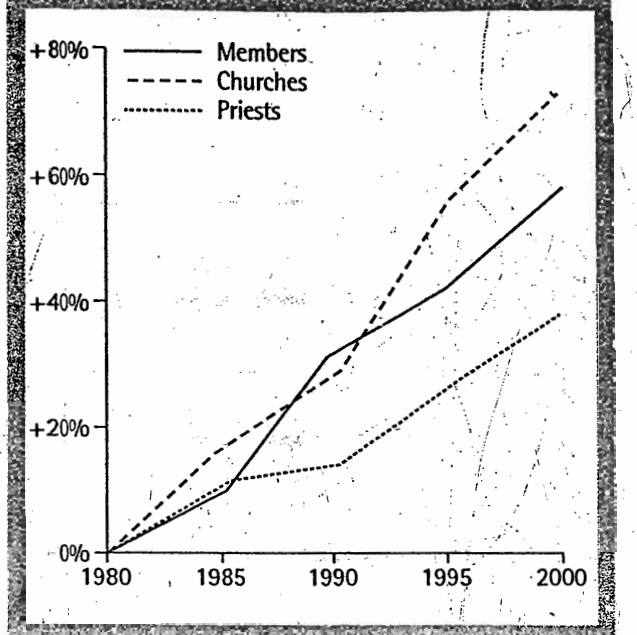
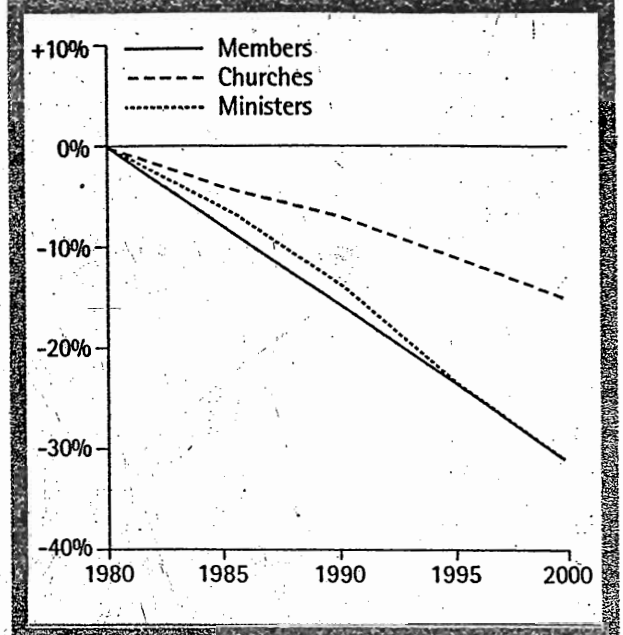


Figure 7.7 Percentage changes since 1980 in the Presbyterian Church



Source: P. Brierley (ed.) (1998) *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 1998/99*, Christian Research, p. 2.9

Table 7.9 Total Free Church membership

	England	Wales	Scotland	N Ireland	Total UK
Membership					
1980	972,893	166,394	78,892	57,716	1,275,895
1985	973,781	148,450	77,015	57,147	1,256,393
1990	1,007,302	136,895	79,667	59,755	1,283,619
1995	1,015,466	124,698	71,550	60,767	1,272,481
2000[1]	1,022,817	112,332	71,128	61,662	1,267,939
Churches					
1980	15,912	2,569	1,087	697	20,365
1985	15,994	2,436	1,111	698	20,339
1990	16,479	2,304	1,128	704	20,715
1995	16,487	2,206	1,109	724	20,626
2000[1]	16,497	2,073	1,119	735	20,524

[1] Estimate

Source: P. Brierley (ed.) (1998) *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 1998/99*, Christian Research, p. 2.10

Table 7.10 Baptist membership and churches

	England	Wales	Scotland	N Ireland	Total UK
Membership					
1980	162,892	51,814	17,564	7,545	239,815
1985	172,573	43,963	18,214	8,349	243,099
1990	166,353	37,820	18,103	8,645	230,921
1995	162,975	34,194	18,083	8,155	223,407
2000[1]	164,295	29,847	17,955	8,220	220,317
Churches					
1980	2,221	827	181	88	3,317
1985	2,279	785	191	93	3,348
1990	2,547	743	195	103	3,588
1995	2,413	715	208	112	3,448
2000[1]	2,413	678	215	121	3,427

[1] Estimate

Source: P. Brierley (ed.) (1998) *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 1998/99*, Christian Research, p. 2.10

Table 7.11 Independent membership and churches

	England	Wales	Scotland	N Ireland	Total UK
Membership					
1980	109,619	74,644	38,395	14,223	**236,881**
1985	113,205	66,785	35,457	14,122	**229,569**
1990	114,453	61,112	36,280	13,680	**225,525**
1995	112,468	53,599	27,572	12,605	**206,244**
2000[2]	114,113	46,808	26,846	12,595	**200,362**
Churches					
1980	2,596	908	528	263	**4,295**
1985	2,538	859	521	259	**4,177**
1990	2,483	817	519	266	**4,085**
1995	2,402	780	470	258	**3,910**
2000[2]	2,346	736	466	261	**3,809**

[illegible]
Estimate
Source: P. Brierley (ed.) (1998) *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 1999/00*, Christian Research, p. 2.10

Table 7.12 Methodist membership and churches

	England	Wales	Scotland	N Ireland	Total UK
Membership					
1980	463,086	25,963	8,240	23,268	**520,557**
1985	422,969	23,026	7,200	21,095	**474,290**
1990	404,381	20,627	7,133	19,591	**451,732**
1995	358,610	18,293	6,312	17,872	**401,087**
2000[1]	329,355	15,650	5,750	16,065	**366,820**
Churches					
1980	7,639	553	79	210	**8,481**
1985	7,173	501	78	203	**7,955**
1990	6,855	451	77	179	**7,562**
1995	6,422	418	76	176	**7,092**
2000[1]	6,033	367	75	161	**6,636**

[illegible]
Estimate
Source: P. Brierley (ed.) (1998) *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 1999/00*, Christian Research, p. 2.10

Table 7.13 New churches membership and congregations

	England	Wales	Scotland	N Ireland	Total UK
Membership					
1980	9,337	300	400	100	**10,137**
1985	32,351	1,000	1,500	500	**35,351**
1990	71,039	1,740	2,775	1,900	**77,454**
1995	100,766	2,400	3,460	2,975	**109,601**
2000[1]	124,100	3,100	4,200	3,800	**135,200**
Churches					
1980	219	4	4	1	**228**
1985	649	15	15	5	**684**
1990	1,120	27	28	16	**1,191**
1995	1,479	36	40	25	**1,580**
2000[1]	1,803	44	46	35	**1,928**

Estimate
Source: P. Brierley (ed.) (1998) *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 1999/00*, Christian Research, p. 2.10

Table 7.14 Pentecostal membership and churches

	England	Wales	Scotland	N Ireland	Total UK
Membership					
1980	105,888	8,154	4,310	8,716	**127,068**
1985	113,893	8,881	4,557	9,338	**136,669**
1990	133,669	10,902	5,717	12,211	**162,499**
1995	163,045	11,651	6,681	15,154	**196,531**
2000[2]	174,861	12,660	7,140	16,815	**211,476**
Churches					
1980	1,568	172	93	71	**1,904**
1985	1,684	171	98	71	**2,024**
1990	1,801	171	98	77	**2,147**
1995	2,036	163	112	88	**2,399**
2000[2]	2,154	156	117	93	**2,520**

[1] Sum of main line Afro-Caribbean and Orthodox Apostolic churches
Estimate
Source: P. Brierley (ed.) (1998) *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 1999/00*, Christian Research, p. 2.10

Table 7.15 Other churches[1] membership and churches

	England	Wales	Scotland	N Ireland	Total UK
Membership					
1980	122,071	5,519	9,983	3,864	141,437
1985	118,790	4,795	10,087	3,743	137,415
1990	117,407	4,694	9,659	3,728	135,488
1995	117,602	4,561	9,442	4,006	135,611
2000[2]	116,093	4,267	9,237	4,167	133,764
Churches					
1980	1,669	105	202	64	2,040
1985	1,671	105	208	67	2,051
1990	1,673	95	211	63	2,042
1995	1,735	94	203	65	2,097
2000[2]	1,748	92	200	64	2,104

[illegible]

Source: P. Brierley (ed.) (1998) *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 1998/99*, Christian Research, p. 23 [illegible]

Table 7.16 Non-Trinitarian church membership, UK, 1980–95

	1980	1990	1995
Christadelphians	22,000	20,000	19,500*
Christian Community	1,060	800*	600
Church of Christ, Scientist	15,000*	11,000	9,500
Church of God International	5	35	75
The Family	200	200	200*
Global Church of God	–	–	50
Jehovah's Witnesses	85,321	116,612	131,000
Liberal Catholic Church	1,830	1,550	1,400
London Church of Christ	–	1,000	1,500
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons)	114,458	159,789	171,000
New Church	2,161	1,712	1,450
Philadelphia Church of God	–	–	50
Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints	2,000*	1,824	1,446
Church of Scientology	30,000	75,000	121,800
Spiritualists	52,404	45,000	40,000*
Theosophists	5,122	4,700	4,500
Unification Church (Moonies)	597	385	390*
Unitarian and Free Christian Churches	11,000	8,500	6,700
The Way	300	600*	750
Other non-Trinitarian	10,000	10,000	10,000
Total	**353,558**	**458,657**	**521,867**

* Estimate

Source: Compiled from P. Brierley (ed.) (1998) *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 1998/99*, Christian Research, pp. 10.2–10.5.

Table 7.17 Major religions other than Christianity, UK, 1980–95

	1980	1990	1995
Ahmadiyya Movement	7,250	7,700	7,900
Bahá'ís	3,000	5,000*	6,000
Buddhists	17,000	31,500	45,000
Hindus	120,000	140,000	155,000
International Society for Krishna Consciousness	300	425	600
Jains	6,000*	10,000	10,000
Jews	110,915	101,239	93,684
Muslims	306,000	495,000	580,000
Satanists	100	280	420
School of Meditation	4,820	7,000*	9,000
Sikhs	150,000	250,000	350,000
Zoroastrians	1,350*	2,000	2,500
Other religions	9,000	15,000	20,000
Total	**735,735**	**1,066,149**	**1,281,014**

* Estimate

Source: Compiled from P. Brierley (ed.) (1998) *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 1998/99*, Christian Research, pp. 10.12–10.15.

the membership of these organizations along with that of other new religious movements. As Table 7.18 shows, membership of such movements rose by nearly 5,000 between 1980 and 1995, an increase of approximately 130 per cent.

All of the above figures should be viewed with some caution. Many of the figures are estimates, and, as we will see below, interpreting religious statistics is difficult and controversial.

Nevertheless they do give some indication of membership trends. Overall there does seem to have been a decline in membership of religious organizations in the UK. Institutional, Christian religions have declined most, while many non-Christian and smaller religions have gained members. Using statistics from *Religious Trends 1998/99* (Brierley, 1998), and taking institutional churches, Free churches, non-Trinitarian churches, major religions other than Christianity, and new religious movements together, membership fell from 8,646,464 to 8,172, 993 between 1980 and 1995 in the UK. This was a fall of 473,471 or approximately

Table 7.18 Membership of new religious movements, UK, 1980–95

	1980	1990	1995
The Aetherius Society	100	100	120
Brahma Kumanis	700	900	1,000
Chrisemma	–	–	20
Creme	250	375	450
Da Free John	35	50	55
Eckankar	250	350	400
Elan Vital	1,250	1,800	2,100
Fellowship of Isis	150	250	300
The Barry Long Foundation	–	400	400
Life Training	–	200	300
Mahikari	–	220	250
Outlook Seminar Training	–	75	90
Pagan Federation	500	900	1,100
The Raelin Movement	100	100	100
Sahaja Yoga	220	280	330
Shinnyeon UK	10	30	50
Solara	–	140	160
3HO	60	60	60
Others	250	1,000	1,500
Total	**3,825**	**7,285**	**8,785**

Source: [illegible] Religion [illegible]

5.5 per cent. This seems to offer some support for the theory of secularization but, as we shall see, critics of the theory see such figures as far from conclusive.

Religious participation in the USA

A very different impression is given by statistics on religious participation in the USA. There, rates of religious participation are much higher than those in Britain and on the surface do not provide support for theories of secularization. Writing in 1993, C. Kirk Hadaway, Penny Marler, P.L. Church and Mark Chaves noted that rates of self-reported church attendance in the USA were around 40 per cent. By this measure, Protestants had about the same attendance rates in the early 1990s as they had in the 1940s. Rates of attendance for Catholics in the USA did decline in the 1960s and early 1970s, but had not fallen any further. For example, in 1991 a poll conducted by Princeton Religious Research Centre found that 42 per cent of Americans claimed to have attended a church or synagogue in the previous week; 45 per cent of Protestants and 51 per cent of Catholics claimed to have done so.

Interpreting the evidence on participation and membership

Most of the long-term evidence on membership and attendance in Britain seems to support the secularization theory. Although recent years have seen a growth in smaller religious organizations, compared to the nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century there is little doubt that fewer people attend a place of worship or belong to a religious organization. In the USA, though, the evidence seems to support the views of those who question the secularization thesis. However, the evidence from both countries is far from conclusive and needs to be used with care. As Grace Davie says, 'Religious statistics are notoriously hard to handle' (Davie, 1989).

Both the reliability and the validity of the statistics are open to question. Nineteenth-century church attendance figures for Britain pose special problems because the methods of data collection used do not meet today's standards of reliability. More recent British figures may be hard to trust as well. Some commentators argue that attendance and membership figures may be distorted by the ulterior motives of those who produce them. Some churches – for example, the Roman Catholic Church – may underestimate the numbers in their congregation in order to reduce the capitation fees they have to pay to central church authorities. Others, particularly Anglican churches, may overestimate the figures to produce impressive totals, particularly where there may be a risk of a church with a small congregation being closed down.

Membership figures can be calculated in different ways, and various churches, denominations and other religious groups use different criteria:

1. Members of the Roman Catholic Church in Britain and the Church of England are normally taken to be those who have been both baptized and confirmed. The numbers may therefore include people who, although officially members, have taken no part in church life since their confirmation.
2. The Church of Wales, on the other hand, bases its figures on those attending Easter Communion.
3. Figures giving the numbers who are held to be members of the Jewish religion simply document the number of Jewish heads of household, regardless of how often or whether they attend a synagogue.

Because of these variations, statistics on church membership are highly unreliable, and the trends indicated by the figures may be misleading.

In the USA the attendance statistics are based on survey evidence. Hadaway, Marler and Chaves (1993) have questioned the reliability of the evidence. They conducted a detailed study of church attendance in a

part of Ohio. In most of the churches they were able to get attendance counts from the clergy, in others they estimated attendance by counting cars in church car parks. They compared these results with findings from their own telephone poll. Their conclusion was that, overall, actual church attendance was about half that claimed in polls. Twice as many people claimed to attend church or a synagogue as actually did so. People exaggerated their church attendance, probably because church attendance was seen as socially desirable behaviour, and people were unwilling to admit their lack of attendance.

The decline in church attendance in Britain can be interpreted in a number of ways:

1 David Martin claims that the relatively high attendances in Victorian Britain may have been influenced by non-religious factors. He believes that in the nineteenth century church-going was a sign of middle-class respectability to a greater extent than it is today. Many Victorians may have attended church to be seen, rather than to express deep religious convictions (Martin, 1969).
2 Some sociologists argue that a decline in institutional religion cannot be taken as indicating a decline in religious belief and commitment. Religion today may be expressed in different ways. Religion may have become increasingly privatized; people develop their own beliefs and relationship with God and see religious institutions as being less important.
3 It is also possible that many individuals who hold religious beliefs, and whose behaviour is also partly directed by such beliefs, are not formally registered as church members.

Table 7.19 Belief in God in Great Britain and Northern Ireland 1991

	Position	Britain (%)	Northern Ireland (%)
'I don't believe in God'	1	10	1
'I don't know whether there is a God and I don't believe there is any way to find out'	2	14	4
'I don't believe in a personal God but I do believe in a higher power of some kind'	3	13	4
'I find myself believing in God some of the time but not at other times'	4	13	7
'While I have doubts, I feel that I do believe in God'	5	26	20
'I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it'	6	23	57
'I don't know' and 'No answer'	7	2	7

Source: British *Social Attitudes Survey* (1992).

Statistics on participation in religious institutions provide only one type of indicator of the religious commitment of individuals and may be only tenuously linked to the strength of religious beliefs. Those, like Bryan Wilson (1966), who see such figures as a measure of secularization are influenced by the traditional view that a religious person is one who goes to church. As Peter Glasner argues, 'These studies have in common the identification of religion with "church-orientated" religion' (Glasner, 1977).

We will now examine some evidence relating to religious belief and activity outside the context of religious organizations.

Belief, church-going and atheism

Opinion poll evidence is perhaps the simplest type of data relating to religious beliefs. However, there are a variety of questions that can and have been asked about religious beliefs, and the questions asked determine the impression given by the data.

Opinion poll data generally finds that many more people retain religious beliefs than are members of religious organizations or regular attenders at places of worship. In 1991 the *British Social Attitudes Survey* found that 62 per cent of people believed in 'God' at least some of the time, while a further 13 per cent believed in a 'higher power of some kind', and 14 per cent were uncertain about whether God existed. Only 10 per cent in Britain and a mere 1 per cent in Northern Ireland denied the existence of God outright.

As with all opinion poll data, there are question marks over the strength of the relationship between what people say and what they do. As Malcolm Hamilton says, saying you believe in God:

> *does not mean that it has any consequences for behaviour, is held with any conviction, or has any real meaning. What the surveys show is not that people are religious but that they have a propensity to say yes to this sort of survey question.*
>
> Hamilton, 1998, p. 29

Furthermore, opinion poll data can also be used to support the secularization theory. Steve Bruce points out that the *British Social Attitudes Survey* found in 1991 that 12 per cent of people in Britain said that they had given up believing in God, whereas only 6 per cent said they had started believing in God, having previously been non-believers (Bruce, 1995). Furthermore, by looking at the results of a number of surveys conducted between 1957 and 1991, Bruce was able to show a decline in the belief in sin, the soul, hell, heaven, life after death and the devil (see Table 7.20).

Less strong support for secularization is provided by Peter Brierley (1991), who has used data from the 1989 English Church Census and elsewhere to estimate the percentages of the population who are Christian and non-Christian. He has also divided Christians up into church-goers, nominal Christians (church members who do not attend regularly), and notional Christians (those who say they are Christian but who are neither church members nor attenders). Non-Christians are divided into the secular and those who hold non-Christian religious beliefs. Figure 7.8 shows Brierley's estimates with the figures for 1980 shown in brackets.

As Brierley says, 'The diagram shows that change in the British religious scene is relatively slow – a percentage point or two over a decade.' There is some evidence that the population is moving away from participation in institutional Christian religion but retaining religious beliefs. There is also evidence of an increase in atheism and agnosticism, but the change is slight. (We will examine the data relating to religion in the USA later, see pp. 487–8.)

Religious belief and participation may be the most obvious areas in which to look for evidence in favour of or against secularization. However, some theorists deny that these are crucial to the secularization thesis. For example, José Casanova (1994) argues that these aspects of religion are essentially irrelevant to secularization. For him, it is the role of religion that is important, in particular the process of differentiation (see p. 482). We will now examine aspects of theories of secularization which focus more on the role of religion in society.

Table 7.20 Belief in sin, the soul, heaven, life after death, the devil and hell, in Britain, 1957–1991

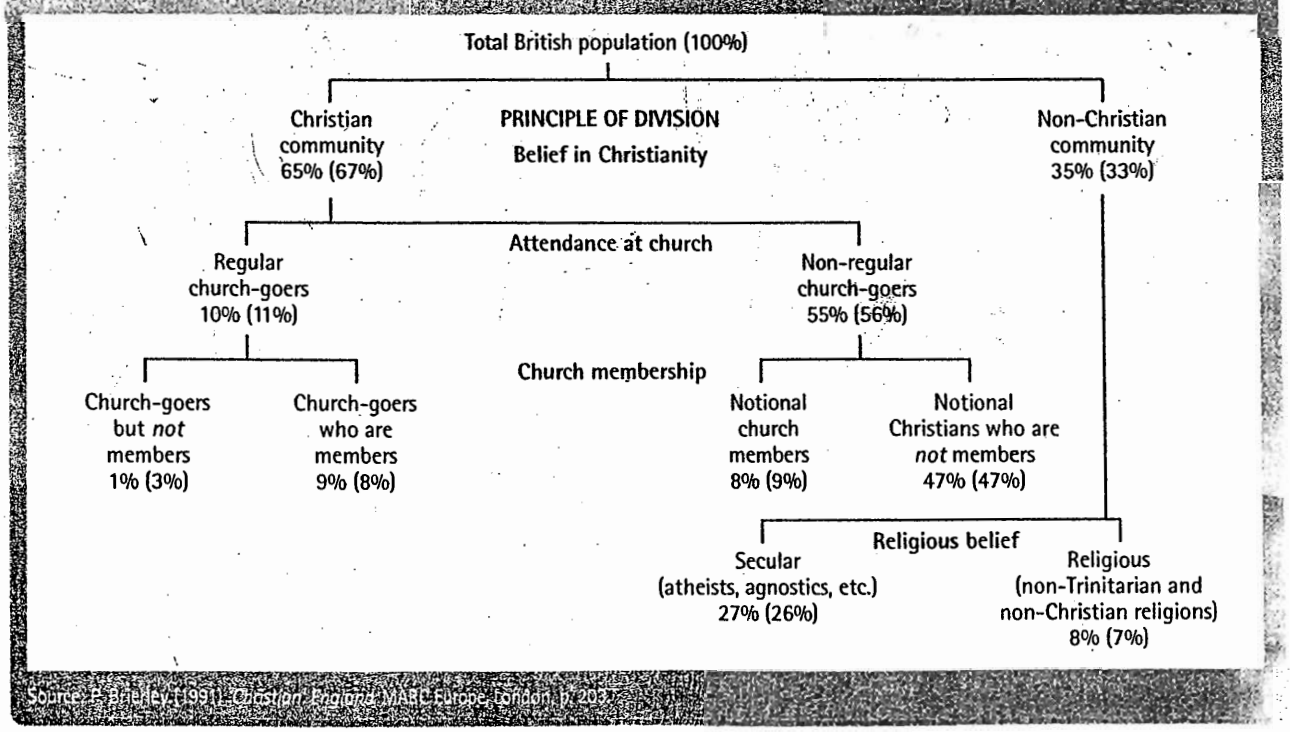
	1957	1981	1987	1991
Sin	–	69	51	–
Soul	–	59	50	–
Heaven	–	57	48	46
Life after death	54	45	43	27
Devil	34	30	31	24
Hell	–	27	29	24

Institutional religion – disengagement, differentiation and societalization

Disengagement

Some researchers, as we have just noted, have seen the truly religious society in terms of full churches. They have therefore seen empty churches as evidence of secularization. Others have seen the truly religious society as one in which the church as an institution is directly involved in every important area of social life. In terms of this emphasis, a disengagement or

Figure 7.8 Religious structure of population in Great Britain, 1990 (figures in brackets given 1980 percentages)



Source: P. Brierley (1991) *Christian England*, MARC Europe, London, p. 203.

withdrawing of the church from the wider society is seen as secularization. David Martin sees this view as concerned with decline in the power, wealth, influence and prestige of the church (Martin, 1969). Compared to its role in medieval Europe, the church in contemporary Western society has undergone a process of disengagement. In the Middle Ages, there was a union of church and state. Today, apart from the right of bishops to sit in the British House of Lords, the church is hardly represented in government.

Steve Bruce argues that the state churches have lost their power as they have become more distant from the British state (Bruce, 1995). This distancing has given them the freedom to be more critical of governments. For example, during the period of Conservative government from 1979 to 1997, the Church of England criticized nuclear weapons policy, and lack of help for the poor in the inner cities. However, the government took little or no notice of the views expressed by church leaders.

Nevertheless, the power of the church in the Middle Ages need not necessarily be seen as a golden age of religion. As David Martin suggests, 'the height of ecclesiastical power can be seen either as the triumph of the religious or its more blasphemous secularization'. Thus, today, the church's specialization in specifically religious matters may indicate a purer form of religion, untainted by involvement with secular concerns such as politics. Martin also suggests that there has been a shift in the focus of religion away from 'the institutions of the state and the economy' towards 'the needs and sentiments of people' (Martin, 1969).

The concept of disengagement is, however, questioned by José Casanova. Casanova is actually a supporter of the theory of secularization, but only in the sense that he believes differentiation has taken place (see below, p. 482). He does not believe that religion has withdrawn from public and political life. Indeed, in his book *Public Religions in the Modern World*, he claims that 'Religion in the 1980s "went public" in a dual sense. It entered the "public sphere" and gained, thereby, publicity' (Casanova, 1994).

Increasing attention was paid to religion by politicians, social scientists and the general public, and religious leaders were increasingly willing to enter public and political debate. Casanova says that 'During the entire decade of the 1980s it was hard to find any serious political conflict anywhere in the world that did not show behind it the not-so-hidden hand of religion.' Examples included the conflict between Jews and Muslim Arabs in the Middle East, between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland and between Muslims, Serbs and Croats in Bosnia. Religion played an important part in the revolts that led to the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the former USSR. The 'Moral Majority' of fundamentalist Christians became influential in the USA. The Salman Rushdie affair (when the Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini declared Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses* blasphemous to Islam and issued a fatwa, or religious death sentence) highlighted a clash between religious and secular values in Britain.

Furthermore, Casanova says:

> *religious activists and churches were becoming deeply involved in struggles for liberation, justice, and democracy throughout the world. Liberation theologies were spreading beyond Latin America, acquiring new forms and names, Asian and African, Protestant and Jewish, black and feminist.*
>
> Casanova, 1994, p. 3

Casanova therefore believes that there has been a deprivatization of religion. Before the 1980s, religion was becoming confined to the private sphere. It was becoming a matter of personal conscience, and religious organizations were withdrawing from trying to influence public policies. From the 1980s, this was reversed, with religions again trying to exert an influence on public life.

Casanova does not believe that this undermines all aspects of the theory of secularization. Nevertheless, he does dismiss that element of the theory which sees secularization as involving the confinement of religious influence to the private sphere. Public religions have returned to playing an important role in politics. The privatization of religion is a 'historical option', which has been followed in some societies at some times, but it is not an inevitable or irreversible aspect of modernity. Since the 1980s the privatization of religion has become an increasingly unpopular option.

Structural and social differentiation

An alternative to the view that disengagement equals secularization is provided by Talcott Parsons (1951, 1960, 1965a). Parsons agrees that the church as an institution has lost many of its former functions. He argues that the evolution of society involves a process of structural differentiation: various parts of the social system become more specialized and so perform fewer functions. (This idea forms part of Parsons's theory of social evolution, outlined in Chapter 15.)

However, the differentiation of the units of the social system does not necessarily lessen their importance. As we saw in a previous section, Parsons argues that religious beliefs still give meaning and significance to life. Churches are still the fount of religious ethics and values.

As religious institutions become increasingly specialized, Parsons maintains that their ethics and values become increasingly generalized. In American society, for instance, they have become the basis for more general social values.

Steve Bruce (1995) discusses essentially the same process as Parsons, although in Bruce's case he terms it social differentiation. Unlike Parsons, he sees it as a feature of secularization that stems from the rationalization of the modern world. In the fourteenth century the medieval church tried to assert control over activities like money lending, defining them as sinful. Social differentiation means that the church now has much less opportunity to involve itself in non-religious spheres. Indeed, to Bruce, social life becomes dominated by the logic of capitalist production with its emphasis on calculability, efficiency and profit. Religious faith and morality become less and less significant in the culture and institutions of modern societies. He says:

> *Modernization sees the freeing of economic activity from religiously sanctioned controls and the development of the world of work as an autonomous sphere driven only by its own values. Gradually other aspects of life go the same way. Education, social welfare, health care, and social control have mostly passed out of church control, and where churches still run such activities they do so in ways that differ little from secular provision.*
>
> Bruce, 1995, p. 128

Unlike Parsons, Bruce sees differentiation as affecting individuals as well as institutions. Modern societies have become increasingly egalitarian. People no longer have fixed roles which are ascribed at birth. There are no longer rigid hierarchies in which everybody knows their place. There is much greater occupational and geographical mobility. People frequently mix with strangers without knowing their status. As a result, it is increasingly difficult for people to see themselves as subject to the power of an omnipotent God. Bruce says, 'The idea of a single moral universe in which all manner and conditions of people have a place in some single grand design became less and less plausible.' Institutional religion therefore exercises a less significant hold over individuals.

José Casanova (1994) sees differentiation as a key feature of modernity and as the core of any theory of secularization. Differentiation initially involved the separation of religion from the state and from economic activity. This came about as a result of four factors:

1. The Protestant Reformation which, in those societies it affected, led to religion making less strong claims for control over the state and civil society.
2. The establishment of modern nation-states which claimed sovereignty over a given territory and which were unwilling to concede part of their sovereignty to external religious centres of power (such as the Papacy).
3. The growth of modern capitalism – the church found it impossible to establish control over the economic sphere.
4. The scientific revolution which undermined church claims to a monopoly of knowledge.

Indeed the strength of churches suffered most in societies where the church held out against developments in science (such as Newton's contribution to physics). Religion lost credibility where it stuck to biblical orthodoxies which became increasingly untenable in the light of new knowledge.

In caesaropapist societies (where an absolute ruler also claimed exclusive religious legitimacy) there was a rapid decline in the popularity of religion once the absolute ruler finally lost authority.

In societies with an established church which has tried to retain its authority over society (such as Spain, where the Catholic Church tried to retain its predominance for much of the period of rule by the fascist leader General Franco (1939–75)), the decline of church-based religion has been quite marked. In other societies where a plurality of religions has been tolerated and the church–state link has been broken early, religion has remained more popular.

Once differentiation between the sacred and the secular had taken place this opened the way for differentiation of other parts of society from one another. Casanova therefore argues that 'The differentiation and emancipation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms remains a general modern structural trend. Indeed this differentiation serves precisely as one of the primary distinguishing characteristics of modern structures' (Casanova, 1994). However, Casanova does not believe that the differentiation of religion from other spheres (which is his definition of secularization) necessarily implies that religion will decline in other ways.

Societalization

Bruce (1995) uses the term societalization (a term first used by Bryan Wilson) to refer to a process in which social life becomes fragmented and ceases to be locally based. Like social differentiation, he sees this as a consequence of a general process of modernization. Modern societies do not have close-knit communities. People's lives are increasingly dominated by large impersonal bureaucracies, and in suburbs people rarely know and mix with their immediate neighbours. People interact with one

another at the level of society as a whole rather than within local communities.

According to Bruce, the decline of community undermines religion in three ways. First, without a strong sense of community, churches can no longer serve as the focal point for communities. For example, large proportions of the community will not turn out for a local wedding or funeral at the parish church because most people will not know the betrothed or the deceased.

Second, people's greater involvement with the broader society in which they live leads them to look far more widely for services. They are less likely to turn to the local priest or vicar for practical or emotional support.

Third, the cultural diversity of the society in which people live leads them to hold beliefs with less certainty. Bruce says 'Beliefs are strongest when they are unexamined and naïvely accepted as the way things are.' In a society where we no longer get constant reinforcement of a particular religious view:

> *Religious belief is now obviously a matter of choice. We may still choose to believe, but we cannot easily hide from ourselves the knowledge that we choose God rather than God choosing us. God may still be respected and loved but that he no longer need be feared means that one major source of motivation for getting religion right has been removed.*
>
> Bruce, 1995, p. 131

According to Bruce, then, fundamental changes in social life in modern societies lead to institutional religion losing its social base, many of its social roles and its main source of legitimation. However, Bruce may exaggerate the extent of change and the consequences for religion. For example, there has been a long-standing debate about whether, and to what extent, there has been a decline of community, with many commentators questioning the view that there has been a straightforward movement from strong to weak communities (see, for example, Slattery, 1985). Bruce asserts the decline of community without examining the evidence in detail. Similarly, some writers have questioned the dominance of religious world views in the past (see below, p. 490). However, Bruce is certainly correct to point out that there has been a growth of religious diversity in many modern societies. The significance of this will now be considered.

Institutional religion – religious pluralism

Some researchers imply that the truly religious society has one faith and one church. This picture is influenced by the situation in some small-scale, non-literate societies, such as the Australian aboriginals, where the community is a religious community. Members share a common faith and at certain times of the year the entire community gathers to express this faith in religious rituals.

In terms of Durkheim's view of religion, the community is the church (Durkheim, 1961). Medieval European societies provided a similar picture: there the established church ministered to the whole society.

A number of sociologists essentially follow this line of thinking. Steve Bruce (1992) argues that religious pluralism results from a variety of sources, all of which have 'undermined the communal base to religious orthodoxy'. England expanded to incorporate Scotland and Ireland, which had different religious traditions, while migration has led to a plurality of religious groups in both North America and Europe. Industrialization reduced the contact between social classes and helped to create new, predominantly working-class versions of Christianity such as Methodism.

Modernization and industrialization bring with them the social fragmentation of society into a plurality of cultural and religious groups. As we have seen above, Bruce believes that the consequence is that the state can no longer support a single religion without causing conflict. The plurality of religions reminds individuals that their beliefs are a personal preference, a matter of choice, and no longer part and parcel of their membership of society.

Wade Roof and William McKinney (1987) have reached broadly similar conclusions about the development of religion in the USA. They quote figures, shown in Table 7.21, which show Protestantism declining and an increase in the percentage of the population with no religious preference or who believe in religions other than Protestantism, Catholicism or Judaism. Roof and McKinney quote a 1976 Gallup survey which showed that 4 per cent of the American population said they had been involved in TM, 3 per cent in yoga, 2 per

Table 7.21 Trends in religious preference in the USA, 1952–85

	1985	1952	Percentage change
Protestant	57	67	– 15
Catholic	28	25	+ 12
Jewish	2	4	– 50
Other	4	1	+ 300
None	9	2	+ 350

Source: Princeton Religion Research Center (February 1986) *Emerging Trends*, vol. 8, no. 2, quoted in W.C. Roof and W. McKinney (1987) *American Mainline Religion*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, p. 18.

cent in mysticism, and 1 per cent claimed involvement in Eastern religions. They argue that religious pluralism has meant that religion 'has lost force as an integrative influence'. Like Bruce, they believe that religious pluralism has created a 'new voluntarism', where religious beliefs become a matter of choice for the individual. They also refer to a 1978 Gallup poll in the USA in which 81 per cent of those questioned agreed with the statement, 'An individual should arrive at his or her own religious beliefs independent of any churches or synagogues.'

On the other hand, it could be argued that a truly religious society is simply one in which religious beliefs and institutions thrive. It is not necessary for everyone to share the same religious beliefs for religion to be important. Northern Ireland is a case in point. There the divisions between Catholics and Protestants are associated with higher rates of church membership and attendance than in other parts of the UK. In some modern societies (such as the USA) it could be that having such religious pluralism exercises a strong influence on society in general, encouraging a toleration of diversity in which a plurality of beliefs can thrive. However pluralism is perceived in modern societies it largely stems from two sources: from the existence of different ethnic groups with their own religious traditions, and from the growth of new sects and cults. These will now be examined.

Ethnicity and religious diversity

Steve Bruce (1996) acknowledges that certain ethnic groups often retain strong religious beliefs. However, he does not see this as an argument against the secularization thesis. This is because Bruce believes that religion remains strong because of its social importance rather than because the members of the group have deep religious convictions as individuals.

Bruce claims that religion tends to serve one of two main purposes for ethnic groups: cultural defence or cultural transition:

1 Religions take on the role of cultural defence where:

> *there are two (or more) communities in conflict and they are of different religions (for example, Protestants and Catholics in Ulster, or Serbs (Orthodox), Croats (Roman Catholic) and Bosnian Muslims in what used to be Yugoslavia), then the religious identity of each can call forth a new loyalty as religious identity becomes a way of asserting ethnic pride.*
>
> Bruce, 1996, p. 96

From Bruce's point of view, it is their ethnic identity that is important rather than religiosity. In Northern Ireland he cites the example of Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party. It represents Northern Ireland Protestants who strongly support the union of Northern Ireland within the UK. (They opposed the peace proposals in 1998–9.) Most of the activists in this party are members of the evangelical Protestant Free Presbyterian Church. Only a tiny percentage of the Northern Irish population, about 1 per cent, are Free Presbyterians, but Ian Paisley's party gets much more support than that. This is because, according to Bruce, ethnic Protestants identify themselves with the party's opposition to a united Ireland, not because they are attracted to the religious convictions of the party's activists.

2 Cultural transition:

> *involves religion acquiring an enhanced importance because of the assistance it can give in helping people cope with the shift from one world to another. It might be that the people in question have migrated; it might be that they remain in the same place while that place changes under their feet.*
>
> Bruce, 1996, p. 96

Religion is used as a resource for dealing with situations where people have to change their identity to some extent. For example, Asian and Afro-Caribbean migrants to Britain and their descendants can use mosques, temples and churches as centres for their communities, and their religion as a way of coping with the ambiguities of being Asian or black and British.

However, Bruce believes that religion loses this role where a group becomes increasingly integrated into the host community. For example, Irish Catholics who migrated to England and Scotland were originally subject to considerable hostility and discrimination from the host population. Catholicism was very important to this group for several generations. However, as Irish Catholics have increasingly married outside their own ethnic group and have enjoyed increasing success, prosperity and acceptance by other members of the population, the importance of their religion as a focus for community identity has declined considerably.

Bruce concludes that 'Cultural defence and cultural transition may keep religion relevant but they will not create a religious society out of a secular one.'

However, this interpretation is not shared by everybody. The historian Callum G. Brown (1992) questions Bruce's claim that it can be seen as evidence of secularization when religion has a role in cultural defence or cultural transformation for particular ethnic groups. He sees 'ethnic defence' as a key function of religion in the modern world. Brown denies that there was ever a 'golden age' in which religion provided a single, unifying world view for all members of a society. There has always been some

diversity in religious outlooks and there have always been some who were sceptical or hostile towards religion. The role of religion has changed, but that is not the same thing as decline. Brown says that 'Religion adapts to different social and economic contexts. It is not static, unchanging and unyielding to different situations. Such changes that churches undergo do not necessarily mean secularisation.' In particular, he argues that contemporary religion might draw its strength from individual communities (including ethnic communities) rather than from society as a whole. A religiously plural society can also be a non-secular society and both the USA and Britain are examples.

Certainly, there is plenty of evidence that religion can and often does remain strong amongst ethnic groups even though it has to adapt to a changed situation if migration or social changes have taken place. George Chryssides (1994) argues that in Britain the religions of immigrant groups and their descendants have had three main paths open to them. The first option is apostasy, where a particular set of religious beliefs is abandoned in a hostile environment. The second is accommodation, where religious practices are adapted to take account of the changed situation. The third option is renewed vigour, where the religion is reasserted more strongly as a response to the actual or perceived hostility to it. Examples of all three responses can be found.

Chryssides cites the case of Morris Cerello – a Sikh who converted to Christianity – as an example of apostasy. An example of accommodation might be a Sikh who removed his turban because he believed it would improve his chances at a job interview. Those who insist on strong religious orthodoxy from their children could be practising their religion with renewed vigour.

Chryssides acknowledges that ethnic minority religions have faced difficulties in Britain. They have had to establish places of prayer and deal with situations where religious observation might be difficult. However, the general pattern has been characterized by accommodation and renewed vigour rather than apostasy. Buildings have been bought and converted into mosques and temples and religious beliefs and practices have been retained or adapted rather than abandoned. For example, many Islamic women have found ways to dress modestly while incorporating Western elements into their clothing. Religious marriage ceremonies have been adapted to meet the requirements for a legal marriage under British law.

The vigour of ethnic minority religions in Britain is demonstrated by the existence of some first-generation converts to them. Chryssides notes that Buddhism has been particularly successful in attracting new followers who have been brought up within the Christian tradition.

Some writers argue that there has been a revival of religion, which directly contradicts the claims of the advocates of the secularization thesis. For example, Gilles Kepel, in a book called *The Revenge of God* (1994), argues that there has been a resurgence of Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the modern world. According to Kepel, this has affected these religions whether they are the religion of a minority or a majority in a particular society. Thus, for example, British Muslims have retained or strengthened their faith, not as a way of coping with a cultural transition, but because they have been influenced by a worldwide Islamic revival.

Furthermore, Kepel sees all the religious revivals as reactions against modernity. He says, 'they complain about the fragmentation of society, its "anomy", the absence of an overarching ideal worthy of their allegiance ... [They] consider that in the final analysis the modernism produced by reason without God has not succeeded in creating values.' If Kepel is correct, far from reducing religion to a source of identity for some ethnic groups, modernity encourages people to rediscover religion as a way of coping with the social changes produced by modernity.

Sects, cults and secularization

The continuing proliferation of sects has been interpreted by some researchers in much the same way as the spread of denominations and religious pluralism in general. It has been seen as a further fragmentation of institutional religion and therefore as evidence of the weakening hold of religion over society.

Accurate measurements of the numbers of sects and the size of their memberships are not available, but estimates have been made. Although Roy Wallis (1984) believed that there was a decline in new religious movements in the late 1970s and early 1980s, more recent figures suggest that they have been growing. Amongst established sects, Jehovah's Witnesses' membership rose from 62,000 in 1970 to 116,000 in 1990 and 131,000 in 1995. Furthermore, estimates made by *Religious Trends 1998/99* (Brierley, 1998) suggest that membership of what they define as new religious movements more than doubled between 1980 and 1995 (see Table 7.18, p. 478). There are certainly more sects today than there were before the Second World War.

Stark and Bainbridge (1985) have shown that the 1960s had the highest rate of cult formation in the USA. Some 23 per cent of the cults they uncovered were formed between 1970 and 1977, 38 per cent in the 1960s, 14 per cent in the 1950s, and the remaining 25 per cent before 1950.

Despite contradictions in the evidence, the apparent vitality of sects seems to provide evidence against the secularization theory. World-rejecting sects are perhaps the most religious type of organization, since they demand greater commitment to the religion than other organizations. If they are stronger than in the past, it suggests that religion retains a considerable appeal for the populations of advanced industrial societies. Andrew Greeley (1972) believes that the growth of new religious movements represents a process of resacrilization: interest in, and belief in, the sacred is being revived. Societies such as Britain and the USA are, if anything, becoming less secular.

Rodney Stark and William S. Bainbridge (1985) also deny that secularization has taken place. They believe that some established churches may have lost part of their emphasis on the supernatural, but secularization never advances far because new religious groups with more emphasis on the supernatural constantly emerge. Stark and Bainbridge put forward statistical evidence to support this claim. According to their figures on religious activity in different states of the USA, cults thrive where conventional religions are weak. For example, in California relatively few people are church-goers but many believe in supernatural phenomena. (For further details of Stark and Bainbridge's theory of religion see pp. 445–6 and pp. 460–2.)

Nevertheless other sociologists see the growth of sects as evidence of secularization. Peter Berger (1970) argues that belief in the supernatural can only survive in a sectarian form in a secular society. In order to maintain a strong religious belief and commitment, individuals must cut themselves off from the secularizing influences of the wider society, and seek out the support of others of like mind. The sect, with its close-knit community organization, provides a context in which this is possible. From this viewpoint, the sect is the last refuge of the supernatural in a secular society. Sects are therefore evidence of secularization.

Bryan Wilson (1982) takes a similar view, maintaining that sects are 'a feature of societies experiencing secularization, and they may be seen as a response to a situation in which religious values have lost social pre-eminence'. In other words, sects are the last outpost of religion in societies where religious beliefs and values have little consequence.

Bryan Wilson is particularly scathing in his dismissal of the religious movements of the young in the West, such as Krishna Consciousness which emerged during the 1960s in the USA. He regards them as 'almost irrelevant' to society as a whole, claiming that 'They add nothing to any prospective reintegration of society, and contribute nothing towards the culture by which a society might live.'

By comparison, Methodism, in its early days as a sect, provided standards and values for the new urban working class, which helped to integrate its members within the wider society. In addition, its beliefs 'steadily diffused through a much wider body of the population'.

In contrast, Wilson feels that the new religious movements show no such promise. Their members live in their own enclosed, encapsulated little worlds. There they emphasize 'hedonism, the validity of present pleasure, the abandonment of restraint and the ethic of "do your own thing"'. Wilson is scornful of their 'exotic novelty' which he believes offers little more than self-indulgence, titillation and short-lived thrills. He believes that movements which seek the truth in Asian religions and emphasize the exploration of the inner self – such as Krishna Consciousness – can give little to Western society. They simply 'offer another way of life for the self-selected few rather than an alternative culture for mankind'. Rather than contributing to a new moral reintegration of society, they just provide a religious setting for 'dropouts'. They do not halt the continuing process of secularization and are 'likely to be no more than transient and volatile gestures of defiance' in the face of a secular society.

Similar conclusions are reached by Roy Wallis (1984) and Steve Bruce (1995, 1996). According to Wallis, 'new religious movements involve only a very small proportion of the population ... and even then often for only very brief periods during the transition to adulthood'. For those who join world-affirming movements the motives for joining are largely secular anyway: they wish to get on in the world rather than pursue other-worldly concerns. Wallis claims that for most of the population new religious movements are 'a matter of profound indifference'.

Steve Bruce argues that new religious movements only recruit very small numbers compared to the massive decline in mainstream Christian religions. World-rejecting new religions have affected the smallest numbers of people, while world-accommodating ones have influenced a greater number of people. Yet it is these religious movements that have the least impact on people's lives. To Bruce, 'people who chant in Soka Gakki or meditate in TM or attend est seminars or Insight weekends' carry on their lives very much as normal and there 'are no consequences for the operation of the social system' (Bruce, 1996).

Secularization and the New Age

Steve Bruce has also commented on the significance, or in his view the lack of significance, of the New Age. Like new religious movements, he sees the New Age as posing little or no threat to the validity of the theory of secularization. Although it affects more people than

sects, 'it cannot aspire to promote radical and specific change because it does not have the cohesion and discipline of the sect' (Bruce, 1996). In fact, he believes that the New Age is simply an extreme form of the individualism that is characteristic of modern societies. As such it has a role as 'symptom and as a cause in the erosion of faith in orthodoxies and the authority of professional knowledge'.

However, Bruce does accept that toned-down aspects of New Age beliefs may become accepted as parts of the 'cultural mainstream'. For example, New Age has had some impact on people's concern for the environment and willingness to give credence to alternative medicines.

It could be argued that Bruce underestimates the significance of the effects he identifies. If substantial numbers of people are willing to question scientific orthodoxy and place some trust in beliefs which require a degree of faith, this in itself could be taken as evidence against the secularization theory. Paul Heelas (1996) certainly regards the New Age as rather more significant than does Bruce. He quotes a 1993 Gallup opinion poll which found that in Britain 26 per cent of people believed in reincarnation, 40 per cent in some sort of spirit, 17 per cent in flying saucers and 21 per cent in horoscopes; while a 1989 Gallup poll found that no less than 72 per cent had 'an awareness of a sacred presence in nature'.

Using a broad definition of the New Age, then, there appears to be at least a minimal level of belief in some of its claims amongst a high proportion of the population. Some New Age magazines are quite successful (*Body, Mind and Spirit* sells about 60,000 per month in Britain), and in the USA there were some 4,000 New Age bookshops by 1989. Heelas argues that aspects of New Age beliefs are deeply embedded in contemporary Western culture. They are a 'radicalized' version of 'humanistic expressivism'. The New Age might not be much like a traditional religion, but to Heelas it provides a strong argument against the view that modern societies have become secular and rational. It is just that individuals have turned within themselves in the search for spirituality rather than looking to the external authority of church religions.

Institutional religion – the secularization of religious institutions in the USA

Will Herberg – denominations and internal secularization

According to Will Herberg (1960), the main evidence for secularization in the USA is not to be found in a decline in participation in religion, but in a decline in the religiosity of churches and denominations themselves. The major denominations have increasingly emphasized this world as opposed to the other world; they have moved away from traditional doctrine and concern with the supernatural; they have compromised their religious beliefs to fit in with the wider society. Because of this, they have become more like the secular society in which they are set.

Herberg claims that the major denominations in America have undergone a process of secularization. They increasingly reflect the American 'way of life' rather than the word of God. For the typical churchgoer, religion is 'something that reassures him about the essential rightness of everything American, his nature, his culture and himself'. But, from Herberg's viewpoint, this has little to do with the real meaning of religion.

Herberg's views on religion in the USA have been challenged on a number of grounds. Roof and McKinney accept that Herberg's analysis had much merit when it was written in the 1950s but they argue that 'it failed to ring true in the America of the 1980s' (Roof and McKinney, 1987). In particular, not all religious groupings seem to have turned their back on what Herberg would see as authentic religion. Like other commentators, Roof and McKinney note the growth of conservative Protestant religions (sometimes called the New Christian Right) which seem to combine a serious commitment to religious teachings, a strong element of theological doctrine and a refusal to compromise religious beliefs. As such, they seem to directly contradict Herberg's claims about secularization within religious institutions.

Institutional religion – the New Christian Right

Roof and McKinney categorize the following religious groups in America as conservative Christians: Southern Baptists, Churches of Christ, Evangelicals/Fundamentalists, Nazarenes, Pentecostalists/Holiness, Assemblies of God, Churches of God and Adventists. Using survey data they estimated that conservative Protestants made up 15.8 per cent of the American population in 1984. Their evidence suggests that these groups have been growing since the 1920s. In 1967 the Southern Baptist Convention overtook Methodists as the largest Protestant denomination. Roof and McKinney quote a 1976 Gallup poll which found that 34 per cent of the population said they had been 'born again'.

Roof and McKinney's data also shows that conservative Protestants are more likely than any other religious group in the USA to attend church and

believe in God. They have rejected any move towards liberal values and instead have strongly supported traditional morality. Conservative Protestants have been strong opponents of abortion, extra-marital or pre-marital sex, homosexuality and the relaxation of divorce laws. They have supported literal interpretations of the Bible, campaigning against the teaching of evolutionary biology on the grounds that it contradicted the biblical account of God's creation of the earth.

A number of sociologists have noted the many ways in which conservative Protestants have succeeded in publicizing and promoting their views in the USA. According to James Davison Hunter (1987), by the early 1980s they had set up 450 colleges and 18,000 schools, established 275 periodicals, 70 evangelical publishing houses and 3,300 Christian bookshops. They had also started 65 television stations and intervened in numerous political campaigns.

Hunter does not claim that the growth of conservative Protestantism disproves the secularization thesis, but he does believe that it challenges it. He says:

> *Secularization may yet prove to be the ultimate design for contemporary society, but that is unlikely. Minimally, one can say that it is not a straight-line occurrence, as is often assumed; cycles of secularity and religious upsurge are evident.*
>
> Hunter, 1987

The limited impact of conservative Protestantism

A different view is taken by Steve Bruce (1988, 1996) who argues that the New Christian Right has had very little impact. Very few of its members who have stood for national office have won their elections. No more than five senators have supported the New Christian Right and they have failed to get any new Federal legislation passed. Opinion polls have showed no shift towards their views on moral issues. In Bruce's view they have achieved no more than to 'remind cosmopolitan Americans that fundamentalists were not extinct and still had some rights' (Bruce, 1996).

Furthermore, Bruce believes that the strength of religious beliefs among evangelical Christians in the USA has gradually been watered down. He quotes a study by James Hunter which found that 77 per cent of young evangelical Americans thought that playing cards was morally wrong in 1951; by 1982 none thought so. Similarly, over the same period and amongst the same group, moral objections to social dancing declined from 91 per cent to 0 per cent, to drinking alcohol from 98 per cent to 17 per cent, and to smoking marijuana from 98 per cent to 17 per cent (quoted in Bruce, 1996).

If Bruce is to be believed, the New Christian Right may have slowed down the process of secularization within its own religious institutions, but it has failed to do any more than that. Indeed he believes that the only reason the New Christian Right gets so much attention is that its members are unusual for holding strong religious convictions in a largely secular world.

Internal secularization in Britain

Less attention has been devoted to the possibility that British churches and denominations have undergone secularization. However, Steve Bruce (1988) does believe that British mainstream churches have abandoned, or at least watered down, a number of their religious convictions. These include beliefs in the virgin birth, Christ's bodily resurrection (the former Bishop of Durham, David Jenkins, called it a 'conjuring trick with a bag of bones'), heaven and hell, and the expectation that Christ would return to earth. Bruce also points out that most British Christian churches have ceased to claim a monopoly of the religious truth.

In the previous sections we have examined approaches to secularization largely in terms of institutional religion. Our focus now changes to a more general view of the role of religion in Western society and is concerned with the influence of religious beliefs and values on social norms and values, social action and consciousness. As in previous sections, assessments of the importance of religion depend largely on the observer's interpretation of what constitutes a 'religious society' and religiously motivated action.

Religion and society – desacrilization

A number of sociologists have argued that the sacred has little or no place in contemporary Western society, that society has undergone a process of desacrilization. This means that supernatural forces are no longer seen as controlling the world, action is no longer directed by religious belief, and human consciousness has become secularized.

Disenchantment

Weber's interpretation of modern society provides one of the earliest statements of the desacrilization thesis. He claimed that modern society is 'characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the "disenchantment of the world"' (Weber, in Gerth and Mills (eds), 1948). The world is no longer charged with mystery and magic; the supernatural has

been banished from society. The meanings and motives that direct action are now rational.

Weber's concept of rational action and his view that modern society is undergoing a process of rationalization are examined in detail in Chapter 15. Briefly, rational action involves a deliberate and precise calculation of the importance of alternative goals and the effectiveness of the various means of attaining chosen goals.

For example, if an individual's goal is to make money, he or she will coldly and carefully calculate the necessary initial investment and the costs involved in producing and marketing a commodity in the most economical way possible. His or her measurements will be objective: they will be based on factors that can be quantified and accurately measured. He or she will reject the means to reach that goal which cannot be proven to be effective.

Rational action rejects the guidelines provided by emotion, by tradition or by religion. It is based on the cold, deliberate reason of the intellect, which demands that the rationale for action can only be based on the proven results.

Science and reason

A number of sociologists have accepted Weber's interpretation of the basis for action in industrial society. In *Religion in a Secular Society* (1966), Bryan Wilson stated that 'Religious *thinking* is perhaps the area which evidences most conspicuous change. Men act less and less in response to religious motivation: they assess the world in empirical and rational terms.'

Wilson argued that the following factors encouraged the development of rational thinking and a rational world view:

1 Ascetic Protestantism, which 'created an ethic which was pragmatic, rational, controlled and anti-emotional'.
2 The rational organization of society, which results in people's 'sustained involvement in rational organizations – firms, public service, educational institutions, government, the state – which impose rational behaviour upon them'.
3 A greater knowledge of the social and physical world, which results from the development of the physical, biological and social sciences. Wilson maintained that this knowledge was based on reason rather than faith. He claimed that:

> *Science not only explained many facets of life and the material environment in a way more satisfactory [than religion], but it also provided confirmation of its explanation in practical results.*
>
> Wilson, 1966

4 The development of rational ideologies and organizations to solve social problems. Ideologies such as communism and organizations such as trade unions offer practical solutions to problems. By comparison, religious solutions, such as the promise of justice and reward in the afterlife, do not produce practical and observable results.

Wilson argues that a rational world view is the enemy of religion. It is based on the testing of arguments and beliefs by rational procedures, on assessing truth by means of factors that can be quantified and objectively measured. Religion is based on faith and as such is non-rational. Its claim to truth cannot be tested by rational procedures.

Peter Berger (1970) develops some of Weber's and Wilson's ideas within the framework of the sociology of knowledge. He maintains that people in Western society increasingly 'look upon the world and their own lives without the benefit of religious interpretations'. As a result there is a secularization of consciousness. Berger argues that the 'decisive variable for secularization' is 'the process of rationalization that is the prerequisite for any industrial society of the modern type'. A rational world view rejects faith which is the basis of religion. It removes the 'mystery, magic and authority' of religion.

Steve Bruce (1988) stresses the specific role of scientific beliefs themselves in undermining religion. He argues that technological advances reduce the number of things that need to be explained in religious terms. It has given individuals a greater sense of control over the natural world and less need to resort to supernatural explanations or remedies. He says:

> *We may still go to church to celebrate the successful conclusion of the harvest but we use chemical fertilisers and weed-killers rather than prayer to ensure a good crop. When all the conventional medical solutions have been exhausted, we may pray for the health of a loved one but only a very few small sects reject conventional medicine and trust instead to the Lord.*
>
> Bruce, 1988

However, he also discusses the importance of rationalization in general. He says:

> *a world of rationality is less conducive to religion than a traditional society. Everything is seen as potentially improvable. Everything can be made more efficient. We find it very easy to talk about means and procedures but very difficult to discuss transcendental means.*
>
> Bruce, 1996, p. 48

Bruce acknowledges that such events as the death of a loved one or an injustice suffered may lead people to turn to God. There are some things even in the modern world that science and rationality cannot deal with. However, when people do turn to God, they do so as individuals. Furthermore, they tend to do so as a last resort after the rational, scientific alternatives have all been fully exhausted. Thus:

> *When we have tried every cure for cancer, we pray. When we have revised for our examinations, we pray. We do not pray instead of studying, and even committed believers suppose that a research programme is more likely than a mass prayer meeting to produce a cure for AIDs.*
>
> Bruce, 1996

Although the argument that scientific rationalism has triumphed over religion and superstition appears strong, not everybody finds it convincing. For example, the development of New Age beliefs seems to suggest that the non-rational has a place in contemporary societies (see pp. 466–9 and 499–500). Furthermore, there is plenty of evidence which appears to point to a religious revival on a global scale (see p. 492).

Also, the theory of postmodernism suggests that societies have begun to move beyond the scientific rationality of modernity, partly because they have started to mistrust science. People are increasingly aware of the failures of science (including the failure to find a cure for AIDs) and, more importantly, the negative side-effects that can be produced by science and technology. Examples might include global warming, air pollution, increasing cancer rates, the depletion of the ozone layer, and so on. In these circumstances people may turn to religion, of one sort or another, as an alternative to science, which some see as creating as many problems as it solves. The relationship between religion and postmodern society will be examined shortly (see pp. 495–500).

In this section we have considered the desacrilization thesis, that is the view that religion and the sacred have largely been removed from the meanings that guide action and interpret the world, and from the consciousness of humanity. This view is difficult to evaluate since it is largely based on the impressions of particular researchers rather than 'hard' data. In addition, it compares industrial society with often unspecified pre-industrial societies in which, presumably, religion provided a guide to action and a basis for meaning. We will deal with the problems involved in this approach in the next section.

Religion in pre-industrial societies

As we saw in the previous sections, the term 'secularization' has been used in many different ways. Whichever way it has been used, though, the supporters of the theory of secularization have tended to take it for granted that pre-industrial societies were highly religious. Some researchers have challenged this view.

Larry Shiner (1971) notes that those who argue that the social significance of religion has declined have 'the problem of determining when and where we are to find the supposedly "religious" age from which decline has commenced'.

The anthropologist Mary Douglas (1973) argues that the use of supposedly 'religious', small-scale non-literate societies as a basis for comparison with modern 'secular' societies is unjustified. She states that:

> *The contrast of secular with religious has nothing whatever to do with the contrast of modern with traditional or primitive ... The truth is that all varieties of scepticism, materialism and spiritual fervour are to be found in the range of tribal societies.*
>
> Douglas, 1973

It is simply an illusion concocted by Westerners that 'all primitives are pious, credulous and subject to the teaching of priests or magicians'.

In the same way, the search for the golden age of religion in the European past may provide an equally shaky standard for comparison. From his study of religion in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, K.V. Thomas states:

> *We do not know enough about the religious beliefs and practices of our remote ancestors to be certain of the extent to which religious faith and practice have actually declined.*
>
> Quoted in Glasner, 1977, p. 71

Secularization – international comparisons

David Martin – *A General Theory of Secularization*

Most sociologists studying secularization have concentrated on making observations about, and researching into, particular modern industrial societies. They have, nevertheless, often assumed that secularization is a universal and perhaps inevitable process. Bryan Wilson (1966) claims, for example, 'Secularization, then, is a long term process occurring in human society.' However, even Wilson, a leading advocate of theories of secularization, admits that 'The actual patterns in which it is manifested are culturally and historically specific to each context.' The nature and extent of the changes in the role of religion in society may vary so much in different

parts of the world that it is misleading to see secularization as a single process.

By concentrating on Britain and the USA, sociologists have had a rather narrow view of social change and religion. For instance, they have not accounted for the revival over recent years of Islamic fundamentalism in Iran and other countries. David Martin has taken a wider view than most sociologists by looking at the changing role of religion in a range of societies (Martin, 1978). Martin's research shows very different patterns of religious practice in various advanced industrial countries. In some cases it shows marked differences within single societies. Martin argues that the role and strength of religion in modern societies are determined by a number of factors:

1 The first important factors are the degree of religious pluralism and the dominant religion. Societies where the Roman Catholic Church claims a monopoly of the religious truth are usually very different to those where Protestantism and Catholicism both have a major foothold, or where there is a greater variety of denominations and churches.
2 The political system of a society and the relationship between church and state both have a significant impact on the importance of religion within that society.
3 The third major factor is the extent to which religion helps to provide a sense of national, regional or ethnic identity.

We will now study a number of examples which illustrate Martin's general theory of secularization.

Variations in religious participation

The level of participation in religion varies widely in Protestant societies. In the USA, 40 per cent or more of the adult population attend church each Sunday; in England the figure is just over 10 per cent; while in Sweden it falls as low as 5 per cent. Martin explains these variations in the following way:

1 In the USA there is a high degree of religious pluralism and no official connection between church and state. There is also a plurality of immigrant groups of different ethnic origin. Religious participation is therefore not confined to higher-status groups who can support a religion closely identified with the state. A plurality of religions flourish as ethnic minorities try to maintain their separate identities. While participation in religion is very high, religion does not play a vital role in the functioning of society. Social solidarity is cemented more by patriotism and by a belief in the American way of life than by shared religious beliefs.
2 In Britain there is an association between the Church of England and the state. However, there is also considerable religious pluralism. Protestant-dissenting denominations draw membership and support from lower social classes who may not be attracted to the established church. Attendance is quite low because of the association of church and state, but not as low as in Sweden where the church is virtually a department of state. In some parts of Britain, such as Wales and Scotland, attendances are higher than the average because of an association between religion and nationalism.
3 Sweden has the lowest attendance figures because of the dominance of a single church and its association with the state. As a result of this close association, and the lack of alternative religious organizations, church attendance is largely confined to higher social classes.

In all of these societies, then, religion retains some influence. Where a church retains important functions, religious participation tends to be low, but participation is much higher in societies where religion appears to have lost many of its functions.

In Roman Catholic countries such as France, Spain, Italy and Portugal, the church still has an important role in society. It influences government policy in areas such as education and laws relating to marriage, divorce, contraception and abortion. Attendances at church are high and, according to Martin, Catholic societies are generally less secular than Protestant ones. There is little religious pluralism and what divisions there are tend to be within the Roman Catholic Church rather than between different religious organizations.

However, such societies frequently have deep social divisions: often there is a strong, and predominantly lower-class, atheist opposition to Catholicism. These divisions are reflected in such conflicts as the Spanish Civil War and the 1968 student protests in Paris, while France and Italy also have sizeable communist parties.

Other countries like the Netherlands, West Germany and Switzerland are split between a Protestant majority and a large Catholic minority, in a ratio of approximately 60:40. In these countries the Roman Catholic minority tends to be among the less affluent, so the ruling elite and Catholicism are not closely connected. Participation in religion is high because it provides a sense of identity for the two main subcultures. Religion plays an important role in such areas of social life as education, where separate Protestant and Catholic schools may be retained.

Religion in the Third World

Martin has also drawn attention to the contrasting fates of religions in different Third World countries (Martin, 1991a, 1991b). In some Latin American countries the Roman Catholic Church remains a key institution in society, and Protestantism has made few converts. In countries such as Mexico and Argentina,

Protestants make up only about 2 per cent of the population. In Brazil, on the other hand, about 20 per cent of the population have become Protestant, and by 1985 there were more Protestant than Catholic ministers. Most ministers represent strongly religious versions of Protestantism such as Pentecostalism and Seventh Day Adventism. Martin argues that Pentecostalism attracts the small shopkeepers and craft workers who have moved to the cities and whose means of earning a living fit in well with a religion that emphasizes self-discipline and thrift.

In Islamic societies religious change also varies from country to country. In Tunisia and Egypt the state has become more secular: Islamic beliefs do not have a great influence on political decisions. In Iran the Islamic revolution of 1979 took the country in the opposite direction with religious leaders gaining most of the political power. In other countries there is a continuing conflict between the religious and the secular. In the Sudan, for example, there are strong advocates of religious pluralism and tolerance, but there are others who wish to see an Islamic state established. In Turkey attitudes towards religion are ambivalent. Some see religion as a cause of 'backwardness'. Others see it as the vital foundation on which the moral values of the society rest.

Prospects for religion

Far from predicting the demise of religion, Martin argues that it is likely to increase in importance. If anything, the future is likely to see the forces of secularization in retreat. Impetus towards secularization originated in north-western Europe, and here the factors which undermined religion have disappeared:

1. First, religion is no longer so closely associated with rich and powerful elites in society. It has therefore become more acceptable to people from lower classes.
2. Second, rationalism has lost some of its appeal. There is increasing interest in the mystical, the supernatural and the religious.

Outside Europe many countries retain strong religious influences on society. From Martin's viewpoint, 'There is no inevitable tilt to history down which every society is sociologically fated to fall.' Secularization is not an automatic and universal process.

Contemporary religious revivals

Martin's views are reflected in some more recent contributions to the debate over secularization which have argued that there is little evidence of a general trend towards secularization in the world as a whole. Gilles Kepel claims that any trend towards secularization was reversed in around 1975 (Kepel, 1994). Furthermore, the various religious revivals were very ambitious – they were aimed at 'recovering a sacred foundation for the organization of society – by changing society if necessary'. He uses the examples of Christians in the USA and Europe, Jews in Israel, and Muslims throughout the world to support his case.

Since 1978, when Pope John-Paul II became Pope, Catholicism has been less willing to concede ground to the secular forces. In Italy, young people have been attracted to the Catholic group, Communion and Liberation, which demands strong personal commitment from Catholics. In France, Catholic 'charismatic renewal' groups have tried to initiate a re-Christianization of society. In former communist countries such as Czechoslovakia and Poland the Roman Catholic Church has enjoyed great popularity.

In the USA the evangelical 'New Christian Right' have succeeded in attracting increasing numbers of Americans to their campaigns to reassert Christian values (see above, pp. 487–8, for a discussion of their significance).

In Israel, groups such as the Lubavitch have campaigned against the watering-down of traditional Jewish beliefs. Political parties based upon the Jewish religion have come to exercise an important influence on Israeli politics by holding the balance of power in parliament between the major political parties. In doing so they have forced the Jewish state to take religious beliefs seriously.

Islamization movements have had success in many parts of the world. For example, the Islamic Salvation Front won elections in Algeria in 1992. Amongst the Palestinians, radical Islamic groups such as Hamas have been prominent in opposing Israeli occupation of the West Bank. Kepel also points to the Salman Rushdie affair. The campaign by British Muslims against Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses* indicates how Islamic values continue to be important even in Western Europe.

To Kepel, all of the above are examples of attempts to counter secularism. They are a reaction to the apparent failure of attempts to base the policies of nation-states upon secular principles. He says, 'They regard the vainglorious emancipation of reason from faith as the prime cause of the ills of the twentieth century, the beginnings of a process leading straight to Nazi and Stalinist totalitarianism.' As such, they are very much a reaction against modernity. However, Kepel does not regard them as being equally successful. He says, 'It is far more difficult to expel secularism from Western society than from today's Jewish or Muslim world.'

Nevertheless, Kepel's work suggests that it might be appropriate to see the modern world as characterized by a continuing conflict between the secular and the sacred, rather than being characterized by the inevitable triumph of the former over the latter.

Secularization – conclusion

As the views of sociologists such as Martin and Kepel illustrate, the secularization thesis has not been definitively proved or disproved. This is partly because sociologists from Weber to Wilson and from Comte to Casanova have used the term 'secularization' in many different ways. This has led to considerable confusion since writers discussing the process of secularization are often arguing about different things.

Martin (1969) states that the concept of secularization includes 'a large number of discrete, separate elements loosely put together in an intellectual hold-all'. He maintains that there is no necessary connection between the various processes lumped together under the same heading. Because the range of meaning attached to the term 'secularization' has become so wide, Martin advocates its removal from the sociological vocabulary. Instead, he supports a careful and detailed study of the ways in which the role of religion in society has changed at different times and in different places.

Glock and Stark (1969) argue that researchers have been unable to measure the significance of religion because they have not given adequate attention to defining religion and religiosity. Until they have clearly thought out and stated exactly what they mean by these terms, the secularization thesis cannot be adequately tested.

There is some evidence that contemporary theorists of secularization do pay more attention to differentiating between different issues that have been considered under the heading 'secularization'. For example, Steve Bruce (1995, 1996), a strong advocate of the theory of secularization, accepts that religion can remain an important part of individual beliefs, but he believes that religion has lost its social and political significance.

José Casanova distinguishes between three aspects of secularization:

1. Secularization as differentiation. In these terms secularization takes place when non-religious spheres of life (such as the state and the economy) become separate from and independent of religion.
2. Secularization as a decline of religious beliefs and practices. In this case secularization takes place when fewer individuals take part in religious activities or hold religious beliefs.
3. Secularization as privatization. With this type of secularization, religion stops playing any part in public life and does not even try to influence how politicians make decisions or individuals in society in general choose to live their lives.

Casanova believes that recent history shows that religious beliefs and practices are certainly not dying out, and that 'public religions' have increasingly re-entered the public sphere. Thus, to him, it is only in the first sense that secularization has taken place. Religion no longer has a central position in the structure of modern societies, but neither does it fade away.

Most theorists who either support or attack the theory of secularization are now willing to admit that the theory cannot be unproblematically applied to all groups in all modern societies. It can therefore be argued that the national, regional, ethnic and social class differences in the role of religion discussed by Martin and others make it necessary to relate theories to specific countries and social groups.

Religion and globalization

While the debate around secularization shows the need to examine the differences between religions in different societies, the theory of globalization suggests that religion in different societies needs to be understood in the context of changes in the world as a whole. There are a number of different theories of globalization (see Chapter 9), but all suggest that the boundaries between societies are becoming less important, that social life within individual societies is increasingly influenced by events elsewhere in the world, and that some social changes are evident throughout the world rather than being confined to particular places. A number of writers have attempted to understand how such changes have influenced religion.

Peter Beyer – globalization, religion, particularism and universalism

Peter Beyer sees globalization as involving a situation in which 'peoples, cultures, societies, and civilizations previously more or less isolated from one another are now in regular and almost unavoidable contact' (Beyer, 1994). This has two contrasting effects. On the one hand, there is an increased danger of clashes between different cultures – now found within the same society – which might misunderstand or be hostile to one another. On the other hand, the increased contact between cultures and religion might reduce the differences between them and therefore reduce the likelihood of conflict.

Global society is characterized by a clash between particularism and universalism. Particularism involves an emphasis on the distinctive characteristics of particular groups. These differences might be national, regional, cultural or religious. Universalism involves an emphasis on similarities between people or societies or values, which result from their common humanity. In this situation religions can take one of three directions:

1 Religion might take a relatively marginal role in global society. Unable to provide an overarching set of values and beliefs that can be shared by all members of society, it might retreat into a limited and privatized role. According to Beyer, globalization leads to the world being dominated by specialized sub-systems. He says, 'Thus, for instance, the world capitalist economy operates in terms of money, the global political system in terms of bureaucratically organized power, the scientific system in terms of verifiable truth.' All of the systems are instrumental in aiming for increased efficiency and the rational achievement of ends.

   There is no obvious role for religion as a sub-system of global society. While religious ritual used to be seen as essential for the success of harvests, for good health or military success, this is no longer the case. Without a global role, religion tends to be left merely to deal with personal questions such as the meaning of life. When religion follows this path, it loses its public role and 'Privatized religion continues to develop in a myriad of pluralistic directions across the full range of religious possibilities.' Individuals choose the sect, cult, denomination or major world religion they wish to follow.

   However, religion is not inevitably confined to the private sphere.

2 The main sub-systems of modernity and globalization create some problems. The global economy, global science and the global political system offer little in the way of an identity for individuals and social groups. Identities tend to be relativized: people lack a single overriding sense of who they are. They may have a number of separate roles (such as a job and family roles) but no single source of identity. Furthermore, in a pluralistic world, in which different cultures and religions live close together and have increasing contact with one another, it becomes difficult to assert that one culture is better than others.

   Religion can adopt an important role in dealing with these problems. Individuals and social groups can use religion to give them a central source of identity. They can use it to reassert their superiority over other social groups. They can use religious affiliations to mobilize groups to seek power and influence in a globalized society in which they feel marginalized or threatened. Very often religions which assert particularistic differences are closely associated with nationalism. Thus, according to Beyer, Israel, Iran, India and Japan are all examples of countries where conservative or fundamentalist religions have been associated with nationalism.

3 The third option is for religion to attempt a more universalistic approach. Beyer calls this the liberal option. In this case religion attempts to be more ecumenical – it tries to bring together different faiths and beliefs. Instead of emphasizing difference, it emphasizes common values or beliefs which are, or it believes should be, shared globally. Examples of such beliefs might be a belief in universal human rights or in some conception of social justice. Beyer sees liberation theology as a good example of this type of development. Although based upon Catholicism, its interests are as much political as religious, with its concern for the poverty of disadvantaged groups in Latin America. Indeed, many of the problems of the poor can be attributed to the operation of the global capitalist system. Another example of the universalistic approach is religious environmentalism where different religious groups can be united in trying to save what may be seen as a divinely created earth.

Beyer concludes that globalization will not lead to the demise of religion. However, it does limit its influence. It is no longer integral to powerful sub-systems such as the global economy, the political system and science. While it remains important to systems of communication, it can only really try to influence events in the world rather than directly shaping them. For example, Beyer says that:

> *with peace and justice issues, many religious people and organizations will become deeply involved in the problems; but the proffered solutions are going to be political, educational, scientific, economic, and medical – assuming, of course, that the global system does not collapse along with its biological environment.*
>
> Beyer, 1994, p. 222

Samuel P. Huntington – *The Clash of Civilizations*

Samuel Huntington sees religion as developing a rather greater role in the modern world than Beyer. Although he does not use the term 'globalization' he discusses the same processes as those identified by globalization theorists. For example, he says, 'the world is becoming a smaller place. The interactions between peoples of different civilizations are increasing; these increasing interactions intensify civilization consciousness' (Huntington, 1993). Like some other theorists of globalization, he believes that the increasing contacts between different groups can sometimes have the effect of intensifying the

Chapter 8

Families and households

Introduction

The family has often been regarded as the cornerstone of society. In pre-modern and modern societies alike it has been seen as the most basic unit of social organization and one which carries out vital tasks such as socializing children. Until the 1960s few sociologists questioned the importance or the benefits of family life. Most sociologists assumed that family life was evolving as modernity progressed, and the changes involved made the family better-suited to meeting the needs of society and of family members.

A particular type of family, the nuclear family (based around a two-generation household of parents and their children), was seen as well-adapted to the demands of modern societies. From the 1960s, an increasing number of critical thinkers began to question the assumption that the family was necessarily a beneficial institution. Feminists, Marxists and critical psychologists began to highlight what they saw as some of the negative effects and the 'dark side' of family life.

In the following decades the family was not just under attack from academic writers – social changes also seemed to be undermining traditional families. Rising divorce rates, cohabitation before marriage, increasing numbers of single-parent families and single-person households, and other trends have all suggested that individuals may be basing their lives less and less around conventional families.

Some have seen these changes as a symptom of greater individualism within modern societies. They have welcomed what appears to be an increasing choice for individuals. People no longer have to base their lives around what may be outmoded and, for many, unsuitable, conventional family structures. Others, however, have lamented the changes and worried about their effect on society. Such changes were seen as both a symptom and a cause of instability and insecurity in people's lives and in society as a whole. This view was advocated by traditionalists who wanted a return to the ideal of the nuclear family. For them, many of society's problems were a result of the increased family instability.

Some postmodernists have begun to argue that there has been a fundamental break between the modern family and the postmodern family. They deny that any one type of family can be held up as the norm to which other family types can be compared. While modern societies might have had one central, dominant family type, this is no longer the case. As a result, it is no longer possible to produce a theory of 'the family'. Different explanations are needed for different types of family.

Alongside these developments in society and sociology, family life has become a topic of political debate. What was once largely seen as a private sphere, in which politicians should not interfere, is now seen as a legitimate area for public debate and political action. As concern has grown in some quarters about an alleged decline of the family, politicians have become somewhat more willing to comment on families. Sometimes they have devised policies to try to deal with perceived problems surrounding the family.

In short, the family has come to be seen as more problematic than it was in the past. The controversies that have come to surround families and households are the subject of this chapter.

We begin by examining the assumption of the 'universality' of the family.

Is the family universal?

George Peter Murdock: the family – a universal social institution

In a study entitled *Social Structure* (1949), George Peter Murdock examined the institution of the family in a wide range of societies. Murdock took a sample of 250 societies, ranging from small hunting and gathering bands to large-scale industrial societies. He claimed that some form of family existed in every society and concluded, on the evidence of his sample, that the family is universal.

Murdock defined the family as follows:

> *The family is a social group characterized by common residence, economic co-operation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults.*
>
> Murdock, 1949

Thus the family lives together, pools its resources and works together, and produces offspring. At least two of the adult members conduct a sexual relationship according to the norms of their particular society.

Such norms vary from society to society. For example, among the Banaro of New Guinea, the husband does not have sexual relations with his wife until she has borne a child by a friend of his father. The parent–child relationship, therefore, is not necessarily a biological one. Its importance is primarily social, children being recognized as members of a particular family whether or not the adult spouses have biologically produced them.

Variations in family structure

The structure of the family varies from society to society. The smallest family unit is known as the nuclear family and consists of a husband and wife and their immature offspring. Units larger than the nuclear family are usually known as extended families. Such families can be seen as extensions of the basic nuclear unit, either vertical extensions – for example, the addition of members of a third generation such as the spouses' parents – and/or horizontal extensions – for example, the addition of members of the same generation as the spouses, such as the husband's brother or an additional wife. Thus the functionalist sociologists Bell and Vogel define the extended family as 'any grouping broader than the nuclear family which is related by descent, marriage or adoption'.

Either on its own or as the basic unit within an extended family, Murdock found that the nuclear family was present in every society in his sample. This led him to conclude that:

> *The nuclear family is a universal human social grouping. Either as the sole prevailing form of the family or as the basic unit from which more complex forms are compounded, it exists as a distinct and strongly functional group in every known society.*
>
> Murdock, 1949

However, as we will discover in the following sections, Murdock's conclusions might not be well-founded.

Kathleen Gough – the Nayar

Some societies have sets of relationships between kin which are quite different from those which are common in Britain. One such society was that of the Nayar of Kerala in Southern India, prior to British rule being established in 1792. Sociologists disagree about whether this society had a family system or not, and thus whether or not it disproves Murdock's claim that the family is universal.

Kathleen Gough (1959) provided a detailed description of Nayar society. Before puberty all Nayar girls were ritually married to a suitable Nayar man in the *tali*-rite. After the ritual marriage had taken place, however, the *tali* husband did not live with his wife, and was under no obligation to have any contact with her whatsoever. The wife owed only one duty to her *tali* husband: she had to attend his funeral to mourn his death.

Once a Nayar girl reached or neared puberty she began to take a number of visiting husbands, or '*sandbanham*' husbands. The Nayar men were usually professional warriors who spent long periods of time away from their villages acting as mercenaries. During their time in the villages they were allowed to visit any number of Nayar women who had undergone the *tali*-rite and who were members of the same caste as themselves, or a lower caste. With the agreement of the woman involved, the *sandbanham* husband arrived at the home of one of his wives after supper, had sexual intercourse with her, and left before breakfast the next morning. During his stay he placed his weapons outside the building to show the other *sandbanham* husbands that he was there. If they arrived too late, then they were free to sleep on the veranda, but could not stay the night with their wife. Men could have unlimited numbers of *sandbanham* wives, although women seem to have been limited to no more than 12 visiting husbands.

An exception to the family?

Sandbanham relationships were unlike marriages in most societies in a number of ways:

1 They were not a lifelong union: either party could terminate the relationship at any time.
2 *Sandbanham* husbands had no duty towards the offspring of their wives. When a woman became pregnant, it was essential according to Nayar custom that a man of appropriate caste declared himself to be the father of the child by paying a fee of cloth and vegetables to the midwife who attended the birth. However, it mattered little whether he was the biological parent or not, so long as someone claimed to be the father, because he did not help to maintain or socialize the child.
3 Husbands and wives did not form an economic unit. Although husbands might give wives token gifts, they were not expected to maintain them – indeed it was frowned upon if they attempted to. Instead, the economic unit consisted of a number of brothers and sisters, sisters' children, and their daughters' children. The eldest male was the leader of each group of kin.

Nayar society, then, was a matrilineal society. Kinship groupings were based on female biological relatives and marriage played no significant part in the formation of households, in the socializing of children, or in the way that the economic needs of the members of society were met.

In terms of Murdock's definition, no family existed in Nayar society, since those who maintained 'a sexually approved adult relationship' did not live together and cooperate economically. Only the women lived with the children. Therefore, either Murdock's definition of the family is too narrow, or the family is not universal.

Gough claimed that marriage, and by implication the family, existed in Nayar society. In order to make this claim, though, she had to broaden her definition of marriage beyond that implied in Murdock's definition of the family. She defined marriage as a relationship between a woman and one or more persons in which a child born to the woman 'is given full birth-status rights' common to normal members of the society.

Matrifocal families – an exception to the rule?

Murdock's definition of the family includes at least one adult of each sex. However, both today and in the past, some children have been raised in households that do not contain adults of both sexes. Usually these households have been headed by women.

A significant proportion of black families in the islands of the West Indies, parts of Central America such as Guyana, and the USA do not include adult males. The 'family unit' often consists of a woman and her dependent children, sometimes with the addition of her mother. This may indicate that the family is not universal as Murdock suggests, or that it is necessary to redefine the family and state that the minimal family unit consists of a woman and her dependent children, own or adopted, and that all other family types are additions to this unit.

Female-headed families are sometimes known as matriarchal families and sometimes as matrifocal families, although both of these terms have been used in a number of senses. We will use the term matrifocal family here to refer to female-headed families.

The causes of matrifocal families

Matrifocal families are common in low-income black communities in the New World. In the USA in 1985, 51 per cent of all black children lived with their mothers but not with their fathers. The percentage is also high in other New World societies. For example, Nancie González (1970), in her study of Livingston, Honduras in 1956, found that 45 per cent of black Carib families had female heads. (See pp. 545–6 for comments on lone parenthood and ethnicity in Britain.)

The high level of matrifocal families has been seen as a result of one or more of the following factors:

1 Melville J. Herskovits (1958) argued that the West African origin of New World blacks influenced their family structure. In traditional West Africa, a system of polygyny (a form of extended family with one husband and two or more wives) and considerable female economic independence meant that the husband played a relatively marginal role in family life. Herskovits maintained that this pattern continues to influence black family life.
2 A second argument sees the system of plantation slavery as a major factor accounting for matrifocal families. M.G. Smith (1962) noted that, under slavery, the mother and children formed the basic family unit. Families were often split with the sale of one or more of their members, but mothers and dependent children were usually kept together. The authority of the male as head of the family was eroded because he was subject to the authority of the plantation owner who, with his white employees, had the right of sexual access to all female slaves. Formed under slavery, the model of the matrifocal family is seen to have persisted.
3 A third argument sees the economic position of blacks in the New World as the basic cause of the matrifocal family. Elliot Liebow (1967), whose views are outlined in Chapter 5 (pp. 321–3), saw female-

headed families as resulting from desertion by the husband because he has insufficient funds to play the role of father and breadwinner.

4 A final argument accepts that poverty is the basic cause of matrifocal families but states also that matrifocality has become a part of the subculture of the poor. This view is contained in Oscar Lewis's concept of the culture of poverty (Lewis, 1961). From his research in a low-income black area of Washington DC, Ulf Hannerz (1969) argued that female-headed families are so common that to some degree they have become an expected and accepted alternative to the standard nuclear family. According to this argument, matrifocal families are not simply a product of poverty but also of culture. (See Chapter 5, pp. 319–23, for a general discussion of the relationship between poverty, culture and family structure.)

Can we then see the matrifocal family as an exception to Murdock's claim that the family is universal, or, if it is accepted as a family, as an exception to his claim that the nuclear family is a universal social group? In order to decide this, we will first consider the arguments that support Murdock, and then the arguments against him.

Support for Murdock

1 Statistically, the female-headed family is not the norm either within black communities or in the societies in which they are set.

2 The matrifocal family is often a nuclear family that has been broken. Particularly in the USA, it is usually a product of separation or divorce. It did not begin life as a matrifocal family.

3 Some sociologists believe that the mainstream model of the nuclear family is valued by blacks and regarded as the ideal.

4 Many sociologists view the female-headed family as a family 'gone wrong', as a product of social disorganization and not, therefore, as a viable alternative to the nuclear family. It has been accused of producing maladjusted children, juvenile delinquents and high-school dropouts. Since it does not appear to perform the functions of a 'proper family', it is regarded as a broken family and not as a viable unit in its own right.

Arguments against Murdock

The following arguments support the view that the matrifocal family should be recognized as an alternative to the nuclear family:

1 Simply because in statistical terms the matrifocal family is not the norm, does not mean it cannot be recognized as an alternative family structure. In many societies that practise polygyny, polygynous marriages are in the minority, yet sociologists accept them as a form of extended family.

2 As Hannerz (1969) argued, in low-income black communities matrifocal families are to some extent expected and accepted.

3 Members of matrifocal families regard the unit as a family.

4 The matrifocal family should not be seen simply as a broken nuclear family. From her West Indian data, González (1970) argues that the female-headed family is a well-organized social group which represents a positive adaptation to the circumstances of poverty. By not tying herself to a husband, the mother is able to maintain casual relationships with a number of men who can provide her with financial support. She retains strong links with her relatives who give her both economic and emotional support. González states that 'By dispersing her loyalties and by clinging especially to the unbreakable sibling ties with her brothers, a woman increases her chances of maintaining her children and household.' In a situation of poverty, 'the chances that any one man may fail are high'.

5 The supposed harmful effects on the children of the matrifocal family are far from proven (see pp. 541–4 for a discussion of lone parenthood).

The above arguments suggest that the matrifocal family can be regarded as a form of family structure in its own right. If these arguments are accepted, it is possible to see the matrifocal family as the basic, minimum family unit and all other family structures as additions to this unit.

The female-carer core

This view is supported by Yanina Sheeran. She argues that the 'female-carer core' is the most basic family unit. She says:

> *The female-carer unit is the foundation of the single mother family, the two parent family, and the extended family in its many forms. Thus it is certainly the basis of family household life in Britain today, and is a ubiquitous phenomenon, since even in South Pacific longhouses, pre-industrial farmsteads, communes and Kibbutzim, we know that female carers predominate.*
>
> Sheeran, 1993, p. 30

In Britain, for example, Sheeran maintains that children usually have one woman who is primarily responsible for their care. These primary carers are often but not always the biological mother; they may 'occasionally be a grandmother, elder sister, aunt, adoptive mother or other female'. The primary carer may get help from female relatives, childminders, nannies, or from their husbands or male partners. Sheeran does not therefore deny that men play some part in childcare, but she does deny that their role is as important as that of women. She is sceptical of claims by some sociologists that men's involvement

in childcare in Britain has greatly increased (see the discussion of the symmetrical family, pp. 529–31, for an example of such a view).

Sheeran seems to be on strong ground in arguing that a female-carer core is a more basic family unit than that identified by Murdock, since in some societies families without an adult male are quite common. However, she herself admits that in Britain a small minority of lone-parent households are headed by a man. According to figures quoted by her from the *General Household Survey* of 1989–90, about 13 per cent of British households consisted of a lone mother with dependent children, and about 2 per cent of lone fathers with dependent children. Mukti Jain Campion, writing in 1995, notes that figures indicated that at that time there were in the region of 100,000 lone fathers in Britain and about 1.5 million in the USA. Thus it is possible to argue that the female-carer core is not the basis of *every* individual family, even if it is the basis of *most* families in all societies.

Matrifocal families, and one-parent families in general, are becoming more common in Britain. We will consider the significance of this development later in this chapter (see pp. 541–4).

Gay families

Another type of household that may contradict Murdock's claims about the universality of the family, as defined by him, is gay and lesbian households. By definition, such households will not contain 'adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship' (Murdock, 1949). Such households may, however, include children who are cared for by two adult females or two adult males. The children may have been adopted, be the result of a previous heterosexual relationship, or they may have been produced using new reproductive technologies involving sperm donation or surrogate motherhood. A lesbian may have sex with a man in order to conceive a child to be raised by her and her female partner.

Most children of gay couples result from a previous heterosexual relationship. Lesbian mothers are rather more common than gay fathers, due to the difficulties gay men are likely to have in being granted custody or given adopted children. However, Mukti Jain Campion quotes a study which claimed that over 1,000 children were born to gay or lesbian couples in San Francisco between 1985 and 1990, and that there were many more people living with gay partners who had conceived children in heterosexual relationships. Thus, while households consisting of gay partners and one or more children may not be very common, they do exist. This raises the question of whether such households should be regarded as families.

Rather like lone-parent families, households with gay parents are seen by some as not being 'proper' families. In most Western societies the gay couple will not be able to marry and any children will have a genetic connection with only one of the partners. However, Sidney Callahan (1997) argues that such households should still be seen as families. He argues that, if marriage were available, many gay and lesbian couples would marry. Furthermore, he believes that the relationships involved are no different in any fundamental way from those in heterosexual households. Callahan therefore claims that gay and lesbian households with children should be regarded as a type of family, at least where the gay or lesbian relationship is intended to be permanent. He concludes, 'I would argue that gay or lesbian households that consist of intimate communities of mutual support and that display permanent shared commitments to intergenerational nurturing share the kinship bonding we observe and name as family' (Callahan, 1997).

The universality of the family – conclusion

Whether the family is regarded as universal ultimately depends on how the family is defined. Clearly, though, a wide variety of domestic arrangements have been devised by human beings which are quite distinctive from the 'conventional' families of modern industrial societies. As Diana Gittins puts it, 'Relationships are universal, so is some form of co-residence, of intimacy, sexuality and emotional bonds. But the *forms* these can take are infinitely variable and can be changed and challenged as well as embraced' (Gittins, 1993).

It may be a somewhat pointless exercise to try to find a single definition that embraces all the types of household and relationship which can reasonably be called families.

Having examined whether the family is universal, we will now examine various perspectives on the role of families in society.

The family – a functionalist perspective

The analysis of the family from a functionalist perspective involves three main questions:

1 First, 'What are the functions of the family?' Answers to this question deal with the contributions made by the family to the maintenance of the social system. It is assumed that society has certain functional prerequisites or basic needs that must be met if it is to survive and operate efficiently. The family is examined in terms of the degree to which it meets these functional prerequisites.

2 A second and related question asks 'What are the functional relationships between the family and other parts of the social system?'

3 It is assumed that there must be a certain degree of fit, integration and harmony between the parts of the social system if society is going to function efficiently. For example, the family must be integrated to some extent with the economic system. We will examine this question in detail in a later section when the relationships between the family and industrialization are considered.

The third question deals with the functions performed by an institution or a part of society for the individual. In the case of the family, this question considers the functions of the family for its individual members.

George Peter Murdock – the universal functions of the family

Functions for society

From his analysis of 250 societies, Murdock (1949) argued that the family performs four basic functions in all societies, which he termed the sexual, reproductive, economic and educational. They are essential for social life since without the sexual and reproductive functions there would be no members of society, without the economic function (for example, the provision and preparation of food) life would cease, and without education (a term Murdock uses for socialization) there would be no culture. Human society without culture could not function.

Clearly, the family does not perform these functions exclusively. However, it makes important contributions to them all and no other institution has yet been devised to match its efficiency in this respect. Once this is realized, Murdock claimed, 'The immense utility of the nuclear family and the basic reason for its universality thus begin to emerge in strong relief.'

Functions for individuals and society

The family's functions for society are inseparable from its functions for its individual members. It serves both at one and the same time and in much the same way. The sexual function provides a good example of this. Husband and wife have the right of sexual access to each other, and in most societies there are rules forbidding or limiting sexual activity outside marriage. This provides sexual gratification for the spouses. It also strengthens the family since the powerful and often binding emotions which accompany sexual activities unite husband and wife. The sexual function also helps to stabilize society. The rules which largely contain sexual activity within the family prevent the probable disruptive effects on the social order that would result if the sex drive were allowed 'free play'. The family thus provides both 'control and expression' of sexual drives, and in doing so performs important functions, not only for its individual members, but also for the family as an institution and for society as a whole.

Murdock applied a similar logic to the economic function. He argued that, like sex, it is 'most readily and satisfactorily achieved by persons living together'. He referred in glowing terms to the division of labour within the family whereby the husband specializes in certain activities, the wife in others. For example, in hunting societies men kill game animals which provide meat for their wives to cook and skins for them to make into clothing. This economic cooperation within the family not only goes a long way to fulfilling the economic function for society as a whole, but also provides 'rewarding experiences' for the spouses working together, which 'cement their union'.

Murdock argued that his analysis provides a 'conception of the family's many-sided utility and thus of its inevitability'. He concluded that 'No society has succeeded in finding an adequate substitute for the nuclear family, to which it might transfer these functions. It is highly doubtful whether any society will ever succeed in such an attempt.'

Criticisms of Murdock

Murdock's picture of the family is rather like the multi-faceted, indispensable boy-scout knife. The family is seen as a multi-functional institution which is indispensable to society. Its 'many-sided utility' accounts for its universality and its inevitability.

In his enthusiasm for the family, however, Murdock did not seriously consider whether its

functions could be performed by other social institutions and he does not examine alternatives to the family. As D.H.J. Morgan notes in his criticism, Murdock does not answer 'to what extent these basic functions are inevitably linked with the institution of the nuclear family' (Morgan, 1975).

In addition, Murdock's description of the family is almost too good to be true. As Morgan states, 'Murdock's nuclear family is a remarkably harmonious institution. Husband and wife have an integrated division of labour and have a good time in bed.' As we will see in later sections, some other researchers do not share Murdock's emphasis on harmony and integration.

Talcott Parsons – the 'basic and irreducible' functions of the family

Parsons (1959, 1965b) concentrated his analysis on the family in modern American society. Despite this, his ideas have a more general application since he argued that the American family retains two 'basic and irreducible functions' which are common to the family in all societies. These are the 'primary socialization of children' and the 'stabilization of the adult personalities of the population of the society'.

Primary socialization

Primary socialization refers to socialization during the early years of childhood which takes place mainly within the family. Secondary socialization occurs during the later years when the family is less involved and other agencies (such as the peer group and the school) exert increasing influence.

There are two basic processes involved in primary socialization: the internalization of society's culture and the structuring of the personality.

Unless culture is internalized – that is, absorbed and accepted – society would cease to exist, since without shared norms and values social life would not be possible. However, culture is not simply learned, it is 'internalized as part of the personality structure'. The child's personality is moulded in terms of the central values of the culture to the point where they become a part of him or her. In the case of American society, personality is shaped in terms of independence and achievement motivation, which are two of the central values of American culture.

Parsons argued that families 'are "factories" which produce human personalities'. He believed that they are essential for this purpose since primary socialization requires a context which provides warmth, security and mutual support. He could conceive of no institution other than the family that could provide this context.

Stabilization of adult personalities

Once produced, the personality must be kept stable. This is the second basic function of the family: the stabilization of adult personalities. The emphasis here is on the marriage relationship and the emotional security the couple provide for each other. This acts as a counterweight to the stresses and strains of everyday life which tend to make the personality unstable.

This function is particularly important in Western industrial society, since the nuclear family is largely isolated from kin. It does not have the security once provided by the close-knit extended family. Thus the married couple increasingly look to each other for emotional support.

Adult personalities are also stabilized by the parents' role in the socialization process. This allows them to act out 'childish' elements of their own personalities which they have retained from childhood but which cannot be indulged in adult society. For example, father is 'kept on the rails' by playing with his son's train set.

According to Parsons, therefore, the family provides a context in which husband and wife can express their childish whims, give and receive emotional support, recharge their batteries, and so stabilize their personalities.

Criticisms of Parsons

This brief summary of Parsons's views on the family is far from complete. Other aspects will be discussed later in this chapter (pp. 524–5) (see also Chapter 3, p. 132), but here we will consider some of the arguments which criticize his perspective:

1 As with Murdock, Parsons has been accused of idealizing the family with his picture of well-adjusted children and sympathetic spouses caring for each other's every need. It is a typically optimistic, modernist theory which may have little relationship to reality.

2 His picture is based largely on the American middle-class family which he treats as representative of American families in general. As D.H.J. Morgan (1975) states, 'there are no classes, no regions, no religious, ethnic or status groups, no communities' in Parsons's analysis of the family. For example, Parsons fails to explore possible differences between middle- and working-class families, or different family structures in ethnic minority communities.

3 Like Murdock, Parsons largely fails to explore functional alternatives to the family. He does recognize that some functions are not necessarily tied to the family. For instance, he notes that the family's economic function has largely been taken over by other agencies in modern industrial society. However, his belief that its remaining functions are

'basic and irreducible' prevents him from examining alternatives to the family.

4 Parsons's view of the socialization process can be criticized. He sees it as a one-way process, with the children being pumped full of culture and their personalities being moulded by powerful parents. He tends to ignore the two-way interaction process between parents and children. There is no place in his scheme for the children who twist their parents around their little finger.

5 Parsons sees the family as a distinct institution which is clearly separated from other aspects of social life. Some contemporary perspectives on the family deny that such clearcut boundaries can be established (see pp. 581–2). The family as such cannot therefore be seen as performing any particular functions on its own in isolation from other institutions.

Critical views of the family

The view that the family benefits both its members and society as a whole has come under strong attack. Some observers have suggested that, on balance, the family may well be dysfunctional both for society and its individual members. This criticism has mainly been directed at the family in Western industrial society.

Edmund Leach – *A Runaway World?*

In a lecture entitled *A Runaway World?* (1967) Edmund Leach presented a pessimistic view of the family in industrial society. Leach, an anthropologist, had spent many years studying small-scale pre-industrial societies. In such societies the family often forms a part of a wider kinship unit. An extensive network of social relationships between a large number of kin provides practical and psychological support for the individual. This support is reinforced by the closely-knit texture of relationships in the small-scale community as a whole.

By comparison, in modern industrial society, the nuclear family is largely isolated from kin and the wider community. Leach summarizes this situation and its consequences as follows:

> *In the past kinsfolk and neighbours gave the individual continuous moral support throughout his life. Today the domestic household is isolated. The family looks inward upon itself; there is an intensification of emotional stress between husband and wife and parents and children. The strain is greater than most of us can bear.*
>
> Leach, 1967

Thrown back almost entirely upon its own resources, the nuclear family becomes like an overloaded electrical circuit. The demands made upon it are too great and fuses blow. In their isolation, family members expect and demand too much from each other. The result is conflict. In Leach's words, 'The parents and children huddled together in their loneliness take too much out of each other. The parents fight; the children rebel.'

The family and society

Problems are not confined to the family. The tension and hostility produced within the family find expression throughout society. Leach argued that the 'isolation and the close-knit nature of contemporary family life incubates hate which finds expression in conflict in the wider community'. The families in which people huddle together create barriers between them and the wider society. The privatized family breeds suspicion and fear of the outside world. Leach argued that 'Privacy is the source of fear and violence. The violence in the world comes about because we human beings are forever creating barriers between men who are like us and men who are not like us.'

Only when individuals can break out of the prison of the nuclear family, rejoin their fellows and give and receive support will the ills of society begin to diminish. Leach's conclusion is diametrically opposed to the functionalist view of the family. He stated that 'Far from being the basis of the good society, the family, with its narrow privacy and tawdry secrets, is the source of all our discontents.'

R.D. Laing – *The Politics of the Family*

In *The Politics of the Family* (1976) and a number of other publications (for example, Laing and Esterson, 1970, Laing, 1971), R.D. Laing presented a radical alternative to the functionalist picture of the 'happy family'. Laing was a phenomenological psychiatrist: he was concerned with interaction within the family and the meanings that develop in that context. His work was largely based on the study of families in which one member has been defined as schizophrenic.

Laing argues that the behaviour of so-called schizophrenics can only be understood in terms of relationships within the family. Far from viewing schizophrenia as madness, he argues that it makes sense in terms of the meanings and interactions that develop within the family. As such it can be seen as reasonable behaviour.

Laing maintains that the difference between so-called 'normal' and 'abnormal' families is small. It therefore follows that a lot can be learned about families in general by studying those labelled as abnormal.

Exploitation in the family

Laing views the family in terms of sets of interactions. Individuals form alliances, adopt various strategies and play one or more individuals off against others in a complex tactical game. Laing is preoccupied with those interaction situations that he regards as harmful and destructive. Throughout his work he concentrates on the exploitative aspects of family relationships. The following example illustrates his approach (Laing, 1971).

Jane is defined as schizophrenic. She is in a perpetual reverie, her own little dream world, which consists of a game of tennis. It is a mixed doubles match; she is the ball. Jane sits motionless and silent and eats only when fed. The adults in the family are in a state of conflict, her father and his mother being ranged against her mother and her mother's father. The two halves of the family communicate only through Jane; she is the go-between. The strain eventually becomes too much for her and she escapes into her dream world. However, as her 'dream' shows, even in this world she cannot escape from the clutches of the family. The game of tennis symbolizes the interaction patterns in the family.

With examples such as this, Laing shows how the family can be a destructive and exploitative institution.

Laing refers to the family group as a nexus. He argues that 'the highest concern of the nexus is reciprocal concern. Each partner is concerned about what the other thinks, feels, does' (Laing, 1962). Within the nexus there is a constant, unremitting demand for mutual concern and attention. As a result there is considerable potential for harm: family members are in an extremely vulnerable position.

Thus, if a father is ashamed of his son, given the nature of the nexus, his son is deeply affected. As he is emotionally locked into the nexus, he is concerned about his father's opinion and cannot brush it off lightly. In self-defence he may run to his mother who offers protection. In this way, Laing argues that 'A family can act as gangsters, offering each other mutual protection against each other's violence.'

Reciprocal interiorization

From interaction within the nexus, reciprocal interiorization develops: family members become a part of each other and the family as a whole. They interiorize or internalize the family. Laing argues that 'To be in the same family is to feel the same "family" inside' (Laing, 1971). The example of Jane illustrates this process – her little world is an interiorization of family interaction patterns.

Laing regards the process of interiorization as psychologically damaging since it restricts the development of the self. Individuals carry the blueprint of their family with them for the rest of their life. This prevents any real autonomy or freedom of self; it prevents the development of the individual in his or her own right. Self-awareness is smothered under the blanket of the family. As a result of family interiorization, Laing states, 'I consider most adults (including myself) are or have been more or less in a hypnotic trance induced in early infancy' (Laing, 1971).

The family 'ghetto'

Like Leach, Laing argues that problems in the family create problems in society. Due to the nature of the nexus and the process of interiorization, a boundary or even a defensive barrier is drawn between the family and the world outside. This can reach the point where 'Some families live in perpetual anxiety of what, to them, is an external persecuting world. The members of the family live in a family ghetto as it were' (Laing, 1962). Laing argues that this is one reason for so-called maternal over-protection. However, 'It is not "over" protection from the mother's point of view, nor, indeed, often from the point of view of other members of the family.'

This perception of the external threat of a menacing society tends to unite and strengthen the nexus. The barrier erected between the family and the world outside may have important consequences. According to Laing, it leads family members, particularly children, to see the world in terms of 'us and them'. From this basic division stem the harmful and dangerous distinctions between Gentile and Jew, black and white, and the separation of others into 'people like us' and 'people like them'.

Within the family children learn to obey their parents. Laing regards this as the primary link in a dangerous chain. Patterns of obedience laid down in early childhood form the basis for obedience to authority in later life. They lead to soldiers and officials blindly and unquestioningly following orders. Laing implies that without family obedience training, people would question orders, follow their own judgement and make their own decisions. If this were so, American soldiers might not have

marched off to fight what Laing regards as a senseless war in Vietnam in the 1960s, and we might no longer live in a society which Laing believes is largely insane.

Despite Laing's preoccupation with the dark side of family life, he stated in an interview with David Cohen in 1977:

> *I enjoy living in a family. I think the family is still the best thing that still exists biologically as a natural thing. My attack on the family is aimed at the way I felt many children are subjected to gross forms of violence and violation of their rights, to humiliation at the hands of adults who don't know what they're doing.*
>
> Quoted in Cohen, 1977, pp. 216–17

Criticisms of Leach and Laing

Leach and Laing in their different ways have presented a radical alternative to the functionalist perspective on the family, but their work is open to a number of criticisms:

1 Neither has conducted detailed fieldwork on the family in contemporary industrial society and in fact Laing's research is limited to investigations of families in which one member has been defined as schizophrenic.

2 Both talk about 'the family' with little reference to its position in the social structure. For example, there is no reference to social class in Laing's work and therefore no indication of the relationship between class and family life.

3 Leach examined the family over time, but the work of Laing lacks any historical perspective.

4 Both authors examine the Western family from their particular specialized knowledge: Leach from his work on family and kinship in small-scale non-Western societies, and Laing from his study of schizophrenia and family life. This inevitably colours their views. In itself, this is not a criticism, but it is important to be aware of the source of their perspectives.

5 To some degree, Leach and Laing both begin with a picture of a society out of control or even gone mad. Leach, in *A Runaway World?* (1967), implies that society has got out of hand; Laing goes even further by suggesting that many aspects of contemporary society are insane. Such views of society will produce what many consider to be an extreme and unbalanced picture of the family. However, it is possible to accuse the functionalists of the opposite bias. For example, Parsons gave the impression of an immensely reasonable society ticking over like clockwork. In this context a well-adjusted, contented family is to be expected.

Leach and Laing have provided a balance to the functionalist view which has dominated sociological thinking on the family for many years. Laing, in particular, has given important insights into interaction patterns within the family. In doing so he may, as D.H.J. Morgan suggests, have come 'closer to family life as it is actually experienced than do many of the more orthodox presentations' (Morgan, 1975).

In the next section we will consider the Marxist view of the family.

Marxist perspectives on the family

Friedrich Engels – the origin of the family

The earliest view of the family developed from a Marxist perspective is contained in Friedrich Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Engels, 1972, first published 1884).

Like many nineteenth-century scholars, Engels took an evolutionary view of the family, attempting to trace its origin and evolution through time. He combined an evolutionary approach with Marxist theory, arguing that, as the mode of production changed, so did the family.

During the early stages of human evolution, Engels believed that the means of production were communally owned and the family as such did not exist. This era of primitive communism was characterized by promiscuity. There were no rules limiting sexual relationships and society was, in effect, the family.

Although Engels has been criticized for this type of speculation, the anthropologist Kathleen Gough argues that his picture may not be that far from the truth. She notes that the nearest relatives to human beings, the chimpanzees, live in 'promiscuous hordes', and this may have been the pattern for early humans.

The evolution of the family

Engels argued that, throughout human history, more and more restrictions were placed on sexual relationships and the production of children. He speculated that, from the promiscuous horde, marriage and the family evolved through a series of stages, which included polygyny, to its present stage, the

monogamous nuclear family. Each successive stage placed greater restrictions on the number of mates available to the individual.

The monogamous nuclear family developed with the emergence of private property, in particular the private ownership of the means of production, and the advent of the state. The state instituted laws to protect the system of private property and to enforce the rules of monogamous marriage. This form of marriage and the family developed to solve the problem of the inheritance of private property. Property was owned by males and, in order for them to pass it on to their heirs, they had to be certain of the legitimacy of those heirs. They therefore needed greater control over women so that there would be no doubt about the paternity of the offspring. The monogamous family provided the most efficient device for this purpose. In Engels's words:

> *It is based on the supremacy of the man, the express purpose being to produce children of undisputed paternity; such paternity is demanded because these children are later to come into their father's property as his natural heirs.*
>
> Engels, 1972

Evidence for Engels's views

Engels's scheme of the evolution of the family is much more elaborate than the brief outline described above. It was largely based on *Ancient Society*, an erroneous interpretation of the evolution of the family by the nineteenth-century American anthropologist, Lewis Henry Morgan. Modern research has suggested that many of its details are incorrect. For example, monogamous marriage and the nuclear family are often found in hunting and gathering bands. Since humanity has lived in hunting and gathering bands for the vast majority of its existence, the various forms of group marriage postulated by Engels (such as the promiscuous horde) may well be figments of his imagination.

However, Gough argues that 'the general trend of Engels's argument still appears sound' (Gough, 1972). Although nuclear families and monogamous marriage exist in small-scale societies, they form a part of a larger kinship group. When individuals marry they take on a series of duties and obligations to their spouse's kin. Communities are united by kinship ties and the result is like a large extended family. Gough argues that:

> *It is true that although it is not a group marriage in Engels's sense, marriage has a group character in many hunting bands and in most of the more complex tribal societies that have developed with the domestication of plants and animals. With the development of privately owned, heritable property, and especially with the rise of the state, this group character gradually disappears.*
>
> Gough, 1972

(Further aspects of Engels's views on the family are examined in Chapter 3, p. 142.)

Eli Zaretsky – personal life and capitalism

Eli Zaretsky (1976) has analysed more recent developments in the family from a Marxist perspective. He argues that the family in modern capitalist society creates the illusion that the 'private life' of the family is quite separate from the economy. Before the early nineteenth century the family was the basic unit of production. For example, in the early capitalist textile industry, production of cloth took place in the home and involved all family members. Only with the development of factory-based production were work and family life separated.

In a society in which work was alienating, Zaretsky claims that the family was put on a pedestal because it apparently 'stood in opposition to the terrible anonymous world of commerce and industry'. The private life of the family provided opportunities for satisfactions that were unavailable outside the walls of the home.

Zaretsky welcomes the increased possibilities for a personal life for the proletariat offered by the reduction in working hours since the nineteenth century. However, he believes that the family is unable to provide for the psychological and personal needs of individuals. He says 'it simply cannot meet the pressures of being the only refuge in a brutal society'. The family artificially separates and isolates personal life from other aspects of life. It might cushion the effects of capitalism but it perpetuates the system and cannot compensate for the general alienation produced by such a society.

Furthermore, Zaretsky sees the family as a major prop to the capitalist economy. The capitalist system is based upon the domestic labour of housewives who reproduce future generations of workers. He also believes that the family has become a vital unit of consumption. The family consumes the products of capitalism and this allows the bourgeoisie to continue producing surplus value. To Zaretsky, only socialism will end the artificial separation of family private life and public life, and produce the possibility of personal fulfilment.

Next we will examine the family from a feminist viewpoint.

Feminist perspectives on the family

The influence of feminism

In recent decades feminism has probably had more influence on the study of the family than any other approach to understanding society. Like Laing, Leach and Marxists, feminists have been highly critical of the family. However, unlike other critics, they have tended to emphasize the harmful effects of family life upon women. In doing so they have developed new perspectives and highlighted new issues.

Feminists have, for example, introduced the study of areas of family life such as housework and domestic violence into sociology. They have challenged some widely-held views about the inevitability of male dominance in families and have questioned the view that family life is becoming more egalitarian. Feminists have also highlighted the economic contribution to society made by women's domestic labour within the family. Above all, feminist theory has encouraged sociologists to see the family as an institution involving power relationships. It has challenged the image of family life as being based upon cooperation, shared interests and love, and has tried to show that some family members, in particular men, obtain greater benefits from families than others.

Recently, some feminists have questioned the tendency of other feminists to make blanket condemnations of family life and have emphasized the different experiences of women in families. Some have rejected the idea that there is such a thing as 'the family' rather than simply different domestic arrangements. They have, however, continued to identify ways in which domestic life can disadvantage women.

In later sections of this chapter we will consider the impact of feminism on the study of conjugal roles, domestic labour, social policy and marriage. In the next section, however, we will examine some of the feminist theoretical approaches to understanding the family.

Marxist feminist perspectives on the family

Marxists such as Engels and Zaretsky have acknowledged that women are exploited in marriage and family life but they have emphasized the relationship between capitalism and the family, rather than the family's effects on women. Marxist feminists use Marxist concepts but see the exploitation of women as a key feature of family life. The next few sections will examine how these theories have been applied to the family. (More details of the Marxist feminist approach can be found in Chapter 3, pp. 148–50.)

The production of labour power

Margaret Benston stated that:

> *The amount of unpaid labor performed by women is very large and very profitable to those who own the means of production. To pay women for their work, even at minimum wage scales, would involve a massive redistribution of wealth. At present, the support of the family is a hidden tax on the wage earner – his wage buys the labor power of two people.*
>
> Benston, 1972

The fact that the husband must pay for the production and upkeep of future labour acts as a strong discipline on his behaviour at work. He cannot easily withdraw his labour with a wife and children to support. These responsibilities weaken his bargaining power and commit him to wage labour. Benston argues that:

> *As an economic unit, the nuclear family is a valuable stabilizing force in capitalist society. Since the production which is done in the home is paid for by the husband–father's earnings, his ability to withhold labour from the market is much reduced.*
>
> Benston, 1972

Not only does the family produce and rear cheap labour, it also maintains it at no cost to the employer. In her role as housewife, the woman attends to her husband's needs, thus keeping him in good running order to perform his role as a wage labourer.

Fran Ansley (1972) translates Parsons's view, that the family functions to stabilize adult personalities, into a Marxist framework. She sees the emotional support provided by the wife as a safety valve for the frustration produced in the husband by working in a capitalist system. Rather than being turned against the system which produced it, this frustration is absorbed by the comforting wife. In this way the system is not threatened. In Ansley's words:

When wives play their traditional role as takers of shit, they often absorb their husbands' legitimate anger and frustration at their own powerlessness and oppression. With every worker provided with a sponge to soak up his possibly revolutionary ire, the bosses rest more secure.

Quoted in Bernard, 1976, p. 233

Kathy McAfee and Myrna Wood make a similar point in their discussion of male dominance in the family. They claim that 'The petty dictatorship which most men exercise over their wives and families enables them to vent their anger and frustration in a way which poses no challenge to the system' (quoted in Rowbotham, 1973).

Ideological conditioning

The social reproduction of labour power does not simply involve producing children and maintaining them in good health. It also involves the reproduction of the attitudes essential for an efficient workforce under capitalism. Thus, David Cooper argues that the family is 'an ideological conditioning device in an exploitive society' (Cooper 1972). Within the family, children learn to conform and to submit to authority. The foundation is therefore laid for the obedient and submissive workforce required by capitalism.

A similar point is made by Diane Feeley (1972), who argues that the structure of family relationships socializes the young to accept their place in a class-stratified society. She sees the family as an authoritarian unit dominated by the husband in particular and adults in general. Feeley claims that the family with its 'authoritarian ideology is designed to teach passivity, not rebellion'. Thus children learn to submit to parental authority and emerge from the family preconditioned to accept their place in the hierarchy of power and control in capitalist society.

(Marxist views on the role of the family in capitalist society mirror Marxist analysis of the role of education – see Chapter 11.)

Criticisms

Some of the criticisms of previous views of the family also apply to Marxist approaches. There is a tendency to talk about 'the family' in capitalist society without regard to possible variations in family life between social classes, ethnic groups, heterosexual and gay and lesbian families, lone-parent families, and over time. As D.H.J. Morgan notes in his criticism of both functionalist and Marxist approaches, both 'presuppose a traditional model of the nuclear family where there is a married couple with children, where the husband is the breadwinner and where the wife stays at home to deal with the housework' (Morgan, 1975). This pattern is becoming less common and the critique of this type of family may therefore be becoming less important.

Marxist feminists may therefore exaggerate the harm caused to women by families and may neglect the effects of non-family relationships (apart from class) on exploitation within marriage. Thus, for example, they say little about how the experience of racism might influence families. They also tend to portray female family members as the passive victims of capitalist and patriarchal exploitation. They ignore the possibility that women may have fought back against such exploitation and had some success in changing the nature of family relationships. Furthermore, they are not usually prepared to concede that there may be positive elements to family life. As we shall see, difference feminists are more prepared to accept that there may be some positive advantages for some women, in some families.

Radical feminist perspectives on the family

There are many varieties of radical feminism. As Valerie Bryson says, 'the radical feminist label has been applied in recent years to a confusingly diverse range of theories' (Bryson, 1992). She says 'it is the site for far ranging disagreements at all levels of theory and practice'. However, Bryson does identify some key characteristics which distinguish radical feminists from other feminists:

1 'It is essentially a theory of, by and for women' and therefore 'sees no need to compromise with existing perspectives and agendas'. Radical feminist ideas tend to be novel rather than adaptations of other theories such as Marxism.

2 'It sees the oppression of women as the most fundamental and universal form of domination.' Society is seen as patriarchal, or male-dominated, rather than capitalist, and women are held to have different interests to those of men.

Radical feminists do not agree on the source of male domination, but most do see the family as important in maintaining male power. We will now analyse one major radical feminist theory of the family.

Christine Delphy and Diana Leonard – *Familiar Exploitation*

Types of feminism

Delphy and Leonard (1992) are unlike most radical feminists in that they attach considerable importance to material factors in causing women's oppression. In this respect they have some similarity with Marxist feminist theories. In particular, Delphy and Leonard attach special importance to work and say that their approach 'uses Marxist methodology'. Nevertheless, they see themselves as radical feminists since they believe that it is men, rather than capitalists or capitalism, who are the primary beneficiaries of the exploitation of women's labour. To them, the family has a central role in maintaining patriarchy. They say:

> *We see the familial basis of domestic groups as an important element in continuing the patriarchal nature of our society: that is, in the continuance of men's dominance over women and children.*
>
> Delphy and Leonard, 1992

The family as an economic system

Delphy and Leonard see the family as an economic system. It involves a particular set of '*labour relations* in which men benefit from, and exploit, the work of women – and sometimes that of their children and other male relatives'. The key to this exploitation is that family members work not for themselves but for the head of the household. Women in particular are oppressed, not because they are socialized into being passive, nor because they are ideologically conditioned into subservience, but because their work is appropriated within the family. Delphy and Leonard argue that 'It is primarily the *work* women do, the uses to which our bodies can be put, which constitutes the reason for our oppression.'

Delphy and Leonard identify the following features as the main characteristics of the family as an economic system:

1 Every family-based household has a social structure that involves two types of role. These are head of household and their dependents or helpers. Family households have members who are connected by kinship or marriage. Female heads of household are uncommon. Figures indicate that only about one in ten adult women in Britain aged 16 to 60 heads a household. Most of these women are single or widows and there are no other adults present. Only one in 25 women aged 16 to 60 heads a household which contains other adults. Where a male adult relative is present it is usually he who takes over as head of household. In the case of married women, even if she has the main income and owns the house, 'she is at least semi-subordinate, owing her husband respect and obedience and having responsibility for domestic (and sexual and emotional) labour'.

2 The male head of household is different from other members because he 'decides what needs doing in a given situation' and assigns tasks to other members or delegates to them. Other family members may change his mind about decisions, but it is his mind to change. He makes the final decision.

3 The head of household provides maintenance for other family members, and they receive a share of family property on his death. However, they have to work for him unpaid.

4 The type and amount of work family members have to do are related to sex and marital status. Female relatives have to do unpaid domestic work; wives in addition have to carry out 'sexual and reproductive work'. Although the precise allocation of tasks varies from household to household, domestic work remains a female responsibility.

5 Money and resources for maintenance, and money inherited by dependents, are not related to the amount of work done. A man must provide for his dependents' basic needs, and may be very generous, but, unlike an employer, he does not purchase labour power by the hour, week or amount produced. The amounts inherited by family members are more related to position – with, for example, sons inheriting more than daughters – than to work.

6 The relations of production within the family often, therefore, involve payment in kind (such as a new coat or a holiday) rather than payment in money.

7 The economic relationships rarely involve formal contracts or bargaining. This means that family members must use informal methods of negotiation. For example, 'Wives and children have to study their husbands and fathers closely and handle them carefully so as to keep them sweet.' The male heads have to find informal ways of motivating their workers and, if possible, 'foster their subordinates' feelings of affection for them'.

8 'The head of the family may have a near monopoly over, and he always has greater access to and control of, the family's property and external relations.'

9 When dependents, particularly wives, have paid employment outside the home they still have to carry out household tasks, or pay others out of their wages to do housework or care for children for them.

Domestic labour

Having outlined how the family works as an economic system, Delphy and Leonard go on to examine in more detail who contributes to and who benefits from family life. They admit that most men do some housework but that such tasks are usually done by women. They claim that 'time-budget studies show ... that the amount of time women spend on domestic work has not declined this

century and they still do twice as much each day as men in all western and eastern bloc countries even when they have paid employment'. Furthermore, there is 'a clear order of responsibility to care for children, the sick and elderly'. This responsibility always falls on female relatives, where they are available, except in special circumstances (for example, if the wife is disabled).

On the other hand, when men marry, they end up doing only half the housework they did as bachelors. However much they may decide to 'help' their wives, husbands do not assume responsibility for housework.

Supporting husbands

As well as carrying out housework and caring for children, the sick and older people, women also contribute a great deal to their husbands' work and leisure by providing 'for their emotional and sexual well-being'. Drawing on the work of a British sociologist, Janet Finch, Delphy and Leonard describe some of the types of help provided by wives. Sometimes they provide direct help – for example, doing office work for a self-employed husband, proofreading books if their husband is an author, or doing constituency work if he is an MP. They may stay at home to answer the phone or arrange dinner parties for colleagues of their husband.

Wives also give moral support, 'observing and moderating his emotions, arranging entertainment and relaxation, and supplying personal needs'. Wives are there to listen when their husbands unburden themselves of their work problems. They provide 'trouble-free sex', which is important since 'men frequently unwind best post-coitally'. Wives also make the house into a home so that it is 'comfortable, warm and undemanding'. Women even control their own emotions so that they can provide emotional care for husbands. They 'flatter, excuse, boost, sympathize and pay attention to men', all to give them a sense of well-being.

In contrast, men make little contribution to their wives' work. They find it 'psychologically, socially or legally impossible' to work under their wives' direction. They might give some assistance to working wives, but the husband's career remains the central one.

Consumption

Delphy and Leonard believe, then, that wives contribute much more work to family life than their husbands. Despite this, they get fewer of the material benefits of family life than men. Men retain ultimate responsibility for family finances, and women consume less than male family members. The (usually) male head of household has the 'decision-making power' to determine what goods are produced or bought for the family and who uses them. For instance, 'the food bought is the sort *he* likes, and he gets more of it and the best bits'. Husbands get more leisure time, more access to the family car, or to the best car if there is more than one; and sons get more spent on their education than daughters. In every area of family consumption it is the status of different family members which shapes who gets what.

Empirical evidence

Delphy and Leonard use four main sources to try to back up their claims. Three of these are studies of British factory workers and their families. They use Goldthorpe and Lockwood's 1962 study of affluent workers in Luton (see pp. 79–81 for further details), a 1970s study of 500 workers and their wives in a Bristol company which made cardboard packing cases, and a 1980s study of redundant steel workers in Port Talbot, Wales. They also use data from Christine Delphy's own studies of French farming families.

Although the studies did not always contain the data needed to test their theories, they found support for their arguments in a number of areas. The following are a few examples:

1. In Bristol, the researchers found that husbands did not want their wives to take paid employment and often discouraged them from doing so. Wives had little influence on their husbands' patterns of work.
2. In Port Talbot, most men strongly resisted doing housework, even though they were unemployed. They saw redundancy as a threat to their masculinity and did not want it further undermined by doing 'women's' jobs in the house. Only 25 per cent of the sample gave more than occasional help with housework and in no case did the husband take the main burden of housework. The Port Talbot study also found that the husband usually retained control of the family finances.
3. Delphy's research revealed that wives' labour was vital to the success of French farms. Farms owned by bachelors enjoyed considerably less success than those owned by married men. Nevertheless, wives had little autonomy and were given the 'arduous, least-valued tasks'. Wives had very little say in how the farm was run and farms were usually handed down to sons.

Conclusion and summary

Delphy and Leonard believe that the family is a patriarchal and hierarchical institution through which men dominate and exploit women. Men are usually the head of household, and it is the head who benefits from the work that gets done. Women provide '57 varieties of unpaid service' for men, including providing them with a 'pliant sexual

partner and children if he wants them'. Wives do sometimes resist their husband's dominance – they are not always passive victims – but 'economic and social constraints' make it difficult for women to escape from the patriarchal family.

Delphy and Leonard do not think that there are simple solutions to the problems created by the family. Individual men may love their wives, but that does not stop them from exploiting them. Single mothers cannot escape from patriarchy 'because they are often poor and their situation is always difficult'. Lesbians 'may be downright ostracized and physically attacked'. In the end, they admit that they do not know what strategy feminists should use to change the family, but they believe that women should continue to struggle to improve their lives, both inside and outside family life.

Evaluation

Delphy and Leonard provide a comprehensive analysis of the family from a radical feminist perspective. They highlight many ways in which the family can produce or reinforce inequalities between women and men. However, their work can be criticized both theoretically and empirically:

1 Theoretically, Delphy and Leonard do not succeed in demonstrating that inequality is built into the structure of the family. Their argument is based upon the assumption that *all* families have a head, usually a man, and it is the head who ultimately benefits from family life. However, they do not show theoretically or empirically that all families have a head who has more power than other family members. They fail to acknowledge that there may be some families in which power is shared. It may well be possible to find inequalities in every household, but that does not necessarily mean that one person is dominant. Ironically, they make similar, false assumptions to those found in the work of the functionalist George Peter Murdock (see pp. 504–6).

2 Empirically, their work is based upon unrepresentative data. The three British studies used are all of manual workers, and two of them are rather dated. Most researchers have found less gender inequality in middle-class families than in working-class families, so these studies may have an in-built bias towards supporting their theory. Furthermore, they were not specifically directed at testing Delphy and Leonard's theory. The relevant data are often therefore absent from the research.

3 Delphy's study of French farming families was specifically directed at testing their theories, but farming families are hardly typical of other families. Family members tend to work in the family business – the farm – and few wives have an independent source of income which could reduce marital inequality.

Delphy and Leonard tend to make rather sweeping statements about inequality which may not apply equally to all families. In doing so they perhaps overstate their case by denying the possibility of exceptions.

Laura M. Purdy – 'Babystrike!'

Feminism and motherhood

Like Delphy and Leonard, Laura M. Purdy (1997) believes that women are disadvantaged and exploited in family relationships. Unlike Delphy and Leonard, she believes that these disadvantages largely result from childcare responsibilities rather than from material inequalities. Purdy argues that in recent years feminists have placed less emphasis on criticisms of families and marriage, while issues such as pornography and sexual harassment have come to be seen as more important. She says, 'critiques of marriage and family seem almost forgotten as feminists, like society at large, now seem generally to assume that all women – including lesbians – will pair up and have children'. Some recent accounts of the family in the popular media suggest that it is possible for women to 'have it all'. They can combine a successful career with a rewarding family life and successful and satisfying child-rearing. Purdy questions whether it is really possible to 'have it all' and whether family life in general, and child-rearing in particular, are really the paths to female self-fulfilment.

Purdy suggests that it is generally assumed that women should want to form couples (whether heterosexual or lesbian) and have children. Couples who choose not to have children are thought of as eccentric and selfish. Young women never 'hear that some people shouldn't have children, either because they don't really want them, because they are not able to care for them well, or because they have other projects that are incompatible with good child-rearing'. Purdy believes that feminism should try to counter the assumption that having children is necessarily desirable.

The disadvantages of motherhood

According to Purdy, there are a number of disadvantages for women in having children. Having children is extremely expensive and can increase the burden of poverty on women who are already poor. Having children represents a commitment for women for the rest of their lives, and a particularly onerous commitment during the first 18 years. According to an American study quoted by Purdy, men still do only 20 per cent of domestic work, despite big increases in female employment. This makes it very difficult for women to compete on equal terms in the labour

market or to try to fight for greater equality. She asks, 'How can women energetically fight the entrenched sexism in society and pursue positions of power and prestige if their time and energy is mostly taken up with children's needs, needs that cannot and ought not be ignored?'

Purdy believes that society in general takes it for granted that women will have children and therefore perform the vital function of reproducing the species. The only way to bring home to men the sacrifices of child-rearing is for women to stop having children. In other words, Purdy advocates a babystrike. Only then would men take women's demands for equality within families seriously. Only then would social arrangements change so that women were able to combine having children with successful careers.

Evaluation

The idea of a babystrike is a novel suggestion for focusing male attention on the disadvantages suffered by women. Purdy makes an important point in drawing attention to the particular problems posed for women by the responsibilities of childcare. However, she places perhaps too much emphasis on one factor – that of child-rearing – in creating and perpetuating women's disadvantages in families. Other feminists, perhaps with some justification, would not accept that children are the only, or even the main, reason for women being unequal within families. They certainly would not accept that women only start to suffer inequality once they have children. Like a number of other theorists of the family, Purdy may exaggerate the effects of one particular source of inequality while neglecting others.

Difference feminism

Neither Marxist nor radical feminism is particularly sensitive to variations between families. Both approaches tend to assume that families in general disadvantage women and benefit men (and, in the case of Marxist approaches, benefit capitalism). Both can be criticized for failing to acknowledge the variety of domestic arrangements produced by different groups, and the range of effects that family life can have.

Increasingly, however, feminists have begun to highlight the differences between groups of women in different family situations. Thus, they have argued that women in single-parent families are in a different situation to women in two-parent families; women in lesbian families are in a different position to women in heterosexual families; black women are often in a different family position to white women; poor women are in a different position to middle-class women, and so on. Feminists who analyse the family in these terms have sometimes been referred to as 'difference feminists'. Difference feminists have been influenced by a range of feminist theories including liberal feminism (see pp. 136–9), Marxist feminism and radical feminism. Their work often has affinities with postmodern theories of the family (see pp. 582–4) and with ideas relating to family diversity (see pp. 537–49). However, they share a sufficiently distinctive approach to be considered a separate feminist perspective on the family.

Michèlle Barrett and Mary McIntosh – *The Anti-social Family*

One of the earliest examples of a theory of the family put forward by difference feminists is provided by the work of Michèlle Barrett and Mary McIntosh (1982). Their work was influenced by Marxist feminism but moves beyond the kinds of Marxist feminist views discussed earlier (see pp. 514–15). Barrett and McIntosh believe that the idea of 'the family' is misleading, given the wide variations that exist in life within families and the varieties of household types in which people live. (Family and household diversity is discussed on pp. 537–49.) If there is no one normal or typical family type, then it may be impossible to claim that the family always performs particular functions either for men or for capitalism.

The 'anti-social' family

Barrett and McIntosh do believe that there is a very strong ideology supporting family life. To them 'the family' is 'anti-social' not just because it exploits women, and benefits capitalists, but also because the ideology of the family destroys life outside the family. They say 'the family ideal makes everything else seem pale and unsatisfactory'. People outside families suffer as a consequence. Family members are so wrapped up in family life that they neglect social contact with others. 'Couples mix with other couples, finding it difficult to fit single people in.'

Life in other institutions (such as children's homes, old people's homes and students' residences) comes to be seen as shallow and lacking in meaning. Barrett and McIntosh argue that homes for the handicapped could be far more stimulating for, say, Down's syndrome sufferers, if it were not for life in institutions being devalued by the ideology of the family.

Like other feminists, they point out that the image of the family as involving love and mutual care tends to ignore the amount of violent and sexual crime that takes place within a family context. They note that 25 per cent of reported violent crimes consist of assaults by husbands on their wives, and many rapes take place within marriage.

They do not deny that there can be caring relationships within families, but equally they do not think that families are the only places in which such relationships can develop. In their view, the ideology that idealizes family life:

> *has made the outside world cold and friendless, and made it harder to maintain relationships of security and trust except with kin. Caring, sharing and loving would all be more widespread if the family did not claim them for its own.*
>
> Barrett and McIntosh, 1982

Linda Nicholson – 'The myth of the traditional family'

Like Barrett and McIntosh, Linda Nicholson (1997) believes that there is a powerful ideology which gives support to a positive image of family life. She argues that this ideology only supports certain types of family while devaluing other types. Nicholson contrasts what she calls the 'traditional' family with 'alternative' families. She is an American feminist and her comments largely refer to the USA, but they may be applicable more generally to Western societies.

The 'traditional' family

Nicholson defines the traditional family as 'the unit of parents with children who live together'. The bond between husband and wife is seen as particularly important, and the family feels itself to be separate from other kin. This family group is often referred to as the nuclear family (see pp. 524–5). When conservative social commentators express concern about the decline of the family, it is this sort of family they are concerned about. They tend to be less worried about any decline of wider kinship links involving grandparents, aunts, uncles and so on.

According to Nicholson, the nuclear family is a comparatively recent phenomenon. It first developed among upper classes in the eighteenth century. For middle-class groups this type of family only became popular in the nineteenth century. Working-class people often aspired to form nuclear families in the nineteenth century, but their low income usually prevented them from doing so. They frequently had to share accommodation with others from outside the nuclear family. Indeed, it was not really until the 1950s and the post-Second World War boom that nuclear family households became the norm for working-class families. Thus Nicholson argues that the conventional family is actually a very recent phenomenon for most people.

However, even in the 1950s, some groups lacked the resources to form nuclear families. This was the case for people with few or outdated skills and for many African Americans who were the victims of racism in the labour market.

Alternative families

Alternative family forms were already developing even before the traditional family reached its zenith. Nicholson says that:

> *even as a certain ideal of family was coming to define 'the American way of life', such trends as a rising divorce rate, increased participation of married women in the labor force, and the growth of female-headed households were making this way of life increasingly atypical. In all cases such trends preceded the 1950s.*
>
> Nicholson, 1997, p. 35

Some of these changes actually altered what was perceived as a 'traditional' family. For example, it came to be seen as 'normal' for married women to work, even if they and their partners had small children. Other changes, though, were seen as producing alternative families. Alternatives to traditional families included, 'Not only gays and lesbians but heterosexuals living alone; married couples with husbands at home caring for children', as well as stepfamilies, single parents, heterosexual couples living together outside marriage, and gay or lesbian couples with or without children.

The merits of different family types

Alternative families, or alternatives to traditional families, tend to be devalued. They are seen as less worthy than traditional families. However, Nicholson rejects this view. Alternative families are often better than traditional ones for the women who live in them. For example, poor black women in the USA derive some benefits when they live in mother-centred families, often without men. They develop strong support networks with other friends and kin, who act as a kind of social insurance system. They

help out the families who are most in need at a particular time if they are in a position to do so.

Such families do have disadvantages. If they have some good fortune and come into money, each family is expected to share resources. This makes it difficult for individual families to escape poverty. Furthermore, the lack of stable heterosexual partnerships means that 'children frequently do not have the type of long-term relationships with father figures which is normative within middle-class households'.

Traditional families also have advantages and disadvantages. Because both partners now tend to work, they have tremendous time pressures, making it difficult to carry out satisfactory and rewarding childcare. Children who are the victims of abuse by parents have relatively little opportunity to turn to other relatives for help. Traditional families place a heavy burden of expectation on the partners, and, with work and childcare commitments, it may be difficult for them to provide the love and companionship each partner expects. The traditional family also precludes and excludes gay and lesbian relationships.

However, traditional families do have some advantages. Their small size tends to encourage intimacy between family members, and, when the relationships work, they can be rewarding and long-lasting.

Traditional families can be economically successful because they are not under strong requirements to share their resources with others.

Conclusion

The fact that they have some advantages does not mean that traditional families are better than alternative types. From Nicholson's point of view, different types of family suit different women in different circumstances. She believes that the distinction between traditional and alternative families should be abandoned. The distinction implies that traditional families are better, when this is often not true. In any case, the idea of the traditional family misleadingly implies that such families have long been the norm, when in fact they have only become popular in recent times, and have never been totally dominant.

By the late 1990s so many people lived in alternatives to traditional families that the idea of the traditional family had become totally outdated. Nicholson therefore concludes that all types of family and household should be acknowledged and accepted because they could suit women in different circumstances. She advocates the celebration of greater choice for people in deciding on their own living arrangements.

Cheshire Calhoun – lesbians as family outlaws

Like Linda Nicholson, Cheshire Calhoun develops a type of difference feminism influenced by postmodernism (Calhoun, 1997). Unlike Nicholson, she focuses on lesbian families rather than looking at the merits of a variety of family forms for women. Calhoun is a postmodern, difference feminist from the United States.

Calhoun argues that feminist theories have generally neglected sexual orientation as a source of oppression distinct from gender oppression. However, Nicholson believes that sexual orientation can be an important source of oppression and that family ideology contributes to that oppression.

Conventional feminist views

Calhoun starts by noting conventional feminist views on the family. Such views see the family as an important source of female oppression for a variety of reasons. These include the ways in which families make women financially dependent upon men, the way family ideology encourages women to put the family before their own interests, inequalities in the amount of domestic work done by men and women, and the way in which family ideology 'often masks gender injustice within the family including battery, rape and child abuse'.

Calhoun accepts that this sort of feminist analysis is accurate but says that 'This picture ... is not, in fact, a picture of *women's* relation to the family, but is more narrowly a picture of *heterosexual* women's relation to the family, marriage and mothering.' Lesbians who live outside heterosexual families can hardly be directly exploited by relationships within such families. Indeed lesbians are uniquely placed to avoid dependence on men within families. However, Calhoun does believe that they are disadvantaged by the ideology of the heterosexual family.

Some lesbian feminists have argued that lesbians should avoid forming families. They have argued that, because women are exploited in heterosexual marriages, marriage and family life are inevitably patriarchal. Similarly they have argued that, because mothering disadvantages heterosexual women – by, for example, limiting their opportunities in the labour market – lesbian women should also avoid becoming mothers. Calhoun disagrees. She believes that it is not family life itself that leads to the exploitation of women, rather it is family life within patriarchal, heterosexual marriages that is the problem. Lesbian marriage and mothering can avoid the exploitative relationships typical of heterosexual marriage. Indeed, lesbian partners may be able to develop forms of marriage and family life which can point

the way to creating more egalitarian domestic relationships.

This view is in stark contrast to a more conventional view that lesbians and gays cannot develop proper marriages or construct genuine families. According to Calhoun, gays and lesbians have historically been portrayed as 'family outlaws'. Their sexuality has been seen as threatening to the family. They have been portrayed as 'outsiders to the family and as displaying the most virulent forms of family-disrupting behaviour'. However, Calhoun believes that the anxiety among heterosexuals about gays and lesbians has in fact been caused by anxiety about the state of the heterosexual nuclear family. Rather than recognizing and acknowledging the problems with such families, heterosexuals have tried to attribute the problems to corrupting outsiders or outlaws: that is, gays and lesbians.

Crises of heterosexual families

Calhoun believes that there have been three historical periods when heterosexual families have been seen as in crisis and consequently gays and lesbians have become a focus of critical attention:

1 In the period from the 1880s to the 1920s, conventional heterosexual family life was challenged by early feminists who campaigned for greater legal rights for women, such as the right to institute divorce proceedings and the right for married women to own property. Some medical theorists attributed these campaigns to women who were too masculine. They developed 'a new gender category variously labelled the sexual invert, the intermediate sex, the third sex ... the man-woman'. This group of women was distinguished by masculine traits such as short hair, smoking and drinking, being aggressive and so on. Calhoun describes this category as 'the precursor to the contemporary categories "lesbian" and "homosexual"'. Most men were unable to accept that the challenge to male supremacy within the family could be mounted by normal women seeking greater equality, and so blamed it on women who deviated from conventional gender norms.

2 From the 1930s to the 1950s, the economic depression and the Second World War were the main sources of a crisis in heterosexual families. During the depression many men lost their jobs and, with it, their breadwinner role. There was also a drop in marriage rates. During the war there were long separations for many married couples, and divorce and desertion became much more common. To Calhoun, all of this represented a 'cultural crisis in masculinity'. With increasing numbers of men unable to sustain their masculinity through being the breadwinning heads of families, there was a 'shift in the cultural construction of masculinity from being gender-based to being sexuality-based'. The key aspect of masculinity now became being heterosexual, not being head of a family. The distinction between (desirable) heterosexuality and (undesirable) homosexuality was reinforced in panics about homosexual child molesters in the periods from 1937 to 1940 and from 1949 to 1955. Once again, a crisis in the heterosexual family was blamed on the corrupting influence of homosexual outsiders on conventional family life.

3 In the 1980s and 1990s a whole range of factors undermined heterosexual family life. These included rising divorce rates and single-parent families becoming so common that 'Father's Day cards now include ones addressed to mothers, and others announcing their recipients as "like a dad"'.

Extended kinship networks have become increasingly important for the urban poor, and the idea of the family headed by a heterosexual couple with their offspring has been undermined by new reproductive technology. Calhoun says:

> *Increasingly sophisticated birth control methods and technologically assisted reproduction using in-vitro fertilization, artificial insemination, contract pregnancy, fertility therapies, and the like undermine cultural understandings of the marital couple as a naturally reproductive unit, introduce nonrelated others into the reproductive process, and make it possible for women and men to have children without a heterosexual partner.*
>
> Calhoun, 1997, pp. 142-3

According to Calhoun, modern family life is essentially characterized by choice. Lesbians and gays introduced the idea of chosen families. You can choose who to include in your family without the restrictions of blood ties or the expectation of settling down with and marrying an opposite-sex partner. Now, however, heterosexuals also construct 'chosen families' as they divorce, remarry, separate, choose new partners, adopt children, gain stepchildren and so on.

Rather than seeing the above changes in a positive light, many commentators have seen them as a threat to families and the institution of marriage. This time there have been two main types of family outlaw who have been scapegoated and blamed for the changes. These are 'the unwed welfare mother and ... the lesbian or gay whose mere public visibility threatens to undermine family values and destroy the family'. In Britain, for example, the Local Government Act of the late 1980s made illegal 'the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship' (quoted in Calhoun, 1997). Similarly, in 1990, the US Congress passed a law prohibiting the federal government from using funds to promote homosexuality.

Conclusion

Calhoun concludes that such scapegoating of lesbians and gays is used to disguise the increasingly frequent departures from the norms of family life by heterosexuals. She says:

> *claiming that gay and lesbian families are (or should be) distinctively queer and distinctively deviant helps conceal the deviancy in heterosexual families, and thereby helps to sustain the illusion that heterosexuals are specially entitled to access to a protected private sphere because they, unlike their gay and lesbian counterparts, are supporters of the family.*
>
> Calhoun, 1997, p. 146

Thus the ideology of the heterosexual family has played an important part in encouraging discrimination and prejudice against gays and lesbians.

To Calhoun, gay and lesbian relationships, with or without children, are just as much family relationships as those of heterosexual couples. She does not believe that arguing for them to be accepted as such in any way legitimates the heterosexual, patriarchal family that has been so criticized by radical and Marxist feminists. In the contemporary world, heterosexual families engage in 'multiple deviations from norms governing the family'. A wide variety of behaviours and family forms have become common and widely accepted. Accepting gays and lesbians as forming families involves the acceptance of just one more variation from traditional conventional families. It has the potential benefit of reducing the anti-gay and anti-lesbian prejudice that has been promoted in the name of preserving the family.

Difference feminism – conclusion

The feminists discussed in this section all avoid the mistake of making sweeping generalizations about the effects of family life on women. They tend to be sensitive to the different experiences of family life experienced by women of different sexual orientations, ethnic groups, classes and so on (although each writer does not necessarily discuss all the sources of difference that affect how families influence women's lives). In these respects they can be seen as representing theoretical advances upon some of the Marxist and radical theories discussed earlier.

However, *some* difference feminists do sometimes lose sight of the inequalities between men and women in families by stressing the range of choices open to people when they are forming families. By stressing the different experiences of women they tend to neglect the common experiences shared by most women in families. Nevertheless, this general approach may be right to suggest that it is possible (if not common) for both men and women to develop rewarding and fulfilling family relationships.

This section has examined the family from a variety of perspectives. The focus now changes to various themes that are significant to our understanding of the family as a unit of social organization. The first theme is the effect of industrialization and modernization on the family.

The family, industrialization and modernization

The pre-industrial family

A major theme in sociological studies of the family is the relationship between the structure of the family and the related processes of industrialization and modernization. Industrialization refers to the mass production of goods in a factory system which involves some degree of mechanized production technology. Modernization refers to the development of social, cultural, economic and political practices and institutions which are thought to be typical of modern societies. Such developments include the replacement of religious belief systems with scientific and rational ones, the growth of bureaucratic institutions, and the replacement of monarchies with representative democracies (see p. 8 for an introduction to the concept of modernity).

Some sociologists regard industrialization as the central process involved in changes in Western societies since the eighteenth century; others attach more importance to broader processes of modernization. However, there are a number of problems that arise from relating the family to industrialization or modernization:

1. The processes of industrialization and modernization do not follow the same course in every society.
2. Industrialization and modernization are not fixed states but developing processes. Thus the industrial system in nineteenth-century Britain was different in important respects from that of today. Similarly, British culture, society and politics are very different at the turn of the millennium from how they were two hundred years earlier.
3. Some writers dispute that we still live in modern industrial societies and believe that we have moved

into a phase of postmodernity. The issue of the family and postmodernity will be examined later in the chapter (see pp. 582–4).

Further difficulties arise from the fact that there is not one form of pre-industrial, or pre-modern, family, but many.

Much of the research on the family, industrialization and modernization has led to considerable confusion because it is not always clear what the family in modern industrial society is being compared to. In addition, within modern industrial society there are variations in family structure. As a starting point, therefore, it is necessary for us to examine the family in pre-modern, pre-industrial societies in order to establish a standard for comparison.

The family in non-literate societies

In many small-scale, non-literate societies, the family and kinship relationships in general are the basic organizing principles of social life. Societies are often divided into a number of kinship groups, such as lineages, which are groups descended from a common ancestor. The family is embedded in a web of kinship relationships. Kinship groups are responsible for the production of important goods and services. For example, a lineage may own agricultural land which is worked, and its produce shared, by members of the lineage.

Members of kinship groups are united by a network of mutual rights and obligations. In some cases, if individuals are insulted or injured by someone from outside the group, they have the right to call on the support of members of the group in seeking reparation or revenge. Many areas of an individual's behaviour are shaped by his or her status as kin. An uncle, for example, may have binding obligations to be involved with aspects of his nephew's socialization and may be responsible for the welfare of his nieces and nephews should their father die.

Something of the importance of family and kinship relationships in many small-scale societies is illustrated by the following statement by a Pomo Indian of northern California:

> *What is a man? A man is nothing. Without his family he is of less importance than that bug crossing the trail. In the white ways of doing things the family is not so important. The police and soldiers take care of protecting you, the courts give you justice, the post office carries messages for you, the school teaches you. Everything is taken care of, even your children, if you die; but with us the family must do all of that.*
>
> Quoted in Aginsky, 1968

In this brief description of the family in small-scale, pre-industrial society we have glossed over the wide variations in family and kinship patterns which are found in such societies. Even so, it does serve to highlight some of the more important differences between the family in kinship-based society and the family in industrial society.

The 'classic' extended family

A second form of pre-industrial, pre-modern family, sometimes known as the classic extended family, is found in some traditional peasant societies. This family type has been made famous by C.M. Arensberg and S.T. Kimball's study of Irish farmers, entitled *Family and Community in Ireland* (Arensberg and Kimball, 1968).

As in kinship-based societies, kinship ties dominate life, but in this case the basic unit is the extended family rather than the wider kinship grouping. The traditional Irish farming family is a patriarchal extended family, so-called because of the considerable authority of the male head. It is also patrilineal because property is passed down through the male line. Within the family, social and economic roles are welded together, status being ascribed by family membership.

On the farm, the father–son relationship is also that of owner–employee. The father–owner makes all important decisions (such as whether to sell cattle) and directs the activities of all the other members of the extended family. He is head of the family and 'director of the firm'.

Typically, the classic extended family consists of the male head, his wife and children, his ageing parents who have passed on the farm to him, and any unmarried brothers and sisters. Together they work as a 'production unit', producing the goods necessary for the family's survival.

Some people have argued that, as industrialization and modernization proceed, kinship-based society and the classic extended family tend to break up, and the nuclear family – or some form of modified extended family – emerges as the predominant family form.

Talcott Parsons – the 'isolated nuclear family'

Structural isolation

Talcott Parsons argued that the isolated nuclear family is the typical family form in modern industrial society (Parsons, 1959, 1965b, Parsons and Bale, 1955). It is 'structurally isolated' because it does not form an integral part of a wider system of kinship relationships. Obviously there are social relationships between members of nuclear families

and their kin but these relationships are more a matter of choice than binding obligations.

Parsons saw the emergence of the isolated nuclear family in terms of his theory of social evolution. (This theory is outlined in Chapter 15.) The evolution of society involves a process of structural differentiation. This simply means that institutions evolve which specialize in fewer functions. As a result, the family and kinship groups no longer perform a wide range of functions. Instead, specialist institutions such as business firms, schools, hospitals, police forces and churches take over many of their functions.

This process of differentiation and specialization involves the 'transfer of a variety of functions from the nuclear family to other structures of the society'. Thus, in modern industrial society, with the transfer of the production of goods to factories, specialized economic institutions became differentiated from the family. The family ceased to be an economic unit of production.

The family and the economy

Functionalist analysis emphasizes the importance of integration and harmony between the various parts of society. An efficient social system requires the parts to fit smoothly rather than abrade. The parts of society are functionally related when they contribute to the integration and harmony of the social system.

Parsons argued that there is a functional relationship between the isolated nuclear family and the economic system in industrial society. In particular, the isolated nuclear family is shaped to meet the requirements of the economic system. A modern industrial system with a specialized division of labour demands considerable geographical mobility from its labour force. Individuals with specialized skills are required to move to places where those skills are in demand. The isolated nuclear family is suited to this need for geographical mobility. It is not tied down by binding obligations to a wide range of kin and, compared to the pre-industrial families described above, it is a small, streamlined unit.

Status in the family

Status in industrial society is achieved rather than ascribed. Individuals' occupational status is not automatically fixed by their ascribed status in the family or kinship group. Parsons argued that the isolated nuclear family is the best form of family structure for a society based on achieved status.

In industrial society, individuals are judged in terms of the status they achieve. Such judgements are based on what Parsons termed universalistic values, that is values that are universally applied to all members of society. However, within the family, status is ascribed and, as such, based on particularistic values, that is values that are applied only to particular individuals. Thus a son's relationship with his father is conducted primarily in terms of their ascribed statuses of father and son. The father's achieved status as a bricklayer, schoolteacher or lawyer has relatively little influence on their relationship since his son does not judge him primarily in terms of universalistic values.

Parsons argued that, in a society based on achieved status, conflict would tend to arise in a family unit larger than the isolated nuclear family. In a three-generation extended family, in which the children remained as part of the family unit, the following situation could produce conflict. If the son became a doctor and the father was a labourer, the particularistic values of family life would give the father a higher status than his son. Yet the universalistic values of society as a whole would award his son higher social status. Conflict could result from this situation, which might undermine the authority of the father and threaten the solidarity of the family.

The same conflict of values could occur if the nuclear family were extended horizontally. Relationships between a woman and her sister might be problematic if they held jobs of widely differing prestige.

The isolated nuclear family largely prevents these problems from arising. There is one main breadwinner, the husband–father. His wife is mainly responsible for raising the children and the latter have yet to achieve their status in the world of work. No member of the family is in a position to threaten the ascribed authority structure by achieving a status outside the family which is higher than the achieved status of the family head.

These problems do not occur in pre-modern, pre-industrial societies. There, occupational status is largely ascribed, since an individual's position in the family and kinship group usually determines his or her job. Parsons concluded that, given the universalistic, achievement-orientated values of industrial society, the isolated nuclear family is the most suitable family structure. Any extension of this basic unit may well create conflict which would threaten the solidarity of the family.

As a consequence of the structural isolation of the nuclear family, the conjugal bond – the relationship between husband and wife – is strengthened. Without the support of kin beyond the nuclear family, spouses are increasingly dependent on each other, particularly for emotional support. As we outlined previously, Parsons argued that the stabilization of adult personalities is a major function of the family in modern industrial society. This is largely accomplished in terms of the husband–wife relationship.

William J. Goode

In *World Revolution and Family Patterns* (1963), William J. Goode surveyed the relationship between family structure and industrialization in various parts of the world. Like Parsons, he argued that industrialization tends to undermine the extended family and larger kinship groupings. Goode offered the following explanations for this process:

1 The high rate of geographical mobility in industrial society decreases 'the frequency and intimacy of contact among members of the kin network'.
2 The relatively high level of social mobility also tends to weaken kinship ties. If members of a working-class family become upwardly mobile, for example, they may adopt the lifestyle, attitudes and values of their new social class. This would tend to cut them off from their working-class kin.
3 Many of the functions once performed by the family have been taken over by outside agencies such as schools, business and welfare organizations. This reduces the dependency of individuals on their family and kin.
4 The importance of achieved status in industrial society means that the family and kinship group have less to offer their members. The family cannot guarantee its members a job or directly provide the necessary education and training to obtain one. The highly specialized division of labour in industrial society makes it even more difficult for an individual to obtain a job for a relative. As Goode states, 'He may not be in a suitable sector of the occupational sphere, or at a level where his influence is useful' (Goode, 1963).

Ideology and the nuclear family

However, Goode did not regard the pressures of industrialization as the only reason for the breakdown of extended family ties. He argued that the move to nuclear families had been 'far more rapid than could be supposed or predicted from the degree of industrialization alone'.

Goode believed that the ideology of the nuclear family had encouraged its growth, particularly in non-Western societies. This is due partly to the prestige of Western ideas and lifestyles. Since the nuclear family is found 'in many areas where the rate of industrialization is slight', Goode recognized 'the independent power of *ideological* variables'. He also argued that the spread of the nuclear family is due in part to the freedom it affords its members. In this type of family people owe fewer obligations to their kin.

The extended family and role bargaining

Goode applied the concept of role bargaining to his study of the family. This means that individuals attempt to obtain the best possible 'bargain' in their relationships with others. They will attempt to maximize their gains. In terms of family relationships, this means they will maintain relationships with kin and submit to their control if they feel they are getting a good return on their investment of time, energy and emotion.

With respect to the extended family and industrialization, Goode argued that 'It is not so much that the new system is incompatible, as it offers an alternative pattern of payments.' In other words, extended family patterns can operate in industrial society. Although it costs time and money, the rapid transport system in modern society means that 'the individual can maintain an extended kin network if he wishes to do so'. However, the 'alternative pattern of payments' offered by industrial society provides a better bargain for many people. They gain more by rejecting close and frequent contacts with kin beyond the nuclear family, than by retaining them.

Goode used the concept of role bargaining to explain social class differences in family structure. From his world survey, Goode found that extended family patterns are most likely to occur in the upper classes. Since members of ruling classes and elites have an important influence on appointments to top jobs, the retention of family ties makes economic sense. In Goode's terms, it is an effective role bargain. By comparison, members of the lower strata 'have little to offer the younger generation to counteract their normal tendency to independence'.

Goode concluded that extended kinship ties are retained if individuals feel they have more to gain than to lose by maintaining them.

Criticism of Parsons and Goode

So far, the arguments examined in this section suggest that modernization and industrialization led to a shift from predominantly extended to predominantly nuclear family types. The nuclear family is portrayed by writers such as Parsons and Goode as being well-adapted to the requirements of modern industrial societies. Furthermore, the nuclear family is generally portrayed in a positive light. David Cheal sees this view as being closely related to the modernist view of progress (Cheal, 1991).

Cheal describes modernism as 'a self-conscious commitment to, and advocacy of the world-changing potential of modernity'. Writers such as Parsons and Goode put forward a modernist interpretation of the family. Cheal attacks Parsons in particular.

Parsons saw the change towards a nuclear family as part of the increased specialization of institutions. The family was seen as an increasingly well-adapted specialist institution which interacted with other specialist institutions such as those of the welfare

state. Cheal is very sceptical of the modernist view of the family advocated by Parsons. He claims that the faith in progress expressed by writers like Parsons and Goode ignored contradictions within modernity. Changes in different parts of society did not always go hand-in-hand. For example, increased employment of women in paid employment did not lead to men sharing domestic tasks equally. From Cheal's point of view, there is nothing inevitable about modern institutions developing in such a way that they functioned well together. Furthermore, Cheal argues that:

> *Parsons's generalizations about family life were often seriously parochial, reflecting narrow experiences of gender, class, race and nationality. Inevitably, that resulted in Parsons drawing some conclusions that have not stood up well to empirical investigation, or to the passage of time.*
>
> Cheal, 1991, p. 34

Peter Laslett – the family in pre-industrial societies

The family in kinship-based society and the classic extended family represent only two possible forms of family structure in pre-industrial society. Historical research in Britain and America suggests that neither was typical of those countries in the pre-industrial era.

Peter Laslett, a Cambridge historian, has studied family size and composition in pre-industrial England (Laslett, 1972a, 1972b, 1977). For the period between 1564 and 1821 he found that only about 10 per cent of households contained kin beyond the nuclear family. This percentage is the same as for England in 1966. Evidence from America presents a similar picture.

This surprisingly low figure may be due in part to the fact that people in pre-industrial England and America married relatively late in life and life expectancy was short. On average, there were only a few years between the marriage of a couple and the death of their parents. However, Laslett found no evidence to support the formerly accepted view that the classic extended family was widespread in pre-industrial England. He states that 'There is no sign of the large, extended co-residential family group of the traditional peasant world giving way to the small, nuclear conjugal household of modern industrial society.'

The 'Western family'

Following on from his research in England, Laslett began to draw together the results of research into pre-industrial family size in other countries (Laslett, 1983, 1984). He reached the conclusion that the nuclear family was not just typical of Britain. He uncovered evidence that there was a distinctive 'Western family' found also in northern France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Scandinavia and parts of Italy and Germany. This type of family was typically nuclear in structure: children were born relatively late, there was little age gap between spouses, and a large number of families contained servants. This family type contrasted with Eastern Europe and other parts of the world (such as Russia and Japan) where the extended family was more common.

According to Laslett, it was at least possible that the predominance of the nuclear family was a factor that helped Western Europe to be the first area of the world to industrialize. He reversed the more common argument that industrialization led to the nuclear family, claiming that the nuclear family had social, political and economic consequences which in part led to industrialization.

Family diversity in pre-industrial societies

Although Laslett has successfully exploded the myth that the extended family was typical of pre-industrial Britain, his conclusions should be viewed with some caution.

Michael Anderson (1980) points out some contradictory evidence in Laslett's own research. Laslett's research might have shown average household size to be under five people, but it also revealed that a majority of the population in pre-industrial Britain (53 per cent) lived in households consisting of six or more people. Anderson also referred to other research that suggests a much greater variety of household types than Laslett's theory of the Western family implies. For instance, research has shown that in Sweden extended families were very common. Furthermore, there is evidence of considerable variation within Britain: the gentry and yeoman farmers, for example, tended to have much larger households than the average.

For these reasons, Anderson is critical of the idea of the 'Western family'. He believes pre-industrial Europe was characterized by family diversity without any one type of family being predominant.

Michael Anderson – household structure and the Industrial Revolution

Michael Anderson's own research into the effects of industrialization on families does not, however, support the view that during industrialization extended families began to disappear (Anderson, 1971, 1977).

Using data from the 1851 census of Preston, Michael Anderson found that some 23 per cent of households contained kin other than the nuclear family – a large increase over Laslett's figures and those of today. The bulk of this 'co-residence' occurred among the poor. Anderson argues that co-residence occurs when the parties involved receive net gains from the arrangement. He states:

> *If we are to understand variations and changes in patterns of kinship relationships, the only worthwhile approach is consciously and explicitly to investigate the manifold advantages and disadvantages that any actor can obtain from maintaining one relational pattern rather than another.*
>
> Anderson, 1971, p. 77

Extended families and mutual aid

Preston in 1851 was largely dependent on the cotton industry. Life for many working-class families was characterized by severe hardship, resulting from low wages, periods of high unemployment, large families, a high death rate and overcrowded housing. In these circumstances, the maintenance of a large kinship network could be advantageous to all concerned:

1. In the absence of a welfare state, individuals were largely dependent on kin in times of hardship and need. Ageing parents often lived with their married children, a situation that benefited both parties. It provided support for the aged and allowed both the parents to work in the factory, since the grandparents could care for the dependent children.
2. The high death rate led to a large number of orphans, many of whom found a home with relatives. Again the situation benefited both parties. It provided support for the children who would soon, in an age of child labour, make an important contribution to household income.
3. A high rate of sickness and unemployment encouraged a wide network of kin as a means of mutual support: with no sickness and unemployment benefits, individuals were forced to rely on their kin in times of hardship.
4. Co-residence also provided direct economic advantages to those concerned. Additional members of the household would lower the share of the rent paid by each individual.
5. Finally, the practice of recruiting for jobs through kin encouraged the establishment of a wide kinship network. Anderson notes that the system of '"Asking for" a job for kin was normal in the factory towns and the employers used the kinship system to recruit labour from the country.'

Anderson's study of Preston indicates that, in the mid-nineteenth century, the working-class family functioned as a mutual aid organization. It provided an insurance policy against hardship and crisis. This function encouraged the extension of kinship bonds beyond the nuclear family. Such links would be retained as long as they provided net gains to those involved. Anderson concludes that the early stages of industrialization increased rather than decreased the extension of the working-class family.

Elizabeth Roberts – family life and duty

Like Anderson, Elizabeth Roberts has studied family life in Lancashire (Roberts, 1984). She conducted a study of working-class women in three Lancashire towns: Preston, Barrow and Lancaster. The study used oral history techniques, interviewing people about their past lives, in order to examine family life between 1890 and 1940.

Like Anderson, Roberts found that extended kinship links remained very strong in working-class families, with family members helping each other out in many different ways. However, her findings differ from Anderson's in two important respects:

1. Roberts found evidence of a great deal of support being given by working-class women to family members in other households as well as to the family members with whom they lived.
2. She denies Anderson's claim that family relationships are largely based upon self-interest. Roberts found that women often gave practical, emotional and even financial support to other family members without getting or expecting much in return. Indeed, providing this help often cost the giver a good deal in time, effort and sometimes money. Roberts therefore argues that family relationships were based rather more on emotions and values than calculating self-interest. People helped their relatives because they felt affection or a sense of duty towards them, and not just because they had something to gain.

Evaluation

Janet Finch (1989) suggests a number of possible explanations for the differences in the findings of Roberts and Anderson:

1. Their studies refer to different time periods. Finch advances the possibility that family life had become less harsh and had stabilized by the end of the nineteenth century, giving people more opportunity to give unselfish support to their kin.
2. The differences could relate to gender. Roberts's study was based upon studies of women and it could be that women are more likely than men to have a strong sense of duty towards relatives.
3. The differences could be a result of using different research methods. Anderson largely used

quantitative data from census returns; Roberts used qualitative data from in-depth interviews. Interviews would be more likely to reveal a sense of duty towards relatives than statistical data.

Finch concludes that the two studies do not necessarily have to be seen as contradictory. It may be that they highlight different aspects of family life in which:

> *Feelings of affection and concepts of duty are taken into calculations about mutual advantage based on material considerations. The result is patterns of support whose basis is probably far more complex than it appears to an outsider and which also perhaps includes the expectation that love and affection themselves will be reciprocated.*
>
> Finch, 1989

Whatever the basis of support between kin, Roberts and Anderson are in agreement that nineteenth-century industrialization did not destroy extended family relationships. This conclusion is also supported by the next research that we will consider, that of Young and Willmott.

Michael Young and Peter Willmott – four stages of family life

Michael Young and Peter Willmott conducted studies of family life in London from the 1950s to the 1970s. In their book, *The Symmetrical Family*, they attempt to trace the development of the family from pre-industrial England to the 1970s (Young and Willmott, 1973). Using a combination of historical research and social surveys, they suggest that the family has gone through four main stages. In this section we will concentrate on their analysis of the working-class family.

Stage 1 – the pre-industrial family

Stage 1 is represented by the pre-industrial family. The family is a unit of production: the husband, wife and unmarried children work as a team, typically in agriculture or textiles. This type of family was gradually supplanted as a result of the Industrial Revolution. However, it continued well into the nineteenth century and is still represented in a small minority of families today, the best examples being some farming families.

Stage 2 – the early industrial family

The Stage 2 family began with the Industrial Revolution, developed throughout the nineteenth century and reached its peak in the early years of the twentieth century. The family ceased to be a unit of production since individual members were employed as wage earners. Throughout the nineteenth century, working-class poverty was widespread, wages were low and unemployment high. Like Anderson, Young and Willmott argue that the family responded to this situation by extending its network to include relatives beyond the nuclear family. This provided an insurance policy against the insecurity and hardship of poverty.

The extension of the nuclear family was largely conducted by women who 'eventually built up an organization in their own defence and in defence of their children'. The basic tie was between a mother and her married daughter, and, in comparison, the conjugal bond (the husband–wife relationship) was weak. Women created an 'informal trade union' which largely excluded men. Young and Willmott claim that 'Husbands were often squeezed out of the warmth of the female circle and took to the pub as their defence.'

Compared to later stages, the Stage 2 family was more often headed by a female. However, this resulted more from the high male death rate than from desertion by the husband.

The Stage 2 family began to decline in the early years of the twentieth century but it is still found in many low-income, long-established working-class areas. Its survival is documented in Young and Willmott's famous study entitled *Family and Kinship in East London*. The study was conducted in the mid-1950s in Bethnal Green, a low-income borough in London's East End. Bethnal Green is a long-settled, traditional working-class area. Children usually remain in the same locality after marriage. At the time of the research, two out of three married people had parents living within two or three miles of their residence.

There was a close tie between female relatives. Over 50 per cent of the married women in the sample had seen their mothers during the previous day, over 80 per cent within the previous week. There was a constant exchange of services such as washing, shopping and babysitting, between female relatives. Young and Willmott argued that in many families the households of mother and married daughter were 'to some extent merged'. As such they can be termed extended families, which Young and Willmott define as 'a combination of families who to some degree form one domestic unit'.

Although many aspects of the Stage 2 family were present in Bethnal Green, there were also indications of a transition to Stage 3. For example, fathers were increasingly involved in the rearing of their children.

Stage 3 – the symmetrical family

In the early 1970s, Young and Willmott conducted a large-scale social survey in which 1,928 people were interviewed in Greater London and the outer

metropolitan area. The results formed the basis of their book, *The Symmetrical Family*.

Young and Willmott argue that the Stage 2 family has largely disappeared. For all social classes, but particularly the working class, the Stage 3 family predominates. This family is characterized by 'the separation of the immediate, or nuclear family from the extended family'. The trade union of women is disbanded and the husband returns to the family circle.

Life for the Stage 3 nuclear family is largely home-centred, particularly when the children are young. Free time is spent doing chores and odd jobs around the house, and leisure is mainly 'home-based', for example, watching television. The conjugal bond is strong and relationships between husband and wife are increasingly 'companionate'. In the home, 'They shared their work; they shared their time.' The nuclear family has become a largely self-contained, self-reliant unit.

Young and Willmott use the term symmetrical family to describe the nuclear family of Stage 3. 'Symmetry' refers to an arrangement in which the opposite parts are similar in shape and size. With respect to the symmetrical family, conjugal roles, although not the same – wives still have the main responsibility for raising the children, although husbands help – are similar in terms of the contribution made by each spouse to the running of the household. They share many of the chores, they share decisions, they work together, yet there is still men's work and women's work. Conjugal roles are not interchangeable but they are symmetrical in important respects.

Reasons for the rise of the symmetrical family

Young and Willmott give the following reasons for the transition from Stage 2 to Stage 3 families:

1 A number of factors have reduced the need for kinship-based mutual aid groups. They include an increase in the real wages of the male breadwinner, a decrease in unemployment and the male mortality rate, and increased employment opportunities for women. Various provisions of the welfare state such as family allowances, sickness and unemployment benefits, and old-age pensions have also reduced the need for dependence on the kinship network.

2 Increasing geographical mobility has tended to sever kinship ties. In their study of Bethnal Green, Young and Willmott showed how the extended kinship network largely ceased to operate when young couples with children moved some 20 miles away to a new council housing estate.

3 The reduction in the number of children, from an average of five or six per family in the nineteenth century to just over two in 1970, provided greater opportunities for wives to work. This in turn led to greater symmetry within the family since both spouses are more likely to be wage earners and to share financial responsibility for the household.

4 As living standards rose, the husband was drawn more closely into the family circle since the home was a more attractive place. It became more comfortable with better amenities and a greater range of home entertainments.

Class and family life

Young and Willmott found that the home-centred symmetrical family was more typical of the working class than the middle class. They argue that members of the working class are 'more fully home-centred because they are less fully work-centred'. Partly as compensation for boring and uninvolving work, and partly because relatively little interest and energy are expended at work, manual workers tend to focus their attention on family life. Young and Willmott therefore see the nature of work as a major influence on family life.

The 'Principle of Stratified Diffusion'

In *The Symmetrical Family* Young and Willmott devise a general theory which they term the Principle of Stratified Diffusion. They claim that this theory explains much of the change in family life in industrial society. Put simply, the theory states that what the top of the stratification system does today, the bottom will do tomorrow. Lifestyles, patterns of consumption, attitudes and expectations will diffuse from the top of the stratification system downwards.

Young and Willmott argue that industrialization is the 'source of momentum', it provides the opportunities for higher living standards and so on. However, industrialization alone cannot account for the changes in family life: it cannot fully explain, for example, why the mass of the population has chosen to adopt the lifestyle of Stage 3 families. To complete the explanation, Young and Willmott maintain that the Principle of Stratified Diffusion is required.

Industrialization provides the opportunity for a certain degree of choice for the mass of the population. This choice will be largely determined by the behaviour of those at the top of the stratification system. Values, attitudes and expectations permeate down the class system; those at the bottom copy those at the top.

A Stage 4 family?

Applying the Principle of Stratified Diffusion to the future (writing in 1973), Young and Willmott postulated the possible development of a stage 4 family. They examine in detail the family life of

2 Greater emphasis by the government and others upon trying to eradicate what some have seen as 'poor parenting', by getting kin beyond children's parents involved in looking after them.
3 Increases in the levels of divorce, cohabitation, lone parenthood, and births outside marriage.
4 An increase in the proportion of families living in poverty and reliant upon benefits, partly as a consequence of more family members experiencing unemployment.
5 A larger proportion of married women taking paid employment outside the home.
6 Young people have started entering the labour force later, and older men are more likely than before to experience unemployment.
7 The labour market has changed so that there are relatively few unskilled jobs for manual workers (especially men) but there is more demand for the highest-qualified workers. More people work part-time or in non-permanent employment.
8 As a consequence of some of these changes, the young often stay reliant upon their families for longer than they did in the past.

Given the scope of these changes, you might expect there to be very major differences in family relationships and the strength of kinship networks. However, McGlone *et al.* actually found considerable continuity between 1986 and 1995.

Contacts with relatives in 1995

The *British Social Attitudes Surveys* revealed that even in 1995 contacts with relatives remained quite frequent. For example, in 1995, 47 per cent of people without dependent children and 50 per cent of those with dependent children saw their mothers at least once a week (see Table 8.1). And 35 per cent of those without children and 45 per cent of those with children saw their fathers at least once a week. (All figures refer to the proportions of those with living relatives of the type specified.)

The proportions were even higher for those who lived within one hour's drive of their relatives. Amongst this group, for example, 75 per cent of those without children under 16 saw their mother, and 63 per cent saw their father, at least once a week. Amongst those with children, 70 per cent saw their mother and 69 per cent saw their father at least once a week. Telephone contact was also common. Amongst women with a dependent child, 78 per cent talked to their mother at least once a week, 54 per cent to their father, 45 per cent to an adult sibling, and 39 per cent to another relative.

In line with other studies, it was found that there were significant social class differences. Tables 8.2 and 8.3 show that contacts were more frequent for manual workers than for non-manual workers, particularly among those with dependent children. The difference between manual and non-manual workers was partly explained by a tendency for manual workers to live closer to relatives but, even when this was taken into account, some differences remained.

Changes in contact over time

Although contacts with relatives remained frequent in 1995, a comparison with 1986 did find that they had declined somewhat. In 1986, 59 per cent of those with dependent children saw their mother at least once a week, declining to 50 per cent in 1995. Contacts with all other relatives had fallen as well. However, the falls were partly accounted for by people living further apart. As Table 8.4 shows, the fall in contact with mothers was less for those who lived within an hour's driving distance than for the group as a whole. Contacts with fathers remained unchanged and those with adult siblings had increased.

What fall there had been was largely accounted for by non-manual workers. This was particularly true of

Table 8.1 Percentage who saw their relative at least once a week, by whether there is a dependent child (1995)

	No child under 16		All with child under 16		Age of child in household: Under 5		5 to 15	
	%	*Base*	%	*Base*	%	*Base*	%	*Base*
Mother	47	535	50	478	51	226	48	252
Father	35	385	45	395	47	206	44	189
Adult sibling	25	1,097	36	543	41	245	33	298
Other relative	31	1,250	45	552	49	242	42	310

Note: The base for each percentage comprises all those with the specified relative (non-resident).
Source: F. McGlone, A. Park and K. Smith (1998) *Families and Kinship*, Family Policy Studies Centre, London, p. 12.

Table 8.2 Proportion with a dependent child who see specified relative at least once a week, by social class (1995)

	Manual workers		Non-manual workers	
	%	Base	%	Base
Mother	65	193	39	271
Father	59	160	36	223
Adult sibling	46	235	28	291
Other relative	57	224	37	314

Note: The base for each percentage comprises all those with the specified relative (non-resident) and dependent children.

Source: F. McGlone, A. Park and K. Smith (1998) *Families and Kinship*, Family Policy Studies Centre, London, p. 14.

Table 8.3 Proportion without a dependent child who see specified relative at least once a week, by social class (1995)

	Manual workers		Non-manual workers	
	%	Base	%	Base
Mother	48	230	47	279
Father	37	173	33	189
Adult sibling	28	540	21	509
Other relative	38	571	24	629

Note: The base for each percentage comprises all those with the specified relative (non-resident) and with no dependent children.

Source: F. McGlone, A. Park and K. Smith (1998) *Families and Kinship*, Family Policy Studies Centre, London, p. 14.

Table 8.4 Proportion with a dependent child who see specified relative living within one hour's journey time at least once a week, 1986 and 1995

	1986		1995	
	%	Base	%	Base
Mother	76	269	70	328
Father	69	196	69	253
Adult sibling	55	300	56	336
Other relative	70	313	64	383

Note: The base for each percentage comprises all those with the specified relative who lives within one hour's journey time (non-resident) and dependent children.

Source: F. McGlone, A. Park and K. Smith (1998) *Families and Kinship*, Family Policy Studies Centre, London, p. 17.

middle-class families where the woman was in full-time paid employment. It appeared that in many dual-earner families there was too little time to maintain regular weekly contact with parents and other relatives. There was no significant change in maternal and paternal contacts among manual workers.

Families and help

As earlier studies suggested, even where there was a lack of contact between family members, that did not necessarily mean that kinship networks had become unimportant. The *British Social Attitudes Surveys* of 1986 and 1995 asked people who they would go to for help with things such as doing household and garden jobs, support during illness, and borrowing money. For household jobs and help while ill, most said they would turn first of all to a spouse or partner, while turning to other relatives was the second most popular choice. For borrowing money, the most popular options were borrowing from other relatives or from a bank. Amongst those who had received help in the previous five years, a high proportion had got that help from relatives. For example, 59 per cent of those without a child under 16 and 71 per cent of those with a child, who had received a loan or gift of money, had got it from a parent or in-law, and over a third of those who had received help when ill had got it from one of these sources.

McGlone *et al.* conclude that family members remain the most important source of practical help. While people tend to turn first to a spouse or partner, after that they turn to other relatives, with friends or neighbours being less important.

Attitudes to families

Here, McGlone *et al.* found that 'the majority of the adult population are very family-centred'. Table 8.5 summarizes the results of the study in this area. It shows that less than 10 per cent thought that friends were more important to them than family members. The vast majority thought that parents should continue to help children after they had left home, and around 70 per cent thought that people should keep in touch with close family members. A majority thought that you should try to keep in touch with relatives like aunts, uncles and cousins, even if you did not have much in common with them.

Conclusions

McGlone *et al.* found that families remain very important to people in contemporary Britain. They argue that their study confirms the results of earlier research showing that families remain an important source of help and support, and that family contacts are still maintained even though family members tend to live further apart. Their research suggests that

managing directors, which, in terms of their theory, should diffuse downwards in years to come. Managing directors are work-centred rather than home-centred – 'my business is my life' being a typical quote from those in the sample. Their leisure activities are less home-centred and less likely to involve their wives than those of Stage 3 families. Sport was an important area of recreation, particularly swimming and golf. The wife's role was to look after the children and the home. As such the managing director's family was more asymmetrical than the Stage 3 family.

Young and Willmott suggest that changes in production technology may provide the opportunity for the Stage 4 family to diffuse throughout the stratification system. As technology reduces routine work, a larger number of people may have more interesting and involving jobs and become increasingly work-centred. Young and Willmott admit that 'We cannot claim that our 190 managing directors were representative of managing directors generally.' However, given the evidence available, they predict that the asymmetrical Stage 4 family represents the next major development.

Evaluation

A number of features of Willmott and Young's work are open to criticism. Many feminists have attacked the concept of the 'symmetrical family', arguing that there has been little progress towards equality between husband and wife (see pp. 552–63 for details). There is also little evidence that the 'Principle of Stratified Diffusion' has led to the 'Stage 4 family' becoming typical of all strata. Married women have continued to take paid employment and few working-class families can afford to adopt the lifestyle and family arrangements of managing directors. Later research by Peter Willmott has not used or supported the concept of the 'Stage 4 family', as we will see on p. 532.

The middle-class family

Contacts with kin

Many of the arguments examined in preceding sections suggest that the middle-class family should be less attached to kin beyond the nuclear unit than its working-class counterpart. The middle-class job market is more geographically mobile and more financially secure. There is therefore less opportunity and less need to maintain a wide kinship network. However, a number of studies have shown that middle-class families maintain close contacts with kin beyond the family.

Research conducted in the late 1950s by Willmott and Young in Woodford, a largely middle-class London suburb, showed that, despite the fact that kin were more geographically dispersed, compared to Bethnal Green, fairly regular contacts were maintained (Willmott and Young, 1960). In Bethnal Green, 43 per cent of husbands and wives had seen their mothers in the previous 24 hours, compared to 30 per cent in Woodford. Although in Woodford there was less frequent contact with parents while the latter were employed, the frequency of contact was much the same as in Bethnal Green when parents retired. On retirement, middle-class parents often moved to Woodford to live near their married children.

In their study of Swansea, South Wales, conducted in the early 1960s, Rosser and Harris found that levels of contact between parents and married children were similar to those in Bethnal Green (Rosser and Harris, 1965). This applied to both middle- and working-class families. Despite the wider dispersal of kin in Swansea, improved transportation facilities (particularly the family car) made frequent contact possible. Rosser and Harris state that 'The picture that emerges, then, is of a vigorous kinship grouping wider than the elementary (nuclear) family, similar to that described in the Bethnal Green studies.' As in Bethnal Green, the Swansea families exchanged services with kin beyond the nuclear family and provided each other with support in times of need.

Quantity and quality of contacts

A major problem in studies of the family is the difficulty of measuring the importance of kin beyond the nuclear family. In a study of middle-class family life also carried out in Swansea, Colin Bell questions whether the frequency of actual face-to-face contacts between kin provides an accurate assessment (Bell, 1968). Bell points to the importance of contact by telephone and mail. He also distinguishes between the quantity and quality of contacts. For example, bumping into mum on a street corner in Bethnal Green may have far less significance than a formal visit to mother by her middle-class daughter.

In his study, Bell found a lower level of direct face-to-face contact with kin beyond the nuclear family than in either the Woodford sample or Rosser and Harris's middle-class sample. Despite this relatively low level of contact, he argues that, compared to the working class, 'Middle-class kin networks may have fewer day-to-day demands but I think that there is little evidence to suggest that they necessarily show any different affective quality.' Thus direct contact may be less frequent but the emotional bonds are the same.

Bell makes a similar point about the provision of services for kin beyond the nuclear family. They may not be as numerous as those provided in the working class, but they may be just as significant. He found

that aid from parents, especially the son's father, was particularly important during the early years of marriage. It often took the form of loans or gifts to help with the deposit on a house or the expenses of the first baby. Bell concludes that kin beyond the nuclear family still play an important part in the lives of many middle-class families.

Similar conclusions were reached by Graham Allan in research conducted in a commuter village in East Anglia in the early 1970s (Allan, 1985). Although he found some evidence that the relationship between working-class wives and their mothers was particularly close, in general there was little difference between the middle- and working-class kinship networks. In both cases relationships were characterized by a 'positive concern' for the welfare of the kin regardless of the frequency of face-to-face contacts.

Contemporary family networks

Peter Willmott – networks in London

In research conducted during the 1980s in a north London suburb, Peter Willmott found that contacts with kin remained important in both the middle and working class (Willmott, 1988). In the area he studied, about a third of the couples had moved to the district in the previous five years. Only a third of all the couples had parents or parents-in-law living within ten minutes' travelling distance. However, despite the distance between their homes, two-thirds of the couples saw relatives at least weekly. Working-class couples saw relatives more frequently than middle-class couples, but the differences were not great.

Maintaining contact was relatively easy for most families because so many had access to cars. Most also had homes that were sufficiently spacious for relatives to come and stay. Some 90 per cent had telephones which enabled them to keep in touch with relatives even if they did not meet face-to-face.

Willmott also found that 'relatives continue to be the main source of informal support and care, and that again the class differences are not marked'. For example, nearly 75 per cent had relatives who sometimes helped with babysitting and 80 per cent looked to relatives to help them when they needed to borrow money.

Margaret O'Brien and Deborah Jones – families and kinship in East London

Margaret O'Brien and Deborah Jones conducted research in Barking and Dagenham, East London, in the early 1990s (O'Brien and Jones, 1996). They collected survey data on 600 young people and their parents in this predominantly working-class area. They compared their findings with a 1950s study of the same area conducted by Peter Willmott (1963).

They found that, compared with the 1950s, this area had developed a greater variety of types of family and household. Of the young people surveyed, 14 per cent lived with a step-parent, and 14 per cent lived in lone-parent families. According to census statistics, over one-third of births in the area took place outside marriage. There were many dual-earner families, with 62 per cent of women in their sample working in paid employment, and 79 per cent of men. In Willmott's 1950s study, family life was much more homogeneous. Then, 78 per cent of people were married, and just 1 per cent were divorced. Most single people were young and lived with their parents.

Despite the move towards a greater plurality of family and household types, O'Brien and Jones did not find that there had been any major erosion in the importance attached to kinship. In both Willmott's and O'Brien and Jones's research, over 40 per cent of the sample had grandparents living locally. In the 1990s, 72 per cent of those studied had been visited by a relative in the previous week, and over half the sample saw their maternal grandparent at least weekly. Twenty per cent had a large network of local kin numbering over ten relatives.

O'Brien and Jones conclude that there has been a pluralization of lifestyles, an increase in marital breakdowns and a big rise in dual-earner households. However, they also found that 'kin contact and association do not appear to have changed significantly since Willmott's study of the borough in the 1950s'. This suggests a greater continuity in kin relationships, at least among the working class in London, than that implied by some other studies.

Families and kinship in the 1980s and 1990s

All of the above studies have been based upon specific geographical areas at a particular point in time. The *British Social Attitudes Surveys* of 1986 and 1995 contained a number of questions on families and kinship (reported in Jowell *et al.* (eds) (1989) and McGlone *et al.*, 1996). The surveys used large representative samples of the British population. The results of these two surveys have been analysed by Francis McGlone, Alison Park and Kate Smith (1998).

Changes affecting families

McGlone *et al.* start by noting that a number of important changes that might affect family life took place between 1986 and 1995. Some of these were:

1 An increase in the proportion of elderly people in the British population, as people live longer and the birth-rate declines; and an increased emphasis by the government on families looking after their elderly rather than the welfare state.

Table 8.5 Attitudes towards the family, by whether there is a dependent child

	No child under 16		All with child under 16		Age of child: Under 5		5 to 15	
% agreeing	%	Base	%	Base	%	Base	%	Base
People should keep in touch with close family members even if they don't have much in common	74	1,407	68	595	66	265	69	330
People should keep in touch with relatives like aunts, uncles and cousins even if they don't have much in common	59	1,414	49	594	42	264	54	330
People should always turn to their family before asking the state for help	54	1,394	42	594	36	264	46	329
I try to stay in touch with all my relatives, not just my close family	50	1,381	43	583	42	259	43	324
I'd rather spend time with my friends than with my family	15	1,370	11	584	9	263	13	321
Once children have left home, they should no longer expect help from their parents	15	1,413	6	596	8	264	4	332
On the whole, my friends are more important to me than members of my family	8	1,393	7	588	8	264	6	324

the 'core' of the family does not just include parents and children – in most households grandparents are part of the core as well. They also found that differences between social classes remained significant, with the working class still more likely to have frequent contacts than the middle class. Despite all the social changes affecting families between 1986 and 1995, kinship networks beyond the nuclear family remain important to people.

Janet Finch – family obligations and social change

Janet Finch has studied changes in family life using a slightly different viewpoint from that of the studies discussed above (Finch, 1989). In a review of research conducted by many different sociologists she has discussed the changing nature of family obligations. Her work is particularly concerned with the extent to which members of a family feel obliged to offer assistance to their kin and feel a sense of duty towards them. This also involves considering what help is given, as well as the reasons behind the decision to give help.

Finch examines the extent to which relatives feel an obligation to provide accommodation by sharing households, and to give economic, emotional or moral support, practical help, financial assistance and personal care (for example, by nursing a sick relative). She considers the possibility that there was a 'Golden Age' before the Industrial Revolution in which family obligations were much stronger and family members helped each other far more.

The myth of a 'Golden Age'

Overall, Finch argues that the idea of a 'Golden Age' of the family which was undermined by the Industrial Revolution is a myth. For example, she says that there is no evidence that people automatically assumed responsibility for elderly relatives in pre-industrial times, and 'most elderly people who are married have always lived only with their spouse'. Also, when primogeniture (inheritance by the first-born son) was the main principle governing inheritance, parents made little or no financial provision for children other than the eldest son in their wills.

Some changes have certainly taken place: far fewer children are permanently looked after by relatives other than their own parents; and in the last 50 years a smaller proportion of the single elderly have been living with relatives. However, such changes are largely a result of demographic trends. Because life expectancy has risen, there are fewer orphans and more elderly people in the population. Because average family size has gone down since the nineteenth century, there are fewer children with whom the rising numbers of elderly might live.

In any case, according to Finch, much of the assistance given in the past was based upon mutual self-interest rather than a selfless sense of obligation to family members. People who took relatives' children into their households often employed them

as servants. When kin outside the immediate nuclear family have lived with each other in the past this has often been for the purpose of sharing housing costs. Before, during and since the Industrial Revolution most kin relationships have not been characterized by unconditional giving by some relatives to others, but have been based upon 'reciprocal exchange on the basis of mutual advantage'.

One exception to this general rule has been the relationship between parents and children. It has been and remains common for parents to help their children without expecting equivalent support in exchange.

Factors influencing family obligations

Finch stresses that the extent and nature of family obligations felt by people vary enormously from one family to another and are shaped partly by interpersonal relationships between the individuals involved. Nevertheless, family obligations are influenced by social factors such as region, gender, ethnicity, generation and the economic situation of the family and its members. Kin relationships remain special to people, and people generally feel more of a sense of duty to members of their family than to anybody else. However, having independence is also important to members of families and reliance upon kin is usually seen as a last resort rather than the first. The family can offer a safety net in times of need and it can offer mutual benefits, but people try to avoid relying upon it too much.

These characteristics of family relationships are not new, according to Finch. Although the circumstances in which family relationships are made have changed enormously since pre-industrial times, there is no evidence that in general there is less sense of obligation to kin than there was in the past.

The isolated nuclear family?

The evidence we have presented so far under the heading of 'The family, industrialization and modernization' provides a somewhat confusing picture. On the one hand there is Talcott Parsons's isolated nuclear family, and on the other a large body of evidence suggesting that kin beyond the nuclear family play an important part in family life and that the importance of that role may not have been greatly diminishing.

In America, a number of researchers have rejected Parsons's concept of the isolated nuclear family. Sussman and Burchinal, for example, argue that the weight of evidence from a large body of research indicates that the modern American family is far from isolated. They maintain that the family can only be properly understood 'by rejection of the isolated nuclear family concept' (Sussman and Burchinal, 1971).

Parsons replied to his critics in an article entitled 'The normal American family' (Parsons, 1965a). He argued that close relationships with kin outside the nuclear family are in no way inconsistent with the concept of the isolated nuclear family. Parsons stated that 'the very psychological importance for the individual of the nuclear family in which he was born and brought up would make any such conception impossible'.

However, he maintained that the nuclear family is structurally isolated. It is isolated from other parts of the social structure such as the economic system. For example, it does not form an integral part of the economic system as in the case of the peasant farming family in traditional Ireland.

In addition, the so-called 'extended families' of modern industrial society 'do not form firmly structured units of the social system'. Relationships with kin beyond the nuclear family are not obligatory – they are a matter of individual choice. In this sense, 'extended kin constitute a resource which may be selectively taken advantage of within considerable limits'. Thus, extended families do not form 'firmly structured units' as in the case of the classic extended family or the family in kinship-based societies.

Evidence from Rosser and Harris's Swansea research supports Parsons's arguments. Rosser and Harris maintained that the nuclear family is 'a basic structural unit of the society' and, although kinship relationships beyond the nuclear family are important to individuals, in terms of the social structure as a whole they are 'not of major and critical importance' (Rosser and Harris, 1965).

The Swansea study revealed a 'vast variation' in kinship relationships. Members of some families were in daily contact with kin beyond the nuclear family; members of other families rarely saw their relatives. Janet Finch's review of family research also found a great variety of relationships within families (Finch, 1989). This is the expected finding in view of Parsons's emphasis upon individual choice. However, as we will see later in the chapter, it may be that nuclear families no longer (if they ever did) make up a vital structural unit in contemporary societies either. There is evidence that the decision to form a nuclear family is increasingly also a matter of choice (see pp. 563–5).

The 'modified extended family'

In order to clear up the confusion surrounding the term 'isolated nuclear family', Eugene Litwak argues that a new term, the modified extended family, should be introduced to describe the typical family in

modern industrial society. Litwak defines the modified extended family as:

> *a coalition of nuclear families in a state of partial dependence. Such partial dependence means that nuclear family members exchange significant services with each other, thus differing from the isolated nuclear family, as well as retain considerable autonomy (that is not bound economically or geographically) therefore differing from the classical extended family.*
>
> Quoted in Morgan, 1975, p. 65

The 'modified elementary family'

Graham Allan accepts Litwak's view that kin outside the nuclear family continue to be important in industrial society (Allan, 1985). On the basis of his own research in a commuter village in East Anglia, he argues that in normal circumstances non-nuclear kin do not rely on each other. In many families there may be little exchange of significant services most of the time. However, in most families the members do feel an obligation to keep in touch. For example, very few married children break off relationships with their parents altogether, and brothers and sisters usually maintain contact. Although significant services are not usually exchanged as a matter of course, kin frequently recognize an obligation to help each other in times of difficulty or crisis.

Unlike Litwak, Allan believes that these kinds of relationships are confined to an inner or 'elementary' family, consisting of wives and husbands, their parents, children, brothers and sisters. The obligations do not extend to uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, cousins or more distant kin. Allan therefore prefers the term modified elementary family to 'modified extended family', since to him it more accurately describes the range of kin who are important to an individual.

The 'dispersed extended family'

On the basis of research carried out in London in the 1980s, Peter Willmott reached broadly similar conclusions to Litwak and Allan. He claims that the dispersed extended family is becoming dominant in Britain (Willmott, 1988). It consists of two or more related families who cooperate with each other even though they live some distance apart. Contacts are fairly frequent, taking place on average perhaps once a week, but less frequent than they were amongst extended families who lived close together. Cars, public transport and telephones make it possible for dispersed extended families to keep in touch. Members of dispersed extended families do not rely on each other on a day-to-day basis.

Like Litwak, Willmott sees each nuclear family unit as only partially dependent upon extended kin. Much of the time the nuclear family is fairly self-sufficient but in times of emergency the existence of extended kin might prove invaluable. Thus Willmott argues that, in modern Britain, 'although kinship is largely chosen, it not only survives but most of the time flourishes'.

The research discussed by McGlone *et al.* (1998) reaches broadly similar conclusions. Kinship networks outside the nuclear family are still important. Indeed they argue that the core of families with dependent children includes not just the nuclear family but also grandparents. Despite all the social changes that could have weakened kinship, people still value kinship ties and for the most part try to retain them even when they live some distance from their relatives.

In this section we have focused on the changes in household composition and kinship networks that have accompanied industrialization in Britain. We will now examine the extent to which the idea of a 'typical family' is accurate.

Family diversity

Although some historians such as Michael Anderson (1980) have pointed to a variety of household types in pre-industrial times and during industrialization, it has generally been assumed that a single type of family is dominant in any particular era. Whether the modern family is regarded as nuclear, modified extended, modified elementary or dispersed extended, the assumption has been that this type of family is central to people's experiences in modern industrial societies. However, recent research has suggested that such societies are characterized by a plurality of household and family types, and that the idea of a typical family is misleading.

The 'cereal packet image' of the family

Ann Oakley (1982) has described the image of the typical or 'conventional' family. She says, 'conventional families are nuclear families composed of legally married couples, voluntarily choosing the parenthood of one or more (but not too many) children'.

Leach (1967) called this the 'cereal packet image of the family'. The image of the happily married

couple with two children is prominent in advertising, and the 'family-sized' packets of cereals and other types of product are aimed at just this type of grouping. It tends also to be taken for granted that this type of family has its material needs met by the male breadwinner, while the wife has a predominantly domestic role.

The monolithic image of the family

The American feminist Barrie Thorne has attacked the image of the 'monolithic family'. She argues that 'Feminists have challenged the ideology of "the monolithic family", which has elevated the nuclear family with a breadwinner husband and a full-time wife and mother as the only legitimate family form' (Thorne, 1992). She argues that the focus on the family unit neglects structures of society that lead to variations in families. She says, 'Structures of gender, generation, race and class result in widely varying experiences of family life, which are obscured by the glorification of the nuclear family, motherhood, and the family as a loving refuge.' The idea of 'The Family' involves 'falsifying the actual variety of household forms'. In fact, according to Thorne, 'Households have always varied in composition, even in the 1950s and early 1960s when the ideology of The Family was at its peak.' By the 1990s, such an ideology was more obviously inappropriate since changes in society had resulted in ever more diverse family forms.

Households in Britain

The view that such images equate with reality has been attacked by Robert and Rhona Rapoport (1982). They drew attention to the fact that in 1978, for example, just 20 per cent of families consisted of married couples with children in which there was a single breadwinner.

As Table 8.6 shows, since the Rapoports first advanced the idea of family diversity, there has been a steady decline in the proportion of households in Great Britain consisting of married couples with dependent children, from 38 per cent in 1961 to just 23 per cent in 1998. There has been a corresponding increase in single-person households in the same period, with the proportion of households of this type rising from 11 per cent in 1961 to 28 per cent in 1998. Furthermore, the proportion of households that were single-parent households with dependent children more than tripled, from 2 per cent in 1961 to 7 per cent in 1998. The total number of lone-parent households rose from 6 per cent to 10 per cent over the same period. Single-parent families are discussed in more detail on pp. 541–4.

Types of diversity

The fact that the 'conventional family' no longer makes up a majority of households or families is only one aspect of diversity identified by the Rapoports. They identify five distinct elements of family diversity in Britain:

Table 8.6 Households by type of household and family

	1961	1971	1981	1991	1998[1]
	%	%	%	%	%
One person					
Under pensionable age	4	6	8	11	14
Over pensionable age	7	12	14	16	14
Two or more unrelated adults	5	4	5	3	3
Single family households					
Couple[2]					
No children	26	27	26	28	28
1–2 dependent children[3]	30	26	25	20	19
3 or more dependent children[3]	8	9	6	5	4
Non-dependent children only	10	8	8	8	7
Lone parent[2]					
Dependent children[3]	2	3	5	6	7
Non-dependent children only	4	4	4	4	3
Multi-family households	3	1	1	1	1
All households[4] (=100%) (millions)	16.3	18.6	20.2	22.4	23.6

1 At spring 1998.
2 Other individuals who are not family members may also be included.
3 May also include non-dependent children.
4 Includes couples of the same gender in 1998.
Source: *Social Trends* (1999) HMSO, London, p. 42.

1 First, there is what they term organizational diversity. By this they mean there are variations in family structure, household type, patterns of kinship network, and differences in the division of labour within the home. For example, there are the differences between conventional families, one-parent families, and dual-worker families, in which husband and wife both work.

   There are also increasing numbers of reconstituted families. The reconstituted family is the second 'emerging form' identified by the Rapoports. These families are formed after divorce and remarriage. This situation can lead to a variety of family forms. The children from the previous marriages of the new spouses may live together in the newly reconstituted family, or they may live with the original spouses of the new couple. Although it might be seen to reflect a failure to create a happy family life, some adults in a reconstituted family may find positive aspects of reconstitution.

   On the basis of a study conducted in Sheffield, Jacqueline Burgoyne and David Clark (1982) claim that some individuals in this situation see themselves as 'pioneers of an alternative lifestyle'. They may choose to remain unmarried to their new partner, and may find advantages in having more than two parental figures in their children's lives. Sometimes they believe that step-siblings gain from living together. Some couples in the Sheffield study felt a considerable sense of achievement from the successful reconstitution of a family. (For further details on divorce, see pp. 566–72.)

2 The second type of diversity is cultural diversity. There are differences in the lifestyles of families of different ethnic origins and different religious beliefs. There are differences between families of Asian, West Indian and Cypriot origin, not to mention other ethnic minority groups. (We discuss ethnic family diversity in more detail on pp. 544–8.) Differences in lifestyle between Catholic and Protestant families may also be an important element of diversity.

3 There are differences between middle- and working-class families in terms of relationships between adults and the way in which children are socialized.

4 There are differences that result from the stage in the life cycle of the family. Newly married couples without children may have a different family life from those with dependent children and from those whose children have achieved adult status.

5 The fifth factor identified by the Rapoports as producing family diversity is cohort. This refers to the periods at which the family has passed through different stages of the family life cycle. Cohort affects the life experiences of the family. For example, those families whose children were due to enter the labour market in the 1980s may be different from other families: the high rates of unemployment during that period may have increased the length of time that those children were dependent on their parents.

Regional diversity

In addition to these five aspects of diversity identified by the Rapoports, David Eversley and Lucy Bonnerjea (1982) point to regional diversity. They argue that there tend to be distinctive patterns of family life in different areas of Great Britain:

1 In what they term 'the sun belt' (the affluent southern parts of England) two-parent upwardly mobile families are typical. Eversley and Bonnerjea claim that this area attracts family builders.

2 They describe a number of coastal regions as the 'geriatric wards'. Much of the south coast (from Cornwall to Sussex, for example) has a disproportionate number of retired couples without dependent children, and widows and widowers.

3 Older industrial areas suffering from long-term decline tend to have fairly conventional and traditional family structures.

4 Inner-city areas tend to have greater concentrations of both one-parent and ethnic minority families.

5 What they describe as 'newly declining industrial areas' (particularly likely to be found in the Midlands) have more diverse family patterns.

6 The final type of region identified by Eversley and Bonnerjea is the truly rural area. Here, the family-based farm tends to produce strong kinship networks.

Gay and lesbian families

Since the Rapoports' pioneering volume on family diversity in Britain, other forms of diversity have developed or become more prominent. Gay and lesbian households may have become more commonplace – certainly there are more openly gay and lesbian households than there were several decades ago. As Jeffrey Weeks, Catherine Donovan and Brian Heaphey argue, 'During the past generation the possibilities of living an openly lesbian and gay life have been transformed' (Weeks, Donovan and Heaphey, 1999). As discussed earlier (see p. 507), many sociologists believe that such households, where they incorporate long-term gay or lesbian relationships, should be seen as constituting families.

According to Weeks *et al.*, homosexuals and lesbians often look upon their households, and even their friendship networks, as being chosen families. Some see their relationships as involving a greater degree of choice than those in more conventional heterosexual families. They choose who to include in their family and negotiate what are often fairly egalitarian relationships. Some see their families as an alternative type of family which they are consciously developing. Weeks *et al.* argue that this may be part of wider social changes in which 'we culturally prioritize individual choice and the acceptance of diversity. Commitment becomes

increasingly a matter of negotiation rather than ascription.' (Their views are similar to those of Anthony Giddens – see pp. 578–9 for details.)

New reproductive technologies

Unlike gay and lesbian relationships, new reproductive technologies add an entirely new dimension to family diversity. It was not until 1978 that the first 'test-tube baby', Louise Brown, was born. The process is called *in vitro* fertilization and involves fertilizing an egg with a sperm in a test-tube, before implanting in a woman's womb. The woman may or may not be the woman who produced the egg.

Surrogate motherhood involves one woman carrying a foetus produced by the egg of another woman. This raises questions about who the parents of a child are, and questions about what constitutes a family. As noted earlier (see pp. 521–3), Calhoun sees this as undermining the centrality of the reproductive couple as the core of the family, and it introduces a greater range of choices into families than was previously available. John Macionis and Ken Plummer (1997) show how new reproductive technologies can create previously impossible sets of family relationships. They quote the case of Arlette Schweitzer, who in 1991 gave birth in South Dakota in the USA to her own grandchild. Her daughter was unable to carry a baby and Arlette Schweitzer acted as a surrogate mother. She gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl. Macionis and Plummer ask, 'is Arlette Schweitzer the mother of the twins she bore? Grandmother? Both?' Such examples, they say, 'force us to consider the adequacy of conventional kinship terms'. They note that such technologies have largely been made available to heterosexual couples of normal child-rearing age, but they have also been used by lesbians, homosexuals, and single and older women. The implication of new reproductive technologies is that biology will no longer restrict the possibilities for forming or enlarging families by having children. They therefore add considerably to the range of potential family types and thus contribute to growing diversity.

A global trend

According to Rhona Rapoport (1989), the decline of conventional family forms and the increasing diversity are part of a global trend. She quotes figures showing a movement towards diverse family structures in very different European countries. In Finland, the percentage of households consisting of a nuclear family declined from 63.8 per cent in 1950 to 60 per cent in 1980. In Sweden, the decline was from 52.4 per cent in 1960 to 42.6 per cent in 1980, and in East Germany from 56.7 per cent in 1957 to 48.7 per cent in 1977. She also points to an enormous increase throughout Europe in the proportion of married women who have paid employment, which suggests that men's and women's roles within marriage are changing and consequently new family forms are developing. These conclusions are broadly shared by a study of diversity in Europe.

Diversity and European family life

At the end of the 1980s the European Co-ordination Centre for Research and Documentation in Social Sciences organized a cross-cultural study of family life in 14 European nations (Boh, 1989). These were Belgium, Finland, France, the German Democratic Republic and Federal Republic of Germany (the study was carried out before re-unification), Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden, and the then Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.

The findings of individual national studies were analysed and compared by Katja Boh. She tried to 'trace the tendencies in changes of family patterns' in order to:

> *answer the crucial question whether these tendencies converge, which would mean that family patterns in European family life are becoming more similar, or the recent political and economic developments have produced differences contributing to a greater diversity in family life patterns.*
>
> Boh, 1989

Evidence of diversity

In most aspects of family life Boh found a wide range of patterns in different countries:

1. The likelihood of married women working varied greatly, with well over 80 per cent in work in the Soviet Union, but less than one-third in Belgium and the Netherlands.
2. Marriage rates appeared to be diverging. In 1932, Poland had the highest rate at 8.3 marriages per thousand of the population; Norway had the lowest at 6.2. By 1984 the gap between the highest rate (10.3 in the USSR) and the lowest (4 in Sweden) was much greater.
3. Boh noted that cohabitation as an alternative to marriage was becoming common in Sweden and Finland but remained comparatively rare in Belgium and Italy.
4. She also discovered that the number of children born per woman was greatest in the Soviet Union and Poland and lowest in the Federal Republic of Germany and the Netherlands.
5. As discussed previously, single parents are much more common in some European countries than in others. Boh found that the highest rates in 1981 were in Finland, while the lowest were in the Soviet Union.

Common trends

Although most of the evidence showed that family life was very different in different European countries, some evidence did point to certain trends being widespread. All European countries had experienced rising divorce rates and many had made it easier to get divorced. Cohabitation appeared to have become more common in most countries, and the birth rate had declined everywhere.

Convergence in diversity

The existence of diverse patterns of family life in Europe, but with some common trends, seems at first sight to be contradictory. However, Katja Boh argues that, together, they produce a consistent pattern of convergence in diversity. While family life retains considerable variations from country to country, throughout Europe a greater range of family types is being accepted as legitimate and normal. This has been caused by:

> *Increasing gender symmetry in work patterns, more freedom in conjugal choice and a more hedonistic view of marriage and love, premarital and experimental sexuality, higher marriage instability and alternative forms of 'living together', decreasing fertility and change in forms of parenting.*
>
> Boh, 1989

Boh concludes:

> *Whatever the existing patterns are, they are characterized by the acceptance of diversity that has given men and women the possibility to choose inside the boundaries of available options the life pattern that is best adapted to their own needs and aspirations.*
>
> Boh, 1989

Before evaluating whether there has really been a move towards diversity, and discussing the significance of the changes that have taken place, we will examine two particularly important sources of diversity – lone parenthood and ethnicity – in greater detail.

The increase in single parenthood

As mentioned earlier, single-parent families have become increasingly common in Britain. According to government statistics, in 1961, 2 per cent of the population lived in households consisting of a lone parent with dependent children, but by 1998 this had more than tripled to 7 per cent (*Social Trends*, 1999). Between 1972 and 1996-7 the percentage of children living in single-parent families increased from 7 per cent to 19 per cent (*Social Trends*, 1998). According to Hantrais and Letablier (1996), Britain has the second highest rate of lone parenthood in Europe. It is exceeded only by Denmark, and rates in countries such as Greece, Portugal and France are much lower than those in Britain. Nevertheless, throughout Europe and in advanced industrial countries such as Japan and the USA, the proportions have generally been increasing since at least the 1980s.

Although useful, figures on the proportions living in single-parent families need to be interpreted with caution. They provide only a snapshot picture of the situation at one point in time and do not represent the changing family life of many individuals. Many more children than the above figures seem to suggest spend part of their childhood in a single-parent family, but many fewer spend all of their childhood in one. Children may start their life living in a single-parent family. However, the single parent may well find a new partner and marry them or cohabit with them. The child will then end up living with two parents.

Greg Duncan and Willard Rodgers estimated – from survey data on children born between 1967 and 1969 in the USA – that less than a third of children born into a single-parent family stayed in one throughout their childhood (Duncan and Rodgers, 1990). The *British Household Panel Survey* revealed that about 15 per cent of lone mothers stopped being lone parents each year. This was usually because they had established a new relationship (quoted in *Social Trends*, 1998).

It should also be noted that many children who live in a single-parent household do see and spend time with their other parent. Furthermore, even in two-parent families, one parent (usually the mother) might be responsible for the vast majority of the childcare. In terms of children's experience, then, the distinction between single-parent and two-parent households is not clearcut.

The causes of single parenthood

Lone parenthood can come about through a number of different routes. People who are married can become lone parents through:

1. divorce
2. separation
3. death of a spouse.

Lone parents who have never been married:

1. may have been living with the parent of the child when the child was born, but they subsequently stopped living together.
2. may not have been living with the parent of the child when the child was born.

Official statistics give some indication of the frequency of the different paths to lone-parenthood, but do not provide a complete picture.

Official figures for Britain show that the largest proportion of female lone parents in 1995–7 were single, with about a third being divorced and just under a quarter separated. The figures for those who were single do not differentiate between those who were cohabiting when the child was conceived and those who were not. These proportions have changed over time. Between 1971 and 1995–7, according to official statistics, the proportion of lone mothers who were single rose from 21 per cent to 33 per cent, the proportion who were divorced rose from 16 per cent to 38 per cent, while the proportion who were widowed fell from 21 per cent to just 6 per cent. The proportions among lone fathers were somewhat different in 1995–7, with more becoming lone parents through being widowed. It should be noted, though, that lone fathers make up only a small minority of lone parents. Only 1 per cent of the family households in the 1996 *General Household Survey* were headed by lone fathers, compared to 18 per cent that were headed by lone mothers (Thomas, Walker, Willmott and Bennett, 1998).

Clearly, then, the rise in lone motherhood is closely related both to increases in the divorce rate and to an increase in births outside marriage. The causes of the rise in divorces are discussed later in this chapter (see pp. 568–72). The increase in single lone mothers may partly result from a reduction in the number of 'shotgun weddings' – that is, getting married to legitimate a pregnancy. Mark Brown (1995) suggests that in previous eras it was more common for parents to get married, rather than simply cohabiting, if they discovered that the woman was pregnant. Marriages that resulted from pregnancy were often unstable and could end up producing lone motherhood through an eventual divorce or separation. Now, the partners may choose to cohabit rather than marry and, if their relationship breaks up, they end up appearing in the statistics as a single, never-married, parent.

According to figures quoted by Brown, there has been a marked increase in jointly registered births outside marriage. In 1971 just 45 per cent of births were jointly registered in England and Wales but this had increased to 76 per cent by 1992. Of these, nearly three-quarters were registered by couples living at the same address. Brown also points out that some lone mothers may intend to cohabit with the father of their child but may be prevented from doing so if they cannot find or afford accommodation together.

The absence of cohabitation does not necessarily imply that the parents do not have a close relationship. Some writers see the rise of single parenthood as a symptom of increased tolerance of diverse family forms. For example, the Rapoports (1982) claim that the single-parent family is an important 'emerging form' of the family which is becoming accepted as a legitimate alternative to other family structures.

However, there is little evidence that a large number of single parents see their situation as ideal and actively choose it as an alternative to dual parenthood. Burghes and Brown conducted research into 31 lone mothers and found that only a minority of the pregnancies were planned. None of the mothers had actively set out to become lone mothers and all of them attributed the break-up of their relationship to 'violence in the relationship or the father's unwillingness to settle down' (Burghes and Brown, 1995). In this small sample, all aspired to forming a two-parent household, but they had failed to achieve it despite their preference.

A number of Conservative politicians have argued that the increase in single parenthood is a consequence of the welfare state. John Selwyn Gummer claimed that there are 'perverse incentives' for young women to become pregnant so that it increases their chance of being allocated council housing. In July 1993, two other Conservative ministers, Peter Lilley and John Redwood, expressed concern about the cost of welfare payments to single-parent families and the possibility that the availability of such payments encouraged single parenthood. In 1993, the then Home Secretary, Michael Howard, expressed approval for a policy in New Jersey in the USA, in which welfare benefits were withdrawn from lone mothers (discussed in McIntosh, 1996).

The view that welfare payments create lone motherhood has been closely associated with Charles Murray's view of the underclass (discussed on pp. 91–2 and 323–8). According to Mary McIntosh, the US President Bill Clinton has suggested that Murray's explanation for the development of the underclass is basically correct. New Labour politicians in Britain have been less willing to openly suggest that lone motherhood is caused by welfare payments. However, they have developed a 'New Deal' for lone parents which encourages them to find employment rather than relying upon benefits (discussed in the Green Paper, *Supporting Families*, 1998). (See pp. 576–7 for a discussion of New Labour policies on families.)

However, there are a number of reasons for supposing that the welfare state is not responsible for the increases:

1 Some commentators do not believe that lone parenthood gives advantages to those seeking local authority housing. In 1993, John Perry, policy director of the Institute of Housing, said:

I've not been able to find a single housing authority which discriminates in favour of single parents over couples with children. The homeless get priority, but there is no suggestion that a homeless single parent gets priority over a homeless couple.

Quoted in *The Independent on Sunday*, 11 July 1993

2 As the next section indicates, single parents who are reliant upon benefits tend to live in poor housing conditions and to have low standards of living. There is little material incentive to become a single parent.

3 There is evidence that a large majority of single parents do not wish to be reliant on state benefits. They would prefer to work for a living but find it impractical to do so. A 1991 DSS survey found that 90 per cent of single parents would like to work at some point in the future and 55 per cent would start work immediately if they could obtain suitable help with childcare (quoted in the *Observer*, 11 July 1993). The 1998 British government Green Paper, *Supporting Families*, quoted figures showing that 44 per cent of lone mothers had paid employment and 85 per cent of the remainder would like to be employed.

David Morgan suggests that the rise in lone parenthood could partly be due to changing relationships between men and women. He says important factors causing the rise could include 'the expectations that women and men have of marriage and the growing opportunities for women to develop a life for themselves outside marriage or long-term cohabitations' (Morgan, 1994).

A longer-term trend that helps to account for the increase could be a decline in the stigma attached to single parenthood. This is reflected in the decreasing use of terms such as 'illegitimate children' and 'unmarried mothers', which seem to imply some deviation from the norms of family life, and their replacement by concepts such as 'single-parent families' and 'lone-parent families', which do not carry such negative connotations. The reduction in the stigma of single parenthood could relate to 'the weakening of religious or community controls over women' (Morgan, 1994).

The consequences of single parenthood

Single parenthood has increasingly become a contentious issue, with some arguing that it has become a serious problem for society. For example, in a letter to *The Times* in 1985, Lady Scott said:

A vast majority of the population would still agree, I think, that the normal family is an influence for good in society and that one-parent families are bad news. Since not many single parents can both earn a living and give children the love and care they need, society has to support them; the children suffer through lacking one parent.

Quoted in Fletcher, 1988, p. 151

Similar sentiments have been expressed by British Conservative politicians and, when they were in government, such views began to influence social policies (see pp. 574–6). New Labour politicians have been less inclined to condemn single parenthood outright, but the Labour government's 1998 Green Paper, *Supporting Families*, did say that 'marriage is still the surest foundation for raising children'.

Sociologists such as Charles Murray have even gone so far as to claim that single parenthood has contributed to creating a whole new stratum of society, the underclass – a claim we consider in detail on pp. 91–6. Mary McIntosh says that 'Over recent years, the media in the United Kingdom have been reflecting a concern about lone mothers that amounts to a moral panic' (McIntosh, 1996). She claims that, as a group, lone mothers have been stigmatized and blamed for problems such as youth crime, high taxation to pay for welfare benefits, encouraging a culture of dependency on the state, and producing children who grow up to be unemployable. She says, 'Perhaps the most serious charge is that they are ineffective in bringing up their children.'

However, while most commentators agree that single parenthood can create problems for individual parents, many sociologists do not see it as a social problem, and some believe that it is a sign of social progress. As Sarah McLanahan and Karen Booth have said:

Some view the mother-only family as an indicator of social disorganization, signalling the 'demise of the family'. Others regard it as an alternative family form consistent with the emerging economic independence of women.

McLanahan and Booth, 1991

Single parenthood and living standards

However single parenthood is viewed, there is little doubt that it tends to be associated with low living standards. The *General Household Survey* of 1996 found that single-parent families were disadvantaged in comparison to other British families. In 1996, 60 per cent of lone-mother families had a gross weekly income of below £150 per week, compared to 7 per cent of married couples (Thomas *et al.*, 1998).

Many of these differences stem from the likelihood of lone-parent families relying upon benefit. British government figures show that, in 1961, one in six lone parents received government benefits; by 1993,

over three-quarters did so. According to DSS figures from 1993, the average single parent with one child received just £67.55 per week in income support, although they might in addition receive extra child allowance and housing benefit to cover rent or mortgage payments.

Other effects

More controversial than the low average living standards of lone parents is the question of the psychological and social effects on children raised in such families. McLanahan and Booth have listed the findings of a number of American studies which seem to indicate that children are harmed by single parenthood. These studies have claimed that such children have lower earnings and experience more poverty as adults; children of mother-only families are more likely to become lone parents themselves; and they are more likely to become delinquent and engage in drug abuse (McLanahan and Booth, 1991).

The findings of such studies must be treated with caution. As McLanahan and Booth themselves point out, the differences outlined above stem partly from the low income of lone-parent families and not directly from the absence of the second parent from the household.

In a review of research on lone parenthood, Louie Burghes notes that some research into the relationship between educational attainment and divorce suggests that children in families where the parents divorce start to do more poorly in education before the divorce takes place. Burghes argues that this implies that 'it is the quality of the family relationships, of which the divorce is only a part, that are influential' (Burghes, 1996).

The more sophisticated research into the effects of lone parenthood tries to take account of factors such as social class and low income. These studies find that 'the gap in outcomes between children who have and have not experienced family change narrows. In some cases they disappear; in others, statistically significant differences may remain. Some of these differences are small' (Burghes, 1996).

E.E. Cashmore has questioned the assumption that children brought up by one parent are worse off than those brought up by two. Cashmore argues that it is often preferable for a child to live with one caring parent than with one caring and one uncaring parent, particularly if the parents are constantly quarrelling and the marriage has all but broken down.

Cashmore also suggests that single parenthood can have attractions for the parent, particularly for mothers, since conventional family life may benefit men more than women. He says:

> *Given the 'darker side of family life' and the unseen ways in which the nuclear unit serves 'male power' rather than the interests of women, the idea of parents breaking free of marriage and raising children single-handed has its appeals.*
>
> Cashmore, 1985

It can give women greater independence than they have in other family situations. However, Cashmore does acknowledge that many lone mothers who are freed from dependence on a male partner end up becoming dependent on the state and facing financial hardship. He concludes that 'Lone parents do not need a partner so much as a partner's income.'

David Morgan does believe that the evidence suggests that the children of single parents fare less well than those from two-parent households (Morgan, 1994). He qualifies this by saying that 'we still do not know enough about what causes these differences'. As with the effects of financial hardships, the children could be affected by the stigma attached to coming from a single-parent family. Morgan argues that 'It is possible, for example, that school teachers may be more likely to label a child as difficult if they have the knowledge that a particular child comes from a single-parent household.'

For Morgan, it is very difficult to disentangle the direct and indirect effects on children of being brought up in a single-parent household, and therefore dangerous to make generalizations about such effects.

Ethnicity and family diversity

Ethnicity can be seen as one of the most important sources of family diversity in Britain. Ethnic groups with different cultural backgrounds may introduce family forms that differ significantly from those of the ethnic majority.

British sociologists have paid increasing attention to the family patterns of ethnic minority groups. They have been particularly concerned to establish the extent to which the family relationships typical of the societies of origin of the ethnic minorities have been modified within the British context. Thus, sociologists have compared ethnic minority families in Britain both with families in the country of their origin and with other British families.

Although some changes in the traditional family life of these groups might be expected, the degree to which they change could provide important evidence in relation to the theory of increasing family diversity. If it is true that cultural diversity is becoming increasingly accepted in Britain, then these families could be expected to change little. If, however, the families of ethnic minorities are becoming more similar to other British families, then family diversity resulting from ethnic differences might be only temporary.

Statistical evidence

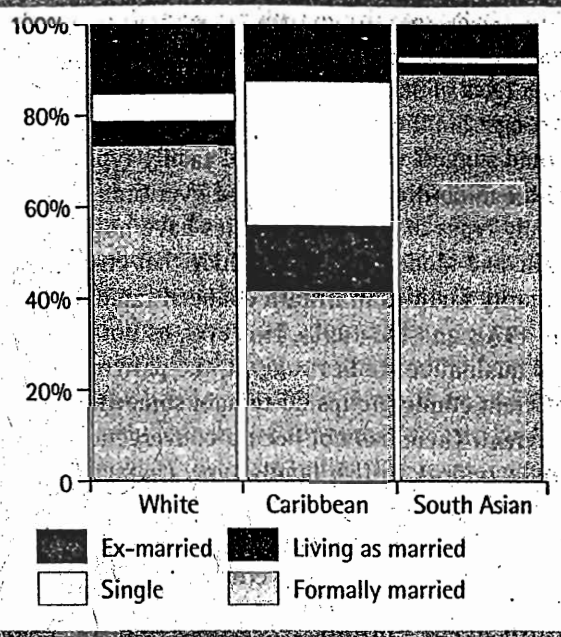
Statistical evidence does suggest that there are some differences in the prevalence of different household types in different ethnic groups.

The Policy Studies Institute's *Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities*, which was conducted in England and Wales in 1994, also found significant differences between the families and households of different ethnic groups (Modood *et al.* 1997, see p. 216 for further details of the survey). Table 8.7 shows the marital status of different ethnic groups among adults under 60. It shows that whites and Caribbeans had higher rates of divorce and cohabitation than other groups, and that Indians, African Asians, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis were the ethnic groups who were most likely to be married.

The survey also found marked differences in the parental status of families with children. These are shown in Figure 8.1. The survey found that 90 per cent of South Asian families with children had married parents. Amongst whites, 75 per cent of families had married parents; amongst Caribbean families, less than 50 per cent had married parents, and a third had single, never-married mothers.

Using data from previous surveys, Tariq Modood *et al.* were able to calculate the proportions of families with children in different ethnic groups which were headed by lone parents at different points in time. Table 8.8 shows that there had been a substantial increase in lone parenthood in all three ethnic groups, but that the increase had been most noticeable in ethnic minorities. The rate amongst South Asian families had risen most quickly, but from a very low base, so that by 1994 they were still by far the least likely group to have formed lone-parent families.

Figure 8.1 Parental status of families with children



Source: T. Modood et al. (1997) *Ethnic Minorities in Britain*, PSI, London, p. 49.

Table 8.8 Proportion of families with children headed by lone parents, 1974–94

	White	Caribbean	South Asian
1974 (household definition)	n.a.	13	1
1982 (household definition)	10	31	5
1994 (household definition)	16	36	5

Source: T. Modood et al. (1997) *Ethnic Minorities in Britain*, PSI, London, p. 49.

Table 8.7 Marital status, 1994

	Percentages						
	White	Caribbean	Indian	African Asian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Chinese
Single	23	41	21	21	19	22	34
Married	60	39	72	72	74	73	62
Living as married	9	10	3	2	3	1	1
Separated/divorced	7	9	3	3	3	1	3
Widowed	1	2	2	1	2	3	–
Weighted count	*4,194*	*1,834*	*1,539*	*960*	*1,053*	*344*	*467*
Unweighted count	*4,187*	*1,298*	*1,560*	*951*	*1,709*	*815*	*271*

Note: Analysis based on all individuals in survey households who were either dependant children or 60 or more.
Source: T. Modood et al. (1997) *Ethnic Minorities in Britain*, PSI, London, p. 24.

Rates amongst Caribbean families had also risen rapidly and were probably the highest rates at the time of all three surveys (there were no figures for whites in the 1974 survey). It is significant that very high rates of single parenthood were not present amongst families of Caribbean origin in 1974. This would suggest that diversity of family types amongst ethnic minorities has developed over time. The family types of ethnic minorities have not remained static and Modood *et al.* conclude that ethnic minority families in Britain changed rapidly between the 1970s and the 1990s. However, as both statistics and qualitative studies suggest, the patterns of different ethnic groups do remain somewhat different. There has not been a convergence to a single, typical, British family type, characteristic of all ethnic groups.

We will now examine the significance of variations in family life by ethnic group.

South Asian families

Roger Ballard (1982, 1990) has examined South Asian families in Britain and compared them to families in South Asia itself. Migration from this area began in the 1950s and was mainly from the Punjab, Gujerat and Bengal. Although there are important differences in family life within these groups, which stem from area of origin, religion and caste, Ballard identifies some features generally held in common.

Families in South Asia are based traditionally around a man, his sons and grandsons, and their respective wives and unmarried daughters. These family groups ideally live and work together in large multi-generational households, sharing both domestic and production tasks. In practice, in the past many households were not as large as might be expected. A high death rate limited the number of generations living together, and sons might establish different households after their father's death when the family land was divided up.

Changes in South Asian families

Ballard found that some changes had taken place in Asian families in Britain. Women were increasingly working outside the home, and production was less frequently family-based because wage labour provided the most common source of income. Ballard claims that married couples in Britain expect more independence from their kin. In some families extended kinship networks are less important than they traditionally are because some of the kin remain in South Asia or live in distant parts of Britain. Families were also split into smaller domestic units, partly because British housing was rarely suited to the needs of large groupings.

The strengthening of South Asian families

Despite these changes, Ballard says:

> *It should not be assumed that such upheavals have either undermined or stood in contradiction to family unity. On the contrary migration has taken place within the context of familial obligations and has if anything strengthened rather than weakened them.*
>
> Ballard 1982

Many migrants found that British culture seemed to attach little value to family honour and placed relatively little emphasis on maintaining kinship ties. As a result, many first-generation immigrants became conservative and cautious in their attitudes to family life. They were vigilant in ensuring that standards of behaviour in the family did not slip and kept a close check on their children.

Ballard found that many children had the experience of two cultures. They behaved in ways that conformed to the culture of the wider society for part of the time, but at home conformed to their ethnic subculture. Although children increasingly expected to have some say in their marriage partners, they generally did not reject the principle of arranged marriages.

The majority of families relied on wage labour, but some of the more successful began to establish family businesses (such as buying a shop) which provided a new focus for the family's economic activities.

Ballard found that, despite the distances involved, most families retained links with their village of origin in Asia. Extended kinship links could stretch over thousands of miles. He found that money was sometimes sent to help support family members who remained in Asia.

In Britain, despite the housing problems, close family ties remained. By living close together, or buying adjoining houses and knocking through a connecting door, people were able to retain strong family links.

Ballard concluded that South Asians had suffered comparatively little disruption to family life as a result of settling in Great Britain.

Asian families in the PSI *National Survey*

Data on families collected in the Policy Studies Institute's *Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities* was analysed by Richard Berthoud and Sharon Beishon (1997). They found that British South Asians 'were more likely to marry and marry earlier than their white equivalents. Few of them lived as married and separation and divorce were relatively rare.' Nearly all South Asian mothers were married and 'a relatively high proportion of South Asian couples, including many with children, lived in the same house

as the young man's father'. Nevertheless, there was some evidence that family patterns were changing.

There were some divorces and some single parents in Asian communities, and another sign of change was a fall in the number of children born to each married couple. The study also found some evidence of changing attitudes to family life, with, for example, young people expecting more say in the choice of marriage partner than their parents had expected.

Cypriot families in Britain

Robin Oakley (1982) conducted a study of Cypriot families in Britain. This group numbers around 140,000, and in some areas, particularly London, the Cypriot community has been established since just after the First World War. Most of the immigration took place in the 20 years following the Second World War.

According to Oakley, Cypriots traditionally have very strong extended family ties, and parents retain strong connections with married children. There are taboos against seeking outside help to solve family problems, and families are not child-centred – children are expected to pull their weight like other family members. Oakley found little evidence that these patterns had changed significantly among British Cypriot families despite the length of time some of them had been in Britain. There were relatively few elderly Cypriots in Britain and for this reason extended kinship links were somewhat weaker than in Cyprus itself.

Families in the West Indies

Research into the family life of West Indians in Britain and in the Caribbean has found greater diversity in their cultural patterns. Jocelyn Barrow (1982) argues that there are three main West Indian family types in the Caribbean:

1 The conventional nuclear family, or 'Christian marriage', which is often little different from nuclear families in Britain. Families of this type tend to be typical of the more religious or economically successful groups in the population.

2 The second main type found in the West Indies, the common-law family, is more frequently found among the less economically successful. An unmarried couple live together and look after children who may or may not be their biological offspring.

3 The third type Barrow calls the mother household, in which the mother or grandmother of the children is head of the household and, for most of the time at least, the household contains no adult males. This type of household often relies a good deal on the help and support of female kin living nearby to enable the head of the household to fulfil her family responsibilities.

West Indian families in Britain

To a large extent, research has shown that a similar mixture of family types exists in Britain amongst West Indian groups. Geoffrey Driver (1982), however, has found that in some cases what appears to be a nuclear family is rather different beneath the surface. He uses the example of a family called the Campbells. In this family the wife took on primary responsibility both for running the household and for being the breadwinner after her husband lost his job. In reality, then, this was a mother-centred family, even though it contained an adult male.

Barrow (1982) found that mother-centred families in Britain, whether or not they contained an adult male, could rely less on the support of female kin than they could in the West Indies. They were much less likely to live close to the relevant kin, and in some cases appropriate kin were still in the West Indies, and could not therefore be called upon to provide assistance.

However, Barrow discovered that equivalent networks tended to build up in areas with high concentrations of West Indians. Informal help with childcare and other domestic tasks is common among neighbours, and self-help projects such as pre-school playgroups are frequent features of West Indian communities.

Mary Chamberlain (1999) studied the importance of brothers, sisters, uncles and aunts to Caribbean families in the United Kingdom and the Caribbean. She found that siblings often played a significant part in the upbringing of their younger brothers and sisters or of their nephews and nieces. Like Barrow, she found that distance from kin made it difficult or even impossible for relatives to play such a significant role in childcare as they played in many families in the Caribbean. Nevertheless, some British Afro-Caribbeans were able to choose to live close to their relatives, and brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles played a greater role in the upbringing of children than is typical of white British families.

Berthoud and Beishon, who analysed the data from the PSI survey, found some distinctive features of black family life in Britain, but also a great deal of variety between families. They say that 'the most striking characteristic is a low emphasis on long-term partnerships, and especially on formal marriage' (Berthoud and Beishon, 1997). British Afro-Caribbean families had high rates of divorce and separation and were more likely than other groups to have children outside of marriage. Among this group there were also high proportions of lone mothers, but Afro-Caribbean lone mothers were much more likely than those from other groups to have paid employment. Nevertheless, over half of Caribbean families with children were married or cohabiting in long-term relationships.

Ethnicity and family diversity – conclusion

The general picture provided by these studies, then, suggests that immigrants and their descendants have adapted their family life to fit British circumstances, but have not fundamentally altered the relationships on which their traditional family life was based. This would suggest that the existence of a variety of ethnic groups has indeed contributed to the diversity of family types to be found in Britain. These ethnic minorities have succeeded in retaining many of the culturally distinctive features of their family life.

Nevertheless, there is also evidence of changes taking place in the families of ethnic minorities, and British culture may have more effect on future generations. Each ethnic group contains a variety of different family types, which are influenced by factors such as class and stage in the life cycle, which relate to diversity in white families. David Morgan warns that:

> *while seeking to recognize ethnic diversity in a multicultural society, ethnic boundaries may be too readily or too easily constructed by, say, white Western analysts. There may be oversimplified references to 'The Chinese family', 'The Muslim family' and so on just as, in the past, there have been oversimplified references to 'the Jewish family'.*
>
> Morgan, 1996, p. 62

Ethnic minority families have not just contributed to family diversity through each group having its own distinctive family pattern, they have also contributed to it through developing diverse family patterns within each ethnic group. The Cypriot example, though, demonstrates the considerable resilience of the culture of an ethnic group, some of whom have been settled in Britain for well over half a century.

Robert Chester – the British neo-conventional family

In a strong attack upon the idea that fundamental changes are taking place in British family life, Robert Chester (1985) argued that the changes had been only minor. He claimed that the evidence advanced by writers such as the Rapoports was misleading, and that the basic features of family life had remained largely unchanged for the vast majority of the British population since the Second World War. He argued:

> *Most adults still marry and have children. Most children are reared by their natural parents. Most people live in a household headed by a married couple. Most marriages continue until parted by death. No great change seems currently in prospect.*
>
> Chester, 1985

Percentage of people versus percentage of households

Chester believed that a snapshot of household types at a particular time does not provide a valid picture of the British family.

The first point that Chester made is that a very different picture is produced if the percentage of people in various types of household is calculated, instead of the percentage of households of various types. Households containing parents and children contain a greater percentage of the population than the percentage of households they make up. This is because family households tend to have more members than other types of household.

Chester's arguments were based upon figures from 1981. As Table 8.9 shows, the way the figures are calculated does make a difference. In 1981, 40 per cent of households were made up of two parents and children, but over 59 per cent of people lived in such households. In 1998, 30 per cent of households consisted of two parents plus children, but 49 per cent of people lived in such households. Despite the decline, very nearly half were still living in nuclear, two-generation households, with a further 24 per cent living in couple households.

The nuclear family and the life cycle

The second point made by Chester was that life cycles make it inevitable that at any one time some people will not be a member of a nuclear family household. Many of those who lived in other types of household would either have experienced living in a nuclear family in the past, or would do so in the future. He said, 'The 8 per cent living alone are mostly the elderly widowed, or else younger people who are likely to marry.' He described the parents–children household as 'one which is normal and is still experienced by the vast majority'.

The 'neo-conventional family'

According to Chester, there was little evidence that people were choosing to live on a long-term basis in alternatives to the nuclear family. However, he did accept that some changes were taking place in family life. In particular, many families were no longer 'conventional' in the sense that the husband is the sole breadwinner. He accepted that women were increasingly making a contribution to household finances by taking paid employment outside the home.

However, he argued that, although 58 per cent of wives, according to his figures, worked, often they only did so for part of their married lives, and frequently on a part-time basis. Many gave up work for the period when their children were young; a minority of married mothers (49 per cent) were

employed, and only 14 per cent of working married mothers had full-time jobs. Because of such figures he argued that 'The pattern is of married women withdrawing from the labour force to become mothers, and some of them taking (mostly part-time) work as their children mature.'

Although he recognized that this was an important change in family life compared to the past, he did not see it as a fundamental alteration in the family. He called this new family form – in which wives have some involvement in the labour market – the neo-conventional family. It was little different from the conventional family apart from the increasing numbers of wives working for at least part of their married lives.

Family diversity – conclusion

While Chester makes an important point in stressing that nuclear families remained very common and feature in most people's lives, he perhaps overstated his case. As Table 8.9 shows, there has been a continuing reduction in the proportion of people living in parents-and-children households, from 59 per cent in 1981 to 49 per cent in 1998. The percentages of people living alone or in lone-parent households have increased. Thus, since Chester was writing, there has been a slow but steady drift away from living in nuclear families in Britain.

In 1990, the position was summed up by Kathleen Kiernan and Malcolm Wicks who said that 'Although still the most prominent form, the nuclear family is for increasing numbers of individuals only one of several possible family types that they experience during their lives.' Similarly, in 1999, Elizabeth Silva and Carol Smart argue that fairly traditional family forms remain important. They note that:

> *in 1996 73 per cent of households were composed of heterosexual couples (with just under 90 per cent of these being married), 50 per cent of these households had children, and 40 per cent had dependent children ... only 9 per cent of households with dependent children were headed by lone parents.*
>
> Silva and Smart, 1999, p. 3

Nevertheless, they argue that 'personal choices appear as increasingly autonomous and fluid'. The idea that family diversity indicates a new era of choice was first advanced by the Rapoports in 1982. They argued that it was increasingly acceptable to form alternative households and families to conventional nuclear ones. They said:

> *Families in Britain today are in a transition from coping in a society in which there was a single overriding norm of what family life should be like to a society in which a plurality of norms are recognized as legitimate, indeed, desirable.*
>
> Rapoport and Rapoport, 1982

The passage of time does not seem to have made their argument less valid. Indeed, a growing number of sociologists have tried to link ideas of choice and diversity with their particular views on modernity and postmodernity. (These views will be examined on pp. 577–84.)

Having surveyed the ways in which the structure of the family may have changed over the years, we will now investigate whether the functions of the family have also changed.

Table 8.9 Households and people in households in Great Britain 1981 and 1998

Type of household	% of households 1981	% of people 1981	% of households 1998	% of people 1998
One person	22	8	28	12
Married couple	26	20	28	24
Married couple with dependent children	32	49	23	40
Married couple with independent children	8	10	7	9
Lone parent with dependent children	4	5	7	8
Other	9	8	7	8

Source: *Social Trends* (1982 and 1999) HMSO, London.

The changing functions of the family

The loss of functions

Many sociologists argue that the family has lost a number of its functions in modern industrial society. Institutions such as businesses, political parties, schools, and welfare organizations now specialize in functions formerly performed by the family. Talcott Parsons argued that the family has become:

> *on the 'macroscopic' levels, almost completely functionless. It does not itself, except here and there, engage in much economic production; it is not a significant unit in the political power system; it is not a major direct agency of integration of the larger society. Its individual members participate in all these functions, but they do so as individuals, not in their roles as family members.*
>
> Parsons, 1955, p. 16

However, this does not mean that the family is declining in importance – it has simply become more specialized. Parsons maintained that its role is still vital. By structuring the personalities of the young and stabilizing the personalities of adults, the family provides its members with the psychological training and support necessary to meet the requirements of the social system. Parsons concluded that 'the family is more specialized than before, but not in any general sense less important, because society is dependent more exclusively on it for the performance of certain of its vital functions'. Thus the loss of certain functions by the family has made its remaining functions more important.

This view is supported by N. Dennis (1975) who argues that impersonal bureaucratic agencies have taken over many of the family's functions. As a result, the warmth and close supportive relationships that existed when the family performed a large range of functions have largely disappeared.

Dennis argues that, in the impersonal setting of modern industrial society, the family provides the only opportunity 'to participate in a relationship where people are perceived and valued as whole persons'. Outside the family, individuals must often interact with strangers in terms of a number of roles. Adopting roles such as employee, customer, teacher and student, they are unable to express many aspects of themselves or develop deep and supportive relationships. Dennis argues that:

> *marriage has become the only institution in which the individual can expect esteem and love. Adults have no one on whom they have the right to lean for this sort of support at all comparable with their right to lean on their spouse.*
>
> Dennis, 1975

Young and Willmott make a similar point, arguing that the emotional support provided by family relationships grows in importance as the family loses many of its functions. They claim that the family:

> *can provide some sense of wholeness and permanence to set against the more restricted and transitory roles imposed by the specialized institutions which have flourished outside the home. The upshot is that, as the disadvantages of the new industrial and impersonal society have become more pronounced, so the family has become more prized for its power to counteract them.*
>
> Young and Willmott, 1973, p. 269

The maintenance and improvement of functions

Not all sociologists would agree, however, that the family has lost many of its functions in modern industrial society. Ronald Fletcher, a British sociologist and a staunch supporter of the family, maintained that just the opposite has happened. In *The Family and Marriage in Britain* (1966), Fletcher argued that not only has the family retained its functions but those functions have 'increased in detail and importance'. Specialized institutions such as schools and hospitals have added to and improved the family's functions, rather than superseded them.

1. Fletcher maintained that the family's responsibility for socializing the young is as important as it ever was. State education has added to, rather than removed, this responsibility since 'Parents are expected to do their best to guide, encourage and support their children in their educational and occupational choices and careers.'
2. In the same way, the state has not removed the family's responsibility for the physical welfare of its members. Fletcher argued that 'The family is still centrally concerned with maintaining the health of its members, but it is now aided by wider provisions which have been added to the family's situation since pre-industrial times.'

   Rather than removing this function from the family, the state provision of health services has served to expand and improve it. Compared to the past, parents are preoccupied with their children's health. State health and welfare provision has provided additional support for the family and made its members more aware of the importance of health and hygiene in the home.
3. Even though Fletcher admitted that the family has largely lost its function as a unit of production, he argued that it still maintains a vital economic function as a unit of consumption. Particularly in

the case of the modern home-centred family, money is spent on, and in the name of, the family rather than the individual. Thus the modern family demands fitted carpets, three-piece suites, washing machines, television sets and 'family' cars.

Young and Willmott (1973) make a similar point with respect to their symmetrical Stage 3 family (see pp. 529–30). They argue that 'In its capacity as a consumer the family has also made a crucial alliance with technology.' Industry needs both a market for its goods and a motivated workforce. The symmetrical family provides both. Workers are motivated to work by their desire for consumer durables. This desire stems from the high value they place on the family and a privatized lifestyle in the family home. This provides a ready market for the products of industry.

In this way the family performs an important economic function and is functionally related to the economic system. In Young and Willmott's words, 'The family and technology have achieved a mutual adaptation.'

Neo-Marxist views

This economic function looks rather different from a neo-Marxist perspective. Writers such as Marcuse (1972) and Gorz (1965) argue that alienation at work leads to a search for fulfilment outside work. However, the capitalist-controlled mass media, with its advertisements that proclaim the virtues of family life and associate the products of industry with those virtues, simply creates 'false needs'. With pictures of the 'Persil mum' and the happy family in the midst of its consumer durables, the myth that material possessions bring happiness and fulfilment is promoted. This myth produces the obedient, motivated worker and the receptive consumer that capitalism requires. The family man or woman is therefore ideal material for exploitation. (We analyse Marcuse's views in more detail in Chapter 10.)

Feminism and economic functions

Feminist writers have tended to disagree with the view shared by many sociologists of the family that the family has lost its economic role as a unit of production and has become simply a unit of consumption. They tend to argue that much of the work that takes place in the family is productive but it is not recognized as such because it is unpaid and it is usually done by women. The contribution to economic life made by women is frequently underestimated.

The radical feminists Christine Delphy and Diana Leonard (1992) accept that industrialization created new units of production such as factories, but deny that it removed the productive function from the family. Some productive functions have been lost, but others are performed to a much higher standard than in the past. They cite as examples 'warm and tidy rooms with attention to décor, and more complex meals with a variety of forms of cooking'. The family has taken on some new productive functions, such as giving pre-school reading tuition to children, and functions such as washing clothes and freezing food have been reintroduced to the household with the advent of new consumer products.

They also point out that there are still a fair number of families which continue to act as an economic unit producing goods for the market. French farming families, which have been studied by Christine Delphy, are a case in point. (We discussed Delphy and Leonard's work in more detail earlier, see pp. 516–18. Housework is discussed in more detail on pp. 552–63.)

Summary and conclusions

In summary, most sociologists who adopt a functionalist perspective argue that the family has lost several of its functions in modern industrial society but they maintain that the importance of the family has not declined. Rather, the family has adapted and is adapting to a developing industrial society. It remains a vital and basic institution in society.

Others dispute the claim that some of these functions have been lost, or argue that new functions have replaced the old ones. From all these viewpoints the family remains a key institution.

All the writers examined here have a tendency to think in terms of 'the family' without differentiating between different types of family. They may not, therefore, appreciate the range of effects family life can have or the range of functions it may perform. Postmodernists and difference feminists certainly reject the view that there is any single type of family which always performs certain functions (see pp. 582–4 for a discussion of postmodernism and pp. 519–23 for a discussion of difference feminism).

The writers discussed also tend to assume that families reproduce the existing social structure, whether this is seen as a functioning mechanism, an exploitative capitalist system, or as a patriarchal society. Yet families are not necessarily supportive of or instrumental in reproducing existing societies. With increasing family diversity, some individual families and even some types of family may be radical forces in society. For example, gay and lesbian families sometimes see themselves as challenging the inegalitarian relationships in heterosexual families (see pp. 562–3 for a discussion of lesbian families).

In this section we have discussed the various functional roles that the family performs; in the next section we focus on the various roles within the family.

Conjugal roles

A major characteristic of the symmetrical family – which Young and Willmott (1973) claimed was developing when they were writing in the 1970s – was the degree to which spouses shared domestic, work and leisure activities. Relationships of this type are known as joint conjugal roles, as opposed to segregated conjugal roles.

In Young and Willmott's Stage 2 family, conjugal roles – the marital roles of husband and wife – were largely segregated. There was a clearcut division of labour between the spouses in the household, and the husband was relatively uninvolved with domestic chores and raising the children. This segregation of conjugal roles extended to leisure. The wife associated mainly with her female kin and neighbours; the husband with his male workmates, kin and neighbours. This pattern was typical of the traditional working-class community of Bethnal Green.

In the Stage 3 symmetrical family, conjugal roles become more joint. Although the wife still has primary responsibility for housework and child-rearing, husbands become more involved, often washing clothes, ironing and sharing other domestic duties. (In fact, from their research Young and Willmott found that 72 per cent of husbands did housework other than washing up during the course of a week.) Husband and wife increasingly share responsibility for decisions that affect the family. They discuss matters such as household finances and their children's education to a greater degree than the Stage 2 family.

Young and Willmott argue that the change from segregated to joint conjugal roles results mainly from the withdrawal of the wife from her relationships with female kin, and the drawing of the husband into the family circle. We looked at the reasons they gave for this in a previous section (see pp. 529–30). The extent to which conjugal roles have been changing and what this indicates about inequalities between men and women have been the subject of some controversy. These controversies will now be discussed.

Inequality within marriage

Although much of the recent research on conjugal roles has been concerned with determining the degree of inequality between husband and wife within marriage, there has been no generally accepted way of determining the extent of inequality. Different researchers have measured different aspects of inequality. Some have concentrated on the division of labour in the home: they have examined the allocation of responsibility for domestic work between husband and wife and the amount of time spent by spouses on particular tasks. Others have tried to measure the distribution of power within marriage.

Young and Willmott are amongst those who have argued that conjugal roles are increasingly becoming joint. However, most sociologists who have carried out research in this area have found little evidence that inequality within marriage has been significantly reduced.

Conjugal roles, housework and childcare

The symmetrical family

Young and Willmott's views on the symmetrical family (see above) have been heavily criticized. Ann Oakley (1974) argues that their claim of increasing symmetry within marriage is based on inadequate methodology. Although the figure of 72 per cent (for men doing housework) sounds impressive, she points out that it is based on only one question in Young and Willmott's interview schedule: 'Do you/does your husband help at least once a week with any household jobs like washing up, making beds (helping with the children), ironing, cooking or cleaning?' Oakley notes that men who make only a very small contribution to housework would be included in the 72 per cent. She says, 'A man who helps with the children once a week would be included in this percentage, so would (presumably) a man who ironed his own trousers on a Saturday afternoon.'

Ann Oakley – housework and childcare

A rather different picture of conjugal roles emerged in Oakley's own research (1974). She collected information on 40 married women who had one child or more under the age of 5, who were British or Irish born, and aged between 20 and 30. Half of her sample were working-class, half were middle-class and all lived in the London area.

She found greater equality in terms of the allocation of domestic tasks between spouses in the middle class than in the working class (see Table 8.10). However, in both classes few men had a high level of participation in housework and childcare: few marriages could be defined as egalitarian. In only 15 per cent of marriages did men have a high level of participation in housework, and in childcare in only 25 per cent.

Chapter 9

Power, politics and the state

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Power, politics and the state

Introduction

In this chapter we are mainly concerned with the nature and distribution of power in modern industrial societies.

Many sociologists argue that political sociology is the study of power in its broadest sense. Thus Dowse and Hughes state that 'politics is about "power", politics occurs when there are differentials in power' (Dowse and Hughes, 1972). In terms of this definition, any social relationship that involves power differentials is political. Political relationships would extend from parents assigning domestic chores to their children to teachers enforcing discipline in the classroom; from a manager organizing a workforce to a general ordering troops into battle.

However, the traditional study of politics has concentrated on the state and the various institutions of government such as Parliament and the judiciary. Sociologists have been particularly concerned with the state, but they have examined it in relation to society as a whole, rather than in isolation.

Sociologists often distinguish between two forms of power, authority and coercion:

1 Authority is that form of power which is accepted as legitimate – that is, right and just – and therefore obeyed on that basis. Thus, if members of British society accept that Parliament has the right to make certain decisions and they regard those decisions as lawful, parliamentary power may be defined as legitimate authority.

2 Coercion is that form of power which is not regarded as legitimate by those subject to it. Thus, from the point of view of some Basque nationalists, the activities of the Spanish police and army in the Basque province may be regarded as coercion.

However, the distinction between authority and coercion is not as clearcut as the above definitions suggest. It has often been argued that both forms of power are based ultimately on physical force, and that those who enforce the law are able to resort to physical force whether their power is regarded as legitimate or not.

We will begin by looking at Max Weber's influential views on power and types of authority.

Max Weber – power and types of authority

Max Weber defined power as:

> *the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action.*
>
> Weber, in Gerth and Mills, 1948, p. 180

In other words, power consists of the ability to get your own way even when others are opposed to your wishes.

Weber was particularly concerned to distinguish different types of authority. He suggested that there were three sources: charismatic, traditional, and rational–legal.

Charismatic authority

Charismatic authority derives from the devotion felt by subordinates for a leader who is believed to have exceptional qualities. These qualities are seen as supernatural, super-human, or at least exceptional compared to lesser mortals.

Charismatic leaders are able to sway and control their followers by direct emotional appeals which excite devotion and strong loyalties. Historical examples which come close to charismatic authority might include Alexander the Great, Napoleon and Fidel Castro. More ordinary people, such as teachers or managers, may also use charisma to exercise power.

Traditional authority

Weber called the second type of authority traditional authority. In this case authority rests upon a belief in the 'rightness' of established customs and traditions. Those in authority command obedience on the basis of their traditional status which is usually inherited. Their subordinates are controlled by feelings of loyalty and obligation to long-established positions of power.

The feudal system of medieval Europe is an example of traditional authority: monarchs and nobles owed their positions to inherited status and the personal loyalty of their subjects.

Rational–legal authority

The final type of authority distinguished by Weber was rational–legal authority. In this case, unlike charismatic and traditional authority, legitimacy and control stem neither from the perceived personal qualities of the leader and the devotion they excite, nor from a commitment to traditional wisdom. Rational–legal authority is based on the acceptance of a set of impersonal rules.

Those who possess authority are able to issue commands and have them obeyed because others accept the legal framework that supports their authority. Thus a judge, a tax inspector or a military commander are obeyed because others accept the legal framework that gives them their power. The rules on which their authority is based are rational in the sense that they are consciously constructed for the attainment of a particular goal and they specify the means by which that goal is to be attained. For example, laws governing the legal system are designed to achieve the goal of 'justice'.

Ideal types

Weber stressed that, in reality, authority would never conform perfectly to any of his three types. His three categories are ideal types, each of which defines a 'pure' form of authority. In any particular example, authority may stem from two or more sources. It is therefore possible to find examples of authority which approximate to one of these types, but it is unlikely that a perfect example of any could be found.

Weber's attempts to define power and authority have been highly influential. The pluralist view of power and the state has adopted Weber's definition as a basis for measuring who has power in modern industrial societies.

Pluralists concentrate on the will (or desires) of individuals or groups to achieve particular ends. The wishes that people have are then compared to actual decisions taken by a government. The group whose wishes appear to be carried out are held to possess greater power than those who oppose them. Therefore, power is measured by comparing the stated wishes of individuals or groups who seek to influence government policy, with the actions taken by their government. (Pluralist views on power and the state are discussed fully below, see pp. 593–601.)

Steven Lukes – a radical view of power

Despite the acceptance of Weber's definition of power by many sociologists, some writers believe that it is too narrow. Steven Lukes (1974) has put forward a radical view of power as an alternative. He argues that power has three dimensions or faces, rather than just one.

Decision making

Like pluralists, Lukes sees the first face of power in terms of decision making, where different individuals or groups express different policy preferences and influence the making of decisions over various issues. Lukes would accept that if a government followed the policies advocated by the trade unions, this would represent evidence that the unions had power. However, he believes that it is misleading to concentrate entirely on decisions taken, for power can be exercised in less obvious ways.

Non-decision making

The second face of power does not concern decision making, but rather focuses on non-decision making. Power may be used to prevent certain issues from being discussed, or decisions about them from being taken.

From this point of view, individuals or groups exercising power do so by preventing those who take a decision from considering all the possible alternative sources of action, or by limiting the range of decisions they are allowed to take.

For example, a teacher might offer students the opportunity to decide whether to do a piece of homework that week or the following week. The class appears to have power, for they have been given the opportunity to reach a decision. In reality, however, most power still rests with the teacher who has limited the options open to the students. The students

are not free to decide whether or not they do this particular piece of work, nor can they choose to reject doing homework altogether.

Shaping desires

The third face of power strays even further from an emphasis on decision making, and the preferences expressed by members of society. Lukes claims that power can be exercised by shaping desires, manipulating the wishes and desires of social groups. A social group may be persuaded to accept, or even to desire, a situation that is harmful to them.

Some feminists would argue that men exercise power over women in contemporary Britain by persuading them that being a mother and housewife are the most desirable roles for women. In reality, feminists claim, women who occupy these roles are exploited by, and for the benefit of, men.

Lukes's definition of power

Having examined the nature of power, Lukes is able to conclude that power can be defined by saying that 'A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interests.' In other words, Lukes argues that power is exercised over those who are harmed by its use, whether they are aware they are being harmed or not.

Lukes has been responsible for refining the concept of power, and showing that it has more than one dimension. As he himself admits, though, what is in a person's interests, or what is good for them, is ultimately a matter of opinion. A mother and housewife might deny that her role in society is any less desirable than that of her husband. She might also deny that she is being exploited.

Despite this problem, the radical definition of power has become increasingly influential. Marxist sociologists in particular have used this definition to attack the evidence used by sociologists advocating other perspectives.

We will develop this issue of defining and measuring power as the various theories are examined in detail. Next, however, we will analyse the role of the state in relation to power.

The state

Definitions of the state

The definition of the state is probably less controversial than the definition of power. Weber provided a definition with which most sociologists are in broad agreement. He defined the state as 'a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' (Weber, in Gerth and Mills, 1948).

In modern Britain, the state rules over a clearly-defined geographical area, which includes England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland (although there is now some devolution of power to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland).

Only the central authority is believed by most members of society to have the right to use force to achieve its ends. Other groups and individuals may resort to violence, but the actions of terrorists, football 'hooligans' and murderers are not seen as legitimate. The state alone can wage war or use the legal system to imprison people against their will.

On the basis of Weber's definition, the state can be said to consist of the government or legislature which passes laws, the bureaucracy or civil service which implements governmental decisions, the police who are responsible for law enforcement, and the armed forces whose job it is to protect the state from external threats.

Many sociologists see the state as consisting of a wider set of institutions and, in Britain, would include welfare services, and the education and health services. Some go even further and see nationalized industries (such as the Post Office) as part of the state. However, in developing their theories of the state most sociologists have concentrated upon the more central institutions such as the government and the civil service.

The twentieth-century world came to be dominated by nation-states which laid claim to territory in every corner of the world (see pp. 263–70 for a discussion of nationalism). However, although states which conform to Weber's definition have existed for thousands of years, and include ancient Greece, Rome and Egypt, and the Aztecs of Central America, the state is a comparatively new feature of many societies. Anthropologists have discovered a number of stateless 'simple' societies. These are sometimes called acephalous or headless societies.

Stateless societies

In the 1930s, E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1951) carried out a study of the Nuer society in Africa. The society consisted of some 40 separate tribes, none of which had a head or chief.

Only a few decisions had to be taken which affected the tribe as a whole, such as whether to mount a raid on a neighbouring tribe, or whether to initiate young men into adult status. Such decisions appear to have been reached informally through discussions between members of the tribe.

Each tribal grouping was based on a particular geographical area, but they did not claim exclusive rights to using that land. More than half the Nuer lived in tribal areas in which they had not been born.

There was no legal system as such, and there were no particular individuals charged with special responsibility for policing the community. Instead, men who believed they had been wronged were expected to challenge the offender to a duel to the death.

In this society there was no government or other institution which claimed a monopoly of the legitimate use of force, and the society was not based upon a clearly defined territory. As such, Nuer society can be seen as stateless.

The feudal state

A number of commentators believe that the modern centralized state is also a relatively new feature of many parts of Europe. They suggest that it did not develop until after the feudal period.

Under feudalism the legitimate use of force was not concentrated in the hands of a centralized authority. While, in theory, the monarch ruled at the centre, in practice, military power and the control of particular territories were in the hands of feudal lords in each region. Gianfranco Poggi has described how, for example, in the Maconnâis in feudal France, the King was a 'dimly perceived, politically ineffective figure' (Poggi, 1978). The Count of the Maconnâis had originally been granted land by the King in return for providing warriors, but by the twelfth century lesser feudal lords, to whom the Count had granted territory, effectively ruled their own territories and monopolized military power. Thus the state was not centralized in any one place, but located in many separate centres throughout the nation.

Only in the seventeenth century did the French monarchy successfully establish its authority over the aristocracy in the regions. Furthermore, it was only in the nineteenth century that transport and communications had developed sufficiently for it to become possible for the centralized state to exercise close control over the far-flung corners of its territory.

The modern state

The centralized state developed comparatively recently in many areas of the world. However, its importance in modern, industrialized societies increased dramatically in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In Britain, for instance, in this period the state greatly extended its involvement in, and control over, economic affairs, and the provision of welfare, healthcare and education. These developments are reflected in the rising proportion of Gross National Product (the total amount of economic activity in a society that can be measured in monetary terms) spent by the government. The economists C.V. Brown and P.M. Jackson (1982) have calculated that government spending as a proportion of Gross National Product (GNP) has risen in Britain, from 8 per cent in 1890, to 29 per cent in 1932, to 40.2 per cent in 1966, and to 51.4 per cent in 1976. By 1997-8 it had gone back down to 38.3 per cent (*Independent Budget Review*, 10 March 1999).

The increasing importance of the state in industrial societies has prompted sociologists to devote considerable attention to this institution. In particular they have debated which groups in society control the state and in whose interests the state is run. We will now examine the competing sociological perspectives on power and the state, beginning with a functionalist perspective.

Power – a functionalist perspective

Most sociological theories of power follow Weber's definition in two important respects:

1 Weber's definition implies that those who hold power do so at the expense of others. It suggests that there is a fixed amount of power, and, therefore, if some hold power, others do not. This view is sometimes known as a constant-sum concept of power. Since the amount of power is constant, power is held by an individual or group to the extent that it is not held by others.

2 The second important implication of Weber's definition is that power-holders will tend to use power to further their own interests. Power is used to further the sectional interests of particular groups in society. This view is sometimes known as a variable-sum concept of power, since power in society is not seen as fixed or constant. Instead it is variable in the sense that it can increase or decrease.

Talcott Parsons – the variable-sum concept of power

Power and collective goals

Talcott Parsons's view of power was developed from his general theory of the nature of society. He began from the assumption that value consensus is essential for the survival of social systems. From shared values derive collective goals, that is, goals shared by members of society. For example, if materialism is a major value of Western industrial society, collective goals such as economic expansion and higher living standards can be seen to stem from this value. The more Western societies are able to realize these goals, the greater the power that resides in the social system. Steadily rising living standards and economic growth are therefore indications of an increase of power in society.

Parsons's view of power differentials within society also derived from his general theory. Since goals are shared by all members of society, power will generally be used in the furtherance of collective goals. As a result, both sides of the power relationship will benefit and everybody will gain by the arrangement. For instance, politicians in Western societies will promote policies for economic expansion which, if successful, will raise the living standards of the population as a whole.

Thus, from this viewpoint, the exercise of power usually means that everybody wins. This forms a basis for the cooperation and reciprocity that Parsons considered essential for the maintenance and well-being of society.

Authority and collective goals

As we saw in Chapter 7, Parsons regarded power differentials as necessary for the effective pursuit of collective goals. If members of society pool their efforts and resources, they are more likely to realize their shared goals than if they operate as individuals. Cooperation on a large scale requires organization and direction, which necessitate positions of command. Some are therefore granted the power to direct others.

This power takes the form of authority. It is generally regarded as legitimate since it is seen to further collective goals. This means that some are granted authority for the benefit of all.

Parsons's views may be illustrated by the following example.

One of the major goals of traditional Sioux Indian society was success in hunting. This activity involved cooperation and power relationships. During the summer months the buffalo – the main food supply of the tribe – were gathered in large herds on the northern plains of North America. The buffalo hunt was a large-scale enterprise under the authority and control of marshals who were appointed by the warrior societies. An effective hunt required considerable organization and direction and was strictly policed. In particular, the marshals were concerned to prevent excitable young warriors from jumping the gun and stampeding the herd, which might endanger the food supply of the entire tribe. Marshals had the authority to beat those who disobeyed the rules and destroy their clothes and the harness of their horses. Thus, by granting power to the marshals, by accepting it as legitimate, and obeying it on that basis, the whole tribe benefited from the exercise of their authority.

Power in Western democracies

Parsons's analysis of the basis of political power in Western democracies provides a typical illustration of his views on the nature of power. He argued that:

> *Political support should be conceived of as a generalized grant of power which, if it leads to electional success, puts elected leadership in a position analogous to a banker. The 'deposits' of power made by constituents are revocable, if not at will, at the next election.*
>
> Parsons, 1967, p. 339

Just as money is deposited in a bank, members of society deposit power in political leaders. Just as depositors can withdraw their money from the bank, so the electorate can withdraw its grant of power from political leaders at the next election. In this sense, power resides ultimately with members of society as a whole. Finally, just as money generates interest for the depositor, so grants of power generate benefits for the electorate since they are used primarily to further collective goals. In this way, power in society can increase.

Many sociologists have argued that Parsons's views of the nature and application of power in society are naïve. They suggest that he has done little more than translate into sociological jargon the rationalizations promoted by the power-holders to justify their use of power. In particular, they argue that Parsons has failed to appreciate that power is frequently used to further sectional interests rather than to benefit society as a whole. We will analyse these criticisms in detail in the following sections.

Power and the state – a pluralist perspective

Pluralism is a theory which claims to explain the nature and distribution of power in Western democratic societies. Classical pluralism was the original form that this perspective took, but it has been heavily criticized. Some supporters of this perspective have modified their position and have adopted an elite pluralist view which takes account of some of these criticisms.

We will first describe and evaluate classical pluralism, before considering elite pluralism at the end of this section.

Classical pluralism

This version of pluralism has important similarities with the Parsonian functionalist theory. Pluralists agree with Parsons that power ultimately derives from the population as a whole:

1 They accept that the government and state in a Western democracy act in the interests of that society and according to the wishes of its members.
2 They see the political systems of countries such as the USA, Britain and France as the most advanced systems of government yet devised, and regard them as the most effective way for a population to exercise power and govern a country.
3 They regard the exercise of power through the state to be legitimate rather than coercive, since it is held to be based upon the acceptance and cooperation of the population.

Pluralists, however, part company from Parsons in three important respects.

The nature of power

First, pluralists follow Weber in accepting a constant-sum concept of power. There is seen to be a fixed amount of power which is distributed among the population of a society. They do not accept Parsons's variable-sum concept of power, which sees it as a resource held by society as a whole.

Sectional interests

Second, they deny that democratic societies have an all-embracing value consensus. They would agree with Parsons that members of such societies share some interests and wishes in common. For example, most citizens of the USA share a commitment to the constitution of the country and the political institutions such as the presidency, the Congress and the electoral system.

However, pluralists do not accept that members of society share common interests or values in relation to every issue. They believe that industrial society is increasingly differentiated into a variety of social groups and sectional interests, and, with the increasingly specialized division of labour, the number and diversity of occupational groups steadily grow. Groups such as doctors, teachers, business people and unskilled manual workers may have different interests. Each group may be represented by its own union or professional association, and these groups may put forward conflicting requests to the government.

Pluralists do not deny the existence of class, or division based on age, gender, religion or ethnicity. However, they do deny that any single division dominates any individual's wishes or actions. According to their view, each individual has a large number of different interests. A male manual worker might not just be a member of the working class, he might also be a car owner, a mortgage payer, an avid reader of library books and a father of two children in higher education. Therefore, while he has certain interests as a manual worker, other interests stem from other aspects of his position in society. As a car owner he has an interest in road tax and petrol prices being kept low, as a mortgage payer in interest rates being reduced, as a library user in more government expenditure on this service, and as a father in higher student grants. Another range of interests could be outlined for a female professional.

To the founder of the pluralist perspective, the nineteenth-century French writer de Tocqueville (1945, first published 1835), a democratic political system requires that individuals have a large number of specific interests. He believed that democracy would become unworkable if one division in society came to dominate all others. Such a situation could lead to a tyranny of the majority: one group in society would be in a permanent majority and the interests and wishes of the minority could be totally disregarded.

Northern Ireland could be seen as a contemporary example of this situation, where the population is split between a majority of Protestants and a minority of Catholics. Most individuals identify so strongly with their religious groupings that other interests are seen to be of secondary importance. The existence of a permanent majority of Protestants prevents a democratic system similar to that in the rest of the UK – that is, operating in such a way that

each member of the Catholic minority has as much influence on government policy as each member of the Protestant majority.

The state

The third difference to the functionalist view follows from the pluralists' denial that a complete value consensus exists. Since individuals have different interests, political leaders and the state cannot reflect the interests of all members of society in taking any single decision.

To pluralists the state is seen as an honest broker which takes account of all the conflicting demands made on it by different sections of society. The state mediates between different groups, ensuring that all of them have some influence on government policy, but that none gets its own way all the time. On one particular occasion the government might take a decision which favours car owners, such as deciding to build a new motorway. On another it might decide against such a project in order to take account of the protests of environmentalists. On a third, the government might reach a compromise, concluding that the road is necessary but changing the route in order to protect an area of particular environmental importance. Pluralists argue that every group over a period of time has its interests reflected in governmental decisions, but because of the divisions within society it is not possible for the state to satisfy everyone all of the time. In Raymond Aron's words, 'government becomes a business of compromise'.

Classical pluralism – political parties and interest groups

Political parties

From a pluralist perspective, competition between two or more political parties is an essential feature of representative government. Political parties are organizations which attempt to get representatives elected to positions in parliaments or their local equivalents. Pluralists claim that competition for office between political parties provides the electorate with an opportunity to select its leaders and a means of influencing government policy.

This view forms the basis of Seymour M. Lipset's definition of democracy. According to Lipset:

> *Democracy in a complete society may be defined as a political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials, and a social mechanism which permits the largest possible part of the population to influence major decisions by choosing among contenders for political office.*
>
> Lipset, 1981, first pub. 1959, p. 27

For efficient government, Lipset argued that competition between contenders for office must result in the granting of 'effective authority to one group' and the presence of an 'effective opposition' in the legislature as a check on the power of the governing party.

Pluralists claim that political parties in democratic societies are representative for the following reasons:

1. The public directly influences party policy, since, in order to be elected to govern, parties must reflect the wishes and interests of the electorate in their programmes.
2. If existing parties do not sufficiently represent sections of society, a new party will usually emerge, such as the Labour Party at the turn of the century in Britain, or the Referendum Party (which campaigned at the 1997 election against Britain accepting a single European currency).
3. Parties are accountable to the electorate since they will not regain power if they disregard the opinions and interests of the public.
4. Parties cannot simply represent a sectional interest since, to be elected to power, they require the support of various interests in society.

However, as Robert McKenzie stated, political parties must not be seen 'as the sole "transmission belts" on which political ideas and programmes are conveyed from the citizens to the legislature and the executive' (McKenzie, 1969). During their time in office and in opposition, parties 'mould and adapt their principles under innumerable pressures brought to bear by organized groups of citizens which operate for the most part outside the political system'. Such groups are known as interest or pressure groups

Interest groups

Unlike political parties, interest groups do not aim to take power in the sense of forming a government. Rather they seek to influence political parties and the various departments of state. Nor do interest groups usually claim to represent a wide range of interests. Instead their specified objective is to represent a particular interest in society.

Interest groups are often classified in terms of their aims as either protective or promotional groups:

1. Protective groups defend the interests of a particular section of society. Trade unions such as the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), professional associations such as the British Medical Association, and employers' organizations such as the Confederation of British Industry are classified as protective groups.
2. Promotional groups support a particular cause rather than guard the interests of a particular social group. Organizations such as the RSPCA, Friends of the Earth and the Lord's Day Observance Society are classified as promotional groups.

3 Membership of promotional groups is potentially larger and usually more varied than that of protective groups since they require only a commitment to their cause as a qualification for joining.

4 By comparison, membership of protective groups is usually limited to individuals of a particular status: for example, miners for membership of the NUM.

In practice, the distinction between protective and promotional groups is not clearcut, since the defence of an interest also involves its promotion.

Interest groups can bring pressure to bear in a number of ways:

1 By contributions to the funds of political parties, such as trade union contributions to the Labour Party.

2 By illegal payments to elected representatives and state officials – in other words, bribery. In 1994 it was revealed that at least one MP in Britain had received payments from Mohammed Al-Fayed in return for asking questions on his behalf in the House of Commons. Although not illegal, this example does suggest that money has sometimes been used to buy access to MPs and government ministers.

3 By appealing to public opinion. An effective campaign by an interest group can mobilize extensive public support, especially if it attracts widespread coverage by the mass media, and its arguments are seen to be valid. Certain conservation groups have successfully adopted this strategy. In the mid-1990s, protesters campaigning for rights for the disabled chained themselves to buses at the entrance to Downing Street. Another example is the campaign launched by rock musicians at the 1999 Brit Awards for the cancellation of a large part of the Third World's debt.

4 By various forms of civil disobedience or direct action. This approach has been used by a wide variety of interest groups. Examples include the gay rights group OutRage! interrupting a sermon by the Archbishop of Canterbury, hunt saboteurs trying to prevent fox hunting, and anti-roads protesters building tree-houses and tunnels to prevent work taking place.

5 By the provision of expertise. It has often been argued that, in modern industrial society, governments cannot operate without the specialized knowledge of interest groups. By providing this expertise, interest groups have an opportunity to directly influence government policy. In Britain, representatives of interest groups now have permanent places on hundreds of government advisory committees.

Interest groups and democracy

Pluralists see interest groups as necessary elements in a democratic system for a number of reasons.

Voting in elections involves only minimal participation in politics for members of a democracy. Classical pluralists believe that as many people as possible should participate as actively as possible in politics. They do not believe that in Britain, for instance, voting once every five years is an adequate level of participation. Interest groups provide the opportunity for many individuals – who are not members of political parties – to participate in politics. For example, many members of the Friends of the Earth limit their active interest in politics to participation in the activities of this organization.

Interest groups are also necessary because even those who have voted for a government may not agree with all its policies. In a party-political system it is necessary to choose between the overall packages offered by the opposing parties. Interest groups make it possible to alter some parts of a governing party's policies while retaining those with which a majority of the population agree.

Clearly it is also vital that those who voted for a losing party have some opportunity to allow their voice to be heard. To the classical pluralist, the large number and diversity of pressure groups allow all sections of society to have a say in politics.

Before an election, a party seeking office outlines its proposed policies in a manifesto. The electorate can choose who to vote for on the basis of the alternative manifestos put forward. However, manifestos cannot be completely comprehensive: new issues not covered by them may arise. In the 1979 election in Britain no reference was made to the Falkland Islands in the manifestos of the major parties, since the Argentinian occupation of the islands had not been anticipated.

Interest groups provide the means through which the public can make their views known to a governing party as circumstances change and new issues arise. Furthermore, interest groups can mobilize public concern over issues that have been neglected or overlooked by the government. The British interest group Shelter draws the attention of the public and government alike to the plight of the homeless, while the Animal Liberation Front campaigns for the rights of voteless and voiceless animals.

According to classical pluralists, then, all sections of society and all shades of political opinion are represented and reflected in a wide variety of groups in Western democracies. Anyone who feels that they are being neglected by the government can form a new pressure group in order to rectify the temporary flaw in the operation of the democratic system.

Measuring power

Pluralists have provided empirical evidence to support their claim that Western societies are governed in accordance with democratic principles. The evidence they advance is based upon an attempt

to show that a government's policies reflect a compromise between the wishes of the various sectional interests in society. They therefore concentrate upon the first face of power: decision making.

Pluralists compare the decisions taken by a government with the wishes of its general public, and the wishes expressed by different groups in the population. By examining evidence from opinion polls and the stated policy preferences of interest groups, pluralists reach the conclusion that countries such as Britain and the USA are genuinely democratic.

Robert A. Dahl – *Who Governs?*

One of the most famous studies supporting the pluralist view is *Who Governs?* by Robert A. Dahl (1961). Dahl investigated local politics in New Haven, Connecticut. He examined a series of decisions in three major issue areas:

1 urban renewal, which involved the redevelopment of the city centre;
2 political nominations, with particular emphasis on the post of mayor;
3 education, which concerned issues such as the siting of schools, and teachers' salaries.

By selecting a range of different issues, Dahl claimed that it should be possible to discover whether a single group monopolized decision making in community affairs.

Dahl found no evidence of one group dominating decision making, but concluded that power was dispersed among various interest groups. He discovered that interest groups only became directly involved in local politics when the issues were seen as directly relevant to their particular concerns. Dahl claimed that the evidence showed that local politics was a business of bargaining and compromise, with no one group dominating decision making.

For example, business interests, trade unions and the local university were involved in the issue of urban renewal. The mayor and his assistants made the major decisions in consultation with the various interest groups and produced a programme that was acceptable to all parties concerned.

Dahl rejected the view that economic interests dominated decision making. He concluded:

> *Economic notables, far from being a ruling group, are simply one of many groups out of which individuals sporadically emerge to influence the policies and acts of city officials. Almost anything one might say about the influence of economic notables could be said with equal justice about half a dozen other groups in New Haven.*
>
> Dahl, 1961, p. 72

Power in Britain

Similar studies on national politics have been conducted by pluralist researchers in Britain. In an important study using the decision-making approach, Christopher J. Hewitt (1974) examined 24 policy issues which arose in the British Parliament between 1944 and 1964. The issues covered four main policy areas:

1 foreign policy (e.g. the Suez crisis of 1956);
2 economic policy (e.g. the nationalization of road haulage);
3 welfare policy (e.g. the Rent Act of 1957);
4 social policy (e.g. the introduction of commercial television).

Hewitt compared the decisions reached by Parliament with the views of the interest groups involved and contemporary public opinion. In some cases the decisions favoured certain interest groups to the exclusion of others. In other cases government decisions favoured some groups but 'substantial concessions were made to the opposing interests'. However, Hewitt found that no one interest group consistently got its own way. He stated that 'Neither the business group nor any other appears to be especially favoured by the government.'

Poll data on public opinion were available on 11 of the 24 issues included in the study. In only one case – the abolition of capital punishment in 1957 – did the decision of Parliament oppose public opinion.

Hewitt's study suggested that both a variety of specialized interests and public opinion in general are represented in the British Parliament. He concluded that:

> *[the] picture of national power that is revealed suggests a 'pluralist' interpretation since a diversity of conflicting interests are involved in many issues, without any one issue being consistently successful in realizing its goals.*
>
> Hewitt, 1974

The CBI

A study of the relationship between government and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) by Wyn Grant and David Marsh (1977) reached similar conclusions.

The CBI was created in 1965 from an amalgamation of three employers' federations. Membership of the CBI includes most of the top 200 manufacturing companies in Britain. It has direct channels of communication with government ministers and powerful civil servants, and is concerned with furthering the interests of private industry, particularly the manufacturing sector. In order to assess its

influence on government, Grant and Marsh examined four pieces of legislation from 1967 to 1972:

1 The CBI fiercely opposed the Iron and Steel Act of 1967 which renationalized the iron and steel industry. Its views were rejected by the Labour government and, according to Grant and Marsh, the CBI 'fought an almost entirely unsuccessful defensive action'.
2 The Clean Air Act of 1968 aimed to reduce air pollution. The two main interest groups involved were the CBI and the National Society for Clean Air. The CBI was successful in obtaining various modifications to the bill, and the resulting act was a compromise between the views of the two interest groups.
3 The Deposit of Poisonous Wastes Act of 1972 was concerned with the disposal of solid and semi-solid toxic wastes. The Conservative government was under strong pressure from conservation groups and, in particular, the Warwickshire Conservation Society, which mobilized strong public support. Although the CBI obtained some important concessions, it by no means got all its own way. Grant and Marsh observed: 'It would seem, then, that a new interest group (the Warwickshire Conservation Society) with hardly any permanent staff can exert as much influence over a specific issue as the CBI.'
4 The Industry Act of 1972 was directed at regional development. The CBI was particularly concerned to prevent the government from having the right to buy shares in private industry. Its members were suspicious of any measures that might give the government more control over private industry. The TUC, on the other hand, favoured direct government investment, particularly in labour-intensive service industries, to ease the problem of unemployment. In practice, neither interest group appears to have had much influence, although the TUC were happier than the CBI with the final act. The government pursued a relatively independent policy, which was a response to 'the immediate demands of economic and political situations' rather than to the pressures of either interest group.

Grant and Marsh conclude that 'the CBI has little consistent direct influence over the policies pursued by government'. Despite its powerful membership and its access to the highest levels of government, 'the CBI's ability to influence events is limited by the government's need to retain the support of the electorate and by the activities of other interest groups'.

Pluralism and contemporary British politics

Although there have been no detailed studies of recent policies from a pluralist perspective, it is possible to argue that there is plenty of evidence of governments taking note of a variety of interest groups. It also appears that the government often follows policies supported by public opinion.

Although balancing a range of interests may not have been particularly typical of Margaret Thatcher's period as prime minister (1979-91), it has been more characteristic of John Major's period in office (1991-7), and that of Tony Blair (1997-). For example, John Major tried to balance the views of pro- and anti-Europeans by his policy of 'wait and see' over whether Britain should enter a single European currency. The 'New Labour' Party under Tony Blair has openly tried to respond to the views of a wide range of pressure groups and to take account of a range of sectional interests. His government has, for example, taken account of the views of trade unions by introducing minimum wage legislation and by giving unions a right to recognition by the employer where certain conditions are met.

On the other hand, the Blair government has not reinstated all the trade union laws repealed under the Conservatives – measures which would have been strongly opposed by the CBI and other groups. Furthermore, the Labour government has actively tried to include business leaders in the government and to take account of business interests and wishes.

In his 1999 budget speech, the chancellor of the exchequer tried to emphasize the even-handedness of the government's approach. He said:

> *With this last budget of the twentieth century, we ... leave behind the century-long sterile conflicts between governments of the left that have too often undervalued enterprise and wealth creation, and governments of the right, too often indifferent to public services and fairness.*
>
> Gordon Brown, quoted in *The Independent Budget Review*, 10 March 1999, p.12

In the budget there were cuts in Corporation Tax (which reflected the wishes of businesses); increases for pensioners (which reflected the wishes of many unions and groups such as Help the Aged); and increases in petrol prices (which pleased many environmental organizations, although hauliers demonstrated against the rises). Although not all pressure groups were pleased by the budget, it does appear to give an example of how a wide range of groups may have their views taken into account by contemporary governments.

Pluralism – a critique

A large body of evidence from studies such as those of Dahl in the US, and Hewitt and Grant and Marsh in Britain, appears to support the classical pluralist position. However, there are a number of serious criticisms of pluralism. These criticisms are concerned both with the methods pluralists use to measure power, and empirical evidence which seems to

contradict their claim that power is dispersed in Western democracies.

Non-decisions and safe decisions

Marxists and other conflict theorists have suggested that pluralists ignore some aspects of power. In particular it is argued that they concentrate exclusively on the first face of power, decision making.

John Urry (in Urry and Wakeford, 1973), for example, believes that pluralists ignore the possibility that some have the power to prevent certain issues from reaching the point of decision. As a result of this non-decision making, only safe decisions may be taken – decisions which do not fundamentally alter the basic structures of capitalist societies.

From this point of view, it is in the interests of the powerful to allow a variety of interest groups to influence safe decisions. This fosters the illusion of real participation and helps to create the myth that a society is democratic. It disguises the real basis of power and so protects the powerful.

Pluralists can also be criticized for ignoring what Steven Lukes (1974) has identified as the third face of power. They do not take account of the possibility that the preferences expressed in opinion polls or by pressure groups might themselves have been manipulated by those with real power. In Marxist terms, the decisions might reflect the false class consciousness of members of society who do not realize where their own true interests lie. Real power might therefore rest with those who control institutions such as the media and the education system, which can play a part in shaping individuals' attitudes and opinions.

The consequences of decisions

Other writers have identified further ways in which power can be measured. Westergaard and Resler argue that 'Power is visible only through its consequences' (Westergaard and Resler, 1976). Government legislation may fail to have its intended effect. Despite an abundance of legislation aimed at improving the lot of the poor, Westergaard and Resler believe that there has 'been little redistribution of wealth':

1 Studies of actual decisions might give the impression that the interests of the poor are represented in government decisions.
2 Studies of the results of those decisions might provide a very different picture.

In any case, many sociologists deny that governments in Western democracies monopolize power. A government might, for example, seek to reduce the level of unemployment in order to secure victory at the next election. However, it is not within the government's power to control all the actions of large corporations, who can decide whether to close existing factories, making some of their workforce redundant, or to invest their profits overseas. This may be increasingly true if some theorists of globalization are to be believed (see pp. 624–33).

Contradictory evidence

The above points pose fundamental questions about the pluralists' method of measuring power, but pluralism can also be criticized on its own terms. Some of the evidence suggests that some interest groups have more influence over government decisions than others. Decision making by governments does not always appear to support the view that power is equally distributed among all groups in society, or that the state acts impartially as an 'honest broker'.

In Britain, a study by David Marsh and David Locksley (1983) contradicts the evidence supporting pluralism, for it suggests that the interest groups representing industry have more influence than other groups with respect to some issues. For example, in 1978 the CBI was successful in discouraging the then Labour government from introducing legislation that would have resulted in workers sitting on the boards of companies. In a similar fashion in 1975, pressure from the CBI and the City of London played a major part in persuading the Labour government to drop proposals to nationalize the 25 largest industrial companies in Britain.

Marsh and Locksley also claim that trade unions have had a considerable amount of influence over legislation relating to prices and wages policies, and industrial relations, although they have had much less impact on other areas of government policy. In recent years, though, the influence of unions has certainly declined. It can be argued that the wishes of trade unions were consistently ignored by the governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major from 1979 to 1997. For some 18 years these pressure groups representing many millions of workers had very little influence on government decisions affecting them.

If anything, promotional groups seem to possess much less influence than protective groups. In a study of nuclear power policy, Hugh Ward (1983) found that 'the anti-nuclear movement in Britain has been very unsuccessful'. Interest groups such as Friends of the Earth failed to persuade successive governments not to build more nuclear power stations. Ward claims that the Central Electricity Generating Board, the UK Atomic Energy Authority, and GEC (General Electric Company) carried much more influence with those governments than the promotional pressure groups opposing expansion.

Although the British government has now stopped ordering new nuclear power stations, this may have

as much to do with the high costs of producing power using nuclear energy compared with more conventional sources. Other anti-nuclear campaigns have not enjoyed success in achieving their objectives. Despite the considerable support that the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) was able to gain in the 1980s, British governments went ahead with ordering Trident nuclear submarines as a replacement for Polaris. Thus it seems that, while governments may take account of the views of pressure groups, they may choose not to do so.

Unrepresented interests

Classical pluralists assume not only that interest groups have equal power, but also that all major interests in society are represented by one group or another. This latter assumption is also questionable.

The fairly recent emergence in Britain of consumer associations and citizens' advice bureaus can be seen as representing the interests of consumers against big business, and of citizens against government bureaucracies. It cannot be assumed that such interests were absent, unthreatened or adequately represented before the existence of such organizations. For instance, the unemployed are a group who, unlike employers and employees, still lack a protective pressure group to represent them.

Reappraisals of classical pluralism

It is not surprising that, given the strength and number of criticisms advanced against classical pluralism, some of its supporters have modified their positions. David Marsh originally provided evidence to support classical pluralism, but later rejected the pluralist approach in favour of what he describes as the fragmented elite model (Grant and Marsh, 1977, Marsh, 1983, Budge, McKay and Marsh, 1983).

Robert A. Dahl (1984) still supports the ideal of a pluralist democracy, but now accepts that it has certain dilemmas. He does not believe that the USA conforms perfectly to that ideal. The central dilemma is the unequal distribution of wealth and income. Dahl now argues that this provides an unequal distribution of power. Wealthy individuals find it easier to take an active and effective part in political life. He also notes that the owners and controllers of large corporations exercise considerable power in making decisions. Dahl therefore calls for increasing democratic control over business, and a reduction in inequalities in wealth and income.

Elite pluralism

Some pluralists, however, have responded to criticisms by adapting the theory to take account of some of the weaknesses of classical pluralism.

David Marsh has described a number of attempts to explain the distribution of power and the operation of the state as elite pluralist theories (Marsh, 1983). These theories share important similarities with classical pluralism:

1 They see Western societies as basically democratic.
2 They regard government as a process of compromise.
3 They agree that power is widely dispersed.

On the other hand:

1 They do not accept that all members of society have exactly the same amount of power.
2 They do not concentrate exclusively on the first face of power.
3 They see elites, the leaders of groups, as the main participants in decision making.

Representative elites – J.J. Richardson and A.G. Jordan

J.J. Richardson and A.G. Jordan (1979) have analysed the British government from an elite pluralist perspective. They argue that consultation among various groups has become the most important feature of British politics. Interest groups are not the only groups involved: government departments, and nationalized and private companies can also play an important part in the negotiations which determine policy. As far as possible the government tries to minimize the conflict between the representatives of organized groups, and to secure the agreement of the different sides concerned with a particular issue.

In these circumstances the participation of the mass of the population is not required to make a country democratic. Members, and indeed non-members of organizations, have their sectional interests represented by the elites, such as trade union leaders and the senior officials of promotional groups.

Unequal influence

However, Richardson and Jordan do not claim that all groups have equal power, or that all sections of society have groups to represent them. An important factor governing the degree of influence an interest group has is whether it is an insider or an outsider group:

1 Insider groups are accepted by the government as the legitimate representatives of a particular interest in society, and are regularly consulted on issues deemed relevant to them.
2 Outsider groups lack this recognition and are not automatically consulted.

According to Richardson and Jordan, the wishes of insider groups, such as the National Farmers' Union

and the CBI, carry more weight with the government than those of outside groups, such as CND.

Richardson and Jordan also point out that some groups in society are in a better position to take action to force policy changes on the government than others. In the 1970s the NUM exercised considerable power through the use and threatened use of strikes which posed serious problems for the government by endangering energy supplies.

In contrast, Richardson and Jordan are also prepared to admit that some interests are not effectively represented at all. While teachers have well-organized unions to represent their views to the government over educational issues, parents have no equivalent organizations.

Despite these apparent drawbacks to democracy in Britain, Richardson and Jordan believe that other factors ensure that the government does not ignore the interests of significant sections of the population. This is because groups who are neglected by the government tend to organize more to force the government to take their views into account.

For example, until comparatively recently, governments of most industrial societies showed little interest in environmental issues. When the problems of pollution and the destruction of the environment became more acute, new interest groups such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth sprang up to force these issues on to the political agenda. Situations where an interest in society is not represented will, therefore, be only temporary.

Measuring power

The elite pluralist position is also more sophisticated than classical pluralism in dealing with the problem of measuring power. Like classical pluralists, Richardson and Jordan stress the importance of examining decisions to determine whose wishes are being carried out. But they also examine the second face of power: they discuss who has influence over what issues reach the point of decision. They are prepared to accept that it is possible for well-organized groups to keep issues off the political agenda for a time.

To illustrate their point they quote an American study by M. Crenson. This study compared two Indiana cities, East Chicago and Gary, which had similar levels of air pollution resulting from industrial activity. In East Chicago, action was taken against this problem as early as 1949; whereas, in Gary, industrialists successfully prevented the problem from emerging as an issue until the middle of the 1950s. Gary relied heavily on one industry – steel – and the importance of this industry to the city persuaded officials not to take action.

Once again, though, Richardson and Jordan do not believe that non-decision making seriously undermines democracy. They claim that 'there is evidence that it is increasingly difficult to exercise this power'. They believe that in modern democracies it is possible for interest groups to force issues on to the political agenda even against the wishes of the government and other organized interests. Among the British examples they cite are those of the Smoke Abatement Society persuading the government to pass the Clean Air Act in 1956, and the Child Poverty Action Group reviving poverty as an issue in the early 1970s.

One reason why new issues can rapidly become important in the political arena is the existence of backbench MPs, who do not hold government office. They are keen to further their careers by showing their talents through advocating a new cause.

Wyn Grant – pressure groups and elite pluralism

In recent work, Wyn Grant (1999) has supported what is essentially an elite pluralist position. Focusing on the role of pressure groups he notes a number of important changes in British politics:

1. The power of the pressure groups – which were most influential in the 1970s – has declined. Thus the TUC and the CBI have lost their central role in discussions with the government, although they still retain some influence.
2. The number of pressure groups has greatly expanded so that very few interests can now claim to be unrepresented.
3. Pressure groups no longer focus so exclusively on Westminster and on changing government policy. There are now 'multiple arenas' in which they try to exert influence. These include the European Union and the courts, and in the future will include the devolved parliaments in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Some pressure groups try to influence people's activities directly rather than trying to get the government to act. For example, the oil company Shell was persuaded not to dump its disused oil rig Brent Spar in the North Sea partly by boycotts of products encouraged by environmental pressure groups.
4. Linked to the above point is an increased use of various forms of direct action. Examples include the firebombing of milk tankers in Cheshire by radical, vegan, animal rights campaigners, the release of mink from mink farms by the Animal Liberation Front, the attempts by anti-roads campaigners to prevent road building, and the attempts of farmers to blockade ports to prevent the importation of Irish beef. Such methods have mixed results, but some, at least, are effective. Direct action not only gains publicity; it can

sometimes increase the costs of activities like building roads or farming mink so that economic disincentives are created.

5 Despite the increase in direct action, there has also been an increase in the number of pressure groups consulted by governments. Some groups previously regarded as outsider groups (such as Greenpeace) have become accepted by governments as suitable groups to consult over matters that concern them. Nevertheless, Grant still believes that a distinction between insider and outsider groups remains valid. Like other elite pluralists, he believes that insider groups tend to have more influence than outsider groups, although the latter group can sometimes achieve their objectives through direct action.

Grant concludes that, 'For all the talk of a "new" Britain and a "new" politics, there is much that looks like "business as usual" in the world of pressure group politics' (Grant, 1999). Pressure groups still help to ensure that Britain is essentially democratic, but it remains true that some groups have more influence than others.

Elite pluralism – a critique

Clearly, elite pluralism does answer some of the criticisms advanced against classical pluralism. It allows for the possibility that, at least temporarily, some interests may not be represented and some groups may have more power than others. It acknowledges that all individuals may not play an active part in politics, and it does not rely exclusively on measuring the first face of power, decision making. However, the analysis of elite pluralists may not be satisfactory in at least three ways:

1 In showing that democracies do not work perfectly, their own evidence raises doubts about the basic pluralist view that power is widely dispersed in Western industrial societies.
2 While they note the existence of elite leaders, they fail to discuss the possibility that these elites monopolize power and use it in their own interests.
3 Elite pluralists take account of two faces of power, but ignore the third. They do not discuss the power of some members of society to influence the wishes of others.

Elite theory

Elite theory differs from both pluralism and functionalism in that it sees power in society as being monopolized by a small minority. Elite theory sees society as divided into two main groups: a ruling minority who exercise power through the state, and the ruled.

There are, however, a number of ways in which elite theorists differ. They do not agree as to whether elite rule is desirable or beneficial for society; they differ in their conclusions about the inevitability of elite rule; and they do not agree about exactly who constitutes the elite or elites.

Classical elite theory

Elite theory was first developed by two Italian sociologists: Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923) and Gaetano Mosca (1858–1911). Both saw elite rule as inevitable and dismissed the possibility of a proletarian revolution leading to the establishment of a communist society. As such they were arguing against Marx's view of power and the state.

Because of the inevitability of elite rule neither saw it as desirable that any attempt should be made to end it. Pareto and Mosca agreed that the basis of elite rule was the superior personal qualities of those who made up the elites. Pareto believed that elites possessed more cunning or intelligence, while Mosca saw them as having more organizational ability. Since people were unequal, some would always have more ability than others, and would therefore occupy the elite positions in society.

According to both theorists, apart from the personal qualities of its members, an elite owes its power to its internal organization. It forms a united and cohesive minority in the face of an unorganized and fragmented mass. In Mosca's words, 'The power of the minority is irresistible as against each single individual in the majority.' Major decisions that affect society are taken by the elite. Even in so-called democratic societies, these decisions will usually reflect the concerns of the elite rather than the wishes of the people. Elite theorists picture the majority as apathetic and unconcerned with the major issues of the day. The mass of the population is largely controlled and manipulated by the elite, passively accepting the propaganda which justifies elite rule.

Although there are broad similarities between the work of these classical elite theorists, there are also some differences.

Vilfredo Pareto

Pareto (1963, first published 1915-19) placed particular emphasis on psychological characteristics as the basis of elite rule. He argued that there are two main types of governing elite, which (following his

intellectual ancestor and countryman, Machiavelli) he called lions and foxes:

1 Lions achieve power because of their ability to take direct and incisive action, and, as their name suggests, they tend to rule by force. Military dictatorships provide an example of this type of governing elite.
2 By comparison, foxes rule by cunning and guile, by diplomatic manipulation and wheeling and dealing. Pareto believed that European democracies provided an example of this type of elite.

Members of a governing elite owe their positions primarily to their personal qualities – either to their lion-like or fox-like characteristics.

Major change in society occurs when one elite replaces another – a process Pareto called the circulation of elites. All elites tend to become decadent. They 'decay in quality' and lose their 'vigour'. They may become soft and ineffective with the pleasures of easy living and the privileges of power, or too set in their ways and too inflexible to respond to changing circumstances.

In addition, each type of elite lacks the qualities of its counterpart – qualities which in the long run are essential to maintain power. An elite of lions lacks the imagination and cunning necessary to maintain its rule and will have to admit foxes from the masses to make up for this deficiency. Gradually foxes infiltrate the entire elite and so transform its character. Foxes, however, lack the ability to take forceful and decisive action, which at various times is essential to retain power. An organized minority of lions committed to the restoration of strong government develops and eventually overthrows the elite of foxes.

Whereas, to Marx, history ultimately leads to and ends with the communist utopia, to Pareto, history is a never-ending circulation of elites. Nothing ever really changes and history is, and always will be, 'a graveyard of aristocracies'.

A critique of Pareto

Pareto's view of history is both simple and simplistic. He dismisses the differences between political systems such as Western democracies, communist single-party states, fascist dictatorships and feudal monarchies as merely variations on a basic theme. All are essentially examples of elite rule and, in comparison with this fact, the differences between them are minor.

Pareto fails to provide a method of measuring and distinguishing between the supposedly superior qualities of elites. He simply assumes that the qualities of the elite are superior to those of the mass. His criterion for distinguishing between lions and foxes is merely his own interpretation of the style of elite rule.

Nor does Pareto provide a way of measuring the process of elite decadence. He does suggest, however, that if an elite is closed to recruitment from below it is likely to rapidly lose its vigour and vitality and have a short life. Yet, as T.B. Bottomore (1993) notes, the Brahmins – the elite stratum in the Indian caste system – were a closed group which survived for many hundreds of years.

Gaetano Mosca

Like Pareto, Gaetano Mosca (1939) believed that rule by a minority was an inevitable feature of social life. He based this belief on the evidence of history, claiming that in all societies:

> *two classes of people appear – a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The first class, always the less numerous, performs all political functions, monopolizes power and enjoys the advantages that power brings, whereas the second, the more numerous class, is directed and controlled by the first.*
>
> Mosca, 1939

Like Pareto, Mosca believed that the ruling minority were superior to the mass of the population. He claimed that they were 'distinguished from the mass of the governed by qualities that give them a certain material, intellectual or even moral superiority', and he provided a sociological explanation for this superiority, seeing it as a product of the social background of the elite.

Unlike Pareto, who believed that the qualities required for elite rule were the same for all time, Mosca argued that they varied from society to society. For example, in some societies courage and bravery in battle provide access to the elite; in others the skills and capacities needed to acquire wealth.

Elite theory and democracy

Pareto saw modern democracies as merely another form of elite domination. He scornfully dismissed those who saw them as a more progressive and representative system of government. Mosca, however, particularly in his later writings, argued that there were important differences between democracies and other forms of elite rule. By comparison with closed systems such as caste and feudal societies, the ruling elite in democratic societies is open. There is therefore a greater possibility of an elite drawn from a wide range of social backgrounds. As a result, the interests of various social groups may be represented in the decisions taken by the elite. The majority may therefore have some control over the government of society.

As he became more favourably disposed towards democracy, Mosca argued that 'the modern

representative state has made it possible for almost all political forces, almost all social values, to participate in the management of society'. But he stopped short of a literal acceptance of Abraham Lincoln's famous definition of democracy as 'government of the people, by the people, for the people' (quoted in Bottomore, 1993). To Mosca, democracy was government of the people; it might even be government for the people, but it could never be government by the people. Elite rule remained inevitable. Democracy could be no more than representative government, with an elite representing the interests of the people.

Despite his leanings towards democracy, Mosca retained his dim view of the masses. They lacked the capacity for self-government and required the leadership and guidance of an elite. Indeed Mosca regretted the extension of the franchise to all members of society, believing that it should be limited to the middle class. He thus remained 'elitist' to the last.

Elite theory and the USA – C. Wright Mills

Whereas Pareto and Mosca attempted to provide a general theory to explain the nature and distribution of power in all societies, the American sociologist C. Wright Mills (1956) presented a less ambitious and less wide-ranging version of elite theory. He limited his analysis to American society in the 1950s.

Unlike the early elite theorists, Mills did not believe that elite rule was inevitable; in fact he saw it as a fairly recent development in the USA. Unlike Pareto, who rather cynically accepted the domination of the masses by elites, Mills soundly condemned it. Since he saw elite rule as based upon the exploitation of the masses, he adopted a conflict version of elite theory. Because the elites and the masses had different interests, this created the potential for conflict between the two groups.

The power elite

Writing in the 1950s, Mills explained elite rule in institutional rather than psychological terms. He rejected the view that members of the elite had superior qualities or psychological characteristics which distinguished them from the rest of the population. Instead he argued that the structure of institutions was such that those at the top of the institutional hierarchy largely monopolized power. Certain institutions occupied key pivotal positions in society and the elite comprised those who held 'command posts' in those institutions.

Mills identified three key institutions:

1 the major corporations
2 the military
3 the federal government

Those who occupied the command posts in these institutions formed three elites. In practice, however, the interests and activities of the elites were sufficiently similar and interconnected to form a single ruling majority, which Mills termed the power elite. Thus the power elite involved the 'coincidence of economic, military and political power'. For example, Mills claimed that 'American capitalism is now in considerable part military capitalism.' As tanks, guns and missiles poured from the factories, the interests of both the economic and military elites were served. In the same way, Mills argued that business and government 'cannot now be seen as two distinct worlds'. He referred to political leaders as 'lieutenants' of the economic elite, and claimed that their decisions systematically favoured the interests of the giant corporations.

The net result of the coincidence of economic, military and political power was a power elite which dominated American society and took all decisions of major national and international importance.

Elite unity

However, things had not always been so. The power elite owed its dominance to a change in the 'institutional landscape'.

In the nineteenth century economic power was fragmented among a multitude of small businesses. By the 1950s, it was concentrated in the hands of a few hundred giant corporations 'which together hold the keys to economic decision'.

Political power was similarly fragmented and localized and, in particular, state legislatures had considerable independence in the face of a weak central government. The federal government eroded the autonomy of the states, and political power became increasingly centralized.

The growing threat of international conflict led to a vast increase in the size and power of the military. The local, state-controlled militia were replaced by a centrally-directed military organization.

These developments led to a centralization of decision-making power. As a result, power was increasingly concentrated in the hands of those in the command posts of the key institutions.

According to Mills, the cohesiveness and unity of the power elite were strengthened by the similarity of the social backgrounds of its members and the interchange and overlapping of personnel between the three elites. Members were drawn largely from the upper stratum of society; they were mainly Protestant, native-born Americans, from urban areas in the eastern USA. They shared similar educational backgrounds and mixed socially in the same high-prestige clubs. As a result, they tended to share similar values and sympathies,

which provided a basis for mutual trust and cooperation.

Within the power elite there was frequent interchange of personnel between the three elites: a corporation director might become a politician and vice versa. At any one time, individuals might have footholds in more than one elite.

Elite dominance

Mills argued that American society was dominated by a power elite of 'unprecedented power and unaccountability'. He claimed that momentous decisions such as the American entry into the Second World War and the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima were made by the power elite with little or no reference to the people.

Despite the fact that such decisions affected all members of society, the power elite was not accountable for its actions, either directly to the public or to any body which represented the public interest. Mills saw no real differences between the two major political parties – the Democrats and the Republicans – and therefore the public was not provided with a choice of alternative policies.

In Mills's analysis, the bulk of the population was pictured as a passive and quiescent mass controlled by the power elite which subjected it to 'instruments of psychic management and manipulation'. Excluded from the command posts of power, the 'man in the mass' was told what to think, what to feel, what to do and what to hope for by a mass media directed by the elite. Unconcerned with the major issues of the day, 'he' was preoccupied with 'his' personal world of work, leisure, family and neighbourhood. Free from popular control, the power elite pursued its own concerns – power and self-aggrandizement.

Elite self-recruitment in Britain

C. Wright Mills's view of the elites in the USA can also be applied to Britain. A number of researchers have found that the majority of those who occupy elite positions in Britain are recruited from the minority of the population with highly privileged backgrounds. This appears to apply to a wide range of British elites, including politicians, judges, higher civil servants, senior military officers, and the directors of large companies and major banks. There are high levels of elite self-recruitment: the children of elite members are particularly likely to be themselves recruited to elite positions.

There is also evidence that there may be some degree of cohesion within and between the various elites. Individuals may occupy positions within more than one elite: cabinet ministers and other MPs may hold directorships in large companies. Individuals may move between the elites: the former businessman Geoffrey Robinson became a minister in Tony Blair's first cabinet in 1997. Directors may also sit on the boards of a number of different companies.

Elites are also likely to have a common educational background: many members of elites attended public schools and went to Oxford or Cambridge University. John Rex argues that this type of education serves to socialize future top decision makers into a belief in the legitimacy of the status quo. It creates the possibility that the elites will be able to act together to protect their own interests. Rex suggests:

> *the whole system of 'Establishment' education has been used to ensure a common mind on the legitimacy of the existing order of things among those who have to occupy positions of power and decision.*
>
> Rex, 1974

The following studies provide evidence for the existence of such elites in Britain.

'Top decision makers'

In a study conducted in the 1970s, Tom Lupton and Shirley Wilson traced the kinship and marital connections of six categories of 'top decision makers'. These categories were ministers, senior civil servants, and directors of the Bank of England, the big five banks, city firms and insurance companies (Lupton and Wilson, 1973).

Lupton and Wilson constructed 24 kinship diagrams, usually covering three generations and indicating relationships by birth and marriage. Seventy-three of the top decision makers appeared on these diagrams, accounting for 18 per cent of the total number of people included in the 24 extended-family groupings. Clearly there were close kinship and marital ties between the elites examined, and certain families were disproportionately represented in the ranks of top decision makers.

Members of Parliament

Table 9.1 shows the result of research by George Borthwick *et al.* into the educational background of Conservative MPs. It compares the new MPs elected in the 1979, 1983 and 1987 elections with those first elected to Parliament before 1979, but who remained MPs after the 1979 election. It therefore highlights changes in background. It shows some decline in the number of public school-educated MPs, but nevertheless over half of the 1987 entry had been to public schools and 44 per cent had been to Oxford or Cambridge University.

John Scott (1991) points out that cabinets, particularly Conservative ones, are even more educationally unrepresentative than the House of Commons as a

whole. For example, four-fifths of Mrs Thatcher's 1983 cabinet were educated at public schools (no less than one-third of whom had been to Eton and Winchester).

The 1997 general election did lead to a substantial change in the make-up of the House of Commons. Research by David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh (1997) reveals that there was a much higher proportion of public-school-educated MPs in the Conservative Party than in the Labour Party which formed the government. As Table 9.2 shows, 67 of

Table 9.1 Educational background of Conservative MPs

	Number	Public school %	Eton %	Oxford %	Cambridge %	Other universities %
Pre-1979	261	75	17	30	25	17
1979 entry	78	59	14	21	14	32
1983 entry	104	55	6	19	19	38
1987 entry	57	53	7	30	14	32

Source: G. Borthwick, D. Ellingworth, C. Bell and D. Mackenzie (1991) 'The social background of Conservative MPs', Sociology, November, p. 71.

Table 9.2 Educational background of candidates, 1997 election

	Labour Elected	Labour Defeated	Conservative Elected	Conservative Defeated	Liberal Democrat Elected	Liberal Democrat Defeated
Type of education						
Elementary	–	–	–	–	–	–
Elementary +	2	–	–	–	–	–
Secondary	48	19	5	48	5	66
Secondary+ Poly/College	86	54	9	74	6	162
Secondary + University	215	120	42	154	16	253
Public school	2	–	9	17	1	8
Public school + Poly/College	5	4	9	28	2	10
Public school + University	60	24	91	154	16	94
TOTAL	418	221	165	475	46	593
Oxford	41	11	46	59	11	38
Cambridge	20	16	38	45	4	25
Other universities	214	117	49	204	17	284
All universities	275 (66%)	144 (65%)	133 (81%)	308 (65%)	32 (70%)	347 (59%)
Eton	2	–	15	20	1	–
Harrow	–	–	–	5	–	–
Winchester	1	–	1	3	–	–
Other public schools	64	28	93	169	18	102
All public schools	67 (16%)	28 (13%)	109 (66%)	197 (42%)	19 (41%)	102 (17%)

Source: D. Butler and D. Kavanagh (1997) *The British General Election of 1997*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, p. 203.

the 418 Labour MPs elected had been to public schools (just two of these had been to Eton), and 109 of the 165 successful Conservative candidates were public-school-educated. Thus 16 per cent of Labour MPs were educated at public schools compared to 66 per cent of Conservative MPs. Nevertheless, even in the Labour Party those with public school backgrounds were over-represented compared to in the population as a whole. There were also high proportions of MPs who had attended Britain's elite universities, Oxford and Cambridge: 61 Labour and 84 Conservative MPs were Oxbridge graduates.

The occupational backgrounds of MPs elected in 1997 were by no means exclusively from elite groups. A wide range of professions was represented. Nevertheless, the Labour cabinet did include wealthy members of the business elite such as Geoffrey Robinson and Lord Sainsbury. As Table 9.3 shows, there were very few MPs with manual occupations. Even in the Labour Party – traditionally the party of the working class – only 13 per cent of their MPs had manual jobs; and the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats each had only a single MP with a manual occupation.

Overall there is no doubt that the election of over 400 Labour candidates reduced the domination of the House of Commons by members of elites, but that did not mean there were not still significant numbers of people from elite backgrounds in Parliament and in government.

Elite theory in the USA and Britain – an evaluation

The evidence provided by C. Wright Mills and by numerous researchers in Britain has shown that those occupying elite positions have tended to come from privileged backgrounds, and that there have been important connections between different elites. However, the significance of these findings is open to dispute.

Some Marxists claim that they provide evidence for a ruling class based upon economic power, rather than a ruling elite based upon the occupation of 'command posts'.

Furthermore, it has been argued that these versions of elite theory fail to measure power adequately: they do not show that these elites actually have power, nor that they exercise power in their own interests against the interests of the majority of the population.

Robert A. Dahl (1973) has criticized Mills from a pluralist perspective. He claimed that Mills had simply shown that the power elite had the 'potential for control'. By occupying the command posts of major institutions it would certainly appear that its members have this potential. But, as Dahl argued, the potential for control was not 'equivalent to actual control'. Dahl maintained that actual control can only be shown to exist 'by examination of a series of concrete cases where key decisions are made: decisions on taxation and expenditures, subsidies, welfare programs, military policy and so on'. If it can then be shown that a minority has the power to decide such issues and to overrule opposition to its policies, then the existence of a power elite will have been established. Dahl claimed that, by omitting to investigate a range of key decisions, Mills failed to establish where 'actual control' lies. As a result, Dahl argued that the case for a power elite remains unproven.

Dahl's criticism of C. Wright Mills applies with equal force to British studies of elite self-recruitment. Furthermore, the British studies make no attempt to measure the second and third faces of power (they make no reference to non-decision making nor do they discuss how the wishes of the population may be manipulated by elites). As such, studies of elite self-recruitment may reveal something about patterns of social mobility but they provide little direct evidence about who actually has power.

Both C. Wright Mills's work and most British studies of elite self-recruitment are very dated. Studies conducted in the 1980s and 1990s are thin on the ground. Some of the more recent research on political elites, which we discussed earlier, and work by John Scott on the 'upper class' (see pp. 51–5) suggest that elite self-recruitment is still common in Britain, but the evidence only covers a limited range of elites.

Fragmented elites – government in Britain

A distinctive elite theory of power and the state is provided by Ian Budge, David McKay and David Marsh (1983). Along with C. Wright Mills they accept that elite rule takes place in modern democracies, but they deny that the elite is a united group. Rather they believe that there are a large number of different fragmented elites which compete for power. They state that 'The evidence points to a variety of groups, interests and organizations all exercising considerable influence over policies but divided internally and externally.'

Budge *et al.* deny that power is concentrated only in the hands of a state elite centred on the prime minister and the cabinet. They point out that political parties may be divided between different factions or groups. Traditionally there have always been divisions between the 'left wing' and 'right wing' of

Table 9.3 Occupational background of candidates, 1997 election

	Labour		Conservative		Liberal Democrat	
	Elected	Defeated	Elected	Defeated	Elected	Defeated
Professions						
Barrister	12	7	20	47	4	6
Solicitor	17	11	9	41	2	27
Doctor/dentist/optician	3	2	2	4	4	11
Architect/surveyor	–	–	2	9	–	7
Civil/chartered engineer	3	2	–	4	1	10
Accountant	2	2	3	24	1	26
Civil service/local government	30	19	5	7	2	28
Armed services	–	–	9	10	1	11
Teachers:						
University	22	4	1	3	2	19
Polytechnic/college	35	17	–	2	1	19
School	54	37	7	19	4	85
Other consultancies	3	4	2	1	1	10
Scientific/research	7	2	1	2	–	7
TOTAL	188 (45%)	107 (48%)	61 (37%)	173 (36%)	23 (50%)	266 (45%)
Business						
Company director	7	3	17	51	2	25
Company executive	9	13	36	90	7	66
Commerce/insurance	2	9	7	33	1	39
Management/clerical	15	8	1	15	1	30
General business	4	7	4	22	–	41
TOTAL	37 (9%)	40 (18%)	65 (39%)	211 (44%)	11 (24%)	201 (34%)
Miscellaneous						
Miscellaneous white collar	69	29	2	16	1	57
Politician/political organizer	40	9	15	20	5	13
Publisher/journalist	29	10	14	27	4	18
Farmer	1	2	5	13	1	7
Housewife	–	–	2	4	–	9
Student	–	4	–	2	–	8
TOTAL	139 (33%)	54 (24%)	38 (23%)	82 (17%)	11 (24%)	112 (19%)
Manual workers						
Miner	12	–	1	–	–	–
Skilled worker	40	20	–	9	1	14
Semi/unskilled	2	–	–	–	–	–
TOTAL	(13%)	(9%)	(1%)	(2%)	(2%)	(2%)
GRAND TOTAL	418	221	165	475	46	593

Source: D. Butler and D. Kavanagh (1997) *The British General Election of 1997*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, p. 205.

the Labour Party over issues such as how many industries should be nationalized. Budge *et al.* claim that there were similar divisions in Conservative cabinets in the early 1980s, between supporters of Thatcherite policies and the 'wets', urging a more cautious approach.

Furthermore, governments cannot always rely on the support of backbench MPs: in the 1974-9 Labour government only 19 per cent of Labour MPs did not vote against government policy at some time. To complicate matters even further, the House of Lords has the power to delay, and sometimes effectively kill, legislation.

For these reasons, Budge *et al.* claim that elites within Parliament are too divided to be able to be the dominant force in British politics.

These divisions are further increased by the civil service. Ministers tend to rely on their civil servants for information and advice, to be guided by civil servants, and to develop departmental loyalties. Those representing spending ministries such as education and defence may, as a result, compete with each other to gain a larger share of the total government budget. Civil servants also have more direct methods of exercising power. Even when decisions have been reached, they have considerable room for manoeuvre in interpreting and implementing them.

Budge *et al.* use a very broad definition of the state. To them it includes not only central government, but also local government and a range of semi-independent institutions and organizations. Local government, they argue, has both the ability and the will to challenge central authority. For example, Britain continues to have a considerable number of local education authorities which retain at least some grammar schools, despite the attempts of successive Labour governments to abolish them.

Further constraints on central government stem from the independence of the judiciary and the police. Judges have considerable discretion in interpreting the law, to the extent that they can have a major impact upon the effects of government legislation. To give just one example, judicial decisions have limited the scope of the Race Relations Act of 1971 so that it does not outlaw racial discrimination in private clubs. The police have almost as much independence. Budge *et al.* point out that chief constables 'are wholly responsible for all decisions' in their force. If senior police officers do not effectively enforce a particular law, government decisions will have little impact.

Yet another important limitation on the government is the existence of a large number of Quangos (Quasi-Autonomous Non-Governmental Organizations). These range from organizations such as the Jockey Club, to the Trustees of National Museums, the BBC and nationalized industries. Although most of these organizations rely to some extent on government funding, they still have freedom to take an independent line. For example, at times the BBC has broadcast programmes against the wishes of, or critical of, the government.

According to this view, then, there are a wide variety of elites within what can be broadly defined as the state, who limit the degree of power held by the government. But Budge *et al.* do not see power as confined to the state. In common with elite pluralists they point out that some pressure groups have considerable power. In particular, the unions have sometimes been able to thwart the government through strikes, while the CBI and financiers have been able to veto some governmental decisions by using their financial power.

The government also has to contend with the elites of international organizations such as NATO and the EC (now the EU), and it is bound by the decisions of the Court of Justice of the EC. In 1976, for example, the British government was forced by that court to introduce tachographs (which can read whether the drivers have broken EC regulations) into commercial vehicles.

Summary and critique

The fragmented elite theory sees power resting with a very wide variety of elites, government ministers, backbench MPs, senior civil servants, officials in local government, the chairpersons of nationalized industries, the leaders of other quangos, senior judges and police officers, top union officials, powerful business people, and those occupying the senior positions in international organizations to which Britain belongs. Since the elite are fragmented and divided rather than cohesive and united, Budge *et al.* do not believe that any single group in society monopolizes power. They would agree with pluralists that a wide variety of groups and interests are represented in society, but they would disagree that this adds up to a truly democratic government. As they put it, 'fragmentation does not guarantee effective popular control'.

Budge *et al.* may exaggerate the extent to which some elites act independently of political leaders. Since their study was published in 1983 the number of quangos in Britain has rapidly increased. For example, new funding councils for various parts of the welfare state have been introduced, along with NHS trusts, and some schools and all colleges have become formally independent of local authorities and the national government. Yet most such quangos still rely very heavily on government funding and in many the government has a role in appointing officials.

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) is a case in point. This organization determines the funding of further education and sixth-form colleges, and as such appears to have considerable power. However, its members are not elected: they are directly appointed by the government. In 1994, two of its members were former Conservative politicians and four were businessmen, including Anthony Close from Forte – a business which contributed £80,500 to the Conservative Party in 1992.

The government not only determines the personnel involved, it also sets the overall budget and has directly intervened in the affairs of the FEFC by, for example, withholding funds from colleges unless they persuaded their staff to accept new contracts. Thus, while quangos might seem to produce independent elites, which can come into conflict with the political elite, their autonomy can sometimes be illusory, with the governmental elite remaining the dominant force.

The fragmented elite theory is also open to the same criticisms as the work of C. Wright Mills. It tends to assume that those in elite positions actually exercise power. Budge *et al.* back their analysis up with numerous examples but do not provide systematic evidence on the basis of distinguishing the three faces of power.

Marxists and some other conflict theorists would claim that all elite theory fails to identify the underlying basis for power. In particular, Marxists argue that power derives from wealth in the form of owning the means of production, rather than from the occupation of senior positions in society. We will examine Marxist views on power and the state in the next section.

Power and the state – Marxist perspectives

Marxist perspectives, like elite theory, see power as concentrated in the hands of a minority in society. Marxist theorists also agree with those elite theorists who see power being used to further the interests of the powerful.

Marxist theories stress that the powerful and the powerless have different interests and that these differences may lead to conflict in society. Unlike elite theory, though, Marxist approaches do not assume that power rests with those who occupy key positions in the state. They see the source of power as lying elsewhere in society. In particular, Marxists put primary emphasis upon economic resources as a source of power.

A wide variety of Marxist theories of power have been developed. We start this section by examining the work of Marx himself, and his friend and collaborator Engels, before going on to consider the views of those who have developed less orthodox Marxist views.

Marx and Engels on power and the state

According to Marx, power is concentrated in the hands of those who have economic control within a society (Marx 1974, 1978; Marx and Engels, 1950b). From this perspective, the source of power lies in the economic infrastructure:

1 In all class-divided societies the means of production are owned and controlled by the ruling class. This relationship to the means of production provides the basis of its dominance. It therefore follows that the only way to return power to the people involves communal ownership of the means of production.

2 In a communist society, power would be more equally distributed amongst the whole of the population, since the means of production would be communally owned rather than owned by individuals.

As we have seen in previous chapters, in capitalist society ruling-class power is used to exploit and oppress the subject class, and much of the wealth produced by the proletariat's labour power is appropriated in the form of profit or surplus value by the bourgeoisie. From a Marxist perspective, the use of power to exploit others is defined as coercion. It is seen as an illegitimate use of power since it forces the subject class to submit to a situation which is against its interests. If ruling-class power is accepted as legitimate by the subject class, this is an indication of false class consciousness.

Ruling-class power extends beyond specifically economic relationships. In terms of Marxist theory, the relationships of domination and subordination in the infrastructure will largely be reproduced in the superstructure (see p. 11 for a definition of these terms). The state (as part of the superstructure) reflects the distribution of power in society. The decisions and activities of the state will favour the interests of the ruling class rather than those of the population as a whole.

Despite the general thrust of the arguments of Marx and Engels, there are, as we will see, some inconsistencies in their statements about the state.

The origins and evolution of the state

Engels claimed that in primitive communist societies the state did not exist. Kinship (or family relationships) formed the basis of social groupings (Engels 1884, in Marx and Engels, 1950b). These societies were essentially agricultural, and no surplus was produced beyond what was necessary for subsistence. It was therefore impossible for large amounts of wealth to be accumulated and concentrated in the hands of a few. There was little division of labour, and the means of production were communally owned.

Only when societies began to produce a surplus did it become possible for a ruling class to emerge. Once one group in society became economically dominant, a state developed.

Engels believed that the state was necessary to 'hold class antagonisms in check'. In primitive communist societies all individuals shared the same interests; in class societies, a minority benefited from the existing social system at the expense of the majority. According to Engels, the exploited majority had to be held down to prevent them from asserting their interests and threatening the position of the ruling class. Thus in ancient Athens the 90,000 Athenian citizens used the state as a method of repressing the 365,000 slaves.

The simplest way the state could control the subject class was through the use of force or coercion. Engels pointed to the police, the prisons and the army as state-run institutions used to repress the exploited members of society.

Engels believed that coercion was the main type of power used to control the population in early states. In ancient Athens and Rome, and the feudal states of the Middle Ages, ruling-class control of the state was clearly apparent. For example, the feudal state consisted exclusively of landowners; serfs possessed neither private property nor political rights.

However, Engels believed that more advanced forms of the state were less obviously a coercive tool of the ruling class. Indeed, Engels described democracies as the 'highest form of state', for with such a state all members of society appear to have equal political power. Each individual in societies with universal suffrage can vote, and in theory therefore has as much influence over government policy as every other individual. According to Engels, this would tend to mean that the existing social order would be perceived as fair, just and legitimate, since the state would be seen to reflect the wishes of the population. As such, the state would not need to rely so heavily on the use of force: in most cases the authority of the state would be accepted by the population.

In reality, however, Engels believed that democracy was an illusion. Real power continued to rest with the owners of the means of production, and not with the population as a whole.

One way in which the ruling class could ensure that the state continued to act in its interest was through corruption. Troublesome officials who threatened to follow policies harmful to the bourgeoisie could be bribed. A second way to determine government policies was through the use of the financial power of capitalists. The state often relied upon borrowing money from the bourgeoisie in order to meet its debts. Loans could be withheld if the state refused to follow policies beneficial to the bourgeoisie.

The end of the state

Marx and Engels did not believe that the state would be a permanent feature of society. Since they believed its purpose was to protect the position of the ruling class and to control the subject class, they argued that it would become redundant once classes disappeared. In the immediate aftermath of the proletarian revolution, the proletariat would seize control of the state. They would use it to consolidate their position, establish communal ownership of the means of production, and destroy the power of the bourgeoisie. Once these objectives had been achieved, class division would no longer exist, and the state would 'wither away'.

The views of Marx and Engels on the state are neatly summed up in the *Communist Manifesto*, where they say 'The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie' (Marx and Engels, 1950a, first published 1848).

However, Engels did accept that in certain circumstances the state could play an independent role in society, where its actions would not be completely controlled by a single class. Engels argued that, at particular points in history, two classes could have roughly equal power. He claimed that in some monarchies of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe the landowning aristocracy and the rising bourgeoisie were in opposition to each other and both were equally powerful. In this situation the state could take an independent line since the warring classes effectively cancelled each other out.

Furthermore, in his more empirical studies Marx recognized that there might be divisions within states in capitalist countries. For example, in *The Class Struggles in France 1848-1850* (Marx, in Marx and Engels, 1950a), Marx acknowledged a difference in interests between finance capitalists on the one hand and the industrial bourgeoisie on the other. Finance capitalists (many of whom were large landowners) had an interest in the government of France retaining the huge debt it had at the time, since financiers

could benefit from lending money to the French state. On the other hand, the industrial bourgeoisie were being harmed by the taxes needed to service the debt.

Marx and Engels inspired many later Marxists to devote a great deal of attention to the study of power and the state, but their original work is sometimes vague, and is sometimes inconsistent. It has been interpreted in different ways. Furthermore, the work of the founders of Marxism has not been entirely free from criticism from more contemporary sociologists adopting this perspective. Consequently a number of contrasting Marxist theories of the state have been developed. These differ over the precise way in which they see the bourgeoisie controlling the state, the extent to which they believe the state enjoys independence from ruling-class control, and the importance they attach to this institution for maintaining the predominance of the bourgeoisie in capitalist societies.

Ralph Miliband – the capitalist state

The British sociologist Ralph Miliband (1969) followed Marx and Engels in seeing power as being derived from wealth. He rejected the pluralist view that in 'democracies' equal political rights give each member of the population equal power. He referred to political equality as 'one of the great myths of the epoch' and claimed that genuine political equality was 'impossible in the conditions of advanced capitalism' because of the power of those who own and control the means of production.

Miliband followed conventional definitions of the state, seeing it as consisting of the institutions of the police, the judiciary, the military, local government, central government, the administration or bureaucracy, and parliamentary assemblies. He believed that it was through these institutions that 'power is wielded', and that this power was exercised in the interests of the ruling class.

Miliband believed that the state could sometimes act as the direct tool or instrument of those who possess economic power. They used it to preserve their economic dominance, maintain their political power and stabilize capitalist society by preventing threats to their position. However, Miliband did accept that in some circumstances direct intervention by the wealthy was not necessary in order for the state to act in their interests.

Elites and the ruling class

To Miliband the state was run by a number of elites who ran the central institutions. These elites included cabinet ministers, MPs, senior police and military officers, and top judges. Together he saw them as largely acting to defend the ruling class or bourgeoisie: he believed that all the elites shared a basic interest in the preservation of capitalism and the defence of private property. In some ways Miliband's views are similar to those of the elite theorist C. Wright Mills, but Miliband sees elites as acting in the interests of capitalists and not just in their own interests.

Miliband attempted to justify his claims by presenting a wide range of empirical evidence:

1 First, he tried to show that many of those who occupy elite positions are themselves members of the bourgeoisie. For example, he pointed out that in America, from 1899 until 1949, 60 per cent of cabinet members were businessmen, and this occupational group also made up about 33 per cent of British cabinets between 1886 and 1950.

2 Obviously the above figures do leave a considerable proportion of the state elite who are not from business backgrounds. To take account of this point, Miliband advanced his second type of evidence, which attempts to show that the non-business person in the state elite will, in any case, act in the interests of the bourgeoisie. He argued that groups such as politicians, senior civil servants and judges are 'united by ties of kinship, friendship, common outlook, and mutual interest'. The vast majority come from upper- or middle-class families. Most share similar educational backgrounds since they have attended public schools and Oxford or Cambridge University. As such they have been socialized into identifying with the interests of the ruling class. Furthermore, even those few recruits to elite positions who come from working-class backgrounds will only have gained promotion by adopting the values of the ruling class. They will have undergone a process of bourgeoisification, and will have come to think and act as if they were members of the bourgeoisie.

3 Third, Miliband claimed to be able to show that the actions of the state elites have, in practice, tended to benefit the ruling class. He pointed out that judges saw one of their primary duties as the protection of private property. He suggested that Labour governments have done little to challenge the dominance of the ruling class. Although the 1945 Labour government nationalized a number of industries, it stopped far short of what many of its supporters would have wished. The existing owners were generously compensated, and the appointment of business people to run the industries meant that they were operated in a capitalistic way which, if anything, assisted private industry.

Legitimation

Miliband also advanced an explanation as to why the majority of the population should accept a state which acts against their interests. He examined various ways in which the subject class was

persuaded to accept the status quo. In effect, he considered the third face of power, claiming that the economic power of the ruling class enabled them to partly shape the beliefs and wishes of the remainder of the population. He believed that this took place through the process of legitimation, which he regarded as a system of 'massive indoctrination'. Miliband argued that the capitalist class sought to:

> *persuade society not only to accept the policies it advocates but also the ethos, the values and the goals which are its own, the economic system of which it is the central part, the 'way of life' which is the core of its being*
>
> Miliband, 1969, p. 211

Miliband illustrated his argument with an analysis of advertising, by means of which capitalist enterprises promote both their products and the 'acceptable face' of capitalism. He argued that all advertising is political since it serves to further the power and privilege of the dominant class. Through advertisements, giant, privately-owned corporations, such as ICI, BICC, Unilever, ITT and the major banks and oil companies, promote the view that their major concern is public service and the welfare of the community. Profits are a secondary consideration and portrayed mainly as a means of providing an improved service.

The image of the corporation and its products is made even rosier by association in advertisements with 'socially approved values and norms'. Miliband argued that capitalism and its commodities are subtly linked via advertisements to 'integrity, reliability, security, parental love, child-like innocence, neighbourliness, sociability'. With these kinds of associations, the exploitative and oppressive nature of capitalism is effectively disguised.

Finally, advertising promotes the view that the way to happiness and fulfilment involves the accumulation of material possessions – in particular, the acquisition of the products of capitalism. The individual is encouraged to 'be content to enjoy the blessings which are showered upon him' by the 'benevolent, public-spirited and socially responsible' capitalist enterprise.

Miliband argued that advertising provides one example of the ways in which capitalism is legitimated. He regarded the process of legitimation as essential for the maintenance of capitalist power. If successful, it prevents serious challenge to the basis of that power: the private ownership of the means of production. In the following chapters, we will examine further aspects of the process of legitimation in detail.

To sum up, Miliband argued that there is direct interference by members of ruling elites in the state. Their dominance is further cemented through the socialization of state personnel from non-elite backgrounds into the values of the elite, and the manipulation of the beliefs of the mass of the population so that they will lend support to pro-capitalist policies.

Nicos Poulantzas – a structuralist view of the state

Nicos Poulantzas (1969, 1976) has criticized Miliband's view of the state and has provided an alternative Marxist interpretation which places less stress on the actions of individuals and more on the role of social structure. A structuralist approach emphasizes the importance of social structure, and minimizes the importance of the actions of individuals in society. As such, Poulantzas saw much of the evidence advanced by Miliband as irrelevant to a Marxist view of the state.

The state and the capitalist system

Poulantzas described the state as 'the factor of cohesion of a social formation': in other words, the state was vital for maintaining the stability of the capitalist system. As part of the superstructure, it would automatically tend to serve the interests of the ruling class. It was not necessary for members of the ruling class to occupy elite positions within the state: the existence of a capitalist system was itself sufficient to ensure that the state functioned to benefit the ruling class. Similarly, the background of members of the state elite was of little importance: it was not their class origin but their class position which determined their behaviour. Since they occupied positions in a state, which inevitably functions to benefit the bourgeoisie, their job would ensure they acted in the interests of the bourgeoisie regardless of their background. They would not take actions harmful to capitalist interests.

Relative autonomy

Poulantzas took this argument a stage further. He claimed that:

> *the capitalist state best serves the interests of the capitalist class only when members of this class do not participate directly in the state apparatus, that is to say when the ruling class is not the politically governing class.*
>
> Poulantzas, 1969, p. 73

Poulantzas argued that the ruling class did not directly govern, but rather its interests were served through the medium of the state. As such, the state was relatively autonomous. To some degree it was free from the ruling class's direct influence, independent from its direct control. However, since the state

was shaped by the infrastructure, it was forced to represent the interests of capital.

Poulantzas argued that the relative autonomy of the state was essential if it was to effectively represent capital. The state required a certain amount of freedom and independence in order to serve ruling-class interests. If it were staffed by members of the bourgeoisie, it might lose this freedom of action. The following reasons have been given for the relative autonomy of the capitalist state:

1 As a group the bourgeoisie is not free from internal divisions and conflicts of interest. To represent its common interests the state must have the freedom to act on behalf of the class as a whole.

2 If the bourgeoisie ruled directly, its power might be weakened by internal wrangling and disagreement, and it might fail to present a united front in conflicts with the proletariat. The relative autonomy of the state allows it to rise above sectional interests within the bourgeoisie and to represent that class as a whole. In particular, it provides the state with sufficient flexibility to deal with any threats from the subject class to ruling-class dominance.

3 To this end the state must have the freedom to make concessions to the subject class, which might be opposed by the bourgeoisie. Such concessions serve to defuse radical working-class protest and to contain the demands within the framework of a capitalist economy.

4 Finally, the relative autonomy of the state enables it to promote the myth that it represents society as a whole. The state presents itself as a representative of 'the people', of 'public interest' and 'national unity'. Thus, in its ideological role, the state disguises the fact that essentially it represents ruling-class interests.

Repressive and ideological state apparatus

Poulantzas did not disagree with Miliband about the importance of legitimation. However, he went much further in seeing this process as being directly related to the state. He used a broader definition of the state than Miliband. He divided it into the repressive apparatus – the army, government, police, tribunals and administration – which exercises coercive power, and the ideological apparatus – the church, political parties, the unions, schools, the mass media and the family – which is concerned with the manipulation of values and beliefs, rather than the use of force.

Most writers do not see institutions such as the family as constituting part of the state. Poulantzas argued that they should be categorized in this way for the following reasons:

1 Like the repressive institutions of the state, they are necessary for the survival of capitalism. Without them the proletariat might develop class consciousness and challenge the capitalist system.

2 The ideological apparatus depends ultimately on the repressive apparatus to defend and maintain it. He gave the example of the defence of education through the French police and army intervening against the student revolts in Paris in 1968.

3 Poulantzas argued that changes in the repressive apparatus of the state lead to changes in the ideological apparatus. In fascist Germany, for instance, the state took direct control of much of the ideological apparatus.

4 He claimed that the ultimate communist aim – the 'withering away' of the state – would only be achieved with the abolition of institutions such as the family.

Criticisms of Poulantzas

Miliband (1972) tried to defend himself against the criticisms made by Poulantzas, and he put forward his own criticisms of the latter's work. In particular he accused Poulantzas of structural super-determinism. In other words, Miliband did not believe that ultimately all aspects of the behaviour of the state were determined by the infrastructure. Such a theory, he claimed, could not account for the differences between fascist and 'democratic' states within capitalist systems.

Furthermore, Miliband argued that Poulantzas's theory was not backed up by empirical evidence. It was not sufficient to simply assert that the state must act in the interests of capitalism.

Miliband also questioned the definition of the state proposed by Poulantzas. He expressed great scepticism about the claim that institutions such as the family could be seen as part of the state. He accepted that they might have an ideological role, but denied that they are in any sense directly controlled by the state. Although he agreed that they are part of the political system, he argued that they possess so much independence or autonomy that it is ridiculous to see them as part of the state.

It can also be argued that the theory of relative autonomy is impossible to prove or disprove. If the theory is accepted, any action the state takes can be interpreted one way or another as benefiting the bourgeoisie. If it does not appear to directly benefit them, it can be dismissed as a mere concession to the proletariat. Some neo-Marxists argue that concessions can be more than token gestures. To writers such as Gramsci, the working class do have some power and can influence the actions of the state. (We will analyse neo-Marxist views later in this chapter.)

Evidence to support Marxism

Marxist writers have adopted more sophisticated methods of measuring power than either pluralists or elite theorists. They have examined all three faces of power identified by Steven Lukes (1974), and have also extended the concept to include the effects of decisions.

The effects of decisions

As we saw earlier, the decision-making approach to measuring power used by pluralists has been heavily criticized. Marxists such as Westergaard and Resler (1976) argued that power can only be measured by its results: if scarce and valued resources are concentrated in the hands of a minority, that group largely monopolizes power in society. Westergaard and Resler maintained that 'power is visible only through its consequences; they are the first and final proof of the existence of power.' Put simply, the proof of the pudding is in the eating: whoever reaps the largest rewards at the end of the day holds the largest share of power.

Westergaard and Resler claimed that the marked inequalities that characterize British society 'reflect, while they also demonstrate, the continuing power of capital'. The concentration of wealth and privilege in the hands of the capitalist class therefore provides visible proof of its power. Legislation on taxation, which could lead to the redistribution of wealth, is not usually enforced effectively. Furthermore, loopholes in the law often allow the wealthy to avoid paying much of their tax.

Westergaard and Resler believed that the welfare state does little to redistribute income, for it is largely financed out of the taxes paid by the working class. More recent research conducted by Westergaard (1995) suggests that, if anything, the 1980s and early 1990s saw increased inequality in Britain (see pp. 122–3).

Apart from information on the distribution of wealth and income, Westergaard and Resler used detailed examples to show that the activities of the state represent the interests of the ruling class.

Concessions to the working class

In Britain, as in other advanced capitalist societies, the state has implemented a wide range of reforms which appear to directly benefit either the subject class in particular or society as a whole. These include legislation to improve health and safety in the workplace, social security benefits such as old-age pensions and unemployment and sickness benefit, a national health service, and free education for all.

However, these reforms have left the basic structure of inequality unchanged. They have been largely financed from the wages of those they were intended to benefit and have resulted in little redistribution of wealth. They can be seen as concessions, which serve to defuse working-class protest and prevent it from developing in more radical directions which might threaten the basis of ruling-class dominance. In Westergaard and Resler's words, 'Their effects are to help contain working-class unrest by smoothing off the rougher edges of insecurity.'

Non-decision making

Marxists have also been concerned to examine the second face of power: non-decision making. John Urry, in criticizing Dahl, argued that he:

> *ignores the process by which certain issues come to be defined as decisions and others do not. The study of decisions is the failure to study who has the power to determine what are decisions.*
>
> Urry, in Urry and Wakeford, 1973

Many Marxists believe that the range of issues and alternatives considered by governments in capitalist societies is strictly limited. Only safe decisions are allowed – those which do not in any fundamental way challenge the dominant position of the bourgeoisie. The sanctity of private property is never questioned; the right of workers to keep the profits produced by their labour is never seriously proposed; and communism is never contemplated as a realistic alternative to capitalism.

Ideology

According to Marxists, the ability of the ruling class to suppress such questions is related to the third face of power. Numerous studies claim that the bourgeoisie are able to produce false class consciousness amongst the working class. Westergaard and Resler (1976) argued that ruling-class ideology promotes the view that private property, profit, the mechanisms of a market economy and the inequalities which result are reasonable, legitimate, normal and natural. If this view is accepted, then the dominance of capital is ensured since 'no control could be firmer and more extensive than one which embraced the minds and wills of its subjects so successfully that opposition never reared its head'.

Westergaard and Resler claimed that, because of the pervasiveness of ruling-class ideology, the capitalist class rarely has to consciously and actively exercise its power. Capitalism and the inequalities it produces are largely taken for granted. A capitalist economy guarantees a disproportionate share of wealth to a minority and generates an ideology which prevents serious questioning of the established order. As a result, issues that might threaten the dominance of capital are usually prevented from reaching the point of actual decision. The capitalist class is therefore able to enjoy the advantage and privilege

'merely because of "the way things work", and because those ways are not open to serious challenge'.

If anything, the plausibility of such arguments increased in later decades of the twentieth century. Countries such as Britain and the United States embraced capitalist free markets more wholeheartedly. The regimes of leaders such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher tried to reduce government spending on welfare and state intervention. Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government in Britain (1979-91) privatized numerous state-owned industries and tried to introduce competitive, capitalist-like relationships into parts of the welfare state such as the National Health Service (NHS).

However, this does not mean that Marxist views are immune from criticism.

Criticisms of Marxism

Marxists provide a considerable amount of evidence to support their views. However, the Marxist theory of the state cannot explain why the state became stronger rather than 'withering away' in communist countries. Furthermore, Marxists fail to take account of the possibility that there are sources of power other than wealth. Some conflict theorists deny that wealth is the only source of power, despite seeing economic power as important. If they are correct, then Marxists certainly exaggerate the degree to which those with economic power dominate state decisions and determine the effects of those decisions.

We will now consider the state from a neo-Marxist viewpoint.

Neo-Marxist approaches to power and the state

A number of writers have put forward theories of the state and the distribution of power in society which are heavily influenced by Marxism, but which differ in some significant way from the original writings of Marx and Engels. This section examines the work of two such writers: the early twentieth-century sociologist Antonio Gramsci, and the contemporary British sociologist David Coates.

Antonio Gramsci – hegemony and the state

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) is among the most influential twentieth-century theorists who have themselves been influenced by Marx. Gramsci was an Italian sociologist and political activist. A leader of the Italian Communist Party, he is partly remembered for the part he played in the Turin Factory Council Movement, in which industrial workers in that city unsuccessfully attempted to seize control of their workplaces. From 1926 until his death, Gramsci was imprisoned by Mussolini's fascist government, and his main contributions to sociological theory are contained in his *Prison Notebooks* written during that time (Gramsci, 1971).

Gramsci parted company with conventional Marxists in arguing against economic determinism: he did not believe that the economic infrastructure determined to any great degree what occurred in the superstructure of society. He talked of a 'reciprocity between structure and superstructure': although the infrastructure could affect what took place in the superstructure, the reverse was also possible.

Gramsci did not deny that the economic infrastructure of society was important: it provided the general background against which events took place. An economic crisis might increase political awareness amongst the proletariat, for instance. However, he felt that the actions of groups trying to maintain or change society were at least as important.

Political and civil society

Unlike traditional Marxists, Gramsci divided the superstructure of society into two parts: political society and civil society. Political society consisted of what is normally thought of as the state. This was primarily concerned with the use of force by the army, police and legal system to repress troublesome elements within the population. Civil society consisted of those institutions normally thought of as private, particularly the church, trade unions, the mass media and political parties.

In a novel way Gramsci claimed that 'the state = political society + civil society'. He used a very broad definition of the state, for he did not think of it in terms of particular institutions but rather in terms of the activities of a dominant class in society.

Hegemony

At one point in his work Gramsci described the state as:

> *the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to maintain the active consent of those over whom it rules.*
>
> Gramsci, 1971, p. 244

If the ruling class managed to maintain its control by gaining the approval and consent of members of society, then it had achieved what Gramsci called hegemony. Hegemony was largely achieved, not through the use of force, but by persuading the population to accept the political and moral values of the ruling class. Here Gramsci stressed the importance of ideas in society: effective ruling-class control was only maintained to the extent that the ruling class could retain command of the beliefs of the population through civil society.

Gramsci's view on how hegemony could be maintained comes close to Marx's view of false class consciousness. However, unlike the views Marx sometimes expressed, Gramsci did not see the ruling class as ever being able to impose entirely false beliefs and values on the population, nor did he see the state as ever being able to act as a simple instrument or tool of ruling-class dominance. The state could only remain hegemonic if it was prepared to compromise and take account of the demands of exploited classes, and, for the following three important reasons, ruling-class hegemony could never be complete.

Historic blocs

In the first place, Gramsci saw both the ruling and subject classes as being divided. The ruling class was divided into groups such as financiers, small and large industrialists and landowners, while industrial workers and agricultural peasants represented a major division within the subject class. No one group on its own could maintain dominance of society. Hegemony was only possible if there was some sort of alliance between two or more groups.

Gramsci called a successful alliance – which achieved a high level of hegemony – a historic bloc; but because of the different elements it contained it would always be something of a compromise between the groups involved.

Concessions

The second reason why the hegemony of one group would never be complete was that the state always had to make some concessions to the subject class. Gramsci said, 'hegemony undoubtedly presupposes that the interests and tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised are taken into account'. From this point of view, the ruling class had to make concessions in order to be able to rule by consent instead of relying on the use of force. It had to adopt some policies that benefited the subject class.

Dual consciousness

If the ruling class were able to indoctrinate the population completely, then clearly it would not be necessary for them to make concessions. However, Gramsci maintained that this was never possible. He believed that individuals possessed dual consciousness. Some of their ideas derived from the ruling class's control over civil society and its ability to use institutions such as the church and schools to persuade people to accept that capitalism was natural and desirable. However, in part, individuals' beliefs were also the product of their activities and experiences. To a limited extent they would be able to see through the capitalist system, and realize that their interests lay in changing it. For example, their day-to-day experience of poor working conditions and low wages would encourage them to believe that, at the very least, some reforms of the system were necessary.

The overthrow of capitalism

According to Gramsci, then, power derived only in part from economic control; it could also originate from control over people's ideas and beliefs. Since the ruling class was unable to completely control the ideas of the population, it could never completely monopolize power. Similarly the subject class would always have some influence over the activities of the state. The activities of political society would benefit them to the extent that they were able to realize where their interests lay and wrest concessions from the ruling class.

Like Marx, Gramsci looked forward with anticipation to a proletarian revolution, but he saw such a revolution arising in a rather different way. He did not accept that the contradictions of the capitalist economic system made a revolution a foregone conclusion.

The revolutionary seizure of power in Tsarist Russia by the Bolsheviks was only possible because of a complete absence of ruling-class hegemony in that country. The rulers lacked the consent of the subject classes and so those classes were able to overthrow them with a direct frontal attack. Gramsci termed such a violent revolutionary seizure of power a 'war of manoeuvre', in which direct action was taken to secure victory.

In most advanced capitalist countries, though, he saw the ruling class as having much more hegemony than they had possessed in Russia. Consequently countries such as Italy and Britain needed a good deal more preparation before they would have the potential for a proletarian revolution. Gramsci called such preparation a 'war of position' – a kind of political trench warfare in which revolutionary elements in society attempted to win over the hearts and minds of the subject classes. It was only when individuals had been made to realize the extent to which they were being exploited, and had seen through the ideas and beliefs of the ruling class, that a revolution was

possible. For this to happen, 'intellectuals' had to emerge within the subject classes to mould their ideas and form a new historic bloc of the exploited, capable of overcoming ruling-class hegemony.

David Coates – *The Context of British Politics*

Gramsci's views on the state are reflected in a number of later studies, including David Coates's book on British politics (Coates, 1984). Coates does place more emphasis on economic factors than Gramsci, but nevertheless eventually draws conclusions which are similar to Gramsci's. We will discuss his examination of the economic influences on the British state first, before considering those aspects of his work which can be seen as 'Gramscian'.

The state and multinationals

Coates starts his work by attempting to show the limitations on the state which are produced by the international capitalist system. He tries to demonstrate that each capitalist country cannot be analysed separately, since capitalism is not limited by national boundaries.

Multinational corporations with branches in a number of different countries form an increasingly important part of the modern capitalist system. The British government's freedom of action is limited by these companies. The multinationals' decisions about where to invest money and where to open and close factories can have a tremendous impact on the British economy. The largest multinationals, such as General Motors, wield massive economic power: General Motors has a greater turnover than the total wealth produced by the Danish economy.

Attempts to control multinationals are unlikely to be successful. If, for example, a government introduces exchange controls to prevent the companies moving profits abroad, then such controls can be bypassed through transfer pricing. This involves one part of a company selling commodities to a part of the same company in another country at unrealistically high or low prices. Through this technique, multinationals effectively move resources from country to country whatever laws a particular government passes.

In any case, if the government is not to risk jeopardizing the high proportion of investment in Britain which comes from abroad, it cannot afford to pursue policies which would seriously threaten the interests of foreign capitalist companies operating in Britain.

The actions of the British government are further restricted by the major international financial institutions and the World Bank. These organizations are intended to oversee the world's banking, financial and monetary systems. In the 1970s a British Labour government was forced to seek a loan from the IMF (International Monetary Fund), but in order to secure it the government had to comply with the IMF's instructions on how the British economy should be managed. (Global influences on states are discussed again later in the chapter, see pp. 624–33.)

The state and finance capital

Like the elite pluralists Richardson and Jordan (1979), Coates stresses the international influences on the British government. Unlike them, and in common with traditional Marxists, he emphasizes the economic limitations on governments. These constraints come not only from abroad but also from within British society.

Coates claims that finance capital (the banks, insurance companies and financial trusts in the City of London) has a particularly strong influence on the British government. He calculates that in 1981 such institutions controlled assets worth some £562 billion, which represents about £10,000 for every member of the population. He suggests that all governments rely to a considerable extent upon the support of these institutions. If, for example, the latter choose to sell sterling it can rapidly cause a currency crisis as the value of the pound falls.

If the government takes measures which harm the City of London's position as a major financial centre in the world, it risks enormous damage to the British economy as a whole. This is because Britain imports more manufactured goods than it exports, and much of the difference in the balance of payments is made up by invisible earnings, such as the income from the sale of insurance policies worldwide provided by Lloyds of London, and other financial services.

In comparison to financiers, Coates claims, industrial capital (in this case British-owned industry) has less influence over government policy. The CBI, for example, failed to persuade the government to reduce the value of the pound and reduce interest rates in the late 1980s. Both of these measures would have benefited industry. The first would have made British goods cheaper and easier to sell abroad; the second would have cut companies' costs by reducing the price of borrowing money. Both, however, would have made Britain less attractive as a financial centre for foreign investors.

Using such evidence, Coates claims that finance capital has had more influence over the British government than industrial capital, and the consequences have been the decline of British manufacturing industry and rising unemployment.

Divisions in the ruling class

These aspects of Coates's work have much in common with traditional Marxism, although they do place more emphasis on international constraints on

the state. In other respects his work is much closer to that of Gramsci. He explicitly rejects the instrumentalist view of the state put forward by Miliband, and the structuralist relative-autonomy approach advocated by Poulantzas.

In the first case, Coates argues that the state cannot be a simple instrument of the ruling class, since the ruling class itself is divided in such a way that different 'fractions' of capital have different interests. Small and large industrialists, multinational and domestic concerns, finance and industrial capital, all place conflicting demands on the state. Often the state cannot serve one section of the ruling class without damaging another.

Coates rejects the structuralist view because he does not accept that the existence of a capitalist system ensures that ultimately the state will have to act in the interests of the ruling class as a whole. As he puts it, 'what capitalism generates around the state is not a set of unavoidable imperatives so much as a set of conflicting demands'. These conflicting demands stem not just from divisions within the ruling class, but also from divisions between classes.

Dual consciousness

Coates points out that capitalism produces not just an economic system but also a civil society. He follows Gramsci in seeing civil society as consisting of private institutions, such as the family, as well as the social relationships between a whole variety of groups. All of these groups make demands on the government, and they include workers and their unions, ethnic minorities and women, as well as capitalists.

Like Gramsci, Coates sees the exploited and oppressed groups as possessing dual consciousness. To some extent they are taken in by attempts to legitimate the capitalist system, but to some extent they also see through that system. According to Coates, individuals in Britain in exploited classes hold contradictory beliefs. They may accept the basic arrangements of capitalism, such as wage labour, but nevertheless believe that the rich have too much power. They may be racist and sexist, but remain committed to human dignity and equal rights and opportunities for all. Many are loyal to parliamentary democracy, but strongly believe that ordinary people have little influence over government.

In this situation the state has to try to maintain its hegemony despite the existence of some degree of class consciousness among the population.

Hegemony

Coates follows Gramsci in seeing the state as the institution which attempts to cement an alliance or historic bloc of different sections of the population, which is capable of maintaining hegemony. Again, he agrees with Gramsci that this may involve making real concessions to exploited and oppressed groups. Coates argues that the ruling class do not monopolize power entirely. Trade unions, for example, can sometimes exercise a genuine influence on government policy. He sees the nationalizations and improvements made in the welfare state under the 1945 Labour government as representing real working-class gains, and not just token concessions.

According to Coates, most British governments have been able to maintain a high degree of hegemony. They have achieved this by succeeding in getting the population to accept a 'national project'. Most people have been willing to go along with state policies which appear to offer some benefit to all sections of the population. Until the 1980s this was fairly easy in a rapidly expanding world capitalist economy: in the 1950s and 1960s full employment, rising wages and the provision of welfare services such as health and education produced a fairly stable society.

However, Coates is not convinced that ruling-class hegemony will remain easy to maintain in the future. He saw Mrs Thatcher's Conservative Party policies as an attempt to produce a new national project based upon an appeal to improve Britain's economic competitiveness by reducing public spending. Coates believed that the economic weakness of the British economy in the world capitalist system (which was in recession in the late 1980s) produced a crisis for the British state. Its legitimacy was increasingly questioned, and he doubted that Thatcherism would be successful in re-establishing ruling-class hegemony.

Evaluation

Coates's work provides a good example of how neo-Marxist theories of power and the state have become increasingly sophisticated. He identifies a wide range of groups, institutions and processes through which power is exercised and the activities of the state are influenced. The groups involved include members of the working class and trade unions as well as different fractions of capital at home and abroad. He denies that one group monopolizes power, or that all power stems from wealth, but agrees with other Marxist and neo-Marxist theorists that power is very unequally distributed.

Although his work may now be somewhat dated, it can be applied to more contemporary British politics. For example, the power of finance capitalists was never more evident than in 1992 when Britain was forced to leave the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM). The ERM was intended to limit the fluctuations in exchange rates for a number of European currencies to those specified by the member states.

Despite the financial muscle of the members (which included Germany, France and Italy, as well as the UK), currency speculators forced Britain to withdraw when speculation by them in sterling meant that the currency could no longer be sustained within the agreed bands.

Although a Labour government was elected in 1997, it went out of its way, both in opposition and in power, to reassure the financial markets that it would do nothing to undermine their interests. For example, Labour leaders promised to stick to the spending plans outlined by the previous government for three years after taking office, and it also promised not to increase income tax. This would suggest that there is limited scope for left-wing governments to adopt radical policies in contemporary capitalist societies. This issue has been debated by theorists of globalization and others who have discussed the extent to which the nation-state retains the autonomy to act as it chooses (see pp. 624–33).

Abercrombie, Hill and Turner – *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*

Writers such as Gramsci and Coates emphasize the role played by ideas and beliefs as sources of power, in addition to economic factors. However, some Marxists following a more traditional line reject this view. Abercrombie, Hill and Turner (1980) deny that there is a coherent dominant ideology in capitalist societies, and question the view that any such ideology is the main factor holding advanced capitalist societies together. In a rather similar way to Gramsci, they suggest that members of the subject and ruling classes often hold contradictory views. For example, members of the subject class may support the welfare state, but believe in the importance of economic freedom and competition between individuals and companies; similarly they are often strongly nationalistic, but this does not square with the existence of multinational corporations.

Furthermore, Abercrombie *et al.* claim to have evidence that members of the subject class actually reject those elements of a dominant ideology that can be identified. They quote a number of studies to support their point. Paul Willis's study of education, *Learning to Labour* (1977), shows that working-class boys reject much of what schools teach them and attach greater value to manual labour than to more highly-rewarded non-manual jobs. Hugh Beynon's study, *Working for Ford* (1973), revealed that many factory-floor workers are alienated from work and feel exploited.

Such evidence might be taken as support for Gramsci's theory of dual consciousness, but Abercrombie *et al.* see it in a very different light. They argue that it shows the importance of economic power, for if so many people reject ruling-class ideology, then it must be the ruling class's wealth rather than their ideological control that allows them to retain their dominance in society. Abercrombie *et al.* argue that it is factors such as the threat of unemployment, the risk of poverty and the possibility of being imprisoned that make the exploited conform in capitalist societies.

Tom Bottomore – elites and classes

Tom Bottomore (1993) provides an example of a contemporary neo-Marxist approach to power and the state. Bottomore agrees with more conventional Marxists that power is largely concentrated in the hands of an economically dominant upper class. However, he believes that in some circumstances non-economic elites may have considerable power. Furthermore, although he rejects pluralist accounts of power, he does believe that a more equitable distribution of power might be achieved through reformed democratic systems.

Power and the global economy

Bottomore claims that:

> *The world economy is dominated by 500 of the largest multinational corporations, by the nation states in which they have their headquarters, and by those institutions of world capitalism such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund which determine and regulate economic development on a world scale.*
>
> Bottomore, 1993, p. 119

According to Bottomore, the earth's wealth has become more concentrated than ever before and, as a consequence, upper classes and elites have become increasingly dominant. He attributes this increased concentration of power to the following factors:

1. Multinational companies have grown both in size and power. These companies allow small numbers of people – that is, their senior executives – to wield enormous amounts of power.
2. New Right governments and thinking, which became dominant in the 1980s and 1990s, 'lauded the role of a business elite, asserted an extreme individualism, and accepted or even welcomed a gross commercialization of social life and the growth of inequality'. This gave ideological support to the dominance of capitalism and capitalists, and created improved opportunities for the accumulation of profit.
3. Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the USSR collapsed leaving yet more markets for capitalists to exploit. Furthermore, the collapse of the regimes seemed to suggest that there was no alternative to free-market capitalism.

Elite rule and class rule

All of these factors appeared to point to an increasingly powerful ruling class. However, Bottomore argues that power does not always stem from economic control. He is prepared to accept that power has sometimes stemmed partly from the possession of military force (as in the case of military dictatorships), or through the occupation of key party positions (as in the case of communism in the USSR or Nazism in Germany). Nevertheless, both military and political elites in totalitarian regimes base their power to a considerable extent on the control of the economy.

Furthermore, by the 1990s, such sources of power had become relatively unimportant. Bottomore says, 'it is evident that in the present-day world, dominated by the leading capitalist countries, classes and class relations have the most potent influence on the character of political rule'.

Bottomore believes that small groups of people, who dominate the crucial decisions in the contemporary world, act like elites, but should be seen 'more accurately as "upper classes"'. They act like elites because they try to ensure that the political system operates in such a way as to minimize the effectiveness of those who oppose the policies they support.

They do this in a number of ways:

1 Party politics plays down the importance of issues and transforms politics into 'media circuses' in which the personality of party leaders is given undue importance.
2 Summit meetings are held to give the largely illusory impression that the leaders of the largest capitalist countries are serious about dealing with major problems facing the world. In fact, summits are largely media events, and little usually changes as a result of them.
3 Political parties in many countries have increasingly concentrated power in their own hands to the exclusion of the mass of the population.
4 In countries like Britain, the political elites generally oppose electoral reform which would allow the views of minorities to be better represented in Parliament.
5 Political leaders are usually hostile to, and take little notice of, social movements which act outside of mainstream politics.
6 Transnational institutions such as the European Union are remote from the mass of the population and do not have directly-elected officials in the most powerful positions.

Participatory democracy

Although Bottomore sees power as largely stemming from wealth, and he believes that capitalists and the political elites are becoming increasingly powerful, he does not follow some other Marxists in claiming that the only way to improve the situation is a communist revolution. Instead, Bottomore believes that progress can be made by developing a participatory democracy.

Such progress may be possible because capitalism already faces a number of problems:

1 Economic crises and instability are becoming more acute and difficult to control in a global capitalist economy.
2 The world capitalist economy faces serious environmental problems (such as global warming) which will make it more difficult to achieve a continued growth in profitability.
3 Opposition to the logic of global capitalist development is growing, particularly in new social movements such as those engaged in ecological and environmental campaigns (see pp. 643–7).

In this situation Bottomore believes that there is scope for significant improvements which would involve a considerable dispersal of power. He argues for a 'radical devolution of power within nation states themselves, to regional and local authorities whose policies can be more closely observed and influenced by the public'.

Active, participatory democracy can also be enhanced through the activities of social movements. These may operate outside conventional parliamentary and pressure-group politics and can involve more and more people in shaping their own societies. People are increasingly well-educated and have the leisure time to devote to the 'self-regulation of their forms of life'. If participatory democracy is successful, then 'social movements of many different kinds are likely to have a growing influence, encouraging the necessary dissolution of the mystique of political elites and at the same time undermining the real dominance of upper classes'.

Evaluation

Bottomore's work provides an updated neo-Marxist approach to power, which takes account of changes such as the development of social movements and the apparent globalization of the economy. It offers an alternative to communist revolution (which seems increasingly unlikely to happen) as a path towards a society in which power is more equally distributed. However, his work uses a mixture of Marxist class theory and elite theory, and, as a result, it appears confused at times. For example, he does not make the links between political elites and upper-class power (which stems from wealth) particularly clear. His claim that the upper classes are getting ever more powerful seems to contradict his view that power could be decentralized and that new social movements could have a growing role in politics. Furthermore, like the other theories examined so far, Bottomore says little about how the state itself may exercise power. This issue is examined in the next section.

State-centred theories of power

The approaches we have considered so far have been society-centred: they see the state and its actions as shaped by external forces in society as a whole. We will now look at an alternative perspective which has a completely different viewpoint.

Eric A. Nordlinger – the autonomy of democratic states

Society-centred and state-centred approaches

According to Eric A. Nordlinger (1981), theories of power and the state are either society-centred or state-centred. To Nordlinger, all the perspectives on the state and power examined so far are society-centred, and society-centred approaches have 'a pervasive grip upon citizens, journalists and scholars alike'. Pluralism sees the state's actions as determined by the democratic will of the people; elite theory sees its actions as shaped by the wishes of a small group of powerful people; Marxism sees the state as shaped by the interests of a ruling class. Although some Marxist and neo-Marxist theories concede that the state may have some autonomy, they do not go far enough, because, in the final analysis, the state is portrayed as being unable to go against ruling-class interests.

Nordlinger criticizes all these approaches saying:

> *the possibility that the state's preferences have at least as much impact on public policy as do society's is ignored; the state's having certain distinctive interests and divergent preferences is not considered; the state's many autonomous actions are not calculated; the state's numerous autonomy-enhancing capacities and opportunities are not examined.*
>
> Nordlinger, 1981

Nordlinger argues that society-centred approaches have been so dominant that a very distorted and one-sided view of the state and power has been produced. Although society can and does influence the state, the reverse sometimes happens. This is what Nordlinger describes as the state-centred approach to the theory of power. The state acts independently or autonomously to change society.

This is true of democracies, as well as other types of state, even though they are supposed to be under the control of the electorate.

The autonomy of the democratic state takes three forms.

Type 1 state autonomy

Type 1 state autonomy occurs when the state has different wishes to those of major groups in society, and implements its preferred policies despite pressure for it not to do so. For example, state policy in Sweden is often formulated by Royal Commissions. About 80 per cent of those who serve on the Commissions are civil servants, and the recommendations are usually followed even when they are unpopular with the electorate or are opposed by elites outside the state. In Norway, public–private committees which formulate public policy are often chaired by civil servants and, again, their recommendations are normally accepted whatever the opposition to them.

To Nordlinger there are many ways in which the state can enhance its autonomy from society. These include:

1. using secretive systems of decision making;
2. using honours, appointments or government contracts to persuade opponents to accept proposals;
3. using the state's resources to counter resources used by opponents (for example, using the funds in the state bank to prop up a currency that is being undermined by speculators);
4. threatening to change a range of policies in such a way as to harm the interests of opponents of the state's policies;
5. taking actions or issuing statements which cause mistrust among different groups of opponents.

Because the state has considerable power of its own, it is sometimes able to utilize it to prevent effective opposition.

Type 2 state autonomy

Type 2 state autonomy occurs when the state is able to persuade opponents of its policies to change their mind and support the government. Nordlinger argues that this is quite common and examples of it can be found in classical pluralist studies such as Dahl's *Who Governs?* (see p. 596). Although Dahl claimed that the authorities in New Haven were responsive to public opinion and the policies they adopted were shaped by interest groups, Nordlinger believes that the authorities played an active role in manipulating public opinion. For example, Dahl himself pointed out that there had been little or no interest in a programme of urban renewal until the mayor put the issue on the agenda and persuaded various interest

groups to support him. None of the interest groups agreed with his proposals when they were first put forward. From this viewpoint, then, Dahl's own evidence showed that the state could act autonomously in shaping public opinion, rather than having its policies shaped by public opinion.

Type 3 state autonomy

Type 3 state autonomy occurs when the state follows policies which are supported, or at least not opposed, by the public or powerful interest groups in society. Very often, significant groups in society may be unsure of what policies to support and leave it up to the state to decide. For example, between 1948 and 1971 the USA's grain farmers, industrial workers and exporters made little attempt to influence America's international monetary policy. Although the policy affected them a great deal, they were unable to predict the effects of the state's policies and so were content to accept whatever policies the state adopted.

On many issues concerned with the state itself there is considerable apathy on the part of the public, and the state has considerable freedom of manoeuvre, even though the issues may be of great importance. Nordlinger suggests that such issues tend to include 'possible changes in the state units' formal powers relative to one another, policy implementation responsibilities, budgetary allotments, staffing, organization, and standard operating procedures'.

Nordlinger's views suggest that the state has considerable autonomy over many issues, whether there is opposition from society or not. While he recognizes that the autonomy is only partial, he perhaps goes further in attributing independence to the state than other state-centred approaches. His theory is backed up by a limited number of empirical examples.

Other sociologists have conducted more detailed research in their attempts to show that the state acts as an independent source of power.

Theda Skocpol – *Bringing the State Back In*

The autonomy of states from society

Theda Skocpol (1985) is perhaps the most influential of the state-centred theorists. She has written extensively about the state as a source of power and is a strong supporter of what she calls *Bringing the State Back In*. She argues that pluralists, functionalists, Marxists and neo-Marxists have all tended to see the state as shaped by external pressures and have neglected the possibility that the state can shape society. Like Nordlinger, she is critical of such approaches. For example, she says:

> *virtually all neo-Marxist writers on the state have retained deeply embedded society-centred assumptions, not allowing themselves to doubt that, at base, states are inherently shaped by classes or class struggles and function to preserve and expand models of production. Many possible forms of autonomous state action are thus ruled out by definitional fiat.*
>
> Skocpol, 1985, p. 5

To Skocpol, states can have considerable autonomy and, as actors, have the potential capacity to achieve their policy goals. These goals 'are not simply reflective of the demands or interests of social groups, classes or society', for states can have their own goals and pursue their own interests.

Skocpol believes that one of the main aims of states and parts of states is to increase their own power. She suggests that 'We can hypothesize that one (hidden or overt) feature of all autonomous state actions will be the reinforcement of the prerogatives of collectivities of state officials.' 'Policies different from those demanded by societal actors will be produced' as states 'attempt to reinforce the authority, political longevity, and social control of the state organizations.'

Skocpol gives a number of examples of states acting in pursuit of their own interests.

In 1968 in Peru there was a coup organized by career military officers who used state power to plan economic growth, weaken opposition groups in society, and try to impose order. In Britain and Sweden, according to Skocpol, the civil services often oppose the policies of elected politicians and have some success in ensuring that their policies are not implemented in such a way as to undermine the power of the state. In the USA, both the White House and the State Department are fairly insulated from public opinion and democratic control, and they often act autonomously. Skocpol's own research had found that in the USA after the First World War, the Department of Agriculture was a powerful part of the state which acted independently in the pursuit of its own interests.

State capacities

Although all states have the potential to achieve their own goals, their capacity to do so will be affected by a number of factors:

1. Skocpol says that 'sheer sovereign integrity and the stable administrative control of a given territory are preconditions for any state's ability to implement policies'. Unless a state can largely command the territory for which it is responsible, it will have no power base from which to achieve its aims.
2. States that have a reliable and substantial source of income are more powerful than those that do not. For example, if a state relies heavily upon the export of a single commodity or product (as some Third

World states do), then it is vulnerable to a decline in demand for the product or a reduction in its value. On the other hand, economies that export a wide variety of products have a more reliable income.

3 States that govern rich societies obviously have more potential for raising domestic taxes than those that govern poor societies. This can strengthen their power base.

4 States that are forced to borrow large amounts of money can end up in a weaker position than those that have sufficient revenue to finance their activities.

5 States also tend to increase their power if they can recruit many of the most able and highly-educated members of society into their ranks. Not only does this tend to improve the organization of the state, it also deprives non-state organizations and groups of the personnel who would be most likely to challenge and undermine the state's power.

Skocpol believes that whether a state becomes powerful or not partly depends upon how well organized groups in society are. She criticizes Marxists for claiming that states always reflect the interests of a dominant class, saying:

> *the political expression of class interests and conflicts is never automatic or economically determined. It depends on the capacities classes have for achieving consciousness, organization, and representation. Directly or indirectly, the structures and activities of states profoundly condition such class capacities.*
>
> Skocpol, 1985, p. 25

To Skocpol, Marxist political sociology 'must be turned, if not on its head, then certainly on its side'. The state shapes the activity of classes as much as classes shape the activity of the state.

States' capacities are profoundly affected by their relationships with other states. Large and powerful armed forces increase the capacity of a state to defend its own territory or seize the territory of other states. Control over territory is the basis of the state's ability to raise revenue and finance its activities. States can be weakened by wars, especially if they incur crippling costs or they suffer military defeats. External threats can result in internal weakness and sometimes contribute to the state losing its autonomy from society.

States and social revolutions

In her most substantial empirical study, Skocpol (1979) compared revolutions in France (1788), China (1911) and Russia (1917). She argues that in all these cases the activities of the states and the weak position that the states found themselves in played a vital role in causing revolutions. The Chinese, Russian and French states acted in ways which undermined their own power and produced a situation where the state was overthrown by particular classes. Although class conflict was important in all of the revolutions, none of them could be understood without considering the role of the state as an autonomous actor. All three were '*imperial states* – that is, differentiated, centrally coordinated administrative and military hierarchies functioning under the aegis of the absolute monarchies'. Although there were differences in the circumstances that led to the revolutions, Skocpol argues that, in all of them, 'The revolutionary crises developed when old-regime states became unable to meet the challenges of evolving international situations.'

In the following section we will analyse the French revolution in more detail to illustrate Skocpol's argument.

France

France fought two wars in the middle years of the eighteenth century: the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–8) and the Seven Years War (1756–63). Both were expensive and France had little military success – in fact in the Seven Years War it lost a number of colonies to Britain.

In eighteenth-century France around 85 per cent of the population were peasants, but agriculture was not highly developed. France had a lower per capita income than Britain and other European competitors, restricting the wealth available for the state to tax. Furthermore, the tax system was inefficient, with numerous exemptions and deductions for the elites who collected the taxes. Consequently the French state got into financial trouble. This was further exacerbated by French involvement in the American War of Independence, when France sided with the American colonists against their British rulers.

In 1797 an Assembly of Notables was called and the finance minister proposed a new land tax to deal with the problem. The Notables rejected the proposal but advocated the establishment of a new body representing landowners, a body which would have to approve any new taxes. When the king refused there were demonstrations and protests in different parts of the country. The king then summoned the Estates General, which consisted of various elites, but this body was unable to reach any agreement about what to do. While most members of the Estates General wanted to restrict the power of the king, they could not agree on how to do it. Consequently the French state was effectively paralysed and its weakness allowed popular protests to take place. Skocpol says:

> *By the summer of 1789, the result was the 'Municipal Revolution', a nation-wide wave of political revolutions in cities and towns throughout France, including of course the celebrated 'fall of the Bastille in Paris'. In the*

context of simultaneous political crises of 1788-9, crowds of artisans, shopkeepers, journeymen, and labourers roamed the cities searching for arms and grain and demanding both bread and liberty.

Skocpol, 1979, pp. 66-7

The French monarch was overthrown and replaced by revolutionary government.

Conclusion

According to Skocpol, in France, Russia and China, it was the weakness of the state which ultimately caused the revolutions. She comments that 'In all three cases ... the ultimate effect of impediments to state-sponsored reforms was the downfall of monarchical autocracy and the disintegration of the centralized administrative and military organizations of the state.' In each case the state could have acted differently by introducing more effective reforms earlier to prevent the development of a revolutionary situation. Each regime was brought down by a combination of external pressures from other states and the way 'agrarian relations of production and landed dominant classes impinged upon state organizations'. While class relationships were important, none of the revolutions could be understood without reference to the actions taken by the states involved.

In all three countries the revolutions led to the collapse of the old regimes, but they were replaced sooner or later by regimes with even more centralized power and more autonomy than the old states: the Napoleonic regime in France, and communist regimes in China and Russia. According to Skocpol, these were all clear examples of states which could exercise power and which could sometimes act to pursue their own interests rather than the interests of groups within society.

Evaluation of state-centred theories

One of the problems with state-centred theories may be that they are often unclear about their precise theoretical position. Thus Bob Jessop argues:

In their eagerness to criticize society-centred analysis, they have failed to distinguish three different sorts of claim about the state. It is not clear whether they are: (a) rejecting the so-called society-centred approach in its entirety and arguing that the state should be the independent variable; (b) bending the stick in the other direction for polemical purposes, one-sidedly emphasizing the importance of the state as a crucial causal factor; or (c) suggesting that a combination of society and state-centred perspectives will somehow provide a complete account of state–society relations.

Jessop, 1990, p. 287

Most critics are prepared to accept that the actions of the state should be taken into account in studies of power. However, many believe that Skocpol and similar writers exaggerate the importance of the state in an attempt to support their approach. Furthermore, Jessop argues that it is artificial and misleading to see the 'state' and 'society' as being quite separate institutions. He sees state and society as so intimately connected that it is not possible to completely separate them in accounts of power.

Both Jessop and McLennan argue that state-centred approaches offer misleading analyses of the so-called society-centred approaches which they are attacking. Jessop claims that they rest on a '"straw-man" account of the society-centred bias in other studies'. In reality, Jessop suggests, other theories do take account of the power of the state. McLennan (1989) argues in similar fashion that many Marxists, such as Poulantzas, recognize that the state has 'relative autonomy' and that its actions are not entirely determined by society. McLennan concludes that 'Pragmatically it is always degrees of autonomy we are dealing with.'

This is true both of Skocpol's work and of many Marxist theories of power, and the theoretical difference between these approaches has been greatly exaggerated by many of the advocates of a state-centred approach.

Globalization and the power of the nation-state

A number of sociologists and others have begun to argue that the analysis of power cannot be confined to examining the distribution of power within particular nation-states. This is reflected in some of the theories we discussed earlier in this chapter. In his Gramscian discussion of British politics, David Coates (1984) recognizes that the actions of the British state are limited by the operation of the international capitalist system (see pp. 617–19), as does Tom Bottomore in his discussion of elites and upper classes (Bottomore, 1993, pp. 619–20). Similarly, the state-centred theories – such as that of Skocpol, discussed above – acknowledge that state power is affected by the actions of other states.

State-centred theories do, however, tend to emphasize the autonomy of individual states and the significance of their actions. Approaches which claim that globalization has taken place tend to see the

power that exists outside nation-states as restricting their activities and limiting their power. From this point of view, power relationships increasingly cut across national boundaries, and states lose some of their capacity to act independently and shape social life within their boundaries.

There are many advocates and some critics of the theory of globalization. We will start by examining the ideas of one of the strongest supporters of the theory, Kenichi Ohmae, before considering the ideas of those who take a less extreme position.

Kenichi Ohmae – *The Borderless World*

As a management consultant and 'business guru', Kenichi Ohmae (1994) is primarily concerned with the significance of globalization, which he alleges is taking place, for large corporations. However, his analysis also encompasses changes in the distribution of power and the role of nation-states. He is one of the most uncompromising and wholeheartedly enthusiastic advocates of globalization and so his views form a convenient starting point.

The inter-linked economy

According to Ohmae, political borders have become increasingly insignificant in a globalized world, particularly in the most developed economic regions. In particular, Ohmae sees the United States, Japan and Europe as forming one, giant, inter-linked economy (ILE), which is being joined by rapidly developing countries such as Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong. He claims that the ILE 'is becoming so powerful that it has swallowed most consumers and corporations, made traditional national borders almost disappear, and pushed bureaucrats, politicians, and the military towards the status of declining industries'.

Ohmae sees such developments as stemming from an opening up of the world economy so that trade between people in different nation-states becomes very easy. This in turn is a consequence of rapid improvements in communications. Through such developments as cable and satellite TV, cheaper, easier and more frequent international travel, and (since Ohmae was writing) the rapid development of the internet, individuals are increasingly able to see what people consume in other countries. It has also become much easier for individuals to buy what they want from other countries. Ohmae says:

> *Today, of course, people everywhere are more and more able to get the information they want directly from all corners of the world. They can see for themselves what the tastes and preferences are in other countries, the styles of clothing now in fashion, the sports, the lifestyles.*
>
> Ohmae, 1992, p. 19

In the past, governments could exercise considerable control over the flow of information to their citizens. Now this is no longer possible. If people see that what they are getting is substandard they will look abroad for something better or insist upon improvements. For example, in Japan the population grew dissatisfied with the standard of their housing. According to Ohmae, 10 million Japanese travel abroad each year. Seeing how others live led them to insist that the government take steps to improve the standard of the housing available to them.

The lack of control governments now have over information is paralleled by the lack of control they can have over the economy. It is becoming increasingly difficult for governments to protect their domestic industries from foreign competition. It is difficult to enforce attempts to impose tariff barriers designed to prevent imports, and, in any case, it is counterproductive. Tariffs are only effective in some low-income economies. India, for example, protects its domestic car industry from external competition. The end result is over-priced and outdated cars which consumers do not like. In higher-income countries, people demand access to the best goods produced anywhere in the world. According to Ohmae, this is not only good for the consumer, it is good for the country's economy as well.

According to Ohmae, most wealth is no longer produced by manufacturing, and most jobs are created when economies are open to investment from any companies, be they domestic, foreign or multinational. He says, 'such functions as distribution, warehousing, financing, retail marketing, systems integration and services are all legitimate parts of the business system and can create as many, and often more, jobs than simply manufacturing operations'.

Global citizens and regional links

Individuals have become global citizens. They, 'want to buy the best and the cheapest products, no matter where in the world they are produced'. Regional economic links have become more important than national economies, and distant parts of the world are connected through business and other ties. Californian businesses often have stronger links with Asian businesses than with businesses in other areas of the USA. Hong Kong has strong links with parts of Canada, since many business people from Hong Kong moved to Canada because they feared the consequences of Hong Kong reverting to Chinese control. There are clusters of investment by Japanese companies in Alsace-Lorraine and South Wales.

If national governments try to limit or stifle these links, they undermine economic growth and incur the displeasure of their citizens. Nor can governments use economic policies to control their economies in the

way they used to. Financiers can move money around the globe in vast quantities almost instantaneously. Governments cannot set tax rates or interest rates, or try to fix the value of their currency without taking account of these facts.

National policies can soon be rendered ineffective if financiers and corporations move their currency or their businesses elsewhere. Indeed, Ohmae argues that corporations should no longer see themselves as being based in a particular society. To be successful they have to produce the best products in the world. The development costs of being the best are often enormous and only global success will repay the initial investment. To achieve such success they need to have footholds throughout the inter-linked economy and adapt their businesses and products to meet local conditions. This cannot be achieved unless businesses lose their sense of being based primarily in a single country.

Governments and consumers

According to Ohmae, then, governments have largely lost their power to regulate and control both their national economies and information within their boundaries. Another important governmental function, providing military security, is also becoming redundant. In the inter-linked economy it makes little sense for nations to fight over territory. Invading your neighbour would involve destroying property owned by your own citizens, and disrupting economic activity which contributes to your own country's wealth. States such as Singapore have little in the way of armed forces, yet they do not live in fear of external military threats.

In Ohmae's view of the world, power has shifted decisively from governments to individual consumers. Both governments and companies alike have to accommodate the demands of consumers if they are to get re-elected, or win and keep customers. It is a world in which there is a plurality of cultures, in which 'People vary in how they want to live.' Regimes that try to maintain or impose a single, national culture (such as communist regimes) are doomed to failure.

If states have lost much of their economic role and power, and their role in controlling information, and if they are losing their military role, and no longer have a national culture to protect, are they still necessary? Do they still have any power? Ohmae thinks they are necessary and that they retain some limited powers. They are necessary, essentially, to produce the conditions in which consumers, workers and corporations can thrive in the global economy. They are still necessary to provide the infrastructure (such as roads and a legal system) which makes it possible for businesses to operate. Above all, though, they need to try to ensure the best possible education for their citizens. Ultimately, Ohmae believes that economic success results from having a highly-educated, entrepreneurial and well-informed population. To achieve these limited objectives, governments still need to raise taxes. However, if their taxes are too high, the effect will be counterproductive, since businesses will simply relocate elsewhere.

Evaluation

Ohmae's view of a world in which political borders are largely irrelevant and power is transferred to consumers is open to many criticisms. Ohmae ignores the continuing role of nation-states in controlling access to their territories as markets for businesses. Although there has been movement towards freer trade in the world economy, completely free trade has not yet come close to fruition. The three biggest capitalist blocs of Japan, North America and the European Union continue to restrict the trade allowed with each other and with nations outside these blocks.

Ohmae surely exaggerates the decline in the importance of the military capability of states. Neither consumers nor corporations have the ability to use military force to impose their will on others. As Nigel Harris says, 'States have a monopoly within their territory of the use of physical power while companies rarely have more than security guards' (Harris, 1992). Individual consumers have even less ability to impose their will on others through the use of force.

Even if Ohmae is correct in believing that the power of the nation-state has declined, it is surprising that he attributes so much power to consumers. Many other theorists of globalization argue that power has shifted to corporations rather than to consumers (see below). Some theorists, such as Hirst and Thompson, raise serious questions about whether globalization has taken place, while others, such as Giddens, accept that globalization has happened, but make far less extreme claims about the decline of state power. Some of these alternative views will now be considered.

Globalization and transnational corporations

As long ago as 1971, Raymond Vernon published a book claiming that the power of nation-states was being eclipsed by the power of multinational (now often called transnational) corporations. Vernon said, 'Suddenly, it seems, the sovereign states are feeling naked. Concepts such as national sovereignty and national economic strength appear curiously drained of meaning' (Vernon, 1971).

Vernon believed that the power of nation-states was declining, but he saw it as shifting to corpora-

tions rather than consumers. Multinational and transnational corporations are defined in different ways by different writers, but, as a minimum definition, they are business organizations which operate in more than one country. Most of the larger transnational corporations operate in numerous countries and their activities involve vast sums of money. For example, the 1995 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development found that global sales by the foreign affiliates of transnational corporations amounted to $5.2 trillion, which was more than the total value of all goods and services traded in the world (which amounted to $4.8 trillion) (*World Investment Report*, 1995).

In view of the increased popularity of theories of globalization, it is not surprising that some sociologists have argued that power has shifted to such corporations in a globalized world. One such sociologist is Leslie Sklair.

Leslie Sklair – *Sociology of the Global System*

Leslie Sklair (1993, 1995) believes that states retain some power but that any understanding of the global system must focus primarily upon transnational corporations (TNCs).

Transnational practices

Sklair points out that 'The largest TNCs have assets and annual sales far in excess of the Gross National Products of most of the countries in the world' (Sklair, 1993). In 1992 there were 135 TNCs with annual sales of more than $10 billion. He claims that:

> *such well-known companies as Ford, General Motors, Shell, Toyota, Volkswagen, Nestle, Sony, Pepsico, Coca Cola, Kodak, Xerox (and many others most of us have never heard of) have more economic power at their disposal than the majority of the countries of the world.*
>
> Sklair, 1993, p. 7

Sklair's model is based upon the idea of transnational practices. He defines these as 'practices that originate with non-state actors and cross state borders'. These are distinguished from international relations which involve the relations between nation-states. According to Sklair, transnational practices are increasingly important, compared to international relations.

Transnational practices take place in three main spheres:

1 the economic
2 the political
3 the cultural-ideological

These correspond to the practices of:

1 the transnational corporation
2 the transnational capitalist class
3 the culture-ideology of consumerism

Sklair sees the transnational corporation as the vehicle of the global system. He points to the enormous wealth of such corporations and the crucial role they have in most national economies.

The transnational capitalist class is the driver of the global system. This class consists of executives of TNCs, 'globalizing state bureaucrats', 'capitalist-inspired politicians and professionals' and 'consumerist elites (merchants, media)' (Sklair, 1995). It is seen as making system-wide decisions which affect the whole of the global system, and it attempts to make decisions which further its own interests within the system. Although it includes some politicians based in particular nation-states, the class opposes protectionism, which puts national interests above those of the class as a whole.

The culture-ideology of consumerism involves the worldwide spread of the ideology, which stresses the benefits of consumerism. It has become so important because of the near-universal spread of the mass media. Sklair says that cheap televisions, cassettes and radios 'now totally penetrate the First World, almost totally penetrate the urban Second and Third Worlds, and are beginning to penetrate deeply into the countryside in every country' (Sklair, 1995).

TNC power

Like Ohmae, then, Sklair largely sees the decline of the power of the state as a consequence of the development of capitalism. Unlike Ohmae, he believes that power largely rests with TNCs rather than consumers. Sklair claims that:

> *Effective TNC control of global capital and resources is almost complete. There are few important national resources that are entirely exempt from economic transnational practices. Transnational capitalist classes rule directly, through national capitalist political parties or social democratic political parties that cannot fundamentally threaten the global capitalist system, or they exert authority indirectly to a greater or lesser extent as the price levied on the non-capitalist states as a sort of entrance fee into the global capitalist system.*
>
> Sklair, 1995, p. 95

To Sklair, consumers are effectively indoctrinated by the ideology of the corporations. Far from ensuring that a globalized world acts in their interests, they, for the most part, tamely consume the products that capitalist ideology pushes. He

says that 'The control of ideas in the interests of consumerism is almost total.'

Despite his more extreme claims, Sklair does recognize both that there is some opposition to the capitalist global system and that nation-states retain some power. There are some anti-global social movements which challenge the ideology of consumerism, including environmental movements. However, Sklair does not believe that they have the power to mount a serious challenge to global capitalism.

States are less powerless. Sklair admits, for example, that the United States of America remains enormously powerful, certainly compared to some Third World states and even the larger TNCs. He says:

> *All the Fortune 500 corporations [the biggest corporations in the world] do not have the same economic impact on the United States, for example, as a few copper TNCs have had on Chile, or fruit companies on Central America, or mining corporations on Southern Africa.*
>
> Sklair, 1995, p. 99

In a few parts of the world, such as China, TNCs have had little success in gaining power at the expense of the state.

Evaluation

Sklair's analysis is more subtle and better supported by evidence than that of Ohmae. It also recognizes that the global system may have serious disadvantages. It seems more plausible to argue that power has shifted to TNCs than to say, as Ohmae does, that consumers are virtually all-powerful. Nevertheless, Sklair may well exaggerate the power of TNCs. His emphasis is on companies involved in production and he says little about the significance of global financiers, bankers and speculators. Yet finance capitalism involves bigger and more rapid flows of resources than does investment abroad by TNCs.

Other theorists such as Jeffrey Frieden (1991) attribute much more importance to finance capitalism. Furthermore, Sklair concentrates almost exclusively on economic aspects of globalization. A slightly broader view is taken by Kevin Bonnett.

Kevin Bonnett – globalization, power and politics

Globalization

Kevin Bonnett (1994) argues that 'Power in Britain (or in any other advanced country) can no longer be understood as first and foremost existing *within* the society.' Nation-states are a comparatively recent historical creation: Italy and Germany did not become unified states until the late nineteenth century and many colonies did not become autonomous states until they achieved independence a few decades ago.

In some parts of the contemporary world – for example, in the former Yugoslavia – nation-states have broken up and, increasingly throughout the world, power is exercised *across* nation-states rather than *within* them. Bonnett says, 'Many of the economic, political, military and ideological powers that shape our lives work across nations – and increasingly they operate on a global scale.' Multinational corporations, international financial markets, transnational communications systems (such as satellite TV) and transnational organizations (such as the EU) all operate outside of the control of individual nation-states, yet have a profound influence on what goes on within them.

Bonnett acknowledges that international forces – such as colonial empires and international trade – have been significant for centuries, but he believes that, recently, global forces have become more important. He claims that 'What is new is the scale and intensity of ... links and the fact that space and time are "shrunk" by the speed and relative cheapness of travel and electronic communications.'

Globalization and nationalism

While global forces seem to weaken the power of the nation-state from outside, they can also do so from within. Transnational and global relationships may also strengthen 'localism or small scale nationalism'. Ethnic and national groups seeking independence from large states can look to transnational organizations or systems of security to assist them in asserting their independence and claiming nationhood. Thus, 'The Baltic states and other parts of the former USSR have found it possible to proclaim independence – by virtue of links to wider economic and military networks', such as the EU and NATO. In Western Europe, Scottish nationalists have stressed the practicality of becoming independent from England while remaining within the EU. Bonnett says:

> *It has come to seem that almost any* people *with a shared culture or language now comes to define itself as a* nation. *And once they define themselves as a nation, the logical step in the contemporary world is to become a* nation-state *– claiming sovereign independence and national self-determination.*
>
> Bonnett, 1994

From this point of view, the power of nation-states is under threat from two directions.

Internationalism threatens to reduce the power of states to exercise power independently, while small-scale nationalism and localism threaten to undermine the unity of existing states.

Evaluation

By including a discussion of nationalism and localism, Bonnett adds a useful extra dimension to our examination of globalization. However, in one sense, nationalism involves reasserting the importance of nation-states and their governments, albeit in smaller nation-states than exist at present. The revival of nationalism cannot therefore be seen as unambiguously undermining the power of states, since, while attacking the power of existing states, it claims power for new ones (see pp. 263–70 for a discussion of nationalism).

Unlike Sklair, Bonnett makes little attempt to qualify his claims about the globalization of the world and he certainly fails to consider evidence that globalization might not be taking place. The same cannot be said of the next theorists to be considered, who are amongst those who have started to question whether globalization is happening at all.

Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson – questioning globalization

'Inter-national' economies and globalized economies

Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson's *Globalization in Question* (1996) makes an attempt to test the theory of globalization empirically. Like Sklair, they put the role of transnational corporations (TNCs) or multinational corporations (MNCs) at the forefront of their argument. They start their analysis by distinguishing between a globalized economy and an inter-national economy.

They argue that a globalized economy consists of a system in which 'distinct national economies are subsumed and rearticulated into the system by international processes and transactions. The international economic system becomes autonomized and socially disembedded, as markets and production become truly global.' In other words, nation-states become almost irrelevant to patterns of economic activity, and the existence of national boundaries makes little or no difference to patterns of trade.

In an inter-national economy, though, 'processes that are determined at the level of the national economy still dominate and international phenomena are outcomes that emerge from the distinct and differential performance of the national economies'. The world is made up of interacting national economies.

TNCs and MNCs

Hirst and Thompson regard corporations as a key test of whether the world economy is global or international. They distinguish between MNCs (multinational corporations) and TNCs (transnational corporations). In MNCs the national base is important and they are effectively regulated by their home government. In contrast, TNCs are globally based and 'footloose'. They have an international management team and are potentially willing to base their operations, including if necessary their headquarters, anywhere in the world.

Hirst and Thompson then use their own data (based on an analysis of the sales, assets and profits of 500 corporations in 1987, and the sales and assets of more than 5,000 corporations in 1992-3) to test whether corporations are still MNCs or have become TNCs. According to their analysis, both sets of data show that home-based activities dominate in terms of such measures as the number of subsidiaries and affiliates, the location of assets, and the place where profits are produced. For example, in 1992-3, 75 per cent of both German and Japanese manufacturing corporations' sales were in the home region/country. The corresponding figure for the UK was 65 per cent, and for the USA 67 per cent. They conclude that MNCs are dominant in a largely inter-national economy.

Nation-states and power

Hirst and Thompson adopt a more balanced position when discussing economic governance and nation-states. They accept that 'the combined effects of changing economic conditions and past public policies of dismantling exchange controls have made ambitious and internationally divergent strategies of national economic governance far more difficult'. States have to adopt increasingly similar policies if they are to succeed in the contemporary world.

Furthermore, Hirst and Thompson admit that states have a reduced capacity 'to act autonomously on their societies'. They give the example of the socialist government of France in the 1980s. It tried to combat unemployment and recession by pumping money into the economy, but the negative reaction of foreign investors and financiers forced it to abandon the policy.

Along with the loss of economic power, Hirst and Thompson believe that there has also been a loss of military power. This is because it has become inconceivable for most developed nations to pursue policies through military force in a post-cold war but nuclear era. It is simply too risky to embark on military campaigns with the possibility of a nuclear response.

States may even have lost some ideological power. With increasingly heterogeneous populations, states are less able to call on nationalist loyalty. The diversity of populations makes it difficult to produce loyalty to any one set of values.

Although Hirst and Thompson believe that the state's capacities have been reduced and in some ways changed, they do not believe that they have been eliminated altogether. The state retains a role

as a 'facilitator and orchestrator of private economic actors':

> *it still retains one central role that ensures a large measure of territorial control – the regulation of populations. People are less mobile than money, goods or ideas: in a sense they remain 'nationalized', dependent on passports, visas, and residence and labour qualifications.*
>
> Hirst and Thompson, 1996, p. 171

It is this quality which gives the state democratic legitimacy. It can claim to speak for a body of people and thus can play a crucial role in negotiating international agreements. Hirst and Thompson see such agreements as crucial in the contemporary international economy. They conclude that 'Politics is becoming more polycentric, with states as merely one level in a complex system of overlapping and often competing agencies of government.'

Evaluation

Hirst and Thompson can be criticized on a number of grounds. First, their analysis of TNCs and MNCs leaves room for alternative interpretations. They themselves point out that 'The fact that only 30 per cent or so of company activity is conducted abroad does not tell us anything about the strategic importance of that 30 per cent to the overall business activity of firms.' Furthermore, the definition of the 'home region' on which the above figures are based is extremely broad. Thus the German 'home region' is taken to include the rest of Europe and the Middle East and Africa, the US home region includes Canada, and the Japanese home region covers the whole of south-east Asia.

Hirst and Thompson perhaps use an over-restrictive definition of TNCs in order to allow them to arrive at the conclusion that there are few genuine TNCs. Furthermore, as Anthony Woodiwiss (1996) points out, Hirst and Thompson are arguing against a rather extreme view of the 'borderless world' (derived from the writings of Ohmae), which is not representative of the more qualified accounts of globalization.

Second, aspects of their argument seem to point in the opposite direction to the conclusions they reach. Their emphasis on inter-national regulation just adds plausibility to the theory of globalization since increased inter-national regulation is only necessary because of globalization.

Third, Woodiwiss argues that they are so keen to find evidence to support their ideas that they tend to ignore potentially contradictory evidence. In particular, they neglect the transnational influences on economies other than those involving corporations (for example, tourism and changes in exchange rates).

Despite these problems, Hirst and Thompson do succeed in raising serious doubts about the more extreme versions of globalization. They show that home markets remain important to corporations and that most do retain strong attachments to their country of origin. They also show that the continued control over territory and ability to represent populations mean that states continue to have sources of power which are not available to other institutions.

Anthony Giddens – globalization and high modernity

Unlike Hirst and Thompson, Anthony Giddens generally supports the theory of globalization. Indeed, as we will see, he explicitly criticizes Hirst and Thompson. However, Giddens is also critical of the extreme version of the theory advanced by Ohmae, as he steers a path between those who deny globalization has taken place and those who think it has completely transformed the world.

Globalization and time–space distanciation

Anthony Giddens defines globalization as 'the intensification of worldwide social relationships which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa' (Giddens, 1990). This often includes events which take place in other nation-states and which may be outside the control of any state. He sees this process as involving 'time–space distanciation', in which interaction is stretched across space so that people no longer have to be physically present to interact with one another. Technological innovations such as the internet and satellite communications make this possible and reduce the time it takes to communicate with people in other parts of the world. National boundaries become less significant and states less able to control what happens in the world.

Competition and the global economy

Part of this process involves increasing competition between businesses in different societies. Businesses have to compete globally if they are to be successful. They cannot rely upon monopolizing their own domestic market. This is because the opening up of world trade prevents national governments from protecting businesses from foreign competition.

Giddens puts forward some evidence to support his claim that globalization is taking place. He attacks Hirst and Thompson's views by arguing that world trade is more important and more open than ever before. According to Giddens (1999), only 7 per cent of the Gross Domestic Products of the richest nations consisted of exports in 1950. By 1970 it was 12 per cent, and by 1997 it had risen further to 17 per cent. Furthermore, Giddens also points out that a much-expanded role has developed for world

financial markets. According to Giddens, 'Over a trillion dollars a day is turned over in currency exchange transactions.' Furthermore, institutional investors who can shift money around the world extremely rapidly have become incredibly powerful. According to his figures, in the USA in 1996 they held assets of $11.1 trillion. Even if Hirst and Thompson are right to point out that much trade is regional, Giddens is convinced that 'there is a "fully global economy" on the level of financial markets'.

Nation-states and power

Where do these economic changes leave the governments of nation-states? Giddens believes that the changes do restrict their power. Nation-states have to compete to attract inward investment from major transnational corporations and they have to keep institutional investors happy. They cannot therefore afford to levy very high taxes in order to pay for expensive welfare programmes. If they tried to tax too highly, businesses would go elsewhere and deprive the government of the business revenue they need to fund their welfare programmes. Giddens says:

> *The new period of globalization attacks not only the economic basis of the welfare state but the commitment of its citizenry to the equation of wealth with national wealth. The state is less able to provide effective central control of economic life.*
>
> Giddens, 1994, p. 140

However, this does not lead Giddens to agree with writers such as Ohmae that the nation-state has lost its power and become insignificant. Giddens asks, 'Is the nation-state becoming a fiction as Ohmae suggests, and government obsolete? They are not, but their shape is being altered' (Giddens, 1999). It is true that governments lose some economic power, but other powers are retained, even enhanced.

Giddens believes that governments can sometimes use nationalist sentiments to increase the support they gain from their populations. Furthermore, he believes that 'Nations retain, and will for the foreseeable future, considerable governmental, economic and cultural power, over their citizens and in the external arena.' However, he believes that to exercise such powers they increasingly need to collaborate with other states, with transnational actors, and with regions and localities within their own states. Each of these has become more important, and national governments, without being stripped of power, do increasingly share it with other groups and organizations.

Evaluation

Giddens provides perhaps the most balanced analysis of globalization. Although parts of his argument are not particularly well backed up with evidence, he does show an awareness of the continuing power of states and of some of the limitations that have been put on that power.

David Held – democracy and the cosmopolitan order

David Held (1993) is a British sociologist who has given detailed consideration to the implications of globalization for the state. His work adds an extra dimension to the views already considered, because it includes a discussion of how democratic systems can try to come to terms with the limitations on them stemming from globalization. He talks of the 'progressive enmeshment today of states and societies in regional and global networks', and considers how democracy can be developed in a world in which the nation-state does not have all the power.

Examples of globalization

Generally Held makes stronger claims than Giddens does about the impact of globalization.

He argues that, in terms of economics, governments find it hard to control their own economy. For instance, countries cannot determine their own interest rates without reference to those in other countries. If a government wants to cut interest rates to stimulate its economy, it may be unable to do so if other countries keep their rates high, thus attracting investment to them. World financial markets can undermine the value of a country's currency, forcing its government to change policy to take account of the new circumstances. Furthermore, multinational companies are using marketing and production systems that are global in scale. The same products are sold throughout the world and production can be moved from one country to another regardless of the wishes of national governments.

Ecological issues cut across national boundaries as well. The destruction of rain forests, air pollution and nuclear disasters can all lead to environmental damage in other parts of the world. With more people travelling, health issues such as AIDS become difficult to address in one country without taking account of the situation in others.

Like other writers on globalization, Held also points to the increased power of international and transnational organizations. He notes that the 'European Community, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or the International Monetary Fund diminish the range of decisions open to given national "majorities"'. Military issues also take on a global dimension, with the existence of spy satellites for gathering intelligence, and intercontinental missiles. With the ending of the cold war, as a result

of the collapse of communism in Russia and Eastern Europe, there are closer contacts and more complex interconnections between groups of nations which were formerly hostile to one another.

Held points out that some countries are in a particularly weak position when trying to maintain their independence and autonomy. Many Third World countries are heavily in debt to the First World and they rely upon them for aid and military protection. They are left 'vulnerable and dependent on economic forces and relations over which they have little, if any, control'.

Overall, then, nations have become less and less isolated and at the same time less able to control their own affairs. This has serious implications for democracy.

Globalization and cosmopolitan democracy

Democracy is based upon the assumption that a group of people can exercise control over their own affairs. As it becomes more difficult to confine issues within national boundaries, it becomes harder to operate democracy along these lines. As well as bringing people together, globalism can create 'fragmentation' and 'disintegrative trends'. Closer global ties bring diverse cultures together and can increase the chances of conflict and war between people of different cultures and national identities. As the old power blocs of the cold war become less dominant, people assert their local and regional, ethnic or nationalist identities, threatening democracy. Globalization can 'weaken old political and economic structures without necessarily leading to the establishment of new systems of regulation'.

Held argues that these problems can only be tackled by producing a new democratic system which enables people in different nations and localities to decide together how they are going to tackle issues which cut across national boundaries.

In fact, since the Second World War it has been recognized that some form of international law and global institutions might be necessary to create order in the world and deal with international issues. In the post-war period the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund were introduced to try to regulate aspects of the world's monetary and economic systems, and the United Nations was established. Although the UN has tried to intervene in issues throughout the world, Held argues:

> *The image of international regulation projected by the charter (and related documents) was one of 'states still jealously "sovereign"', but linked together in a 'myriad of relations'; under pressure to resolve disagreements by peaceful means and according to legal criteria.*
>
> Held, 1993, pp. 33-4

Because of the emphasis on sovereignty of states, though, the UN has not been able to act effectively in most of the situations it has tried to deal with. Members of the Security Council have been able to veto any policy they disapproved of and, with China, the USA, Russia, the UK and France all as permanent members, there has rarely been agreement. Nevertheless, the UN has, according to Held, been useful. It has:

> *provided a vision, in spite of its limitations, of a new world order based upon the meeting of governments and, under appropriate circumstances, of a supranational presence in world affairs championing human rights.*
>
> Held, 1993, p. 36

Despite its having had some success, Held does not believe that the UN, or a similar body, can produce democracy in the new, globalized world. Instead, he proposes a cosmopolitan model of democracy in which people can participate in decisions taken at different levels. Some decisions would be taken by new regional parliaments representing areas such as Africa and Latin America. The existing European Parliament could be strengthened. Some transnational issues could be resolved by referendums held in those areas of the world affected by particular issues.

Individuals would be protected in the cosmopolitan model of democracy by the 'entrenchment of a cluster of rights, including civil, political, economic and social rights, in order to provide shape and limits to democratic decision-making'. These rights would be incorporated into the constitutions of nation-states and international bodies. Such rights would be upheld by international courts which would have strong powers to punish governments which refused to conform to them. Ultimately the world would need 'an authoritative assembly of all democratic states and societies – a re-formed UN, or a complement to it – would be an objective'.

Conclusion and evaluation

Held admits that his proposals have many possible pitfalls. People might wish to ask questions about a new democratic international assembly – questions such as 'Would it have any teeth to implement decisions? How would democratic international law be enforced?' and 'Would there be a centralized police and military force?' However, Held believes that most concerns could be 'met and countered' and that the establishment of the sort of international body he proposes is not beyond the bounds of possibility.

Held's views are perhaps somewhat idealistic. While many states are affected by global issues, that does not necessarily mean that they have the same interests in relation to those issues. For example,

poor Third World countries have an interest in changing some aspects of the global economy which benefit the rich First World, and which the latter therefore wants to retain. The disagreements among member states of the EU and the inability of the UN to take effective action in places such as Bosnia, Kosova and Chechnya suggest that Held's vision of international democracy and cooperation will not easily become reality. Nevertheless, he may be right to point out that democracy must tackle the problem of globalization if power is not to become more distant from the citizens of nation-states. Identifying the problem is easier than finding the solution, but it could at least be seen as a step in the right direction.

Michael Mann – the sources of social power

In recent work, Michael Mann (1986, 1993) has started an ambitious project which aims to develop new theories of power and of sociological theory in general. However, far from simply entering current debates about power and sociological theory in an abstract way, he has tied his theory of social life to an account of the development of societies from 10,000 BC to the present day. In doing so, he has returned to the all-embracing questions about societal development which so concerned the 'classical' sociologists, Marx, Weber and Durkheim. Furthermore, Mann has a considerable advantage over these eminent sociologists, since he has access to up-to-date historical and archaeological evidence which was unavailable to them.

Mann's work incorporates elements from the theories of power discussed in the two preceding sections of this chapter:

1 He agrees with writers such as Skocpol that the state can be an independent source of power, arguing that 'political power' is as important as ideological, military and economic power.

2 He follows theories of globalization in claiming that theories of power cannot be confined to examining how power is distributed within national boundaries. Like Held and others, Mann believes that networks of power can stretch across countries and across the globe. He does not, however, see this as a particularly new phenomenon, claiming that networks of power have long extended across sizeable geographical areas.

In some ways Mann's work represents a more fundamental challenge to theories of power than state-centred approaches and the theory of globalization, for Mann starts his analysis by attacking perhaps the most basic concept of sociology, that of 'society'.

The non-existence of 'society'

Mann says 'if I could, I would abolish the concept of "society" altogether'. Although he continues to use the word 'society' for the sake of convenience, he is anxious to point out that 'societies are not unitary. They are not social systems (closed or open); they are not totalities.' Mann claims that it logically follows from this standpoint that non-existent societies cannot be divided into parts or sub-systems, as they are by Parsons, nor can they be analysed in terms of 'levels', as in the Marxist division between the infrastructure and the superstructure. Furthermore, he rejects the idea of societal evolution because of his belief that societies are not unitary.

How, then, is Mann able to justify his rejection of so many central concepts in sociological theory? His main argument is very simple: human behaviour is not, and has never been, exclusively related to, or caused by, a particular territory in which an individual lives. In the modern world, for example, the development of the mass media has led to many aspects of culture extending across national boundaries. Nor is the spread of cultural influences particularly new: for centuries, major religions such as Islam and Christianity have had an influence which transcends national boundaries.

Like theorists of globalization, Mann claims that a society such as Britain is not a political unit which can be analysed independently. Britain is a member of the military alliance NATO, and of the economic grouping of nations, the EU. Many companies in Britain are owned by multinational corporations which are based abroad. Through trade, the British economy is affected by other countries, and cultural products from all parts of the world are imported. In order to understand the culture, politics, military activity and economics of Britain, then, it is necessary to consider what happens in other parts of the world. Throughout history, according to Mann, trade, war and conquest have ensured that there has never been an isolated society.

Power networks and types of power

On the basis of such observations, Mann reaches the view that 'societies are constituted of multiple overlapping and intersecting sociospatial networks of power'. In order to understand social life, sociologists need to study the way that humans enter into social relationships which involve the exercise of power.

Since power is so central to his theory, Mann spends some time explaining what he means by the

word and distinguishing different forms of power. He sees power as the ability to pursue and attain goals through mastery of the environment. Power, in this sense, can take two separate forms:

1 Distributional power is power over others. It is the ability of individuals to get others to help them pursue their own goals. Distributional power is held by individuals.
2 In contrast, collective power is exercised by social groups. Collective power may be exercised by one social group over another: for example, when one nation is colonized by another. It may also be exercised through mastery over things: for example, the ability to control part of nature through an irrigation scheme.

Having distinguished between different types of power, Mann goes on to explain the two main ways in which it can be exercised:

1 Extensive power is 'the ability to organise large numbers of people over far-flung territories in order to engage in minimally stable cooperation'. An example of extensive power would therefore be the influence over believers exercised by a major religion.
2 Intensive power, on the other hand, is the ability 'to organise tightly and command a high level of mobilization or commitment from the participants'. Thus a religious sect might be seen as having intensive power in comparison to the more extensive power of a church.

In the final part of Mann's analysis of different types of power, he identifies a difference between authoritative and diffused power:

1 Authoritative power is exercised when conscious, deliberate commands are issued, and those to whom they are issued make a conscious decision to follow them. A football player following a referee's instructions to leave the field would be an example of authoritative power.
2 Diffused power spreads in a more spontaneous way. It involves power relationships, but ones which operate without commands being issued. Mann uses the example of market mechanisms: a company can go out of business not because someone commands that it does, but because it is unable to compete with other companies producing the same types of product. Often this type of power produces behaviour that appears as 'natural' or 'moral', or as resulting from 'self-evident common interests'.

By combining the distinctions between intensive and extensive, and authoritative and diffused power, Mann is able to distinguish four principal types of power. Examples of the four types of power are given in Table 9.4.

Table 9.4 Michael Mann – examples of social power

	Authoritative	Diffused
Intensive	Army command structure	A general strike
Extensive	Militaristic empire	Market exchange

Source: M. Mann (1986) *The Sources of Social Power* vol. 1, Cambridge: University Press, Cambridge, p. 9.

The sources of power

So far, this account of Mann's theory has explained the types of power that he believes exist, but not where that power comes from. Central to his approach is the simple idea that power can have four sources: these can be economic, ideological, political and military.

Mann follows Marx in thinking that economic power is important, but he does not attribute the primary role to it that Marx does, because of the importance of the three other sources. Ideological power involves power over ideas and beliefs; political power concerns the activities of states; and military power the use of physical coercion. In Marxist theory these sources of power are often seen as being united. From a Marxist point of view, the group that has economic power – those who own the means of production – will also have ideological power through their ability to promote false class consciousness. Furthermore, the economically ruling class will exercise control over the state and will therefore have political power; and, through the state, it will also monopolize military power.

However, Mann disagrees with the Marxist view, claiming that each source of power can be independent of the others. Ideological power can be wielded by churches or other religious organizations, which may have little or no economic power. The political power of a state does not ensure that it will have ideological power. In communist Poland, for example, much of the population appeared to attach more importance to the ideas of the Roman Catholic Church and the free trade union Solidarity than to those of the communist state. Even political and military power are not necessarily tied together. In feudal Europe, military power rested mainly in the hands of individual lords and not with the state. In modern societies, in a *coup d'état* the army actually takes power from the political rulers. Thus, in Chile, General Pinochet led a military coup in which power was seized from President Allende's elected government.

Of course, Mann accepts that in a particular society at a particular time, two or more of the four sources of power might be monopolized by a social group, but all power never rests in one set of hands. Since no society is completely independent, networks of power will stretch across national boundaries, thus

preventing a single group within a society from having all the power.

An example of Mann's approach

In his explanation of social changes Mann explains how these various sources of power are related to each other. For example, he demonstrates how, shortly after AD 1300, an innovation in military strategy led to a number of important social changes in Europe, and in particular a weakening in the influence of feudalism.

At the battle of Courtrai, Flemish infantrymen were faced by an attack from French mounted knights. At the time, semi-independent groups of armoured mounted knights were militarily dominant and the normal tactic for infantry who were attacked by them was to flee. On this occasion, though, the Flemings were penned against a river and had no alternative but to fight. By adopting a close-knit formation, the pike phalanx of the Flemings was able to unseat many of the knights and secure victory.

As a result, feudal mounted armies lost their dominance, and societies such as the Duchy of Burgundy, which did not adapt to the changed circumstances, declined. Furthermore, the change led to a centralization of state power and a reduction in the autonomy of feudal lords. It became recognized that mixed armies of cavalry, infantry and artillery were the answer to the pike phalanx, and states could more easily provide the resources to maintain this type of army than could individual lords. Thus changes in the nature of military power led to an extension of the political power of the state.

On the surface, it might appear that this significant episode in history is an example of military technology determining the course of social change, but Mann believes that ideological and military factors were also important. He suggests that pike phalanxes could not have succeeded unless the individuals in them were convinced that those on either side of them would stand firm. In societies such as Flanders and Switzerland, such trust was likely to develop because of the way of life of the burghers and free peasants there. Furthermore, the different types of army produced by the Flemings and the Swiss on one side, and feudal societies on the other, were related to their respective abilities to produce an economic surplus to finance their armies. Thus the four sources of social power were all linked: an extension of military power was related to the nature and distribution of ideological and economic power and led to an increase in the political power of the state. In this example, military power was particularly important, but, according to Mann, in other episodes in history, any of the other three sources of power can assume a more central role.

Conclusion

Other theories of power and the state tend to emphasize a particular source of power. Marxism stresses the importance of economic power, pluralism stresses ideological power in democracies, and elite and state-centred theories emphasize political power. Mann's approach argues that any complete theory must embrace all of these, as well as including military power.

Michel Foucault – power/knowledge

The nature of power

The work of Michel Foucault (1926-1984) provides an influential and novel view of power. Like Mann, he saw power as something that is not concentrated in one place or in the hands of particular individuals. However, he goes much further from conventional views of power than Mann does. Foucault's complex (and sometimes obscure and contradictory) writings suggest that power is found in all social relationships and is not just exercised by the state. Nevertheless, much of his work is concerned with the way in which the state develops its ability to classify and exercise power over populations.

To Foucault, power is intimately linked with knowledge: power/knowledge produce one another. The extension of the power of the state therefore involves the development of new types of knowledge which enable it to collect more information about and exercise more control over their populations. This involves the development of discourses: ways of talking about things which have consequences for power. However, Foucault does not just think of power in coercive terms: as well as restricting people, power can enable them to do things. Furthermore, and paradoxically, he only sees power as operating when people have some freedom. Power never allows total control and, indeed, constantly produces resistances and evasions as people try and often succeed in slipping from its grasp.

Foucault's ideas will now be examined in more detail.

Madness and Civilisation

Much of Foucault's early work was taken up with an account of how the state increasingly tried to regulate and control populations. Before the eighteenth century, governments made little attempt to control, regulate or even monitor the behaviour of the mass of the population. Few statistics were produced, and few records kept.

In *Madness and Civilisation* (1967) Foucault describes how such phenomena as unemployment, poverty and madness started to be seen as social problems by states in the eighteenth century. Before that, the mad were largely free from state interference. Although they were sometimes cast out of towns, they were permitted to wander as they wished in rural areas. Alternatively they were put to sea together in 'ships of fools'. However, this system of dealing with the mad was replaced by places of confinement (such as madhouses) in which the mad, the poor and the sick were separated and isolated from the rest of the population.

Foucault argues that this was due to a new concern in European culture with a sense of responsibility for such social problems and a new work ethic. It was felt that something should be done with the mad; and others were punished for the new sin of laziness.

By the start of the nineteenth century, however, the policy of confining these diverse groups together came to be seen as a mistake. For example, although the unemployed were forced to work in the madhouses, this just led to them doing some of the work needed in the local area, thus increasing unemployment and making the problem worse. Consequently, new methods were used to separate the different groups of undesirables.

New scientific disciplines, such as psychiatry, were developed to categorize people (as sane or mad, and as suffering from different illnesses). In this process the discourses of the social sciences came to be involved in power relationships. According to Madan Sarup, by discourse Foucault meant 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Sarup, 1988).

From this viewpoint, the practices of psychiatry (and, connected to them, the knowledge contained in theories) created the mentally ill. Psychiatry was a discourse and a tactic used to control particular groups in the population. The technique of classifying people as mentally ill was an important part of the state's gradual development of systems of administration. Administration allowed the monitoring of people and hence offered the potential for controlling their behaviour.

However, classifying and monitoring people did not just involve a straightforward coercive use of power by the state. Rather it created the possibility of localized power/knowledge relationships that took place at an individual level. For example, power/knowledge related to the discourse of psychiatry created the possibility of power being exercised in individual interactions between psychiatrists and their patients. In Foucault's view, though, the power is part of the discourse of psychiatry, and not something which is held by individual psychiatrists.

Discipline and Punish

Many of the themes first explored in *Madness and Civilisation* were explored further in a later book, *Discipline and Punish* (1991, first published 1975). In this book, Foucault traces the changes in the nature and purposes of punishment in the eighteenth century. His book starts with a graphic account of the execution of the French murderer Damiens in Paris in 1757. Damiens was first placed on a scaffold where pieces of flesh were torn from him using red-hot pincers. Lead, oil, resin wax and sulphur were melted together and then poured on to the flesh wound. Each of his four limbs was then attached to a separate horse so that they could pull him apart. However, initially this failed, and a knife had to be used on Damiens to make it easier for the horses to pull his body apart. Still alive, his head and the trunk of his body were tied to a stake and set on fire.

By the late eighteenth century such public punishments were starting to die out. Punishment was increasingly hidden. People were executed behind closed doors using swifter methods (such as the guillotine or hanging), and many people were locked away in prisons. Here they were subjected to a regime involving a strict timetable of work, sleep, education and so on.

Changes in punishment

Foucault argues that these changes involved a fundamental shift in the nature of punishment. In the early eighteenth century, punishment focused on the body, it involved the direct infliction of pain as a way of making the offender suffer for his crimes, and as a way of discouraging others. By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, this had changed. It was no longer the body that was the main focus of punishment, but the soul. The punishment consisted of a loss of rights – particularly the right to liberty – rather than the suffering of pain. The certainty of being caught was intended to deter people, rather than the public humiliation of execution or being placed in the stocks.

Furthermore, the intention was to reform the offender rather than simply to make him suffer.

Foucault admits that there was not a clearcut break between these two systems of punishment (executions continued to be used, for example), but he argues that, nevertheless, there was a definite shift from one approach to another.

What was being judged also subtly changed. In the earlier period people were judged for what they had done. By the later period they were judged for what sort of a person they were. The motivation behind the crime began to be taken into account because of what it revealed about the offender. The punishment used varied according to the motivation. Foucault says:

> *The question is no longer simply: 'Has the act been established and is it punishable?' But also: 'What is this act, what is this act of violence or this murder? To what level or to what field of reality does it belong? Is it a phantasy, a psychotic reaction, a delusional episode, a perverse action?' It is no longer simply: 'Who committed it?' But: 'How can we assign the causal process that produced it? Where did it originate in the author himself? Instinct, unconscious, environment heredity?'*
>
> Foucault, 1991, p. 19

A whole range of experts were involved in answering these questions: experts such as psychologists and psychiatrists, educationalists, and members of the prison service. Control over punishment became fragmented and wrapped up in their specialist knowledge. Foucault says, 'A corpus of knowledge, techniques, "scientific" discourses is formed and becomes entangled with the practice of the power to punish.'

In such extracts, Foucault, then, tries to show that, even as the state developed techniques for controlling populations, it also ceded power to the experts who had the knowledge deemed necessary to exercise power in ways suitable for reforming people.

The exercise of power/knowledge

However, Foucault does not argue that such knowledge/power relationships are entirely '"negative" mechanisms that make it possible to repress, to exclude, to prevent, to eliminate'. Instead, he believes that there are also 'positive' aspects to them. They can be positive in the sense that they make it possible for certain things to be achieved. Foucault gives the example of how punishments can be used to motivate workers to step up their efforts and provide more of the labour power that society might need.

Foucault is also insistent that power is not something simply possessed by individuals. He says, 'power is exercised rather than possessed'. An individual does not simply hold power; they can use power if they can muster the right 'dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques' to achieve what they want. Furthermore, power is only exercised by getting people to do something, when they have a choice not to. It is not simply physical coercion, where there are no options open to those over whom power is exercised. In fact (in a later work) Foucault makes it clear that he thinks there are very few circumstances in which people have no choice. In most circumstances somebody would have a choice of resisting by the possibility 'of committing suicide, of jumping out through the window, of killing the other' (Foucault, 1988, quoted in Hindess, 1996).

From Foucault's point of view, then, it is always possible to resist the exercise of power, to refuse to go along with what others are trying to get you to do. When attempts are made to exercise power, the result always has an element of uncertainty. Indeed, he believes that power can sometimes be reversed. At one point in his work he argues that the fact 'that I am older and that at first you were intimidated can, in the course of the conversation, turn about and it is I who can become intimidated before someone, precisely because he is younger' (Foucault, 1988, quoted in Hindess, 1996).

In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault reiterates his belief that power/knowledge are virtually inseparable. He says:

> *we should admit that power produces knowledge ... that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.*
>
> Foucault, 1991, p. 27

Partly because power is so wrapped up with knowledge, there is almost always some chance to resist the exercise of power by challenging the knowledge on which it is based. For example, a psychiatric patient could question the accuracy of a psychiatrist's diagnosis.

Because power/knowledge imply one another, power relationships are present in all aspects of society. They 'go right down into the depths of society ... they are not localised in the relations between the state and its citizens or on the frontier between classes' (Foucault, 1991).

Thus Foucault would see most of the views of power discussed in this chapter as inadequate because they are too limited in scope. Marxism is too limited because it only focuses on class relationships of power. Pluralism and elite theory are inadequate because they concentrate on power exercised by the state. None of them look at power in the everyday

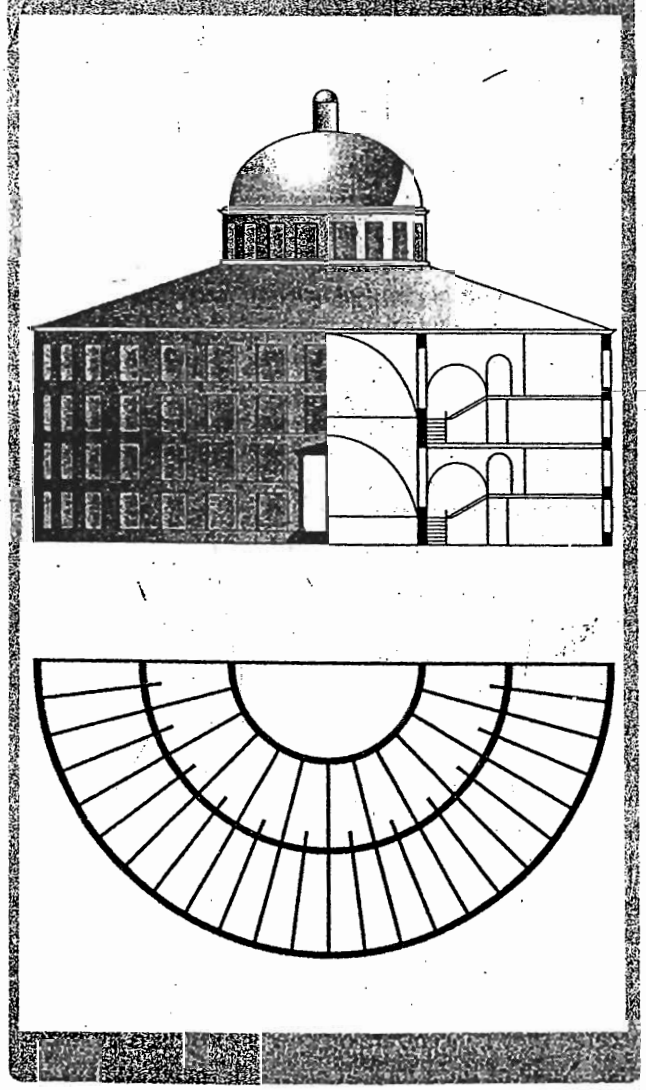
activities of people and the commonly-used discourses involved in interaction.

Government and discipline

Although Foucault does not believe that power/knowledge is only exercised through the state, that does not mean that he thinks that power/knowledge is absent from the state. Attempts are made by states and other authorities to govern, manipulate and control behaviour. Although never entirely successful, sophisticated techniques can be devised to do this.

In *Discipline and Punish*, for example, Foucault goes into considerable detail about the way in which activities overseen by the state involve power/knowledge. For example, he discusses the panopticon, a prison design proposed by the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham. Although never fully implemented, aspects of it were incorporated into the design of some prisons, as illustrated in Figure 9.1. The key feature of the panopticon was a central tower which allowed prison warders to see into every cell and therefore to observe the activities of all the inmates. The use of backlighting would mean that the warders would be able to see into cells without the inmates knowing whether they were being observed at any particular time. Inmates would therefore have to restrain their activities and act in a disciplined manner all the time, just in case they were being watched.

Figure 9.1: Bentham's panopticon prison design



Foucault sees discipline as an important feature of modern societies. Techniques of surveillance are used to check on people's behaviour in places such as schools, hospitals and elsewhere. However, the possibility of being watched also encourages self-discipline: people become accustomed to regulating and controlling their own actions, whether or not somebody is checking up on them.

Discipline gives people the ability to regulate and control their own behaviour. According to Foucault, it is based upon the idea that humans have a soul that can be manipulated. This is far more effective than trying to punish individual bodies by inflicting extreme pain, in the way described earlier in the execution of Damiens. Instead of punishing bodies, you try to produce docile bodies – bodies which pose no threat to order because they are self-disciplined.

Discipline is an important part of governing, but it is not confined to the activities of the government. It is also present in the activities of organizations (from nineteenth-century factories to contemporary corporations). Furthermore, it is never entirely successful. As Barry Hindess describes it, 'The suggestion is, then, that we live in a world of disciplinary projects, and all of which suffer from more or less successful attempts at resistance and evasion. The result is a disciplinary, but hardly disciplined society' (Hindess, 1996).

In Foucault's view, government extends far beyond the activities of the state and, particularly, the passing and enforcement of laws. Attempts at government through discipline are almost ubiquitous features of modern societies, but such attempts are never completed and never entirely successful. The unruly pupil, the worker who sabotages machinery, and the psychiatric patient who denies their diagnosis are as much a feature of modern society as the disciplined citizen with a docile body.

Evaluation

Foucault's work provides a number of important insights into the nature of power. For example, he succeeded in showing that knowledge is closely connected to power, he demonstrates that power can be found in many social relationships other than

those involving the state, and he makes the important observation that power is unlikely to be absolute. He is aware that people often resist or evade attempts to exercise power.

In many ways, then, his work is subtler than that of other writers, such as some Marxists (who tend to see power as concentrated in the hands of an economic ruling class), elite theorists (who see it as concentrated in the hands of those in key positions), and pluralists (who focus on the decisions of the state to the exclusion of other ways of exercising power).

However, it can be argued that Foucault underestimates the importance of the sources of power discussed in some of these theories. For example, he neglects the power than can be exercised through the control of economic resources, such as the power to shut down a plant by shifting production elsewhere. He neglects the power that can be exercised through the use of military force. On a smaller scale, he might exaggerate the power of a mental patient to resist or evade their diagnosis; and, of course, the power of prisoners is usually strictly limited and does not include the power to change their sentence. Foucault tends to focus too much on the power associated with knowledge rather than other types and sources of power.

Foucault's work on power is in some ways contradictory. On the one hand, it documents the increased ability of governments and others to watch, record, manipulate or even control the activities of populations. On the other hand, it insists that power is only exercised when people have some freedom, and it claims that resistance is always possible. Thus his work seems to point in opposite directions. It also involves a strange definition of power which directly contradicts more conventional definitions. In most views of power (such as Weber's, discussed on pp. 588–9), power is exercised precisely when people do not have freedom to act as they choose rather than when they do.

Despite these problems, Foucault certainly succeeded in developing ideas that have proved to be provocative and have stimulated both research and theorizing. He has also provided an interesting analysis of how modern societies develop techniques of social control.

Postmodernism, politics and new social movements

There are a variety of postmodern approaches to politics. Most, like Foucault, see politics as involving a wider range of activities than those confined to the state and political parties. They all tend to identify a difference between modern politics and postmodern politics. They vary in the sort of changes they associate with postmodern politics and the significance they attach to those changes.

We will start by examining some of the more extravagant claims made by postmodernists, and then discuss postmodern theories that make more modest claims about changes in the nature of power and politics. The most extreme view of all is perhaps that of Jean Baudrillard. He goes way beyond Foucault's claim that power is dispersed, arguing that power has disappeared and politics is no longer real.

Jean Baudrillard – the end of politics

Perhaps the most extreme postmodern view of power and politics is advanced by Jean Baudrillard (1983). Baudrillard's basic position is that signs (such as words and visual images) no longer reflect or represent reality. Instead, signs have become totally detached from reality and indeed disguise the fact that reality no longer exists. In this process, politics becomes simply about the manipulation and exchange of signs to produce the appearance of a non-existent reality. We have entered an era of simulacra: signs which mask the fact that reality no longer exists.

Examples of the end of politics

Baudrillard gives a number of examples of this process:

1 Party politics in Western democracies gives the impression of offering a real choice between different parties with differing policies. In reality this is an illusion. The differences between parties (such as the Republicans and Democrats in the USA) are minuscule, and the same homogeneous political elite occupy state positions whoever wins the election. Having elections maintains the impression that political conflict continues to exist.

2 To Baudrillard, wars have also lost their reality: they have become simulacra. That is not to say that they do not have real effects. Baudrillard concedes that 'the flesh suffers just the same, and the dead ex-combatants count as much there as in other wars'. However, wars do not exist in the sense that they involve 'the adversity of adversaries, the reality of antagonistic causes, the ideological seriousness of war – also the reality of defeat or victory'.

Baudrillard gives the example of the bombing of Hanoi by the USA during the Vietnam war. He thinks that this bombing had no military purpose, since America had already decided to withdraw its forces, but it did allow the Vietnamese to pretend to be reaching a compromise and the Americans to feel less bad about leaving. The bombing was a simulacrum because it hid the reality that nothing was at stake – the bombing could make no difference to the outcome.

3 Baudrillard seems to believe that contemporary politicians have no real power. He describes Presidents Johnson, Nixon, Ford and Reagan as puppet presidents who lacked the power to change the world. Their main purpose was to maintain the illusion that politics continued as normal. To Baudrillard they were simply the 'mannequins of power'.

4 Baudrillard believes that even the most potentially devastating political conflict, the cold war, hid the absence of power. In the cold war the possession of vast arsenals of nuclear weapons by the main (supposed) protagonists (the USA and the USSR) was irrelevant. The destructiveness of the weapons cancelled each other out and made any actual war impossible. The situation therefore '*excludes the real atomic clash* – excludes it beforehand like the eventuality of the real in the system of signs'.

Baudrillard therefore believes that real power and actual politics have disappeared into a system of signs which is based around simulacra – signs which have no relationship to an actual reality. He talks of 'the impossibility of a determinant position of power', and describes 'power itself eventually breaking apart ... and becoming a simulation of power'.

Evaluation

Baudrillard's claims are so extravagant that they are hard to justify. He provides no definition of power, so it is difficult to evaluate his claim that it has disappeared. Nevertheless, Baudrillard admits that people are killed in real wars, and he does not justify his claim that there are no real victors and vanquished in wars. For example, the USA did lose the Vietnam war, and a regime to which it was hostile did take control of the government. By any reasonable definition of power and politics, this was a political defeat for the USA and a victory for their Vietnamese enemies, since the Vietnamese regime did gain power against the wishes of the US government.

There are many similar examples which seem to contradict Baudrillard's arguments.

Baudrillard may have more of a point in arguing that it often makes little difference which political party wins elections in countries such as the USA. However, he still fails to show that there are no significant differences between the policies of different parties. Baudrillard tends to make sweeping generalizations backed up by examples whose significance is debatable. He does not systematically examine the evidence which might support or refute his case. For this reason, his claims, while interesting, are open to serious doubt. Even other postmodernists do not go as far as arguing that power has disappeared and that politics is just an illusion. They do, however, claim to have identified some important changes in power and politics in a postmodern era. (For further evaluation of Baudrillard, see Chapter 15.)

Jean-François Lyotard – the decline of metanarratives

Politics and language-games

As discussed elsewhere (see Chapter 15 for a detailed account), Jean-François Lyotard associates postmodernism with a decline of metanarratives. By this he means that people no longer place their faith in big, all-embracing stories about how the world works or about society. In politics they lose their belief in political ideologies such as Marxism and fascism. However, it is not just particular sets of political beliefs that lose people's support; rather, people become sceptical that any set of beliefs can provide an effective understanding and resolution of the problems of humanity. People no longer think that a perfect society is attainable.

The implication of this view is that politics will become less about arguments over major ideologies and will become more localized and limited in scope. Lyotard sees knowledge in general as the main source of power in postmodern societies. As people lose their faith that any one metanarrative can provide comprehensive knowledge, knowledge breaks down into a series of different, specialist language-games. Politics therefore becomes increasingly linked to specialist language-games and less concentrated in the hands of states.

Furthermore, knowledge itself becomes evaluated more according to whether it is useful, rather than whether it is true. That is, if knowledge can be used to achieve certain specific aims, then it is accepted, whether or not it can be shown to be true in terms of scientific theories. Lyotard says that knowledge 'will continue to be, a major, perhaps the major – stake in the competition for power' (Lyotard, 1984).

Useful knowledge is not confined to states, and is increasingly possessed by multinational corporations and by other organizations and individuals that are part of civil society. Lyotard is aware that power can be exercised through coercion (which could be exercised, for example, by state-controlled military forces), but he sees such power as becoming much less important than that exercised by those who possess the most useful knowledge.

Evaluation

Lyotard's work opens up a number of ideas on power and politics, which have been developed and reiterated by later postmodernists. These include the equation of power with knowledge; the possibility that the state loses much of its power; the idea that politics becomes fragmented; and the idea that people become concerned with single issues rather than grand ideologies.

While there may be some truth in all of these ideas, they are also open to criticism. For example, this sort of approach tends to ignore military power; it may underestimate the power of nation-states (see pp. 621–4); and it ignores the continuing importance of some 'metanarratives'. For example, nationalist metanarratives remain a powerful force in areas such as Serbia; and religious metanarratives remain powerful in Islamic Iran.

Some critics have argued that most Western societies are dominated by the idea of free-market capitalism, which is no less of a metanarrative than the ideology of communism. Such examples suggest that centralized state power and big issues remain important in contemporary politics. (For further evaluation of Lyotard, see Chapter 15.)

Nancy Fraser – postmodern politics and the public sphere

The public sphere

Nancy Fraser argues that there has been a shift from predominantly modern to predominantly postmodern politics in contemporary societies. She argues that such a shift involves a change in the public sphere. She defines the public sphere as those aspects of social life other than the economy and the activities of the state. She describes it as 'the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs' and as 'a site where social meanings are generated, circulated, contested and reconstructed' (Fraser, 1995). Fraser believes that the public sphere has undergone important changes which involve a transition in the nature of politics.

The public sphere in modern societies

According to Fraser, in modern societies three main assumptions were made about the public sphere:

1 It was assumed that democratic debate was possible between people even if they had different statuses. Thus a poor person with a low-status job had as much chance to participate in debate in the public sphere as someone who was rich, successful and in a high-status job.

2 It was thought preferable to try to integrate everyone into one arena in which the concerns, the preferences and the beliefs of the public were discussed. It was thought undesirable for groups to discuss issues separately from one another. It was believed that 'a single, comprehensive public sphere is always preferable to a nexus of multiple publics'.

3 In the modern conception of the public sphere it was believed that people should discuss what was in the public interest, what was good for everyone, rather than arguing for their own private interests and what was good for them.

Fraser questions all of these modern assumptions about the public sphere:

1 In practice, inequalities between members of the public restricted the chances disadvantaged groups had to make their voices heard and their opinions count. What Fraser calls 'protocols of style and decorum'– ways of talking and acting – served to mark out higher-status individuals from lower-status ones. Lacking the appropriate protocols, women and those from ethnic minorities and lower classes found it difficult to get their views listened to and respected.

2 In a situation where substantial inequalities exist, Fraser denies that it is desirable to have public debate confined to a single, overarching public sphere. She believes it is far better to have multiple public spheres in which members of different social groups or those with specialist interests discuss issues with one another. In these groups people can develop alternative competing views to those of the political mainstream, and then compete to get their views on to the political agenda. Fraser says:

> *members of subordinated social groups – women, workers, people of color, and gays and lesbians – have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics. I have called these "subaltern counterpublics" in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated groups invent and circulate counter discourses.*
>
> Fraser, 1995, p. 291

Eventually groups such as feminists may succeed in getting their ideas taken seriously and effecting some changes in society.

3 Fraser also rejects the idea that people should not push their private interests in the public sphere. She argues that what starts out as being a private interest can come to be accepted as an issue of public concern. For example, when feminists started raising the issue of sexual harassment their ideas were not taken seriously. Most people considered the behaviour they complained of to be no more than 'innocent flirting'; others saw it as a purely personal matter.

Fraser argues that the personal and the private can be political, and you cannot presume in advance

that certain things should be off limits for public debate. Furthermore, labelling issues like sexual harassment as private simply serves to perpetuate and reinforce the power of privileged groups – in this case, men. The divide between the public and the private is an artificial division of modern societies and it should not be allowed to shape public, political debate. People themselves should be the only arbitrators of what should be discussed in the public sphere and it should not be limited by any conception of what is in the public interest.

Postmodernism and the public sphere

Fraser therefore believes that modern assumptions about the public sphere need to be replaced by postmodern ones. These should involve:

1 The elimination of the inequalities between social groups which prevent people from having equal power in public, political debate.
2 The acceptance and encouragement of different groups having their own debates.
3 The rejection of the idea that supposedly 'private' issues should be off limits for public debate.

Fraser therefore advocates a pluralistic politics in which the widest possible participation takes place. She sees politics as operating outside the formal mechanisms of party politics and parliamentary government, and sees it as involving a wide variety of groups talking, discussing and arguing. She sees issues such as gender, ethnicity and sexuality as very important in postmodern politics. Class also remains important, but it is no longer the dominant issue it once was. To Fraser, inequalities stemming from class, race, gender and sexuality cut across each other and influence debates in the public sphere. The interplay of different types of inequality is characteristic of postmodern politics. She illustrates these points with reference to the discussion of the issue of Clarence Thomas in US politics (this case is also referred to in Chapter 4, see p. 271).

Clarence Thomas and postmodern politics

Clarence Thomas is a US judge who was nominated in 1991 to be appointed to the Supreme Court of the USA. Clarence Thomas is black and has generally conservative views. His nomination was generally supported by right-wing politicians. However, after being nominated, a black woman, Anita Hill, accused him of sexually harassing her some years earlier when she was working with him in a junior position.

The argument over whether Thomas should be confirmed in his appointment was played out in the public sphere, even though it involved behaviour – sexual harassment – which some saw as a private issue. It involved issues of race, gender and class differences. The struggle over the appointment involved trying to present the case as a particular sort of issue (a class, gender or race issue). It showed the importance of language in postmodern politics because the argument rested upon the words used to define the issue.

The Senate Judiciary Committee, which reviewed the proposed appointment, initially decided not to publicize the accusations made by Hill. However, pressure from feminist groups, who accused the committee of sexism, brought the issues into the open for public debate. The feminists succeeded, therefore, in getting the question of sexual harassment accepted as being of legitimate public concern. However, the White House, who proposed Thomas in the first place, managed to argue that other aspects of Judge Thomas's private life (including a claim that he had admitted watching pornographic movies when he was a law student) were not relevant to public debate.

Anita Hill was not so successful in ruling her private life out of bounds for public scrutiny. Fraser says, 'Soon the country was awash in speculation concerning the character, motives, and psychology of Anita Hill.' She was accused by different people of being 'a lesbian, a heterosexual erotomaniac, a delusional schizophrenic, a fantasist, a vengeful spurned woman, a perjurer, and a malleable tool of liberal interest groups'.

Anita Hill had some success in presenting herself as a woman who was the victim of discrimination and inappropriate behaviour by a man. Although they were both black, Judge Thomas had more success in using the issue of race to defend himself. Fraser describes how he claimed that the hearings were 'a "high-tech lynching" designed to stop "an uppity Black who deigned to think for himself". He spoke about his vulnerability to charges that played into racial stereotypes of black men as having large penises and unusual sexual prowess.' In doing so, he tried (largely successfully) to make Anita Hill appear to be behaving like a white racist. Fraser says, 'the result was it became difficult to see Anita Hill as a black woman'. The position of black *women* became marginalized. Thomas succeeded in claiming some of the protections of privacy that had historically been given to white men. Hill was not able to get the same protections. This was not, perhaps, too surprising given that, historically, 'black women have been highly vulnerable to sexual harassment at the hands of masters, overseers, bosses and supervisors'.

Class issues were also involved in the case. As Hill's superior when he was alleged to have harassed her, it could be argued that Thomas was trying to exploit his superior class position to obtain sexual favours. However, supporters of Thomas in the media portrayed the issue quite differently. They depicted Anita Hill as

a professional, intellectual yuppie, while Judge Thomas was depicted as an ordinary bloke with down-to-earth and commonsense views. This depiction ignored the fact that Hill was born into rural poverty.

In the end, Thomas was confirmed as a Supreme Court judge.

Conclusion

Fraser claims that this whole episode neatly illustrates the nature of postmodern politics. It shows how arguments over how issues are defined are crucial. It shows how arguments over what should be allowed into the public sphere and what should be kept private are of key importance. It demonstrates how inequalities between a range of social groups continue to shape postmodern politics in debates in the public sphere. It shows how debates in the public sphere influence the activities of the state. Finally it shows how, in the public sphere, a wide variety of different voices can be heard.

The Thomas/Hill case led to:

> *the fracturing of the myth of homogenous 'communities'. The 'black community', for example, is now fractured into black feminists versus black conservatives versus black liberals versus various other strands of opinion that are less easy to fix with ideological labels. The same thing holds true for the 'women's community'. This struggle showed that women don't necessarily side with women just because they are women.*
>
> Fraser, 1995, p. 307

Postmodern politics is more complicated than modern politics ever was.

Evaluation

Fraser makes some useful observations about contemporary politics. Certainly she seems on strong ground in arguing that issues relating to what should be private and what can be public are important, and in claiming that gender, ethnicity and sexuality are important political issues as well as class. However, she may exaggerate the difference between modern and postmodern politics.

Although they might have been less prominent in the past, issues such as gender and ethnicity have not been absent from politics in previous eras. (Examples include arguments over the introduction of voting rights for women and campaigns to abolish slavery.) Furthermore, there has always been a plurality of groups (such as pressure groups) trying to get their particular issues to the top of the political agenda. If there has been a move towards the sort of postmodern politics described by Fraser, then it may be a matter of degree rather than a clearcut break with a very different system of modern politics.

New social movements and the new politics

Postmodern theories of power and politics, such as that of Fraser, stress the fragmentation and widening of political debate, and relate it to a decline in the importance of conventional party politics. These themes can all be linked to the emergence and development of what have come to be known as new social movements, which are seen by some sociologists as a key aspect of changes in the nature of politics in contemporary capitalist societies. The main characteristics of new social movements will be outlined first, before discussing a range of views on the significance of these movements.

Simon Hallsworth – 'Understanding new social movements'

Simon Hallsworth provides a useful introduction to the main characteristics of new social movements.

Defining new social movements

According to Hallsworth, the term 'new social movements' is generally applied to 'movements such as feminism, environmentalism, the anti-racist, anti-nuclear and civil rights movements which emerged in liberal democratic societies in the 1960s and 1970s' (Hallsworth, 1994). They are movements which are 'held to pose new challenges to the established, cultural, economic and political orders of advanced ... capitalist societies'. The term is not usually applied to movements supporting traditional values (such as the anti-abortion movement), to long-established social movements (such as trade unions), or to conventional political parties. It is sometimes used broadly to incorporate religious movements like the Moonies, the Human Potential Movement and some ostensibly non-political groups such as New Age travellers.

New social movements and issues

New social movements tend to have an issue basis. They are focused on particular social issues. These broadly divide into two types of issues:

1 The first type are concerned with issues to do with 'the defence of a natural and social environment perceived to be under threat'. In this category are

animal rights groups (such as the Animal Liberation Front), anti-nuclear groups (such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) and environmental groups (such as Greenpeace, and Friends of the Earth). They tend to be opposed to 'a perceived tendency inherent in the logic of the modern industrial order to plunder and annihilate the natural world'. The more radical ones believe that their campaigns can show the way towards a quite different sort of society, in which people live in more harmonious ways with animals, the natural environment and each other. Others have more modest aims, such as encouraging recycling to limit damage to the environment.

2 The second type have a 'commitment to furthering the provision of rights to historically marginalised constituencies in societies such as women, ethnic minority groups and gay people'. Feminist, anti-racist and gay rights groups (such as OutRage!) come into this category, as do groups campaigning for the rights of the disabled.

The novel features of new social movements

New social movements represent a departure from conventional party and pressure-group politics in a number of ways:

1 Such groups have tried to extend the definition of what is considered political to include areas such as individual prejudice, housework and domestic violence.

2 They have generally rejected the development of bureaucratic organizations in favour of more informal structures. Hallsworth says, 'they are usually characterised by low levels of bureaucracy, decision-making premised upon the idea of full participation, the appointment of few (if any) full-time officials, and a blurring of the social distance between officials and other members'. They are not content to delegate to, or be represented by, elites. Instead they seek a participatory democracy.

3 New social movements tend to be diverse and fragmented, with many organizations and informal groups concerned with the same issues. There is no central leadership to coordinate the activities of the different groups. Feminism provides a good example of this (see pp. 136–9 for a discussion of different types of feminism).

4 Unlike political parties, they do not seek power for themselves. Unlike traditional pressure groups (like unions and employers' organizations), they do not use threats to withdraw resources (such as labour power or capital) to achieve their objectives. Instead they use a wide range of tactics, from illegal direct action (sometimes including bombs) to civil disobedience. They also use a variety of means, such as publishing books and appearing on television, to win people over to their causes.

5 New social movements tend to pursue very different values to conventional politicians. Generally, economic issues related to improving people's material living standards are not given much prominence. They are mainly concerned with what Hallsworth and others call 'post materialist values'. These are more to do with the quality of life than with material comfort. They are the product of societies in which it is assumed that people's basic material needs (such as food and shelter) can be easily met.

6 According to Hallsworth, members of new social movements tend to have certain social characteristics which distinguish them from members of more conventional political organizations. Most members tend to be young (particularly between 16 and 30). They also tend to be from neither traditional working-class nor upper-class backgrounds. Instead they are mainly from a new middle class, 'who tend either to work principally in the public/service sector of the economy (such as teachers, social workers, nurses etc.) or who are born to parents who work in the public sector'. Those who are outside conventional employment, particularly students and the unemployed, are also over-represented in these movements.

Conclusion

Hallsworth concludes that new social movements:

> *may be conceived as the heralds of distinctly new forms of politics in western liberal democratic societies. Considered in this way their uniqueness is apparent in the novelty of the issues they have sought to contest; in the post-material values they have sought to advocate; in their distinctive organisational form and structure; in the form of political activity with which they are associated; as well as by the distinctive profile of their membership.*
>
> Hallsworth, 1994, p. 10

However, different sociologists have disputed both how significant these movements are and what their significance is. Some of these disagreements will now be examined.

Stephen Crook, John Pakulski and Malcolm Waters – social movements and postmodernization

Crook, Pakulski and Waters associate the development of social movements with a process they define as postmodernization. This involves a clear shift from the politics of modern societies to a new politics of postmodernizing societies. Although postmodernization is an ongoing process and may not yet be complete, they do believe that 'New politics marks both a substantive and permanent change in the political complexion of advanced societies' (Crook, Pakulski and Waters, 1992).

Old politics in modern societies

According to these writers, politics in modern societies had a number of key features:

1 It was dominated by political parties drawing their support from particular classes.
2 Politics was largely concerned with the sectional interests of these classes.
3 Politics was dominated by the activities of elites who were supposed to represent the interests of particular socio-economic groups.
4 The state was the key focus of political activity and the exercise of power. In Europe the bureaucratic-corporatist state was developed. Corporatism involved allowing the representatives of the two sides of industry (capital and labour, or employers and workers) access to state decision-making through their organizations. In Britain, for example, these were principally the CBI (Confederation of British Industry) and the TUC (Trades Union Congress). Negotiations between these groups were used to reach compromise solutions and blunt the impact of class conflict.
5 In the old politics, political activity was seen as belonging to a separate, specialized sphere of social life, which was not the concern of ordinary people in their everyday activities.

New politics in postmodernizing societies

However, according to Crook *et al.*, old politics of this sort has largely given way to a new politics which is very different.

New politics has the following characteristics:

1 The class basis of support for political parties declines. Left-wing parties can no longer rely upon working-class support, and right-wing parties can no longer rely on members of the middle and upper classes voting for them. The electorate becomes more volatile and identifies less with a particular class.
2 Politics becomes less concerned with sectional interests and more concerned with moral issues that affect everyone. For example, a concern with animal rights, world peace or ecology is not confined to particular classes but is based upon a universal appeal to moral principles. Furthermore, people's political views become associated with their choice of lifestyle rather than with class membership. Thus ecological movements will be supported by those who choose to live green lifestyles (for example, by recycling their products or cycling rather than using cars) rather than by people from any particular class.
3 The new politics moves away from people relying upon elites to represent them. In the new politics, social movements encourage everyone to become involved in campaigns over certain issues. The members of new social movements are often suspicious of leaders and want to retain democratic control over their own organizations.
4 The new politics is not focused on the activities of the state, nor is it based upon the incorporation of sectional interest groups into state decision making. Unions and employers' organizations lose some of their influence on government, and the focus of politics moves from the state to civil society.
5 This change is so great that the new politics 'spills over and fuses with the socio-cultural arena ... protests combine with leisure activities and merge into a total counter-cultural *Gestalt*'. Political views do not just reflect your lifestyle; choosing to live in a particular way is a political statement and a form of political activity.

Postmodernization and the shift to new politics

What then has caused the shift to the new politics?

Perhaps the most important factor is what Crook *et al.* call class decomposition. Members of social classes become less similar to one another. There is progressive social differentiation: that is, even people from the same backgrounds become increasingly dissimilar to one another. Members of the bourgeoisie become divided between owners and managers, the working class becomes divided according to the region they live in, their level of skill, and 'a growing diversity of lifestyles and consumption patterns'. The middle class also becomes increasingly heterogeneous, with divisions between professional, administrative and technical workers and between state employees and those working in private industry.

New social movements do tend to attract particular groups in the population, such as the young, the geographically mobile, the well-educated and those in creative and welfare professions. However, according to Crook *et al.*, this represents 'socio-cultural rather than socio-economic' divisions. It is related to lifestyle and consumption patterns rather than class divisions. (For more details of Pakulski's views on class, see pp. 119–22.)

Another important cause of the shift to the new politics is the increasing importance of the mass media in postmodernizing societies. As the media come to penetrate all areas of social life, politics becomes increasingly about the manipulation of words and symbols in the mass media. In this situation, political issues are:

> *always contextualized, and linked with the global issues and general values, often in the form of such doom scenarios as nuclear holocaust and greenhouse disaster. This dramatizes them, adds a sense of urgency, and generates mass anxiety which proves to be an exceptionally potent propellant for action.*
>
> Crook, Pakulski and Waters, 1992, p. 156

The media therefore contribute to people taking a more global outlook, which makes it less likely that

they will confine their political concerns to narrow sectional interests.

Conclusion

Crook *et al.* conclude that postmodernization has led to a permanent shift in politics, resulting in 'the increased diversity of political processes – more open organizational structures, more diverse elites, more fluid and fragmented alliances and loyalties, and more complex networks of communication'. They go on to argue that 'Even if the inevitable normalization strips the new politics of some of its formal idiosyncrasies, the diversity that constitutes a major departure from the class-structured partisan politics of the past will persist.'

Evaluation

Crook *et al.* identify some significant trends in contemporary politics, but they may exaggerate them. Some writers argue that there has been little if any decomposition of classes (see pp. 122–3). Others have questioned the view that the class basis of voting has significantly declined (see pp. 659–62). Trade unions and employers may still have an important role in contemporary politics and, from a Marxist point of view, writers such as Crook *et al.* ignore the continuing powerful influence of the capitalist economy on politics (see pp. 609–19). Perhaps a more balanced view of new social movements and new politics is taken by the next writer to be considered, Anthony Giddens.

Anthony Giddens – social movements and high modernity

Like Crook *et al.*, Anthony Giddens (1990) believes that important changes have been taking place in politics in contemporary societies. Unlike Crook *et al.*, Giddens believes that these changes are part of developments in modernity rather than part of a transition to postmodernity. As modernity has developed, and moved into a phase which he calls high modernity or radicalized modernity, changes have taken place; these have been changes in emphasis rather than complete transformations.

Giddens characterizes modernity as having four institutional dimensions, illustrated in Figure 9.2:

1 Capitalism is 'a system of commodity production centred upon the relation between private ownership of capital and propertyless wage labour'. The analysis of capitalism has been the focus of much of the sociology developed by Marxists.

2 Industrialism is 'the use of inanimate sources of material power in the production of material goods, coupled to the central role of machinery in the production process'.

Figure 9.2 The institutional dimensions of modernity

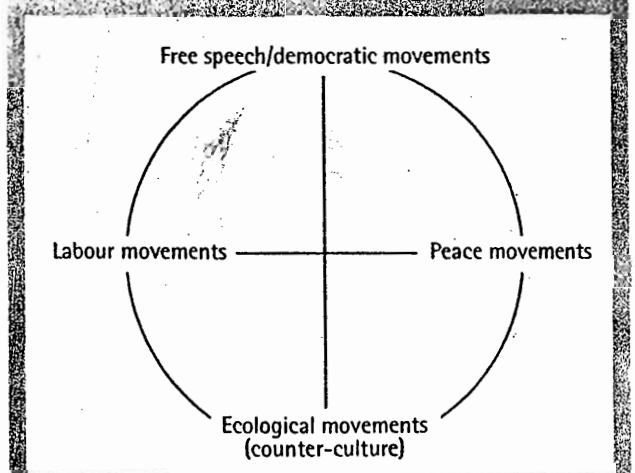
Source: A. Giddens (1990) *The Consequences of Modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, p. 59.

3 Surveillance 'refers to the supervision of the activities of subject populations in the political sphere'. Following Foucault (see pp. 635–9), this may take place in workplaces, prisons, schools and similar institutions. It is largely the concern of nation-states and, with the advent of modern societies, the ability of states to monitor their populations greatly increases.

4 Military power concerns 'control of the means of violence'. This again is largely the prerogative of the nation-state, and the development of military technology leads to the industrialization of war and increases the ability of the nation-state to use violence.

According to Giddens, social movements develop which correspond to these four institutional dimensions. These are illustrated in Figure 9.3.

Figure 9.3 Types of social movements



Source: A. Giddens (1990) *The Consequences of Modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, p. 159.

Social movements concerned with each of the four dimensions have existed throughout the modern period. However, in high, or radicalized, modernity the emphasis in political activity shifts away from labour movements, which were most prominent in the early period of modernity:

1 Labour movements correspond to the institution of capitalism. They are specifically concerned with 'attempts to achieve defensive control of the workplace through unionism and to influence or seize state power through socialist political organisation'.
2 Free speech/democratic movements correspond to the institutional dimension of surveillance. Like labour movements, they have a long history within modernity. In earlier periods they were often closely linked to labour movements. At the same time as trying to gain economic improvements for their members, they often also tried to win them greater rights to democratic participation. In recent times, free speech/democratic movements have tended to become separated from labour movements and have campaigned in their own right. A British example is Charter 88, which campaigns for, amongst other things, the introduction of a Bill of Rights for British citizens.

The other two types of movement – ecological and peace movements – Giddens describes as 'newer in the sense that they have come to increasing prominence in relatively recent years'. However, he does not believe that they are completely new; both have a history dating back to much earlier in the modern period.

3 Peace movements are concerned with the means of violence. Pacifist movements go back to earlier wars, such as the First World War, when the industrialization of war meant that war was becoming increasingly destructive. However, peace movements have become more prominent because of the 'growth in high-consequence risks associated with the outbreak of war, with nuclear weaponry forming the core component in contemporary times'.
4 Ecological movements correspond to the institutional realm of industrialism. The 'created environment' is therefore their area of concern. Like peace movements, they are not completely new. In the nineteenth century, ecological movements were linked with romanticism and were mainly intended to 'counter the impact of modern industry on traditional modes of production and upon the landscape'. In the late twentieth century they assumed greater prominence, partly because of the increased risks associated with possible global ecological catastrophes (such as global warming, and the depletion of the ozone layer).

Conclusion

Giddens therefore sees globalization (see pp. 630–1) and increases in risk as major factors leading to the increasing prominence of social movements concerned with peace and ecology. However, he stresses that such movements are not entirely new, and nor have they replaced other actors as a source of power or the location of political activity.

To Giddens, party politics, the nation-state, and the economic power of business remain crucially important in high-modern societies. Discussing how power can be exercised to improve modern societies, he says:

> *Peace movements, for example, might be important in consciousness raising and in achieving tactical goals in respect of military threats. Other influences, however, including the force of public opinion, the policies of business corporations and national governments, and the activities of international organisations, are fundamental to the achieving of basic reforms.*
>
> Giddens, 1990, p. 162

Social movements might be increasingly important, but they have not eclipsed or replaced other political arenas.

Evaluation

Giddens's views are based upon a rather abstract model of modernity and its institutional dimensions, which is not really supported by detailed empirical evidence. Because his discussion is pitched at a high level of generality, he goes into little detail about such issues as the background and objectives of those who join social movements, and the way they are organized.

Nevertheless, his work is useful because it shows an awareness of continuities in the development of politics and social movements, which are neglected by some other writers – writers who may exaggerate the degree to which such movements are genuinely novel.

Voting behaviour

If Giddens's analysis is correct, then the state remains an important source of power, and party politics remains at least as important as the campaigns of social movements. In parliamentary democracies governments are formed through competition between political parties in elections. This process is the subject of this section, which focuses on patterns of voting in Britain.

Butler and Stokes – partisan alignment

Until the 1970s, patterns of voting in post-war Britain were predictable. Most psephologists (those who study voting behaviour) agreed on the basic characteristics of British voting and on the explanation of these characteristics. David Butler and Donald Stokes (1974) were perhaps the most influential psephologists during the 1960s and early 1970s and their views became widely accepted.

There were two main features of the British political system at this time: partisan alignment and a two-party system. These were closely related to each other and, together, seemed to make it relatively easy to explain British voting.

Class and partisan alignment

The theory of partisan alignment (strong adherence to a particular party) explained voting in the following way:

1 It suggested that class, as measured by a person's occupation, was the most important influence on voting.

2 It claimed that most voters had a strongly partisan self-image: they thought of themselves as 'Labour' or 'Conservative'.

3 This sense of identity led to voters consistently casting their votes for the party with which they identified. Few people changed their votes from election to election, there was little electoral volatility, and there were few floating voters who were prepared to consider changing their allegiance.

Using the evidence from Butler and Stokes's research into the 1964 election, Ivor Crewe found that 62 per cent of non-manual workers voted Conservative, and 64 per cent of manual workers voted Labour (Sarlvick and Crewe, 1983).

Butler and Stokes themselves produced a range of figures which appeared to confirm that most voters had a strongly partisan self-image, and that this self-image was closely related to voting. In 1964, for example, only 5 per cent of those they questioned did not claim to identify with a party. Of those who did identify with a party only 12 per cent said they identified 'not very strongly', while 41 per cent identified 'fairly strongly' and 47 per cent 'very strongly'. In the local elections in May 1963, 85 per cent of those with a Conservative partisan self-image voted Conservative, and 95 per cent of those who identified with the Labour Party voted Labour.

The strength of these political ties was reflected in the low swings (percentage changes in votes) between Conservative and Labour in successive elections. In the general elections of the 1950s the average swing was just 1.6 per cent. Few people changed the party they voted for because of the strength of their attachment to one or other of the major parties. As late as 1974 Butler and Stokes felt justified in saying 'class has supplied the dominant basis of party allegiance in the recent past'.

The two-party system

The second main feature of British voting patterns, the two-party system, was perhaps even more striking: together the Labour and Conservative parties dominated the political scene. In no election between 1945 and 1966 did their combined vote fall below 87.5 per cent of those cast, and the third most popular party, the Liberals, gained in excess of 10 per cent of the vote only once (in 1964).

The results did not surprise psephologists. If class determined voting, and there were two classes, then inevitably there would be two dominant parties to represent those classes. The Conservatives gained so many votes because middle-class non-manual voters identified with that party, while the Labour Party enjoyed similar levels of support among working-class manual voters. There was little room left for a third party. The Liberals were not believed to represent any particular class, and therefore could not rely on strongly partisan support from any particular section of the electorate. This was reflected in the very low vote they received in some elections: in 1951 the Liberals gained only 2.5 per cent of the votes cast.

Political socialization

So far we have examined the evidence for partisan alignment and the existence of a two-party system. However, this does not explain why there should be such a strong relationship between class and voting.

The explanation provided by Butler and Stokes was essentially very simple. To them, political socialization held the key to explaining voting. As children learned the culture of their society, they also learned the political views of parents and others with whom they came into contact. Butler and Stokes stated quite emphatically that 'A child is very likely indeed to share the parents' party preference.'

They saw the family as the most important agent of socialization, but, by the time an individual was old enough to vote, other socializing institutions would have had an effect as well. Butler and Stokes argued that schooling, residential area, occupation and whether they belonged to a union would all influence the way people voted. The Conservative Party could expect to get most support from those who:

1 attended grammar or public schools;

2 lived in middle-class areas where many people were homeowners;

3 were not members of unions.

Labour support would be most likely to come from those who:

1 attended secondary modern schools;
2 lived in working-class areas (and particularly on council estates);
3 were union members.

The most important factor, though, was whether voters had a manual or non-manual occupation.

All of these factors were important because they influenced the extent to which voters came into contact with members of different classes and therefore whether they mixed with partisan Labour or Conservative supporters. Generally speaking, all of these factors reinforced the effects of the voter's class background. For instance, children with parents who voted Labour were more likely to go to secondary modern schools and become trade union members.

In emphasizing the effects of socialization, Butler and Stokes were denying that the policy preferences of an individual were important. Voters were not thought to pay much attention to the detailed policies outlined in party manifestos. They did not choose who to vote for on the basis of a rational assessment of which package of policies on offer would benefit them most. They voted emotionally, as an expression of their commitment to a particular party. To the extent that they had preferences for policies, these were largely shaped by the parties themselves: voters would trust their party to implement the best policies.

The 'problem' of deviant voters

The partisan alignment theory of voting was so widely accepted that in 1967 Peter Pulzer claimed that 'Class is the basis of British party politics; all else is embellishment and detail' (Pulzer, 1967). However, the partisan alignment theory could not explain the existence of deviant voters: those who did not conform to the general pattern.

Throughout the post-war period a significant number of the British electorate have been deviant voters. Deviant voters are normally defined as manual workers who do not vote Labour, and non-manual workers who do not vote Conservative. In other words, deviant voters are those who do not vote for the party which is generally seen as representing their class.

The precise number of deviant voters fluctuated between elections, but generally there have been considerably more manual workers who did not vote Labour than non-manual workers who did not vote Conservative. According to Ivor Crewe, in the 1959 election 34 per cent of manual workers voted Conservative and 22 per cent of non-manual workers voted Labour (Sarlvick and Crewe, 1983).

The existence of deviant voters was important to psephologists both because of their political significance and the challenge they posed for the dominant partisan alignment theory:

1 They were politically important because they were central to determining the results of elections. (For most of the period since the war, manual workers have formed a majority of the population; if there had been no deviant voters, the Labour Party would have won every election.)
2 They were important for theories of voting because their existence seemed to directly contradict the claim that class was the basis of politics.
3 Consequently, considerable attention was devoted to studying these voters and explaining their behaviour.

Deferential voters

One of the earliest explanations of working-class Conservative voting was given in the late nineteenth century by Walter Bagehot. He argued that the British are typically deferential to authority and prone to defer decision making to those 'born to rule' whom they believe 'know better'. Hence the attraction of the Conservative Party which, particularly in the nineteenth century, was largely staffed from the ranks of the landed gentry, the wealthy and the privileged. The Conservatives represented traditional authority, and Bagehot argued that party image, rather than specific policies, was the major factor affecting voting behaviour. This led to the existence of the deferential voter.

In the early 1960s, Robert McKenzie and Alan Silver (1972) investigated the relationship between deferential attitudes and working-class support for the Conservative Party. They claimed that deference accounted for the voting behaviour of about half the working-class Tories in their sample.

Secular voters

Those working-class Tories whose support for the Conservative Party could not be accounted for by deferential attitudes were termed secular voters by McKenzie and Silver. Secular voters' attachment to the Conservative Party was based on pragmatic, practical considerations. They evaluated party policy and based their support on the tangible benefits, such as higher living standards, that they hoped to gain. They voted Conservative because of a belief in that party's superior executive and administrative ability.

McKenzie and Silver suggested that working-class support for the Conservatives had an increasingly secular rather than a deferential basis. They argued that this change helped to explain the increasing volatility of British voting patterns. Secular voters

were unlikely to vote simply on the basis of party loyalty. Almost all the deferentials but only half the seculars stated that they would definitely vote Conservative in the next election. The seculars were waiting to judge specific policies rather than basing their vote on traditional party loyalties.

The theory of the secular voter proved to be highly influential and is very similar to many later theories of voting. McKenzie and Silver believed that secular voters made up quite a small, though increasing, section of the electorate. However, despite their small numbers, they represented a fundamental challenge to the partisan alignment theory since their motives for voting for a particular party were quite different from those of a partisan party supporter.

Contradictory socializing influences

Butler and Rose (1960) offered some explanations of deviant voting which were quite consistent with the theory of partisan alignment. They suggested that contradictory socializing influences on individuals would reduce their sense of loyalty to the party of their class. If, for example, one parent voted Labour and the other Conservative, there would be a considerable chance of their children becoming deviant voters in later life. Social mobility could also lead to deviant voting if individuals ended up in a different class to that of their parents. For example, individuals from a working-class background who experienced upward social mobility and gained middle-class jobs might vote according to their background rather than according to their current class position.

Embourgeoisement

Another explanation of deviant voting, which was broadly consistent with the theory of partisan alignment, suggested that a change was taking place within the working class. After the Labour Party was defeated in a third consecutive election in 1959, some psephologists began to consider the possibility that defeat had become inevitable for Labour in general elections.

Butler and Rose suggested that one section of the manual workforce was increasingly adopting middle-class attitudes and lifestyles. Affluent workers were enjoying living standards equal or even superior to those of the middle class, and consequently were more likely to identify themselves as middle-class and support the Conservative Party. (This argument is a version of the embourgeoisement theory which we discussed in Chapter 2.) In effect, Butler and Rose were suggesting, not that partisan alignment was less strong, but that the boundary between the middle and working classes had shifted so that some manual workers could now be considered middle-class.

A study by Eric Nordlinger (1966) found no support for this explanation. The Labour voters in Nordlinger's sample earned on average slightly more than the working-class Tories, although the factor which appeared to differentiate the two groups was not income as such, but the *degree of satisfaction* with income. Working-class Tories were found to be much more satisfied with their levels of income than their Labour counterparts. Satisfaction would lead to a desire to maintain the status quo, and hence support for the Conservative Party with its more traditional image. Dissatisfaction would lead to a desire for change, and hence support for Labour, with its image as the party of change.

The argument that working-class affluence leads to Conservative voting was further discredited by Goldthorpe *et al.*'s study of affluent workers in Luton (Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1968a). Goldthorpe *et al.* found that affluence does not lead to middle-class identification nor to support for the Conservative Party. Of the affluent workers in Luton who voted in the 1955 and 1959 elections, nearly 80 per cent voted Labour, which is a significantly greater percentage than for the working class as a whole.

Goldthorpe *et al.* found that the most common reason given for Labour support was 'a general "working-class" identification with Labour' and a feeling that the Labour Party more closely represented the interests of the 'working man'. However, there appeared to be little of the deep-seated party loyalty which is supposed to be characteristic of the traditional working class. Like their attitude to work, the Luton workers' support for Labour was largely instrumental. They were primarily concerned with the pay-off for themselves in terms of higher living standards.

Cross-class attachments

Goldthorpe *et al.* argue that affluence as such reveals little about working-class political attitudes. They maintain:

> *the understanding of contemporary working-class politics is found, first and foremost, in the structure of the worker's group attachments, and not, as many have suggested, in the extent of his income and possessions.*
>
> Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1968a

The importance of 'group attachments' is borne out by their research. Those affluent workers who voted Conservative usually had white-collar connections. Either their parents, siblings or wives had white-collar jobs or they themselves had previously been employed in a white-collar occupation. These 'bridges' to the middle class appeared to be the most important factor in accounting for working-class

Conservatism in the Luton sample. Attachments with and exposure to members of another class seemed to have a strong influence on cross-class voting.

This idea was developed by Frank Parkin (1968). He argues that, through greater exposure to members of the middle class than their Labour counterparts, working-class Tories internalized the dominant value system which the Conservative Party represents.

Bob Jessop (1974) found support for this view from a survey conducted in the early 1970s. He argued that members of the working class vote Conservative 'because they are relatively isolated from the structural conditions favourable to radicalism and Labour voting' – that is, from the conditions which serve to insulate manual workers from the middle class and the dominant value system. Such structural conditions are found in their most extreme form in the mining, shipbuilding and dock industries. Traditionally, workers in these industries formed occupational communities in single-industry towns. Insulation from members of the middle class both at work and in the community led to the development of a working-class subculture which provided an alternative to the dominant value system. In this setting, strong loyalties to the Labour Party developed.

These views did nothing to alter the widespread acceptance of the partisan alignment theory of voting. In line with that theory, writers such as Parkin tried to explain deviant voting in terms of political socialization. They added to the sophistication of the theory by examining situations in which individuals might experience contradictory socializing influences, but they did not change the basic framework within which voting was explained.

Middle-class radicals

Frank Parkin (1968) was one of the few writers who also analysed the reasons for deviant voting by middle-class Labour supporters. His explanation was quite different from that for working-class Conservatism. He found that these middle-class radicals were likely to have occupations 'in which there is a primary emphasis upon either the notion of service to the community, human betterment or welfare and the like or upon self-expression and creativity'. Such occupations include teaching and social work. Since Labour is seen as the party mainly concerned with social welfare, voting Labour is a means of furthering the ideals which led people to select these occupations.

Middle-class Labour voters tend to be outside the mainstream of capitalism. Parkin states that their 'life chances rest primarily upon intellectual attainment and personal qualifications, not upon ownership of property or inherited wealth'. As such they have no vested interest in private industry, which the Conservative Party is seen to represent.

In this case, individuals were seen to be voting for the party that was most likely to serve their interests and beliefs. They were not voting according to political socialization: they themselves were actively evaluating what the competing parties had to offer.

Parkin's explanation for this group of deviant voters comes closer to the theories of voting that were to become popular in the 1970s and 1980s than to the theory of Butler and Stokes. In the next section we will look at various attempts to analyse the patterns of voting in Britain since 1974.

Patterns of voting since 1974

During the 1970s, and particularly from 1974 onwards, important changes started to take place in the pattern of British voting. In the following sections we will outline briefly the changes that took place and then examine possible explanations for these changes:

1 The first major change appeared to be the declining influence of class on voting behaviour. The distinction between manual and non-manual workers no longer appeared to account for the way most of the electorate voted. There seemed to be much more volatility than in early elections, with a substantial proportion of the electorate changing the party it voted for from election to election.

2 The second and closely related change was the rapid increase in the numbers of deviant voters. Studies suggest that in the 1983 and 1987 elections a minority of manual workers voted Labour, while the Conservative share of the non-manual vote has been less than 60 per cent in every election since 1974.

3 The third change may help to explain the second: Britain might have changed from a two-party to a three-party system. In 1981 four leading members of the Labour Party broke away to form the new Social Democratic Party. They then joined with the Liberal Party to fight the 1983 election together. The resulting Alliance succeeded in gaining 26.1 per cent of the votes cast, only just over 2 per cent behind Labour's 28.3 per cent share. For the first time since the war the combined Labour and Conservative stranglehold over voting was seriously threatened. A third party (or in this case an alliance of two 'third' parties) seemed to have a real chance of forming a government at some future date.

The Alliance did less well in 1987 but still polled 22.6 per cent of the votes cast. After 1987 the Liberals and the SDP merged to form the Liberal Democrats. In 1992 their vote declined further to 18.3 per cent, but this was still much higher than their share of the vote in any election between 1945 and 1970. In 1997 their vote increased marginally to 18.6 per cent, but the number of seats they won jumped up to 46, twice as many as in their previous best post-war performance (23 seats in 1983).

4 The final change that appeared to be taking place was the decline of the Labour Party. Labour had done badly in 1979, gaining only 36.9 per cent of the votes cast, but the 1983 result was even more disastrous. At that election Labour received a lower share of the popular vote than at any time since 1918. It even seemed as if Labour could hardly be considered a national party any longer: it won only three non-London seats in the entire south-east of England. Labour's strength was increasingly confined to the traditional heartlands of its support in the depressed industrial regions of Wales, Scotland and the north of England.

A number of commentators speculated that Labour's decline might be permanent. If conventional explanations of voting behaviour were correct, then a number of social changes were threatening the basis of the Labour vote. By 1983 non-manual workers outnumbered manual workers. Employment in industry, and particularly 'heavy' industries such as mining and shipbuilding, was declining. This was precisely where Labour had traditionally enjoyed its most loyal support. As early as 1981 Peter Kellner claimed that 'the sense of class solidarity which propelled Labour to victory in 1945 has all but evaporated' (Kellner, 1981).

As we will see, the view that Labour was in permanent decline was hardly borne out by the result of the 1997 election.

We will now consider a number of attempts to explain these changes. As psephologists took account of the alterations in voting behaviour, the emphasis placed upon political socialization by Butler and Stokes was increasingly rejected. It was replaced by an emphasis on the policy preferences of individual voters.

Bo Sarlvik and Ivor Crewe – partisan dealignment

Ivor Crewe was amongst the first commentators to criticize the approach of Butler and Stokes and to identify changing trends in British voting. In this section we will discuss his work with Bo Sarlvik, published in 1983. In later sections we will review Crewe's work on the 1987 and 1992 elections.

Sarlvik and Crewe argued that Butler and Stokes could not explain the reduction of class-based voting since 1974. Evidence suggested that embourgeoisement could not account for the decline in partisanship. Nor could Sarlvik and Crewe find any evidence that there had been a sudden and dramatic increase in voters whose parents had different party loyalties. They accepted that there had been more social mobility, but it was nothing like enough to account for the rise in deviant voting.

The decline in partisan voting

Tables 9.5 and 9.6 summarize some of the main findings of the *British Election Studies*, which have been conducted by a number of different researchers using survey techniques to collect standardized information about a large sample of voters. (The 1997 figures are based on a BBC/NOP exit poll.) The findings appear to confirm Crewe's theory that partisan dealignment has taken place in Britain.

Sarlvik and Crewe originally defined partisan dealignment as a situation where:

> *none of the major occupational groups now provides the same degree of solid and consistent support for one of the two major parties as was the case in the earlier post-war period.*
>
> Sarlvick and Crewe, 1983

In later writings, however, Crewe distinguished between partisan dealignment and class dealignment. Partisan dealignment referred to a decline in the percentage of the electorate who had a strong sense of loyalty to a particular party; class dealignment referred to a decline in the relationship between the working class and Labour voting and the middle class and Conservative voting.

Table 9.6 shows different measures of the strength of the relationship between class and voting, including a measure of the amount of absolute class voting. This is the percentage of voters who were middle-class and voted Conservative or who were working-class and voted Labour. In other words, it measures the percentage of non-deviant voters. In 1983 non-manual Labour voters were in a minority of voters at 47 per cent.

The Alford Index is another measure of the degree to which class influences voting, on a scale of 1 to 100. For Labour, if the score were 100, then all manual workers who voted would vote Labour. If the score were 0, Labour would gain the same proportion of votes in the middle class as in the working class. For the Conservatives, if the score were 100, then all non-manual workers who voted would vote Conservative. If the score were 0, the Conservatives would gain the same proportion of votes in the working class as in the middle class. By this measure, the decline in partisan voting in the working class

Table 9.5 Occupational class and party choice, 1964–97 (per cent)

	1964		1966		1970	
	Non-manual	Manual	Non-manual	Manual	Non-manual	Manual
Conservative	62	28	60	25	64	33
Labour	22	64	26	69	25	58
Liberal	16	8	14	6	11	9

	February 1974		October 1974		1979	
	Non-manual	Manual	Non-manual	Manual	Non-manual	Manual
Conservative	53	24	51	24	60	35
Labour	22	57	25	57	23	50
Liberal	25	19	24	20	17	15

	1983		1987		1992		1997	
	Non-manual	Manual	Non-manual	Manual	Non-manual	Manual	Non-manual	Manual
Conservative	55	35	54	35	56	36	37	24
Labour	17	42	20	45	24	51	37	58
Liberal, etc.	28	22	27	21	21	14	20	13

Source: D. Denver (1994) *Elections and Voting Behaviour in Britain*, 2nd edition, Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, p. 91, and D. Denver (1997) 'The results: how Britain voted', in A. Geddes and D. Tonge (eds), *Modern British Politics*, 3rd edition, Manchester University Press, Manchester, pp. 182, and p. 67.

Table 9.6 Measures of class voting, 1964–92

	Alford index (Labour)	Alford index (Conservative)	Absolute class voting
1964	42	34	63
1966	43	35	66
1970	33	31	60
Feb 1974	35	29	55
Oct 1974	32	27	54
1979	27	25	55
1983	25	20	47
1987	25	19	49
1992	27	20	54

Source: D. Denver (1994) *Elections and Voting Behaviour in Britain*, 2nd edition, Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, p. 67.

has been dramatic. It fell substantially between 1964 and 1983, dropping from 42 to 25.

From such evidence, Sarlvik and Crewe concluded that most voters were no longer strongly loyal to a party on the basis of their class, and that there was much greater volatility in the electorate. In the four elections of the 1970s, for example, less than half of the electorate (47 per cent) voted Labour or voted Conservative four times in a row.

The causes of partisan dealignment

First, Sarlvik and Crewe argued, factors other than class seemed to be increasingly related to voting. Such factors included whether voters rented or owned their housing, and whether they were members of trade unions. In 1979 the Conservatives were 51 per cent ahead of Labour among non-manual workers who were not in trade unions, but only 7 per cent ahead of those who were members. Labour was 33 per cent ahead of the Conservatives among manual trade union members, but actually 1 per cent behind among non-union manual workers.

Sarlvik and Crewe believed that class boundaries were being blurred by factors such as these. There were fewer 'pure' members of the working class who had manual jobs, lived in council houses and belonged to trade unions; and fewer 'pure' members of the middle class who had non-manual jobs and were non-unionized. The increasing numbers of unionists in the middle class and the increasing numbers of homeowners in the working class had reduced the level of partisan alignment among individuals with the traditional party of their class, and had resulted in class dealignment as well.

The second explanation of partisan dealignment put forward by Sarlvik and Crewe provided a more fundamental challenge to the theories of Butler and Stokes. They argued that it was misleading simply to see the voters as captives of their socialization, unable to make rational choices about which party to vote for. Instead, Sarlvik and Crewe claimed that voters' active decisions about which party's policies best suited them had to be included in any explanation of voting. From their analysis of the 1979 general election, Sarlvik and Crewe argued that 'voters' opinions on policies and on the parties' performances in office "explain" almost twice as much as all the social and economic characteristics taken together'.

According to Sarlvik and Crewe, the main reason why the Conservatives won in 1979 was simply that the electorate was unimpressed with the performance of the previous Labour government and supported most Conservative policies. Some issues were particularly important. Sarlvik and Crewe found that Conservative proposals designed to limit the power of trade unions and plans to privatize some state-funded industries were the most important policies which persuaded Labour voters to switch to the Conservatives.

Despite the significance Sarlvik and Crewe attached to the policy preferences and active choices of the electorate, they did not claim that class was of no importance. They stated that 'The relationships between individuals' social status and their choice of party have by no means vanished. But as determinants of voting they carry less weight than before.' Traditional theories could not be completely rejected: Sarlvik and Crewe still saw class as the most important aspect of a person's social status, but parties which wished to win elections could not just rely on the loyalty of their supporters – their policies had to appeal to voters as well.

Himmelweit, Humphreys and Jaeger – a consumer model of voting

Some psephologists went much further than Sarlvik and Crewe in rejecting the partisan alignment theory of voting. Himmelweit, Humphreys and Jaeger (1985) based their findings upon their own longitudinal study of voting, which followed a group of men who were 21 in 1959, through to the October election of 1974.

In their book *How Voters Decide* Himmelweit *et al.* argued that an understanding of voting should be based on analysing members of the electorate's deliberate selection of a party to vote for, and not on political socialization. They emphasized the rational choices made by voters. They believed that people decided how to vote by deciding what they wanted, and how far each party met their requirements.

To explain this theory, Himmelweit *et al.* compared an elector's choice of party with a consumer making a purchase. For example, someone choosing a new car will take a number of factors into account, such as price, comfort, performance, size, running costs and reliability. Some factors will be more important to a particular individual than others: one potential purchaser might put most emphasis on price and running costs, while another is primarily concerned with performance and size. Consumer choice is not always easy: you might want both cheapness and high quality. If you cannot have both, you will have to compromise.

Himmelweit *et al.* argue that choosing a party involves the same sort of process. Certain policies will be more important to you than others. One party will come closer to your views in their stated policy than another. No single party is likely to advocate all the single policies that you support. Consequently you will have to weigh up which party offers the most attractive package, taking into account the importance you attach to each issue.

Of course, a voter may not have 'perfect knowledge' of all the policies on offer, but there is more to buying products than examining the labels and listening to the claims of advertisers. Potential purchasers may have had some previous experience of the product and if it has proved satisfactory in the past they are more likely to buy it again, even if it is not exactly suited to their needs. In a similar way, voters have experience of previous governments and they can judge the parties on the basis of past performance. One reason for the rise in 'deviant' voting, according to Himmelweit *et al.*, was the increasingly negative judgements made by voters on the parties they had previously chosen: they decided to opt for new brands because their old choices proved so unsatisfactory.

The image Himmelweit *et al.* provided of the voters, then, is of very calculating individuals trying to achieve their objectives as best they can. However, they did not altogether dismiss more emotional factors in voting. These factors can be compared to brand loyalty, and advice from friends and relatives about products. You may identify with a particular product which you have used before and which you trust; you may also be influenced by what people you know tell you about products, and their recommendations. Similarly, when voting, you may have some loyalty to a party, and you may be influenced by the political preferences of others.

However, these factors (which are similar to Butler and Stokes's concepts of party alignment and

political socialization) were considered of little importance by Himmelweit *et al.* They argued that such factors were only important if your policy preferences cancelled each other out. In other words, only if two or more parties offered you equally attractive sets of policies would you be influenced by party loyalty or the opinion of others. By 1974, Himmelweit *et al.* thought that party loyalty had a minimal impact on the electorate, although they accepted that it may have been more important before then.

Himmelweit *et al.* provided statistical support for their consumer model of voting. They claimed that 80 per cent of voting in the October 1974 election could be predicted on the basis of their model.

If Himmelweit *et al.*'s theory is correct, it has important implications for the political parties. It suggests that all the parties have a chance of winning elections if they can tailor their policies to fit those preferred by a majority of the electorate. Regardless of how badly Labour did in 1983, such a consumer model does not suggest that its decline is necessarily permanent or irreversible. According to this theory of voting, the parties are competing for the votes of the whole of the electorate, and not just for those of a small number of floating voters.

Criticisms

This radical new explanation of voting has been heavily criticized. Paul Whiteley (1983) describes the study as unreliable, since it was based on a small and unrepresentative section of the population. By 1974, Himmelweit *et al.*'s sample consisted of just 178 respondents, all of whom were male, aged about 37, and some 75 per cent of whom were non-manual workers. It cannot be assumed that the factors influencing the voting of this group will be typical of the factors influencing the voting of the rest of the population.

A more fundamental objection to explaining voting in terms of policy preference is raised by David Marsh (1983). He points out that this type of explanation cannot fully account for voting unless it explains why people prefer certain policies in the first place. These types of theory deny the importance of class, but fail to suggest alternative influences on the choice of policy.

Heath, Jowell and Curtice – the continuing importance of class

Heath *et al.*'s conclusions contradict those of many other psephologists because they use different and more sophisticated research methods (Heath, Jowell and Curtice, 1985).

Redefining class

The first, and perhaps most important, methodological change involves the definition and measurement of class. Heath *et al.* argue that defining the middle class as non-manual workers and the working class as manual workers is theoretically inadequate. They claim that classes can be more adequately defined in terms of economic interests, that is, according to their situation in the labour market. They therefore use a version of John Goldthorpe's neo-Weberian class scheme to distinguish five classes. (See pp. 114–17 for further details of Goldthorpe's class scheme.)

The five classes are:

1. The salariat, which consists of managers, administrators, professionals and semi-professionals who have either considerable authority within the workplace or considerable autonomy within work.
2. Routine non-manual workers, who lack authority in the workplace and often have low wages.
3. The petty bourgeoisie, which consists of farmers, the owners of small businesses, and self-employed manual workers. Their situation depends upon the market forces that relate to the goods and services they supply. They are not wage labourers and they are not affected in the same way as other workers by employment and promotion prospects. This group cuts across the usual division between manual and non-manual workers.
4. 'Foremen' and technicians, who either supervise other workers or who have more autonomy within work than the fifth class.
5. Manual workers – Heath *et al.* do not separate manual workers in terms of the degree of skill their job requires since they do not believe that skill levels have a significant impact on voting.

Apart from using new class categories, another important feature of Heath *et al.*'s work is the way they deal with the voting of women. Nearly all of the previous studies classified women voters according to the occupation of their husband if they were married. Heath *et al.* argue that women's own experience of the workplace will have a greater impact on their voting than that of their husband.

Table 9.7 summarizes Heath *et al.*'s findings on class voting in the 1983 election.

The continuing importance of class

The results suggest a stronger relationship between class and voting (in 1983) than the results of studies using conventional definitions of class:

1. The working class remained a stronghold of Labour support.
2. 'Foremen' and technicians (who would normally be categorized as part of the skilled working class) were strongly Conservative.

Table 9.7 Class voting in the 1983 election

Class	Conservative	Labour	Alliance	Others
Petty bourgeoisie	71%	12%	17%	0%
Salariat	54%	14%	31%	1%
Foremen/ Technicians	48%	26%	25%	1%
Routine non-manual	46%	25%	27%	2%
Working class	30%	49%	30%	1%

Source: A. Heath, R. Jowell and J. Curtice (1985) *How Britain Votes*, Pergamon, Oxford, p. 40.

3 The petty bourgeoisie (some of whom would normally be defined as manual workers) were the strongest Conservative supporters.

4 The salariat and routine non-manual workers gave most of their support to the Conservatives, but it was also in these classes (as well as in the working class) that the Alliance gained its greatest share of the votes.

Examining the results of one election does not reveal whether or not class-based voting has declined. Heath *et al.* therefore attempt to measure the strength of the relationship between class and voting since 1964. It is more difficult to measure this relationship using a fivefold division of the population into classes, so they decided to measure the strength of the relationship between class and voting by measuring the likelihood of the salariat voting Conservative and the working class voting Labour.

From their figures they calculated an odds ratio which determines the relative likelihood of a class voting for the party it could be expected to. The figures in Table 9.8 show how many times more likely it is for the working class to vote Labour and the salariat to vote Conservative than vice versa.

Table 9.8 produced some unexpected findings. There appear to have been wide variations in the relationship between class and voting, but no long-term dealignment. According to this measurement, 1983 was an average election and not a year in which the influence of class was at its lowest since the Second World War.

Table 9.8 Odds ratio for working class voting Labour and salariat voting Conservative in general elections, 1964–83

Election	1964	1966	1970	1974 (Feb)	1974 (Oct)	1979	1983
Odds ratio	9.3	7.3	3.9	6.1	5.5	4.9	6.3

Source: Adapted from A. Heath, R. Jowell and J. Curtice (1985) *How Britain Votes*, Pergamon, Oxford, p. 20.

Changes in the class structure

Heath *et al.* claim that much of the change in levels of support for the different parties is the result of changes in the distribution of the population between classes. For example, the working class has shrunk as a proportion of the electorate while the salariat and routine non-manual groups have grown. However, changes in the class structure alone cannot explain all the changes in levels of support for the parties in elections. Heath *et al.* calculated what percentage of the votes each party would have gained in 1983 if they had kept the same levels of support in each class as they had in 1964. The results are summarized in Table 9.9.

Table 9.9 Changes in party support 1964–83 and the British share of the vote in 1983 if parties had retained the same level of support in each class from 1964

	Labour	Conservative	Liberal Alliance
% vote 1964	44	43	11
% vote 1983	28	42	25
Predicted % vote in 1983 given changes in the class structure	37	48.5	12.5

Source: Adapted from A. Heath, R. Jowell and J. Curtice (1985) *How Britain Votes*, Pergamon, Oxford, p. 20.

On these figures, the Labour Party did even worse than expected, the Conservative Party failed to take advantage of changes in the social structure, while the increase in Liberal/Alliance support was far greater than would be anticipated. Consequently Heath *et al.* conclude that factors other than changes in the social structure must have affected patterns of voting.

Rejection of consumer theory

Heath *et al.* reject the view that detailed policy preferences account for these changes. They measured people's views on various policies and asked them where they thought the major parties stood on these issues. They also asked voters which issues they thought were most important:

1 Unemployment and inflation came top of the list, and on both Labour had the most popular policies.

2 The Alliance proved most popular on the third most important issue (whether there should be more

spending on welfare or tax cuts), while Labour and the Conservatives tied a little way behind.

3 Conservative and Alliance policies proved most popular on the fourth most important issue, defence.

On the basis of this evidence, Labour should have won a handsome victory. If the six most important issues were taken into account, Labour and the Conservatives would have received the same share of the vote. Heath *et al.* therefore reject the consumer theory of voting; their evidence suggests that it cannot explain the Conservative victory in 1983.

Party images

Despite rejecting the consumer theory, Heath *et al.* do not deny that the actions taken by a political party affect the vote it obtains, but they believe that it is not the party's detailed policies that matter, but its overall political stance in the eyes of the electorate. They say, 'It is not the small print of the manifesto but the overall perception of the party's character that counts.' If voters believe that a party has the same basic ideology as they have, they will be likely to vote for it. From this point of view, Labour lost so badly in 1983 because many voters believed it had moved too far to the left, despite the extent to which they agreed with its policies.

Class, ideology and voting behaviour

Heath *et al.* use a more complex model of ideology than the simple left/right distinction that is usually employed. They argue that there are two main dimensions to ideological differences on issues:

1 Class issues are mainly economic: they concern such questions as whether industries should be nationalized or privatized, and whether income and wealth should be redistributed. The ideology which supports nationalization and redistribution can be called left-wing, and the opposite right-wing.

2 Liberal issues concern non-economic questions such as whether there should be a death penalty, whether Britain should retain or abandon nuclear weapons, and whether there should be a strong law-and-order policy or not. For the sake of convenience, the ideology which supports the death penalty, the retention of nuclear weapons and strong law-and-order policies will be called 'tough', while its opposite will be called 'tender'.

In terms of these differences, the Labour Party supports left-wing and tender policies, the Conservative Party supports right-wing and tough policies, and (according to Heath *et al.*) the Alliance was perhaps slightly to the right of centre on class issues and more tender than tough on liberal issues. Liberal supporters have a distinctive ideological position and, according to Heath *et al.*, it is one that is becoming increasingly popular with the electorate.

From their analysis of changes in voters' ideology, Heath *et al.* find that there have been distinct shifts. On average, voters increasingly support right-wing economic policies, but more tender social policies. These changes seem to have benefited the Alliance more than the other major parties, both of whom have experienced a significant move away from their ideology on one of the two dimensions. The study finds that the main reason for the high level of Alliance support in 1983 was the increasing proportion of voters whose ideological position roughly coincided with that party's.

Summary

The complex and highly sophisticated theory of voting devised by Heath *et al.* differs from both the partisan alignment and consumer theories. Class remains very important but it does not directly determine the party voted for. It is not specific policies that matter, but the class of the voters and how they perceive the ideological position of the parties. From this point of view, the prospects for the parties in the future will be partly determined by changes in the class structure, but they can also affect their chances of success by the way they present themselves to the electorate.

Criticisms of Heath, Jowell and Curtice

Ivor Crewe (1986) has attacked the work of Heath *et al.* In particular he criticizes their use of an odds ratio table based upon the chances of the working class voting Labour and the salariat voting Conservative. Crewe says, 'their odds ratio is a two-party measure applied to a three-party system'. It fails to take account of the growth of support for centre parties – the Liberals and the Alliance – in the elections of 1979 and 1983. Furthermore, Crewe points out that in 1983 the working class and the salariat combined made up a minority of the electorate (45 per cent).

The response to criticisms

Heath *et al.* (1987) have answered these criticisms. They argue that odds ratios are more appropriate for measuring the relationship between class and voting than the class index of voting used by Crewe. In Crewe's index all voters who do not vote Conservative or Labour are seen as a kind of deviant voter and are used as evidence that classes have lost their 'social cohesion or political potential'.

Heath *et al.* point out that the centre parties can increase their share of the vote without any change in social classes. For example, if the Labour or Conservative Party change their policies, and thereby appeal less to potential centre-party voters, they can

lose support without the electorate changing their views. Heath *et al.*'s odds ratio avoids this problem because the level of support for centre parties does not directly affect the ratio. It measures the strength of class-based voting in the class-based parties. It does not fall into the trap of assuming that a vote cast for somebody other than a Labour or Conservative Party candidate indicates a decline in the relationship between class and voting.

Heath *et al.* are happy to acknowledge that the odds ratio used in their original study measured the relationship between class and voting in a minority of the electorate. To counter this problem they calculated odds ratios for a number of other classes. They found the same 'trendless fluctuations' in the relationship between class and voting revealed in their original study. Once again they discovered no evidence that class was exerting less influence on voting behaviour than it had in the past.

Ivor Crewe – the 1987 election and social divisions

According to Crewe's figures, in 1987 the percentage of people voting for the party representing their class increased marginally (Crewe, 1987a, 1987b). Compared to 1983 the combined percentage of non-manual Labour voters rose from 47 per cent to 48 per cent. Nevertheless, deviant voters still made up a majority of the electorate (52 per cent). Crewe argues that the election largely confirms his analysis of trends in voting behaviour. He claims it shows that divisions continue to grow within both the middle and working classes.

Divisions in the middle class

Using data from a Gallup survey commissioned by the BBC, Crewe found that the Conservatives lost support in the middle class. In both the 'core' middle class of professionals, administrators and managers, and the 'lower' middle class of office and clerical workers, the Conservative vote fell 3 per cent compared to 1983. These data would seem to suggest that the Conservative Party was losing support from all sections of the middle class. However, Crewe claimed to have discovered a major split in the class between university-educated and public-sector non-manual workers on the one hand, and non-university-educated and private-sector non-manual workers on the other. As Table 9.10 shows, the Conservatives lost 9 per cent of their vote amongst the university-educated middle class and 4 per cent amongst those working in the public sector.

Thus Crewe believes that 'new divisions' are opening up in the middle class. Education and the sector in which individuals work are both starting to exercise a strong influence on voting patterns, resulting in an increasingly divided middle class.

Table 9.10 The new divisions in the middle class: voting in 1987

	University-educated		Public sector		Private sector	
	1987	1983–87	1987	1983–87	1987	1983–87
Conservative	34%	−9%	44%	−4%	65%	+1%
Labour	29%	+3%	24%	–	13%	–
Liberal/SDP	27%	+4%	32%	+4%	22%	−1%

Source: I. Crewe (1987) 'A new class of politics', *Guardian*, 15 June.

Divisions in the working class

As we discovered in an earlier section (see pp. 652–4), Crewe has believed for some time that the working class is divided. Labour has been losing support in the 'new working class' who live in the south of the country, own their own homes, are non-union members and work in the private sector. Crewe found that these divisions continued to be very important in 1987. For example, the Conservatives led Labour by 46 per cent to 26 per cent amongst the working class in the south of England, and by 44 per cent to 32 per cent amongst working-class homeowners. Crewe claims that the Labour Party:

> *had come to represent a declining segment of the working class – the traditional working class of the council estates, the public sector, industrial Scotland and the North ... It was a party neither of one class nor one nation, it was a regional class party.*
>
> Crewe, 1987a

Policy preference and voting

Crewe also examined the influence of policies on voting in 1987. On the surface he found little support for his belief that policy preference was becoming more important in shaping voters' behaviour. When asked to name the two issues that concerned them most, respondents were most likely to mention unemployment, followed by defence, the NHS and education. On all of these issues, except defence, Labour policies enjoyed more support than Conservative policies. Crewe says, 'Had electors voted solely on the main issues Labour would have won.'

Crewe therefore revised his earlier position that policy preference was crucially important in shaping voting. Instead, Crewe argued that voters attach more importance to their own prosperity than they do to issues that they identify as problems for society as a whole. He said, 'when answering a survey on the

important issues respondents think of public problems; when entering the polling booths they think of family fortunes'.

The Gallup survey found that 55 per cent believed that the Conservatives were more likely to produce prosperity than other parties; only 27 per cent thought they were less likely to do so. Furthermore, respondents were more likely to say that opportunities to get ahead, the general economic situation and their household's financial situation had improved, than they were to say the reverse. Thus Crewe believed that the main reason that the Conservatives won in 1987 was that people felt more prosperous and they trusted the Conservatives to deliver rising living standards.

Anthony Heath, John Curtice, Geoff Evans, Roger Jowell, Julia Field and Sharon Witherspoon – *Understanding Political Change 1964-87*

Heath *et al.* conducted the *British Election Study* into the 1987 election. Their findings were published in the book *Understanding Political Change* (Heath *et al.*, 1991). In it they examined how voting and voters had changed between 1964 and 1987. They discussed a number of influential ideas on voting and political change by using data from successive election studies. In doing so they challenged many of the ideas put forward by other psephologists. In particular they raised doubts about whether the social psychology had changed much at all. Society and politics might have changed, but Heath *et al.*'s findings suggested that the reasons why people voted in particular ways had not altered much over more than two decades.

Volatility and party identification

First, Heath *et al.* examined the proposition that voters had become more volatile and less willing to identify with a party and remain loyal to it. In 1964, 88 per cent of those questioned said they identified very or fairly strongly with a political party. By 1987 this had declined to 71 per cent. On the other hand, there was no clear trend in the percentage of respondents who thought of voting for another party during the campaign and who could not therefore be considered party loyalists. In 1964, 25 per cent of those asked thought of voting for another party; in 1983 the figure was the same, 25 per cent; and in 1987 it had increased only marginally to 28 per cent. Thus, while some figures suggested a small but significant decline in partisan alignment, other figures were more ambiguous.

The research reached more clearcut conclusions on electoral volatility. Between the 1959 and 1964 elections 18 per cent of those who voted in both elections changed who they voted for; between the 1983 and 1987 elections 19 per cent of those who voted in both changed their choice of party. Heath *et al.* used three different measures of volatility but obtained similar results for all of them. They said:

> *All three measures show much the same changes over time, the differences being rather modest and showing no clear trend towards increasing volatility. Volatility was at its highest on all three measures between 1970 and 1974, but since then it has fluctuated.*
>
> Heath, *et al.*, 1991

Policy preference, parents and voting

In examining the extent to which party preference influences voting, Heath *et al.* note that the strength of the relationship will be influenced by the degree to which the policies of parties differ. If, for example, Labour and Conservative have very different manifestos at an election, more people are likely to vote for a centre party such as the Liberals (now the Liberal Democrats), leaving Labour and Conservative supporters polarized in their views. If Labour and Conservatives put forward less distinct sets of proposals at an election, they are likely to pick up votes from centre parties, and the voters for the two main parties are likely to have less distinctive views.

Heath *et al.* compared the 1964 and 1979 elections to examine changes in the relationship between policy preference and voting, since the Liberals polled about the same proportion of the votes in those two elections and the perceived differences between Labour and the Conservatives were at a similar level in the two elections. They found that policies seemed to have had a considerable amount of influence on voting in the 1979 election. This appeared to be in line with the theory that voters were becoming more rational and were increasingly influenced by their policy preferences. However, Heath *et al.* also found that 'issues were rather important in 1964'. The different policies of Labour and the Conservatives on nuclear weapons and on privatization versus nationalization both exercised a considerable influence on voting in that year. Heath *et al.* conclude that 'voters were rational and sophisticated in the 1960s just as they are today'. Thus Heath *et al.* accept the importance of policy preference for voting but deny that this is anything new.

They also examined the influence of parents on voting, and again found that there seemed to be relatively little change from the 1960s. While there had been a small decline in the likelihood of children voting the same way as their parents, this could be

explained by an increase in social mobility which meant that children ended up in a different class from that of their parents. Where children remained in the same class there was no evidence that political socialization in childhood had become less important.

The findings of Heath *et al.* on party identification, volatility, policy preference and the influence of parents on voting represent a challenge to the view of Crewe and others that a major change in the factors influencing voting took place in the 1970s. Heath *et al.* found that a similar mix of factors influenced voting in the 1970s and 1980s as in the 1960s. The idea that a fundamental change had taken place was not supported by the evidence.

Class-based voting

As in their earlier study, Heath *et al.* discussed the view that class was becoming less closely related to voting. They distinguished between absolute and relative class voting. Absolute class voting measures the proportion of people voting for the class their party is commonly held to represent: in other words, the percentage of voters who are not 'deviant voters'. Table 9.11 is based on the five-class model used by Heath *et al.* in their earlier study, but with the working class and 'foremen' and technicians combined to form the working class, and the other three classes (petty bourgeoisie, routine non-manual workers and the salariat) combined to form the middle class.

Table 9.11 shows, and Heath *et al.* acknowledge, that absolute class voting has declined. However, it has declined rather less than it first appears if

9.11 Absolute class voting, 1964–87

	Middle class Conservative plus working-class Labour as percentage of all voters	Middle-class Conservative or Liberal plus working-class Labour as percentage of all voters
1964	64.0	70.7
1966	64.4	69.9
1970	60.2	64.4
February 1974	55.5	66.5
October 1974	57.4	68.6
1979	56.7	64.3
1983	51.7	66.9
1987	51.6	66.3

Source: A. Heath *et al.* (1991) *Understanding Political Change: the British Voter 1964–1987*, Pergamon Press, Oxford, p. 65.

Liberals and other centre parties are regarded as class-based parties representing the middle class. Heath *et al.* argue that it is legitimate to see them in this way since they draw a comfortable majority of their votes from middle-class voters. Thus, to Heath *et al.*, absolute class voting has declined, but not to the extent that psephologists such as Crewe have claimed.

On the other hand, Heath *et al.* are unwilling to concede that relative class voting has declined, at least since 1970. Using an odds ratio which compares the chances of the salariat voting Conservative with the chances of the working class voting Labour (this statistical measure is explained further on p. 656), they found that there was little change between the 1983 and 1987 elections. They therefore confirmed their earlier claim that there had been 'trendless fluctuations' in relative class voting, although this time they did say that these fluctuations had been typical only since 1970. They say, 'Looking ... at the Conservative:Labour log odds ratio, we see that this declined rapidly between 1964 and 1970. There is however no further decline after 1970.'

Heath *et al.* therefore modify their position from that expressed in the earlier work, *How Britain Votes*. They say that there has been a 'modest' decline in the relationship between class and voting, but much less than that claimed by many other commentators. However, one reason for this has simply been an increase in the number of candidates standing for centre parties. In 1964, 1966 and 1970 the Liberals contested only just over half the seats in the general elections. In later elections they, or other centre parties, have stood in nearly all constituencies. Simply by having a greater number of candidates they have attracted more votes away from the more clearly class-based parties, and thus they have weakened the apparent relationship between class and voting. Any change in the relationship has more to do with political changes than any alteration in the psychology of the electorate.

Divisions within classes

Heath *et al.* examine Crewe's claims that there is a 'new working class' and that new divisions have opened up in the middle class. They concede that housing tenure has a relationship with voting, but deny that this is anything new. According to their figures, living in a council house influenced people to vote Labour as much in 1964 as it did in 1987. Similarly, being an owner-occupier was just as likely to influence somebody to be a Conservative voter in 1964 as it was in 1987.

Union membership, or non-membership had some influence on voting, as did ethnicity (people from an ethnic minority were more likely to vote Labour), but

there was no evidence that the strength of either of these relationships had increased. Indeed, membership or non-membership of a trade union seemed to be becoming less of an influence on voting.

However, region had become more important. In 1964, region had little effect on working-class voting patterns, but in 1987 the working class living in the south were becoming proportionately more likely to vote Conservative, while those in the north, and in Wales and Scotland were becoming proportionately more inclined to vote Labour.

Heath *et al.* conclude that 'the working class is certainly fragmented' but, with the exception of regional differences, this fragmentation is nothing new.

Heath *et al.* found more evidence that there were new divisions in the middle class. In particular, they found that 'welfare and creative professionals' were increasingly inclined to vote Labour, while other members of the middle class were likely to remain loyal to the Conservatives. They also found that having had higher education was increasingly associated with non-Conservative voting in the middle class. Longer-established divisions in the middle class were based on religion (with members of the Church of England being more likely than others to vote Conservative) and social background (with middle-class people from working-class backgrounds more likely than others to vote Labour).

Overall, Heath *et al.* found that neither the middle class nor the working class were 'internally homogeneous', but this was nothing new and most of the divisions within the classes dated back at least as far as the 1960s.

'Pocket-book voting'

As we discussed earlier, another theory proposed by Crewe was that people voted according to their own economic interests: they voted for the party they thought would be best for their standard of living. Heath *et al.* examined this theory, calling it pocket-book voting.

They did find that people who had voted Conservative in 1983 were less likely to vote Conservative again in 1987 if they felt that their own standard of living, or the standard of living in the country as a whole, had fallen. However, Heath *et al.* questioned the theory that voting was directly related to living standards. People were much more likely to mention the government's general competence or incompetence as a reason for changing their vote than they were to mention standards of living. Furthermore, those who did mention their own standard of living were also very likely to mention the interests of the social class to which they belonged. This suggested that they tended to see their own self-interest as tied to the interests of their class as a whole. Heath *et al.* claim that 'pocket-book voting and class voting may not be rivals but rather may be different aspects of the same phenomenon'.

Conclusion

Heath *et al.* conclude that, between 1964 and 1987, voting was affected by social changes (such as the contraction of the working class) but there had been little change in the factors shaping voting. Class, non-class social factors, policy preferences and party images all had an influence and no one factor could explain voting in either 1964 or 1987. Many of the apparent changes were due either to social change or to political change, and not to changes in the motivation of voters. Many social factors had been working against the Labour Party, reducing the percentage of the population likely to vote for them. Other changes had benefited the Liberal Party and other centre parties. Politically, the success of the Liberals (and the SDP) had increased volatility and led to the apparent reduction in the importance of class. Part of this success, though, was simply due to the increased number of candidates these parties had put up at elections.

As in their study of the 1983 election. Heath *et al.* calculated the effects of changes on Labour's electoral prospects. Comparing 1964 and 1987, the effects of social changes plus the increased number of Liberal candidates and the extension of the franchise to those aged over 18 could be expected to have disadvantaged the Labour Party by 8.4 per cent, advantaged the Liberal/Alliance by 8.9 per cent, and made no overall difference to the Conservative vote. Obviously these changes made it difficult for Labour to win elections. Nevertheless, Labour did better in 1987 than it had done in 1983.

Criticisms of *Understanding Political Change*

In a review of *Understanding Political Change*, Ivor Crewe was rather less critical than he had been of Heath's earlier work in *How Britain Votes*. He even praised aspects of the book saying:

> *The technical accuracy and theoretical interest of what Heath* et al. *have to say about volatility, tactical voting and other supposed consequences of partisan alignment are for the most part unchallengeable. Analysis and interpretation are authoritative, sophisticated and almost painfully cautious.*
>
> Crewe, 1992

This more positive tone was hardly surprising since, as Crewe acknowledged, the conclusions of *Understanding Political Change* were rather closer to his own views than those of the earlier study. Crewe

said of the change in emphasis, 'Earlier confidence has given way to caution: the missionary's impatience with the old primitives has mellowed into the old cleric's self-doubt and scepticism.'

Crewe notes that Heath and his collaborators gave less weight to the political values of parties and voters than they had done earlier and put more emphasis on social and political changes. Nevertheless, Crewe recognized that there were still considerable differences between himself and Heath *et al.*, and he identifies a number of weak spots in their analysis:

1 He argues that Heath *et al.* only take a very limited number of political changes into account. For example, while they analyse the extension of the vote to 18-20-year-olds and the expansion in the number of Liberal candidates, they take no account of things such as changes in party leaders, or the impact of the press and other media. They give no good reason for excluding some possible influences on voting while paying close attention to others.

2 They fail to consider the possibility that voting behaviour had shaped some of the factors they had analysed rather than the other way round. For example, the rise in the number of Liberal candidates could be seen as resulting from the great success enjoyed by Liberal candidates in by-elections between 1970 and 1974. Heath *et al.* may have got cause and effect the wrong way round. In other words, the rise in the number of candidates was caused by increased popularity and not vice versa.

3 Crewe continues to insist that the relationship between class and voting had become much less strong. He admits that measures of relative class voting give some indication of how ideologically distinctive classes are. Nevertheless, absolute measures are also important. For example, if Labour support fell to 25 per cent in the working class, but to 0 per cent in the middle class, this would show up as a strengthening of the class basis of voting in odds ratio tables. What this would fail to make clear was the fact that Labour could no longer be seen as the party of the working class since it was attracting just a quarter of their votes. To Crewe, then, absolute measures of class voting are vital for measuring the 'political cohesion of a single class'. According to Heath *et al.*'s own figures, Labour's share of the working-class vote fell from 68 per cent in 1964 to 48 per cent in 1984, and Crewe believes that such figures cannot but be taken to show that the working class lost some of its political solidarity.

The 1992 election

The results of the 1992 election are given in Table 9.12. They show that, although the Conservatives won the election, their vote dropped by 0.4 per cent, compared to the 1987 election. Labour's vote rose by 3.6 per cent and the Liberal Democrats lost 2.0 per cent of the vote, compared to the Alliance's share in 1987. The Conservatives were returned to office with an overall majority for the fourth successive time, having already held office for 13 years. Nevertheless, their overall majority was cut from 101 to 21, and Crewe calculates that, 'had a mere 1,702 people voted Labour rather than Conservative in the eleven most marginal Conservative seats, the government would have lost its overall majority' (Crewe, 1992).

On the surface, then, the decline of the Liberal Democrat vote seemed to firmly establish Labour as the only serious alternative to the Conservatives, and the small size of the Conservatives' overall majority seemed to give Labour grounds for optimism. However, many commentators interpreted the result quite differently. What the result meant for Labour, and for the future of British politics generally, was keenly debated.

Richard Rose – Labour's 'shattering' defeat

Labour's advantages

Richard Rose (1992) argues that the result of the 1992 election 'was shattering for Labour not only because it thought it was going to win but because, by all the old rules, it *should* have won'. From this point of view, Labour fought the election under very favourable conditions, yet it still ended up about 8 per cent behind the Conservatives. Rose identifies a number of factors which were working to increase the Labour vote in 1992:

1 Labour had been a relatively united party between 1987 and 1992, and the left wing, which had lost Labour votes in previous elections, no longer had much influence in the party.

2 The centre parties had been damaged by the arguments which surrounded the merger of the largest sections of the Liberal and Social Democratic Parties to form the Liberal Democrats. Labour therefore had a good opportunity to win votes from former Liberal and SDP voters.

Table 9.12 The 1992 general election

	Total number of votes	MPs elected	Share of UK vote (%)	Share of GB vote (%)
Conservative[a]	**14,049,508**	**336**	**41.8**	**42.8**
Change from 1987	+313,171	−39	−0.4	−0.4
Labour	**11,557,134**	**271**	**34.4**	**35.2**
Change from 1987	+1,527,190	+42	+3.6	+3.7
Liberal Democrat[b]	**5,998,446**	**20**	**17.8**	**18.3**
Change from 1987	−1,342,706	−2	−4.8	−4.8
Welsh/Scottish Nationalists[c]	**786,348**	**7**	**2.3**	**2.4**
Change from 1987	+245,886	+1	+0.6	+0.7
Others[d]	**433,870**	**0**	**1.3**	**1.3**
Change from 1987	+282,353	0	+0.8	+0.8
Northern Ireland parties[e]	**785,093**	**17**	**2.3**	**–**
Change from 1987	+54,941	0	+0.1	–
Total	**33,610,399**	**651**	**United Kingdom turnout**	**77.7**
Change from 1987	+1,080,835	+1	Change from 1987	+2.3

Notes:
a The figures for the Conservative Party [illegible] candidates in Northern Ireland [illegible] 1987 [illegible]
b The Liberal Democrats exclude 75 candidates standing for the Liberal Party who polled 647,744 votes; they are compared with the Liberal/SDP Alliance in 1987.
c The figures for the Nationalists include 3 joint Plaid Cymru/Green candidates.
d The figures for other parties include all candidates and votes in Northern Ireland [illegible] Other candidates [illegible] votes; 75 Liberal Party candidates [illegible] 647,744 votes; 200 candidates for the Natural Law Party, 160,617 votes; and 1,000 other candidates [illegible] a total of 1,834,000 votes.
e The figures for Northern Ireland include all candidates and votes including Conservative (11 candidates), Natural Law (9), Workers (8) and others (8) as well as the Ulster Unionists, the Democratic Unionists, the Popular Unionists, the SDLP, Sinn Fein and the Alliance.

Source: I. Crewe (1992), 'Why did Labour lose (yet again)?', *Politics Review*, September, p. [illegible]

3 The 1992 election was held because the government had come to the end of its five-year term and was unable to put it off any longer. The conditions under which the Conservatives were forced to seek re-election were very far from ideal for them. In particular, 'The economy was in prolonged recession and unemployment had risen sharply in the South of England', which was the heartland of Tory support. If a sense of economic well-being helped governments to win elections, then the poor economic situation seemed likely to be a serious handicap to the Conservatives.

4 The Conservative election campaign was widely seen as lacking in inspiration. It seemed 'at times even defeatist', suggesting that the Conservatives themselves were far from confident of success. This was hardly surprising since the opinion polls consistently indicated that Labour would win.

5 The Conservative Party had 'experienced two leadership contests, first to remove Margaret Thatcher and then to choose the relatively unknown John Major as her successor'. The elections had exposed divisions within the Conservative Party and had resulted in their leader being much less experienced than the leader of the main opposition party, Neil Kinnock.

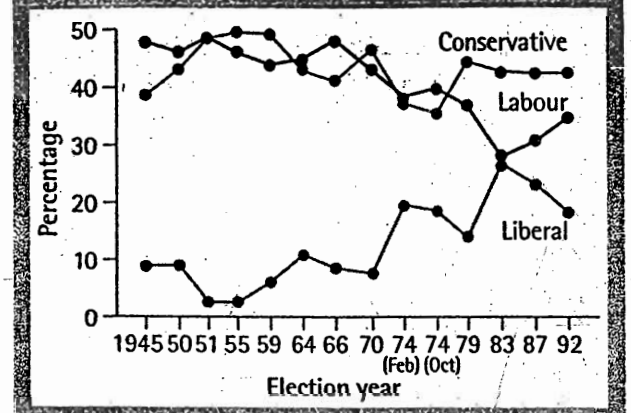
Taken together, these factors meant that Labour expected to win. The question, therefore, was why they failed to do so.

A structural realignment in electoral competition

Rose observes that 'Election outcomes can be influenced both by short-term actions of party leaders and long-term structural change.' In 1992 the short-term factors were in Labour's favour. However, according to Rose, the long-term structural factors had so undermined Labour's vote that they outweighed any advantages that Labour enjoyed.

Figure 9.4 shows trends in votes for the three main parties since the war. To Rose, this figure demonstrates that there has been a significant change since 1974. Before that date, Conservative and Labour shares of the vote had been fairly similar. From 1974 onwards, though, the Labour average declined, while the Conservative vote stayed at about

Figure 9.4 Share of vote by party, 1945-92



Source: R. Rose (1992) 'Long-term structural crisis or short-term realignment: The 1992 election in dynamic perspective', *Parliamentary Affairs*, October, p. 454.

the same level. In the six general elections between February 1974 and 1992, the Conservative vote ranged between a low of 35.8 per cent in October 1974 and a high of 43.9 per cent in 1979. The Labour range was between a low of 27.6 per cent in 1983 and a high of 39.2 per cent in October 1974. Rose calculates that 'the mid point of the Conservative range is 6.4 per cent above that of Labour', and he notes that since 1979 the Conservative vote has usually been near the top of its range whilst the Labour vote has been near the bottom of its range. From these figures he concludes that there has been a structural realignment in electoral competition. Labour's 'normal vote', ignoring short-term influences, has fallen to 33-4 per cent, while the Conservative 'normal vote' has stayed as high as 40-1 per cent.

Structural changes

Rose identifies the following changes which, in his view, had led to Labour's long-term electoral decline:

1 Cities, which used to be Labour strongholds, have declined as population centres, leaving Labour with fewer urban constituencies where it can rely on winning.

2 In 1951, 28 per cent of people were homeowners. By 1992 this figure had risen to almost 75 per cent. Since homeowners are more likely to vote Conservative than council tenants, this has reduced the normal level of Labour support.

3 Standards of living have risen sharply since 1951. Gross Domestic Product per capita has gone up 139 per cent even after allowing for inflation. Many more people own a range of consumer goods which were the prerogative of a rich minority in 1951. The number of poor, who are traditionally Labour supporters, has fallen substantially.

4 Educational standards have also risen fast. Between 1950 and 1992 the proportion of young people staying on to receive tertiary education nearly tripled. There are fewer voters with a very poor education – another group which has traditionally been prone to voting Labour.

5 Perhaps more controversially, Rose also claims that:

> *Structural changes in British society since 1951 have replaced an old system of class relations with new divisions of life style and taste. In 1951 the distinction between cloth caps and bowler hats, the civilian equivalent of officers and other ranks, was marked in many ways from manners and accents to voting.*
>
> Rose, 1992

Without the old class system, Labour cannot rely on solid support from the working class. The working class is in any case shrinking, from over two-thirds of the electorate in the 1950s to under a half by the 1990s.

6 Trade union membership has declined. It fell by a quarter in the 1980s alone, and union members have always been more inclined to vote Labour than non-union members.

Together these changes have been steadily undermining Labour support, making it increasingly difficult for Labour to win elections.

Political problems for Labour

Writing in 1992, Rose believed that Labour's long-term problems could well be compounded by shorter-term political problems by the time of the next election:

1 The economy might well be in a better state than in 1992.

2 There was no guarantee that Labour would maintain party unity for a further five years, and any splits could have serious consequences in lost votes.

3 Labour could try for an electoral pact with the Liberal Democrats but, to Rose, political problems made such a pact 'impossible to conceive', at least until after the second general election of the 1990s. In any case, research suggested that voters who defected from the Liberals or Liberal Democrats were just as likely to change to voting Conservative as voting Labour.

4 In Scotland, Labour was very successful in 1992, but at a future election a number of its seats could come under threat if there was any further revival of support for the Scottish Nationalist Party.

Rose also points out that, despite Labour increasing its share of the vote in 1987 and again in 1992, it still had a mountain to climb. Even if Labour gained a further 3.4 per cent of the vote in the next election (its average increase in the previous two), it would still poll fewer votes than the Conservatives.

Rose does say that it was not inevitable that the Conservatives would win the next election, but he also says, 'the hope for a Labour majority in Parliament in 1996 can be described as "Micawberism run mad", a passive hope that someday something will turn up'. He implies that if Labour could not win in 1992, when nearly all the short-term factors favoured the party, then its future prospects were dismal.

Conclusion

Rose's analysis is not particularly sophisticated and not backed up by his own detailed empirical research. Nevertheless, his case appeared quite convincing and he was not alone in suggesting that Labour was in trouble. Most other psephologists, though, did not go quite as far as him in writing off Labour's future chances.

Ivor Crewe – the 1992 election

A devastating setback for Labour

Ivor Crewe (1992) reaches broadly similar conclusions to Rose about the performance of the parties in the 1992 election. According to Crewe, the election was not a total success for the Conservatives even though they won their fourth consecutive election. It was the lowest share of the vote with which the Conservatives had won an election since 1922 and, with a 2 per cent swing in its favour, 'Labour came very close to toppling the Conservative government.' Nevertheless, the election was a 'devastating setback for the Labour party'. It was its third worst percentage vote since the Second World War (with only the 1983 and 1987 elections being worse) and, despite its gains, it still ended up 7.4 per cent behind the Conservatives.

Like Rose, Crewe argues that factors were working very much in Labour's favour. He identifies the following reasons why Labour might have been expected to win:

1 Unlike the previous two elections, the 1992 election was fought during a recession, which harmed the electoral chances of the government. Labour did not have the problem of being blamed for widespread strikes (as it had as a result of the 'Winter of Discontent' in 1978-9); it did not have the problem of 'left wing extremism and weak leadership' (as it did in 1983); and it did not have an unpopular unilateral nuclear disarmament policy (as it did in 1987). The government had to contend with adverse publicity about 'unemployment, bankruptcies and house repossessions', all of which 'soared throughout 1992'.

2 In the early 1980s most Tory policies had been fairly popular, but by 1992 the Conservatives had implemented a number of very unpopular measures. The 'poll tax' became 'the worst policy disaster of any post-war government' and the government was eventually forced into replacing it. The government's economic policy 'was almost as great a shambles' and 'educational and health reforms were too long delayed for their claimed benefits to make an impact by election day'.

3 The Labour Party had transformed itself into a 'united disciplined, moderate and modern' party, while its main competitor for anti-Conservative votes, the Liberal/SDP Alliance, had lost support because of difficulties over merging to become the Liberal Democrats.

4 The Labour Party managed to get 'caring' issues such as health, education and unemployment to the top of the agenda during the election campaign, and it was on these issues that it enjoyed the most favourable image with the electorate.

Like Rose, Crewe concludes that Labour should have won, and he identifies the key question about the election as 'Why did Labour lose yet again?'

Class and voting

One possible reason for Labour losing could have been continuing class dealignment, resulting in a further erosion of working-class support.

Table 9.13 shows the patterns of class voting in 1992 and the changes from the preceding two elections, according to opinion poll evidence. The figures show that Labour enjoyed the biggest swing in 1992, compared to 1987, amongst professional and managerial workers. But it also regained a considerable number of working-class votes, with a 4.5 per cent swing, compared to an overall swing of about 2 per cent. Crewe admits, therefore, that 'by conventional definitions class voting slightly increased'. The proportions voting for their traditional classes went up: 47 per cent of those voting being working-class Labour voters or middle-class Conservative voters, compared to 44 per cent in 1987.

Furthermore, the split between the 'traditional' and 'new' working class became less apparent. As Table 9.14 shows, the Conservative lead over Labour amongst the working class in the south was cut from 18 to 2 per cent; a 12 per cent Conservative lead amongst working-class owner-occupiers became a 1 per cent Labour lead; and amongst working-class non-union members Labour also regained the lead from the Conservatives.

Although Crewe argues that 'the rise in class voting should not be exaggerated' – since under half of those voting still cast their vote along class lines – the election provided little support for theories of class dealignment. Labour voting did increase in the middle class, weakening the relationship between class and voting in that class; but, in the working

Table 9.13 Class voting in 1992

	Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Con lead over Lab	Swing to Lab
Professional/ managerial (ABs)					
Vote in 1992	55	23	22	+32	+5.5
Change from 1987	−1	+10	−9	−11	
Change from 1979	−9	+2	+6	−11	+5.5
Office/clerical (C1s)					
Vote in 1992	50	29	21	+21	+1.0
Change from 1987	+2	+4	−6	−2	
Change from 1979	−4	−1	+5	−3	+1.5
Skilled manual (C2s)					
Vote in 1992	41	40	19	+1	+3.0
Change from 1987	−2	+4	−2	−6	
Change from 1979	0	−4	+4	+2	−2.0
Semi-skilled/unskilled manual (DEs)					
Vote in 1992	31	55	14	−24	+4.5
Change from 1987	−1	+8	−7	−9	
Change from 1979	−3	+2	+1	−5	+2.5
Unemployed					
Vote in 1992	27	56	17	−29	+0.5
Change from 1987	+1	+2	−4	−1	
Change from 1979	−13	+7	+6	−20	+10.0

Source: I. Crewe (1992) 'Why did Labour lose (yet again)?' Politics Review, September, p. 5.

class, traditional patterns of voting returned to some extent. Labour's defeat could not therefore be put down to a loss of support in the working class.

Issues and voting

Crewe's figures also suggest that issues may not have influenced the election result to the extent that would be expected by policy preference theories of voting. As in his analysis of the 1987 election, Crewe found that Labour policies tended to be more popular on the issues which people said were most important to them. When asked to select two issues, health, unemployment and education were the most frequently mentioned by opinion poll respondents. On all of them Labour enjoyed a healthy lead over the Conservatives.

Defence – which had been mentioned as one of the two most important issues by 35 per cent in 1987 – was mentioned by only 3 per cent in 1992. Conservative policies on defence were much more popular than Labour's, and the decline in the importance of defence to the electorate must have benefited Labour.

The economy and economic well-being

The economy did not appear to be a particularly important issue for most voters. Only 11 per cent mentioned prices as one of the two most important issues and 10 per cent mentioned taxation. However, as Crewe had observed about the 1987 election, what people say is important to them when asked by opinion pollsters may not be the same as what actually influences them when they come to vote. A feeling of economic well-being may be crucial to governments seeking re-election.

Table 9.14 Working-class voting in 1992

	The new working class				The traditional working class			
	Lives in South	Owner occupier	Non-union member	Works in private sector	Lives in Scotland or North	Council tenant	Union member	Works in public sector
Conservative	40	40	37	32	26	22	29	36
Labour	38	41	46	50	59	64	55	48
Liberal Democrat	23	19	17	18	15	13	16	16
Con or Lab majority	Con	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab
in 1992	+2	+1	+9	+18	+33	+42	+26	+12
Con or Lab majority	Con	Con	Con	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab
in 1987	+18	+12	+2	+1	+28	+32	+18	+17
Swing to Labour 1987–92	+ 8.0	+ 6.5	+ 5.5	+ 8.5	+ 2.5	+ 5.0	+ 4.0	− 2.5 (to Con)

Source: Gallup/BBC survey (10–11 June 1987); Gallup post-election survey (10–11 April 1992)

However, at first sight even this explanation does not seem to account for Labour's surprising failure: 30 per cent of respondents believed that their living standards had fallen during the preceding year, and only 25 per cent thought they had improved.

Nevertheless, Crewe believes that voters' perceptions about the comparative abilities of Labour and the Conservatives to deliver economic prosperity played a crucial part in determining the result. If people did not feel that the Conservatives were making them better off (as they did in 1987), they did feel that they would be worse off under Labour. In general they blamed economic problems on world recession or on Mrs Thatcher, rather than John Major who had replaced her as Conservative leader. Many feared the economic effects of electing a Labour government even though they thought Labour had better policies on most non-economic issues. In an exit poll (conducted on voters leaving the polling station), 53 per cent thought the Conservatives were the party most likely to take the right decisions on the economy, whereas only 35 per cent saw Labour as the best party in this respect.

With one exception, the opinion polls leading up to the election predicted that Labour would get a bigger share of the vote than the Conservatives. Even the exit polls considerably underestimated the margin of Conservative victory. In part, these inaccuracies may have been due to the limitations of the opinion polls themselves, but there was also evidence of a late swing from Labour to the Conservatives. Amongst those who changed their mind at the last minute, income tax, the economy, prices and interest rates were much more likely to be seen as important than they were by other voters. During the campaign the Conservatives attacked Labour, claiming that if a Labour government were elected it would result in a 'double whammy' of more taxes and higher prices. The evidence suggests that this part of the Conservative campaign had some success in spreading fear of the financial consequences of a Labour government, causing a last-minute switch which contributed to Labour's defeat.

Other factors

As well as concern about Labour's competence to run the economy, Crewe identifies a number of other factors that may have contributed to the result:

1 Public perceptions of the leadership qualities of the Conservatives' John Major and Labour's Neil Kinnock may have been important. One poll found that 52 per cent thought Major would make the better leader, compared to 23 per cent who named Kinnock. To Crewe, 'Kinnock was a serious electoral liability'.

2 Despite the widespread view that Labour managed its campaign better, it was the Conservatives who gained support during the run-up to the election. Across a whole range of issues Conservative policies gained in popularity as the campaign progressed. Crewe suggests that the electorate either developed a view that the Conservatives had more 'general governing competence than Labour' or it feared that Labour might be incompetent.

3 A third factor which was cited by many as influencing the outcome was the coverage of the election by the press. Most papers supported the Conservatives and some were particularly strong in doing so. On election day the *Sun* published a front-page picture of Neil Kinnock's head superimposed on a light-bulb with the headline, 'If Kinnock wins today will the last person to leave Britain please turn out the lights.' Some people argued (including the *Sun* itself) that this was crucial in persuading a number of *Sun* readers in marginal constituencies to change their minds at the last minute and vote Conservative, and therefore allow the Conservatives to retain a slender overall majority.

   Crewe finds some support for this view. Amongst *Sun* readers there was a big swing of 7.5 per cent to the Conservatives at the last minute. However, this was unlikely to have saved any more than six seats. Its effects should not be exaggerated because there was also a big swing amongst readers of the non-aligned *Independent* (7 per cent) and a rather small swing (2.5 per cent) amongst readers of the strongly pro-Tory *Daily Express*. Although the press did make a difference, it was not a decisive one.

Conclusion

Although Crewe saw the election as a 'devastating setback' for Labour, since it had lost despite fighting the election 'in as ideal conditions as an opposition could hope to find', his findings were not quite as pessimistic about Labour's prospects as Rose's. Crewe believed that the Conservatives might well have lost their overall majority if the opinion polls had not misleadingly shown Labour to be ahead. Fear of a Labour government (rather than great enthusiasm for a Tory government) 'galvanised Conservative support'. There was a high turn-out amongst Conservative supporters, and waverers who were considering voting for the Liberal Democrats returned to the Conservative fold to avoid a Labour victory.

Nevertheless, Labour did not deprive the Conservatives of an overall majority, despite the conditions under which the election was fought, a result which scarcely suggested that Labour could be confident of its future electoral prospects.

Heath, Jowell and Curtice – 'Can Labour win?'

Heath, Jowell and Curtice (1994) were involved in conducting the *British Election Study* for the 1992 election, as they had been in 1983 and 1987. They

carried out two surveys on the 1992 election. One was a cross-section survey in which a sample of voters were interviewed in the week following the election. The second was a panel survey in which respondents interviewed in 1987 were re-interviewed in 1992. The second survey excluded voters who were too young to vote in 1987, but panel surveys provide a better indication than other types of survey as to why people change their votes from election to election. (Panel surveys are a type of longitudinal study – this kind of research is discussed in Chapter 14.)

The size of Labour's task

Like Richard Rose and Ivor Crewe, Heath *et al.* start their analysis by noting that Labour lost despite factors operating in its favour, such as the recession, the unpopularity of the poll tax, the weakness of the Liberal Democrats, the merits of the Labour campaign and the greater popularity of its policies compared to 1987. They say, '1992 seemed to be Labour's best chance of victory since 1974. But the party still lost with nearly eight points less of the popular vote than the Conservatives.'

Nevertheless, Heath *et al.* believed that the 1992 election did offer some hope to Labour supporters. They argued that, in order to deprive the Conservatives of an outright victory in the next election, Labour would need a swing of just 0.5 per cent in its favour. On the other hand, it would need a 4.1 per cent swing to win an overall majority. This would be a higher swing than Labour had achieved in any election since 1945.

In Labour's favour was the need to win a smaller share of the vote than the Conservatives in order to win an overall majority. Labour tends to be stronger in seats with a smaller electorate so it could win more seats than the Conservatives for the same number of votes. To win outright on the current constituencies, Labour would need to be just over 0.5 per cent ahead of the Conservatives, whereas the Conservatives would need to be more than 6.5 per cent ahead of Labour to gain an overall majority.

Heath *et al.* point out that one problem for Labour was that boundary changes were due to take place before the next election. If votes were cast as they had been in 1992, these would be likely to give the Conservatives around 12 extra seats while depriving Labour of 5 seats. On the other hand, Labour stood to gain more than the Conservatives from any revival in Liberal Democrat fortunes, since the latter were challenging the Conservatives in far more constituencies than they were challenging Labour.

Heath *et al.* therefore argued that there was 'a mountain Labour has to climb' to win an overall majority, but the 'lower slopes are rather gentler'. Depriving the Conservatives of an overall majority would be relatively easy for Labour if it could continue to progress from its 1992 position. However, as Heath *et al.* noted earlier, Labour did fight the 1992 election under very favourable conditions, making it seem unlikely that it could do even better in the future.

In order to explore future prospects in more depth, Heath et al. went on to consider different theories of voting and their relevance for the different parties.

Volatility

Heath *et al.* comment that the likelihood of a big swing to Labour would be greater if the electorate were becoming more volatile. However, they found little evidence that this was happening. According to their findings, 22 per cent of people changed how they voted between 1987 and 1992, a slight increase on the 19 per cent who changed between 1983 and 1987. Nevertheless, this was still lower than the 24 per cent who changed the way they voted between the 1970 and February 1974 elections.

Social change and Labour's chances

Heath *et al.* agree with commentators like Rose that Labour is handicapped by social changes which undermine Labour's electoral base. According to their figures, the declining size of the working class could have been expected to cost Labour a 6 per cent share of the vote between 1964 and 1992.

As with volatility, though, the theory of class dealignment could be seen as giving Labour some hope. If voters are becoming less and less influenced by class when deciding which party to support, then a decline in the size of the working class need not be a major disadvantage for Labour. As in their earlier work, though, Heath *et al.* are generally critical of theories of class dealignment. Their figures suggest that there was no change in the amount of relative class voting, comparing the working class and salariat between the 1987 and 1992 elections. (For a definition of relative class voting, see p. 660.) They therefore 'conclude that class remains important, and that the declining size of the working class is indeed an important long-term problem for Labour'.

There are some social changes which have benefited Labour, including the increasing size of the ethnic-minority electorate and an increase in those receiving higher education (both groups are more likely to vote Labour), and a decline in the number of regular church-goers (who tend to vote Conservative). Overall, though, Labour's prospects have certainly been harmed by social changes.

Social attitudes

Table 9.15 details the proportions of people agreeing with a number of statements about government policy. According to Heath *et al.*, it shows that:

> *on the face of it, the electorate was more left-of-centre on a number of key issues (though not all) at the time of the 1992 general election than they had been at the time of Labour's last election victory in 1974.*
>
> Heath, Jowell and Curtice, 1994

For example, more people favoured spending money to get rid of poverty, putting money into the NHS, and giving workers more say at their places of work. Nearly as many people favoured the redistribution of wealth to working people in 1992 (48 per cent) as had done in 1974 (54 per cent). Heath *et al.* thought that some of the apparent shift to the left might be illusory and result from 'people's perceptions that the status quo had shifted to the right'.

Nevertheless, to the extent that voting is influenced by attitudes to issues, Labour could draw some comfort. There was little evidence that Labour's ideological position was becoming more unpopular or unacceptable to the electorate.

Party identification and political factors

If policies were not a major problem for Labour, trends in party identification were. Table 9.16 shows that identification with the Conservatives and Liberals was at a similar level in 1964 and 1992. On the other hand, Labour appeared to lose the loyalty of many of its supporters in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and it had failed to win them back. To Heath *et al.*, the sudden change in Labour Party identification was so swift that it could not have resulted from long-term social trends. Rather it was a consequence of short-term political failure by the Labour Party. The 'Winter of Discontent', the formation of the SDP and disagreements over nuclear weapons within the party 'not only cost the party votes in the short-term but also broke the long-term bond that formerly linked them to the party'.

Labour's prospects

Although not denying the enormous task Labour faced in trying to gain an overall majority in a future election, Heath *et al.* saw Labour as having more chance of success than either Richard Rose or Ivor Crewe did. From their analysis it appeared to be crucial that Labour should persuade more people to identify with the party.

Writing in 1994, Heath *et al.* found evidence that this might be happening:

1 John Major's standing in the opinion polls had declined to make him the 'most unpopular Prime Minister for the longest period in opinion poll records', and Labour's then leader, John Smith, was much more popular than his predecessor Neil Kinnock had been.

Table 9.15 Long-term trends in attitudes

	October 1974	1979	1987	1992
Percentage agreeing that the government should ...				
Redistribute income and wealth to ordinary working people	54	52	50	48
Spend more money to get rid of poverty	84	80	86	93
Nationalize more companies	30	16	16	24
Privatize more companies	20	38	31	23
Not introduce stricter laws to regulate trade unions	–	16	33	40
Give workers more say in running places where they work	58	55	76	79
Put more money into the NHS	84	87	90	93
Percentage agreeing that ...				
Welfare benefits have not gone too far	22	17	34	46

Source: A. Heath, R. Jowell and J. Curtice (1994) 'Labour's last chance?' in Heath *et al.* (eds) *Labour's Last Chance? The 1992 Election and Beyond*, Dartmouth Publishing, Aldershot, p. 285.

Table 9.16 Trends in party identification

	Conservative %	Labour %	Liberal %	None %
1964	41	42	12	5
1966	39	45	10	5
1970	42	42	8	7
February 1974	38	39	14	6
October 1974	36	39	15	7
1979	39	38	12	9
1983	37	31	19	11
1987	39	32	17	11
1992	42	34	13	8

Notes

Liberal represents Liberal 1964–79, Liberal, SDP or Alliance 1983–87, Liberal Democrat 1992.

The figures are adjusted to take account of the sampling variation in the survey estimates. They do not sum to 100% because of 'other' parties.

Non-voters excluded.

Source: A. Heath, R. Jowell and J. Curtice (1994) 'Labour's last chance?' in Heath *et al.* (eds) *Labour's Last Chance? The 1992 Election and Beyond*, Dartmouth Publishing, Aldershot, p. 287.

2 The Conservatives had damaged their image as a result of splits within the party over Britain's relationship with the EC.
3 In September 1992 the actions of currency speculators had forced Britain to withdraw from the Exchange Rate Mechanism (which was supposed to protect the exchange rate of the pound).
4 A number of ministers were forced to resign or were dismissed between 1992 and 1994 as a consequence of 'either sexual scandals or failures in office'.
5 Perhaps most damaging of all, the Conservatives undermined their image as a low tax party by raising a number of taxes and by imposing VAT on domestic fuel.

Opinion poll evidence suggested that the Conservatives were losing support. One poll in 1993 found that only 33 per cent of people believed that the government was competent; and a succession of polls put Labour over 10 per cent ahead of the Conservatives. Furthermore, over four polls in 1993, Gallup found that on average only 30 per cent of the electorate identified with the Conservatives while 36 per cent identified with Labour.

Heath *et al.* remind readers that Labour enjoyed a big lead in most of the opinion polls before the 1992 election, but it still lost. They also say that 'we would expect mid-term disaffection from a governing party to dissipate somewhat and be replaced by a "homing tendency" at the following general election'. The Conservatives could expect to regain much of their support by the time voters actually got the chance to choose a new government. However, Heath *et al.* also raise the possibility that a major change could be taking place in British politics. They say:

> *It is at least plausible that the period since 1992 may have inflicted long term damage to the public's image of and affection for the Conservative Party of the kind inflicted on Labour some ten to fifteen years earlier.*
>
> Heath, Jowell and Curtice, 1994

If that were the case, the Conservative and Labour parties might return to being fairly evenly matched in their quest for election victories.

The 1997 general election

The election result

The result of the 1997 general election certainly gave psephologists food for thought. It appeared to offer strong confirmation of some theories, while making others seem completely implausible. In particular, it appeared to make a nonsense of the claims of some psephologists (such as David Rose) that, after the 1992 result, Labour had an almost impossible task to win an overall majority. David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh comment that 'The result was all the more striking, considering the many analyses in the immediate aftermath of the 1992 election that Labour faced too high a mountain to climb' (Butler and Kavanagh, 1997). The implications for some theories, though, were not so clearcut.

The results of the election are given in Table 9.17.

Table 9.17 The results of the 1997 general election

Party	Share of vote	Change	Number of seats	Change
Conservative	31.4	−11.4	165	−178
Labour	44.4	+9.2	419	+145
Lib Dem	17.2	−1.1	46	+28
Others	7.0	+3.3	11	+5

Note: Change in the number of seats was affected by the redistribution of seats that each party would have won in 1992 had the new boundaries been in operation. The Speaker is counted as a Labour member although she was not opposed by the other major parties.

Source: D. Denver (1997) 'The results: how Britain voted', in A. Geddes and J. Tonge (eds) *Labour's Landslide*, Manchester University Press, [illegible]

The results marked a considerable change from previous elections. As David Denver says, 'By any standards the result was dramatic' (Denver, 1997a). Some of its most dramatic characteristics have been pointed out by Denver and others:

1 Labour won its first general election victory for some 23 years, with its highest share of the vote since 1966. It won an overall majority in the Commons of 179 – their biggest ever overall majority. (The previous best was 146 in 1945.) It was the biggest majority for any government since 1935. Labour won 'many seats that would normally have been considered as certain Conservative wins' (Denver, 1997a). As Table 9.17 shows, there was a massive swing to the Labour Party (9.2 per cent) and an even larger swing away from the Conservatives (-11.4 per cent). According to Denver, the swing from Conservative to Labour was 10.3 per cent – the biggest swing between the two since the Second World War.
2 The Conservative Party suffered a very bad defeat. Andrew Geddes and Jonathon Tonge (1997) point out that the Conservatives got their lowest share of the vote since 1832. David Denver (1997a) notes that seven cabinet ministers lost their seats, the Conservatives lost over half their seats overall, and they won no seats in Wales or Scotland. Although they got a higher share of the vote than the Labour Party had managed in their worst post-war

performance (28 per cent in 1983), the scale of the change in fortunes from one election to another was certainly the biggest in post-war history.

3 There was no dramatic change in the fortunes of the third party (the Liberal Democrats) in terms of the share of the vote. However, there was a big increase in the number of seats they won. They increased their number of MPs from 18 to 46, with an increase in their share of the vote of less than 1 per cent. This was almost certainly due to a big increase in tactical voting. Considerable numbers appeared to vote for someone other than their first-choice candidate in order to defeat a Conservative candidate (see below). It was also a successful election for minor parties and independent candidates. The share of the vote gained by 'others' increased by 3.3 per cent to 7 per cent. The independent 'anti-sleaze' candidate Martin Bell defeated the Conservative Neil Hamilton in what was considered a very safe Conservative seat. David Denver notes that Martin Bell became the first candidate without links to a political party to be elected an MP in a general election since 1945. A new party, the Referendum Party (which was opposed to Britain joining a single European currency and was led by the businessman James Goldsmith), won 2.7 per cent of the vote.

The limits to the landslide

However, it is possible to exaggerate the novel features of the 1997 election. In particular, the scale of Labour's victory in terms of their overall majority was disproportionate to the scale of their success in terms of votes cast. Andrew Geddes and Jonathan Tonge (1997) note that the number of seats won by Labour was partly a product of the first-past-the-post voting system. In this system the candidate with the most votes in each constituency wins the seat, and the votes cast for losing candidates effectively count for nothing. The system tends to favour the most successful parties and makes it very difficult for minor parties to win seats unless their support is concentrated in specific areas of the country (as is the case with the Scottish Nationalist Party, for example).

Labour won 63 per cent of the seats with 44 per cent of the votes cast. Geddes and Tonge calculate that 'Under a strictly proportional system, Labour would have been denied an overall majority, possessed 128 fewer MPs and been confronted by thirty-nine extra Conservative and sixty-six Liberal Democrat MPs.'

John Curtice and Michael Steed observe that Labour's share of the vote was lower than any it achieved between 1945 and 1966, including three elections it lost during that period. Furthermore, the turnout was, at 71.2 per cent, the lowest since the war. Less than a third of the electorate (30.9 per cent) actually voted for the Labour Party.

Overall, then, it was the swing from the Conservatives to Labour that was the most notable feature of the election rather than the proportion of votes that the Labour Party gained.

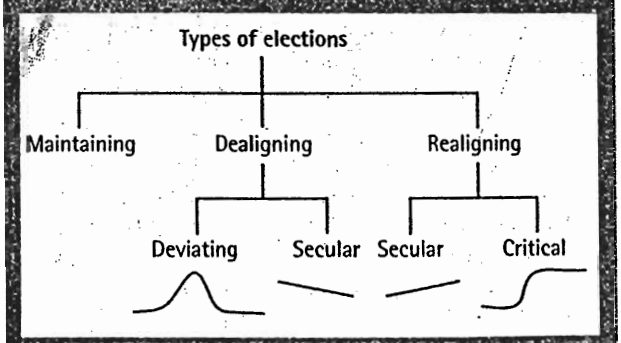
The *British Election Study* of 1997

The significance of the 1997 general election was the focus of the book *Critical Elections* which was based on the *British Election Study* (Evans and Norris (eds), 1999). The 1997 *British Election Study* was the eleventh in a series of studies dating back to 1964. The 1997 study used a sample of 2,733 in England and Wales and 882 in Scotland. A number of psephologists used data from the 11 studies to evaluate whether 1997 represented a radical break from previous elections. All based their articles upon a framework for analysing elections outlined by Pippa Norris and Geoffrey Evans (1999a).

Pippa Norris and Geoffrey Evans – 'Understanding electoral change'

Pippa Norris and Geoffrey Evans argue that it is possible to distinguish between three main types of elections: maintaining elections, dealigning elections and realigning elections. Dealigning elections can be subdivided into two types, deviating and secular; whilst realigning elections can also be divided into two types, secular and critical (see Figure 9.5).

Figure 9.5 Analytical typology of elections



Source: P. Norris and G. Evans (1999) 'Introduction: understanding electoral change', in G. Evans and P. Norris (eds) *Critical Elections: British Parties and Voters in Long-Term Perspective*, Sage, London, p. xxvii.

1 Maintaining elections are elections in which no major changes take place in the nature of voting, in the nature of the competing parties or in the issues which are of key importance in politics. There may be small shifts in the share of votes gained by each party but these are due to short-term political factors rather than long-term trends or fundamental changes. Thus, while the governing party might change, the fundamental character of politics does not.

   Norris and Evans comment that the big swing from Conservative to Labour in 1997 makes it implausible that 1997 could be seen as a maintaining election.

2 Dealigning elections take place when 'the social psychological bonds linking parties and voters loosen' (Norris and Evans, 1999a). These are of two types:

   Deviating elections result when 'particular personalities, issues or events produce a temporary sharp reversal in the "normal" share of the vote for major parties'. They often contain strong protest votes against a party in power and can involve a sudden surge in support for minor parties. One example was the 1989 European elections, when the Green Party achieved a much higher share of the vote in Britain than it has received before or since. Deviating elections do not signal a long-term change except in as much as they show that the electorate has become more volatile. Short-term political factors have most influence on the outcome.

   Norris and Evans say that:

   > *The 1997 election can be most plausibly regarded as a deviating election if it is interpreted primarily as an expression of negative protest against the 18 years of Conservative rule, prompted by the pervasive problems of sexual and financial sleaze, internal leadership splits and the sense of economic mismanagement which afflicted the Major administration after the 'Black Wednesday' ERM debacle.*
   >
   > Norris and Evans, 1999a, p. xxix

   (For details about 'Black Wednesday', see pp. 618–19.) If this analysis was correct, then the Labour Party could expect electoral difficulties in the future once the Conservatives had sorted out their problems.

   Secular dealignment describes elections which involve a 'long term, incremental and cumulative progressive weakening in party-voter bonds'. Such elections may involve a long-term process of class dealignment, where voters cease to automatically support a party which they believe represents their class interests. Bo Sarlvick and Ivor Crewe argued in 1983 that there had been a 'decade of dealignment' in British politics (see pp. 652–4), and they therefore saw elections in the 1970s and 1980s as involving secular dealignment.

   If the 1997 election could be seen in these terms, then Labour's victory would be a product of continuing trends. They were able to win because of the gradual erosion of loyal support for both parties. However, like a victory based upon a deviating election, one victory, however big, would not guarantee future success. A volatile and fickle electorate with few loyalties could as easily turn against the Labour Party as it had against the Conservatives in 1997.

3 Realigning elections involve evolutionary or revolutionary change in the social and psychological bonds between voters and parties. In such elections a significant part of the electorate begin to identify with particular parties, when they did not do so before.

   Secular realignment is characterized by 'an evolutionary and cumulative *strengthening* in party support over a series of elections'. From this viewpoint, Labour's 1997 victory was a case of 'one more heave'. They had picked up support in the 1987 and 1992 elections and this process continued in 1997 as they had further improved their appeal to the electorate. Norris and Evans say that 'Such an interpretation would rest on broadened Labour support for non-traditional constituencies for the parties, such as among women or younger voters, due to the process of value change in the British electorate'.

   Critical elections involve the biggest changes of all. They are *'those exceptional contests which produce abrupt, significant and durable realignments in the electorate with major consequences for the long-term party order'*. They affect the agendas of several governments and not just the one elected in the critical election. Critical elections have three related features:

   i. There is some realignment in the 'ideological basis of party competition'. Issues which were not important in previous elections might become central to the political agenda. Alternatively, one or more parties might shift their ideological position so much that they 'leapfrog' over other parties. Thus, for example, a traditionally left-wing party might move so far that they become more right-wing than a party of the ideological centre. Another alternative is that a new party with significant support might become established for the first time.

   ii. There will be 'some realignments in the social basis of party support'. For example, particular classes, ethnic groups or regions will change from predominantly supporting one party to supporting another.

   iii. Finally, there will be 'realignments in the partisan loyalties of voters'. Large numbers of people become loyal to a party for the first time or shift their loyalty from one party to another.

There are a number of ways in which the 1997 election could be interpreted as a critical election which changed the face of British politics. It could be argued that the election saw a major shift to the right by the Labour Party, with the consequence of widening its social appeal to members of the middle class and gaining many new partisan supporters. Britain's role in the European Union emerged as an important issue while other issues declined in importance. For example, defence policies became less controversial with the end of the cold war between Russia (and previously the Soviet Union) and the West.

In their introductory chapter, Norris and Evans reserved judgement about whether 1997 was a critical election or not. We will now review the findings of the other social scientists who examined data from the *British Election Study* of 1997, before returning to the conclusions reached by Norris and Evans.

Ian Budge – changes in party policy and ideology

The first issue examined by one of the researchers was the question of how far the Labour Party had changed its policies and ideology. Ian Budge (1999) examined the major policy positions of the Labour Party, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats (previously the Liberals and the Liberal/Social Democrat Alliance) in every election since 1945. Each sentence in the manifestos was analysed in terms of whether it adopted a left-wing or a right-wing stance. Budge then calculated whether, overall, the manifesto had a preponderance of left-wing or right-wing policies. Table 9.18 gives some indication of the sorts of policies that were judged to be left-wing or right-wing. Figure 9.6 charts the findings of the study.

Table 9.18shows some significant movements in party ideology. Between 1992 and 1997 the Labour Party manifesto moved sharply to the right, so that for the first time in post-war history there were more right-wing than left-wing policies. Furthermore, Labour had leapfrogged over the Liberal Democrats, so that Labour's manifesto was the more right-wing.

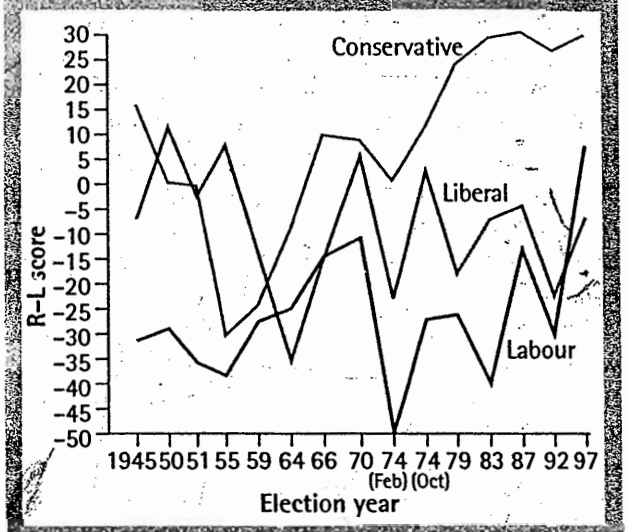
However, Budge did not conclude that these changes were necessarily indicative of a critical election. The Liberal Democrats held their position on the centre-left, and the 'Conservatives kept, broadly speaking, their Thatcherite right-wing posture'. The Labour Party certainly changed its stance, but it deviated 'only from their leftward shift of position in 1992'. Having temporarily shifted to more left-wing policies in the previous election, Labour continued its general move to the right which had begun in 1983.

Table 9.18 Budge's left–right coding scale

Codings of manifesto sentences: Right emphases (Sum of Pos for)	Minus	Left emphases (Sum of Neg for)
Pro-military		Decolonization
Freedom, human rights		Anti-military
Constitutionalism		Peace
Effective authority		Internationalism
Free enterprise		Democracy
Economic incentives		Regulate capitalism
Anti-protectionism		Economic planning
Economic orthodoxy		Pro-protectionism
Social services limitation		Controlled economy
National way of life		Nationalization
Traditional morality		Social services expansion
Law and order		Education expansion
Social harmony		Pro-labour

Source: I. Budge, 'Party policy and ideology: reversing the 1950s?', in G. Evans and P. Norris (eds), *Critical Elections: British Parties and Voters in Long-Term Perspective*, Sage, London, p. [illegible]

Figure 9.6 British parties' ideological movement on left–right scale, 1945–97



Source: H.-D. Klingemann *et al.* (1994), *Parties, Policies and Democracy*, Westview Press, Boulder, quoted in I. Budge, 'Party policy and ideology: reversing the 1950s?', in G. Evans and P. Norris (eds), (1999) *Critical Elections: British Parties and Voters in Long-Term Perspective*, Sage, London, p. [illegible]

Budge does not believe that this change will necessarily be permanent. Having established a stronger electoral position, the Labour Party might well move back towards more left-wing policies,

perhaps with a renewed emphasis on welfare spending. Budge therefore believes that 1997 can best be interpreted as a deviating election rather than a critical one, at least in terms of party ideology.

Pippa Norris – the ideology of MPs

Research by Pippa Norris (1999a) examines whether the shift to the right in Labour's manifestos is reflected in the ideology of Labour politicians. She uses survey data about more than 1,000 candidates and MPs from the major parties who stood in the 1992 and 1997 elections. The surveys included a range of questions that were used to measure the ideological stances of different candidates. For example, they were asked how far they agreed or disagreed with statements such as 'Ordinary working people get their fair share of the nation's wealth' and 'There is one law for the rich and one law for the poor' and 'Private enterprise is the best way to solve Britain's economic problems.'

Norris found strong evidence that there had been a shift to the right amongst Labour politicians. Compared to MPs and candidates in 1992, those in 1997 were more likely to agree that private enterprise could solve economic problems, and to disagree that major public services should be in public ownership, and that the government should be responsible for providing jobs. In all these respects there was evidence of a drift to the right.

Furthermore, Norris also detected a trend away from a liberal stance and towards what she calls a 'populist stance' on moral and social values. For example, Labour politicians became increasingly likely to endorse 'censorship to uphold moral standards while fewer expressed tolerance of political rights for anti-democratic parties. Many more Labour MPs agreed that "young people today don't have enough respect for traditional values".'

One exception was the issue of homosexuality where there was a move towards greater tolerance. By comparing the views of Labour MPs first elected in 1997 with those who had already been in Parliament, she found that these shifts were more marked among the new MPs. She also found them to be more evident amongst younger Labour MPs than older ones. Indeed, amongst all parties, MPs under 35 tended to be more right-wing than their older counterparts.

Overall, Norris found a convergence in the values of politicians from the three major parties, with some shift towards the centre from the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats maintaining their centre-left position, and Labour being close to them. Comparing these results with the values of the British electorate as revealed in the election studies, she found that Labour politicians were 'closer to the median British voter than the average Conservative politician'. Labour seemed to have had some success in capturing the middle ground. Indeed, Conservative politicians expressed views which were so far to the right on economic issues that, in 1997, the views of Conservative voters were actually closer to those of Labour and Liberal Democrat politicians than they were to Conservative politicians.

Norris concludes that, in terms of the values of MPs, 'the new House does represent a decisive break with the past pattern of party competition'. With Labour and Liberal Democrat politicians having an ideological position close to the bulk of the British electorate, 'the Conservatives occupy a lonely but distinctive position on the right'. Nevertheless, the attitudes of the younger politicians suggest that the House of Commons might drift further right as younger politicians take the places of older ones.

Paul Webb and David Farrell – the ideology of party members

Webb and Farrell (1999) examine whether the changes in party manifestos and in the ideology of MPs and candidates were reflected in the ideology of party members. Labour saw an increase in party membership from 279,530 in 1992 to 405,000 in 1997, while the Conservative membership fell from 500,000 to 400,000 over the same period. Liberal Democrat membership held steady at around 100,000.

Webb and Farrell found some movement in the values of Conservative members. Generally they had moved a little to the right in the 1980s and then back to the left in the 1990s. However, changes amongst Labour members had been greater. Webb and Farrell say, 'After moving fairly sharply left between 1987 and 1992, they then lurched even more dramatically to the right between 1992 and 1997.' Like Labour MPs and candidates, Labour members also became more inclined to support authoritarian social and moral views. Webb and Farrell argue that the influx of new members joining the party after Tony Blair became leader accounts for much of this change.

Amongst members of all parties Webb and Farrell found that extreme views had become less common. They say, 'In general terms, the gap between party members and voters diminished considerably in the 1990s.' In the past, Conservative members tended to have more right-wing views than Conservative voters, while Labour members tended to have significantly more left-wing views than Labour voters. By 1997 the differences between members and voters were the smallest they had been for decades.

Webb and Farrell therefore argue that the 1997 election may have represented a 'critical realignment in the predominant pattern of party competition in

Britain'. However, they suggest that there is no guarantee that this state of affairs will persist. It is always possible that changing circumstances will produce new ideological splits between political leaders, party members and voters in each party.

Ivor Crewe and Katrina Thompson – dealignment or realignment?

Ivor Crewe and Katrina Thompson (1999) use *British Election Study* data to examine whether the dealignment Crewe had claimed to detect in earlier elections (see pp. 652–4 and 658–9) had continued in 1997. Realignment might have taken place if significant numbers of voters had started to identify with particular parties, when they had not done so in the past. There would be evidence of realignment if the big increase in the Labour vote represented a corresponding increase in its number of loyal supporters. If this had taken place, then it might indicate that 1997 was a critical election because it had changed the level of support the parties could expect at future elections.

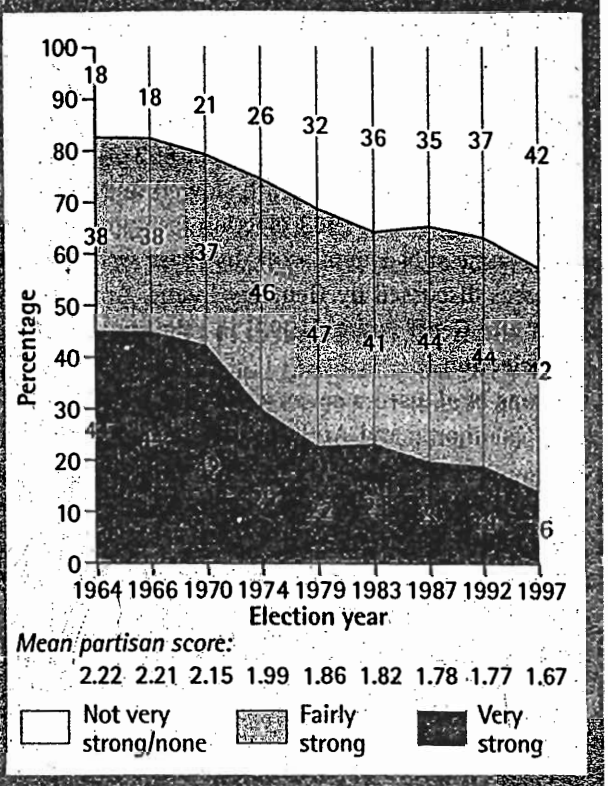
On the other hand, 1997 might be no more than a deviating election if the Conservatives had been 'defeated by a temporary protest of dissatisfied voters' (Crewe and Thompson, 1999).

On the surface, the 1997 election did provide evidence of a dramatic realignment. According to Crewe and Farrell, it saw the biggest change in party identification since 1964. Conservative identifiers went down from 45 per cent to 39 per cent between 1992 and 1997, while Labour identifiers rose from 33 per cent to 46 per cent. The percentage of Conservative identifiers was the lowest it had been since 1964. All of this seemed to indicate that Labour had replaced the Conservatives as the natural majority party, only able to be defeated in exceptional circumstances. If that was the case, then 1997 would certainly have been a critical realigning election.

However, Crewe and Farrell interpret the data differently. They argue that questions about party identification measure little more than current voting preferences. Party identification changes in line with voting and says little about long-term commitments. According to Crewe and Farrell, a better indication of partisanship is found in those who *strongly* identify with a particular party.

Figure 9.7 shows a long-term trend towards declining partisanship, or what Crewe calls partisan dealignment. In 1964, 44 per cent of voters very strongly identified with a political party; by 1997 it was just 16 per cent. Furthermore, in 1997 it was the youngest voters – those in the 18-24 age group – whose partisanship was the weakest. While Labour benefited from a large swing in votes, it could not claim to have gained a large block of loyal and partisan followers.

Figure 9.7 Strength of identification with a political party, 1964–97



Source: I. Crewe and K. Thompson (1999) 'Party loyalties: dealignment or realignment?' in G. Evans and P. Norris, *Critical Elections: British Parties and Voters in Long-Term Perspective*, Sage, London, p. 31.

Crewe and Farrell note that the Labour Party continued to enjoy very high levels of popularity in the period after the election. With so many new supporters, the aftermath of the election provided the potential for substantial realignment towards the Labour Party. Crewe and Farrell describe an 'opportunity to harden the overwhelming but soft partisanship of young voters into a New Labour generation; but these same voters are open to conversion to another party if the government is perceived to fail.'

Labour's success was caused by 'ideological convergence' with other parties, as it shifted towards the ideological middle ground. It was not based on attracting loyal support from particular social groups, or based on specific policy issues. The electoral success and post-election popularity of Labour were largely based upon short-term political factors, such as a divided Conservative Party and a 'buoyant economy', rather than more long-term or fundamental factors. For Crewe and Farrell, then, 1997 was a potentially realigning election, but not one that in itself involved a critical realignment.

Geoffrey Evans, Anthony Heath and Clive Payne – class and voting in 1997

Part of Crewe and Sarlvick's original argument that dealignment was taking place suggested that class dealignment was occurring (see pp. 652–4). This view was questioned by Heath, Jowell and Curtice in their study of the 1983 election (see pp. 655–8), and in some subsequent work by these writers. This issue was discussed by Geoffrey Evans, Anthony Heath and Geoff Payne (1999) in relation to the 1997 election.

Evans *et al.* used a seven-class model devised by John Goldthorpe and Anthony Heath, rather than the simple division between manual and non-manual workers. They found that in 1997 unprecedented proportions of the service classes and other non-manual classes voted Labour.

Table 9.19 shows that, in 1997, over a third of the higher service class and over 40 per cent of the lower service class voted Labour, as did nearly half (49 per cent) of routine non-manual workers. Labour did even better amongst working-class voters but, compared to elections in the 1960s, the gap between the support Labour got from middle- and working-class voters was much narrower. Evans *et al.* note that Labour did no better amongst the working class in 1997 than they had in the 1960s, but between 1964 and 1997 their middle-class support more than doubled.

Table 9.19: Class by party vote for elections, 1964–97 (per cent)

Election	Base	Party	Higher service	Lower service	Routine non-manual	Petty bourgeoisie	Foremen & technicians	Skilled working class	Unskilled working class
1964	*1,359*	Con	65	61	59	74	37	25	26
		Lab	18	20	26	15	48	70	66
		Lib	17	19	15	11	15	5	8
1966	*1,413*	Con	66	56	49	67	35	22	25
		Lab	19	29	41	20	61	73	70
		Lib	15	15	10	13	4	5	5
1970	*1,303*	Con	66	60	51	69	39	33	32
		Lab	22	32	40	20	56	63	61
		Lib	12	8	9	11	5	4	7
1974 Feb	*1,858*	Con	59	51	45	68	39	23	24
		Lab	17	26	29	18	39	59	61
		Lib	24	23	26	14	22	18	15
1974 Oct	*1,746*	Con	57	47	44	70	35	20	22
		Lab	17	30	32	13	52	62	65
		Lib	26	23	24	17	13	18	13
1979	*1,410*	Con	61	61	52	77	44	28	34
		Lab	24	19	32	13	45	58	53
		Lib	15	20	16	10	11	14	13
1983	*2,877*	Con	60	53	53	71	44	33	29
		Lab	8	16	20	12	28	47	49
		Lib/SDP	32	31	27	17	28	20	22
1987	*2,860*	Con	63	50	51	64	39	31	31
		Lab	11	19	26	16	37	48	48
		Lib/SDP	26	31	23	20	24	21	21
1992	*2,131*	Con	66	50	54	66	41	37	28
		Lab	16	21	30	17	45	50	60
		Lib Dem	18	29	16	17	14	13	12
1997	*1,822*	Con	44	37	33	43	21	14	18
		Lab	34	42	49	40	62	67	69
		Lib Dem	22	21	18	17	17	19	13
Change 1992–97		Con	*–22*	*–13*	*–21*	*–23*	*–20*	*–23*	*–10*
		Lab	*+18*	*+21*	*+19*	*+23*	*+17*	*+17*	*+9*
		Lib Dem	*+4*	*–8*	*–2*	*0*	*+3*	*+6*	*+1*

Source: G. Evans *et al.* (1999) 'Class, Labour as a catch-all party?', in G. Evans and P. Norris, *Critical Elections: British Parties and Voters in Long-Term Perspective*, Sage, London, p. 90.

Evans *et al.* measured the overall relationship between class and voting, using a composite measure of 'changes in the odds ratios between classes and parties across elections' (see p. 656 for a description of odds ratios). The results are given in Figure 9.8.

In Figure 9.8 the 1964 election is taken as a base and other figures show how strong the class and voting relationship was in comparison to 1964. The figure shows what Evans *et al.* describe as 'a generally declining trend from the highest point in 1964 to the lowest in 1997 with some fluctuations in-between'. In 1997, for example, the class–voting relationship was only about 60 per cent as strong as it had been in 1964.

Unlike some of the earlier studies involving Anthony Heath, Evans *et al.* were prepared to admit that class was exercising a decreasing influence on voting patterns by the end of the millennium. However, they argued that this change was largely the result of changes in the Labour Party and its relationship with working-class voters. Statistically, much of the variation in the relationship between class and voting was caused by changes in the relationship between class and Labour voting. Evans *et al.* suggested, therefore, that it might be the changing character of the Labour Party that was largely responsible for the weakening relationship between class and voting. In particular, it might be caused by changes in the ideology and policies of Labour so that it became a party appealing to all classes (a 'catch-all party') rather than one which aimed its appeal specifically at the working class.

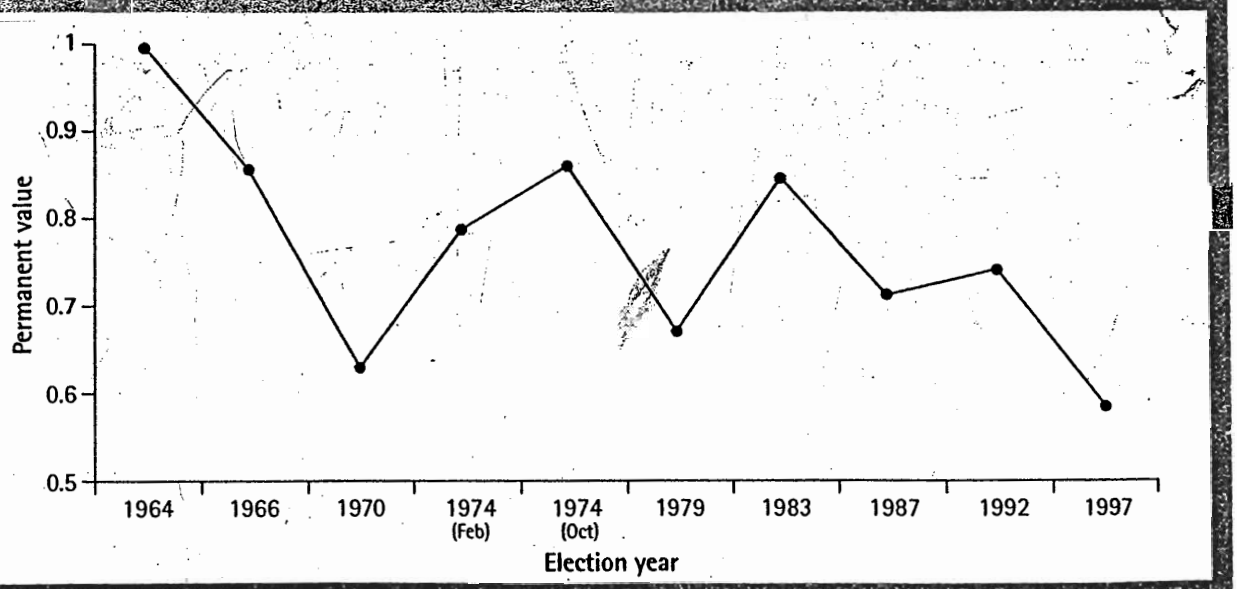
Evans *et al.* noted that the study by Ian Budge (see pp. 673–4) had found that the Labour Party had moved well away from a left-wing ideology by 1997 in an attempt to appeal to middle-class voters. Evans *et al.* looked at data from the *British Election Studies* which measured whether voters thought there was a 'good deal', 'some', or 'not much' difference between the parties. In 1997 only 33 per cent of voters thought there was a good deal of difference between the parties. This compares to 46 per cent giving this reply in 1964 and as many as 82 per cent in 1983 and 84 per cent in 1987.

In general, then, it appeared that the voters accurately perceived that the ideological gap between the parties had narrowed by 1997. Evans *et al.* attribute the decline in class-based voting to this reduction in the perceived ideological gap between the parties. In particular, the Labour Party attracted so many middle-class votes in 1997 because it had largely abandoned left-wing policies which would appeal to working classes but alienate middle classes.

The big fluctuations in the class and voting relationship between elections did not suggest that the changes were part of an inevitable and long-term trend in society. Rather they were a product of short-term political changes within parties. If this was the case, then the relationship between class and voting might strengthen in the future if a more clearcut ideological division between the Conservative and Labour parties returned.

Evans *et al.* therefore conclude that the dip in class voting in 1997 does not show that it was a critical election since it did not necessarily signal a

Figure 9.8 Influence of class on voting



Source: G. Evans *et al.* (1999) 'Class, Labour as a catch-all party?' in G. Evans and P. Norris, *Critical Elections: British Parties and Voters in Long-Term Perspective*, Sage, London, p. 93.

permanent change. They say, 'The future strength of class voting therefore depends more upon party strategy and electoral appeals than upon secular trends in society.'

Non-class cleavages and voting

If there was no critical change in class voting in 1997, did a critical change take place in the relationship between other social factors and voting? Researchers examined the *British Election Studies* for any major shift in voting according to ethnicity, gender and region. In the process, they were able to examine at least parts of Crewe's earlier arguments that sectoral cleavages might be replacing class divisions as a major influence on voting (see p. 653). Crewe saw region as one important sectoral cleavage but did not see ethnicity and gender as particularly significant.

Ethnicity

Shamit Saggar and Anthony Heath (1999) looked at the relationship between ethnicity and voting. Using data that went back to 1974, they found no evidence of a major shift in the voting of ethnic minorities. Labour attracted between 72 per cent and 83 per cent of ethnic-minority votes in the six elections between October 1974 and 1997; the Conservatives between 7 per cent and 18 per cent. In 1997 an overwhelming 84.8 per cent of blacks and Asians voted Labour, 11.3 per cent voted Conservative and 3.2 per cent voted for the Liberal Democrats. Saggar and Heath conclude that the 1997 election reinforced existing patterns of ethnic-minority voting and that there was no evidence of a critical realignment.

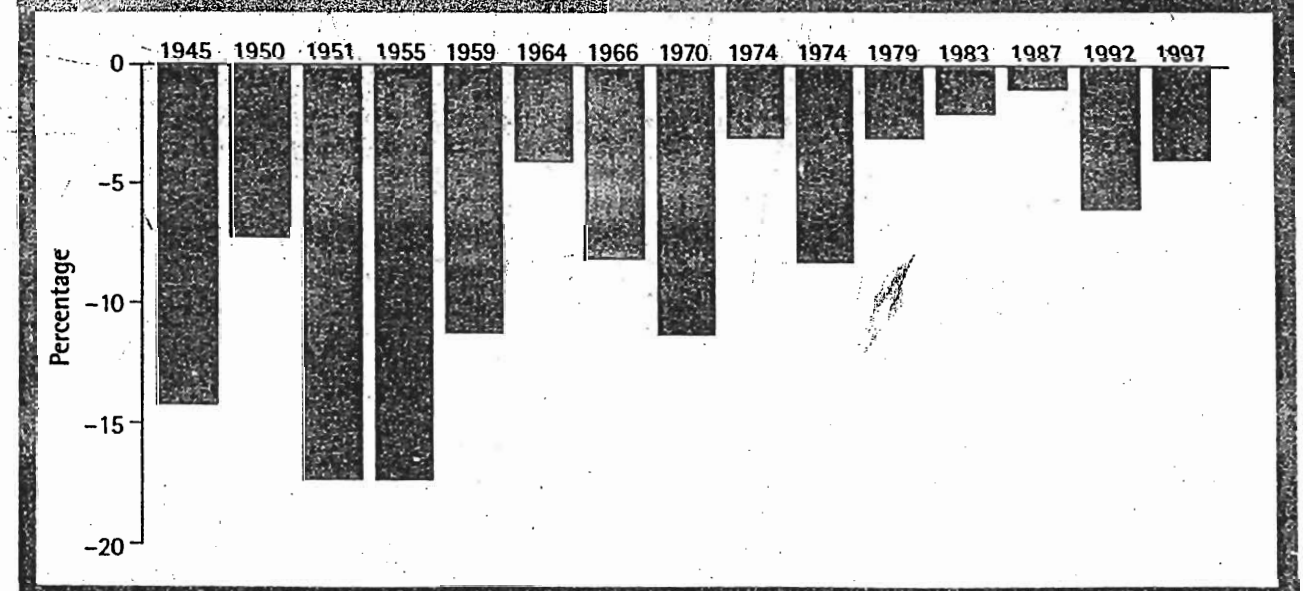
Gender

Pippa Norris (1999b) found more evidence of changes in the relationship between gender and voting. In the 1960s and 1970s, women in Britain were proportionally more likely to vote Conservative and less likely to vote Labour than men.

In most countries, women have traditionally given more support to right-wing parties than men. Recent studies in a number of countries have suggested that the gender gap in voting is reducing. In some countries, such as the USA, the traditional gender pattern has been reversed. Women have gone from being more right-wing than men to being more left-wing.

Figure 9.9 shows the gender gap in post-war British elections. It calculates 'the difference in the Conservative-Labour lead among women minus the Conservative-Labour lead among men' (Norris, 1999b). For example, if the Conservatives had an 8 per cent lead over Labour among women but a 3 per cent lead among men, the gender gap would be 5 per cent. The figure shows that the gender gap has fluctuated considerably, from about 17 per cent in 1951 and 1955, to just around 2 per cent in 1987 and about 4 per cent in 1997. However, the figure does indicate a gradual reduction in the gender gap. Women are no longer much more inclined to vote Conservative than men.

Figure 9.9 The British gender gap, 1964–97



Source: P. Norris (1999) 'Gender: a generation gap?' in G. Evans and P. Norris, *Critical Elections: British Parties and Voters in Long-Term Perspective*, Sage, London, p. 152

Norris finds that the relationship between gender and voting is influenced by age. Older women are more likely to vote Conservative than older men, whereas younger women are more likely to vote Labour than younger men. Norris argues that:

> *The most plausible reason for this we can suggest is that the younger generation of women spent their formative years during the height of the second wave women's movement, the social revolution in sex roles which occurred in the 1960s, and the change in cultural values associated with feminism.*
>
> Norris, 1999b, p. 162

As older generations of women die and younger generations reach voting age we might therefore expect the gender-gap in voting to be reversed so that women become more inclined to vote Labour than men. Norris concludes that 1997 was not a critical election in terms of gender and voting. Women were still more likely to vote Conservative overall than men were. However, she does anticipate a gradual 'secular realignment' in patterns of gender and voting in line with the leftward drift she has detected among women.

Region and voting

John Curtice and Alison Park (1999) detected two main features of the geography of voting in the 1997 election:

1. The swing from Conservative to Labour was bigger in the southern parts of England than in the northern parts.
2. There was a good deal of tactical voting. In particular, in constituencies where either a Liberal Democrat or a Labour candidate seemed well-placed to unseat a Conservative MP, anti-Conservative voters seemed to switch to the party which had the best chance of defeating the Conservatives.

One consequence of these shifts was that the Conservatives lost more seats than they would have done if the fall in their vote had been evenly spread. Curtice and Park believe that the trends in the 1997 election represented dealignment rather than realignment. Between the mid-1950s and the mid-1980s regional factors exercised an increasing influence on voting. Even when factors such as class were taken into account, Labour gained more support in the north while the Conservatives increased their support in the south. The 1997 election reversed these trends and therefore reduced the influence of region in shaping people's voting preferences. Curtice and Park calculate that, between 1987 and 1997, a quarter of the regional gap in voting preferences disappeared, although southerners were still more likely to vote Conservative than northerners.

Curtice and Park examine a number of possible explanations for the narrowing of regional differences in voting.

First, they consider the idea that it was due to economic differences. While earlier recessions had generally had the most adverse effects on industrial jobs in northern constituencies, by the mid-1990s there were increasing numbers of job losses in services and in the south. So perhaps a sense of economic gloom had spread to the south and turned voters against the Conservative government. However, Curtice and Park found that at the time of the election those in the south of England were more likely than those in the north to believe that the economy was improving. They therefore dismissed this as a way of explaining the narrowing regional gap in voting.

Second, they considered the possibility that the change resulted from the Labour Party deliberately targeting southern voters. As part of their modernization strategy, the Labour Party set out to shed policies that were unpopular with southern voters. In particular, Labour abandoned its commitment to nationalization (which had been Clause 4 of its constitution), distanced itself from trade unions, and promised not to increase income tax.

Curtice and Park found some evidence to support this second theory. Data from the *British Election Study* of 1997 found that, throughout the country, Labour was perceived as being more right-wing than it had been in previous elections. People had noticed the changes in policy and this had affected people's image of the party.

Furthermore, by 1997, those in the south saw the Labour Party as more right-wing than those in the north. This could explain why Labour gained more ground in the south of the country, where much of the electorate was hostile to the more left-wing positions Labour had adopted in previous elections. Curtice and Park comment that 'overall, Labour's modernization project was particularly successful in overcoming negative perceptions and associations that the southern voter had of the party in the 1980s'.

In terms of tactical voting, Curtice and Park estimate that in 1997 nearly 5 per cent of voters switched to their second-preference party (either Labour or Liberal Democrats) in order to defeat a Conservative candidate. In contrast, in 1992 only about 3.5 per cent of voters did this, and in the previous two elections only about 3 per cent. So there was a significant increase in tactical voting. If this were to continue into future elections, then 1997 could be seen as a critical election.

However, this could not be seen as evidence of a critical realignment. The willingness to vote tactically is most common amongst those who do not have strong partisan loyalty to one party. The increase in

tactical voting was therefore indicative of dealignment, particularly among those with left-of-centre views. Curtice and Park argue that:

> *never before had Labour and the Liberal Democrats been felt to have so much in common. And as a result, more voters were relatively indifferent in their feelings towards the two parties while at the same time disliking the Conservatives.*
>
> Curtice and Park, 1999, p. 144

Curtice and Park conclude that most of the evidence points to 1997 as a dealigning election. The north–south divide became less significant, and the closing of the ideological and policy gap between Labour and the Liberal Democrats weakened some people's attachment to either of these parties. The main reason for these changes was that people's perceptions of the parties had changed. The electorate's reasons for choosing to vote for a particular party had not altered radically, but people thought that the Labour Party had changed, making it more attractive to southern voters in particular. This would suggest that the ideological image of parties is an important factor shaping voting behaviour.

Geoffrey Evans – the issue of Europe

Geoffrey Evans (1999) used *British Election Study* data to examine the importance of policies on European integration in the 1997 election. Europe was certainly a significant issue to the political parties. The Conservatives were split over attitudes to Europe. The Euro-sceptic wing of the party opposed further integration in general, and the entry of sterling into a common European currency (the Euro) in particular. Some other senior Conservatives were Euro-enthusiasts and were strongly in favour of more integration. The Labour Party, which had adopted a stance opposed to European integration in the 1980s, was more pro-Europe than the Conservatives by the time of the 1997 election. Although the Labour manifesto did not commit a Labour government to accepting a common currency, it was not hostile to the possibility.

Evans found that, in 1997, Labour voters were more pro-Europe than Conservative voters. In 1992 there had been little difference in the attitudes to Europe among Conservative and Labour voters, and in previous elections it was Labour voters who were more anti-Europe and Conservative voters more pro-Europe. Thus the views of voters supporting these parties had shifted in line with the changing policies of the parties.

Although Evans found that views on Europe seemed to have only a small influence on voting, the issue did cut across traditional class allegiances. Working-class voters who were hostile to Europe were a little more likely to vote Conservative in 1997, compared to pro-Europe working-class voters. Conversely, Labour had more success among pro-Europe middle-class voters than among those who were anti-Europe. Because working-class voters tend to be more hostile to Europe than middle-class ones, the reversal in party policies towards Europe served to weaken the relationship between class and voting. Evans concludes that 'Europe now cross-cuts the left–right basis of voting and because of party realignment on the issue now serves to reduce the effects of class on vote.'

Pippa Norris and Geoffrey Evans – was 1997 a critical election?

Pippa Norris and Geoffrey Evans (1999b) reviewed the findings of all the researchers who analysed the 1997 *British Election Study* in order to decide whether 1997 was a critical election or not.

In terms of the result, they argue that factors such as the large swing from Conservative to Labour, the high level of volatility, and the big increases in the seats won by Labour and the Liberal Democrats do suggest that 1997 was a critical election. However, they point out that 'Labour's landslide was largely the product of the exaggerative qualities of the electoral system rather than landslide of votes.' Despite the size of their majority, Labour got significantly fewer than half of the votes cast.

In terms of changes in party politics, they see the ideological shift in Labour's position as the most significant feature of the election. For only the second time in post-war politics (the other occasion being 1964) Labour manifesto policies were more right-wing than those of the Liberal Democrats (previously the Liberals). Labour also had more right-wing than left-wing policies overall. Labour had broken with many of its socialist policies and adopted 'social liberalism ... emphasizing market incentives, opportunities and civic responsibilities within a devolved state'.

Furthermore, this shift in policies was in line with changes in the views of party members and MPs. Younger MPs were particularly supportive of 'New Labour' policies. The closeness of the Labour and Liberal Democrat policies, compared to the distinctively right-wing policies of the Conservatives, was also a new feature of party competition in 1997.

However, Norris and Evans argue that there is little evidence of any major realignment of the electorate. The evidence points instead to increased dealignment. Fewer voters were strongly identifying with parties in 1997 than in previous elections. Class had declined in significance, but largely because Labour had adopted less left-wing policies. Labour's reversal of policy to become more sympathetic to

European integration lost them some working-class support, thus contributing to class dealignment. Regional and gender factors were exercising a less strong influence on voting, while ethnic minorities continued to offer strong support for Labour.

Overall, Norris and Evans believe that the most significant change in 1997 was the ideological dealignment involved in Labour's move to the centre. However, it was not clear in the aftermath of the election whether this would be a permanent change, or whether Labour would drift back towards more left-wing policies once they were more confident of success in future elections.

In terms of social changes and the relationship between parties and the electorate, Norris and Evans conclude that 'The most consistent evidence suggests a pattern of continuing secular dealignment in the British electorate due to political changes in party competition.' The 1997 election could not, therefore, be regarded as a critical election. It represented a deepening of previous trends towards dealignment and not a radical break with the past.

However, Norris and Evans did think that there was some possibility that 1997 could turn out to have been an important turning point. If Labour could achieve a sense of partisan loyalty amongst the large number of young voters who supported them in 1997, then they might have set in motion processes leading to an eventual realignment of party support in their favour.

Evaluation

Norris and Evans and the other writers who analysed the results of the 1997 *British Election Study* put primary emphasis upon the ideological shift in the Labour Party in explaining the result of the 1997 election. In doing so they rather downplay the role of other possible factors, particularly those relating to the unpopularity of the Conservative Party.

Anthony King (1998) argues that the main factor explaining the 1997 result was the unpopularity of the Conservative Party. He sees the exit of Britain from the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) as the event which triggered the Conservatives' 'loss of reputation'. In previous elections some people had been unwilling to vote against the Conservatives because they believed that the Conservatives were the only party who could be trusted to run the economy competently.

On 16 September 1992 – so-called 'Black Wednesday' – Britain was forced to leave the ERM as the result of speculators such as George Soros selling sterling and buying other currencies. This was despite the assertions of the Conservative chancellor, Norman Lamont, that Britain would not be forced to leave. Although the economy was actually quite successful in the period leading up to the 1997 election, the Conservatives were not seen as responsible. Economic success had followed when the Conservatives had been forced, against their will, to abandon the main plank of their economic policy. After Black Wednesday, Conservative ratings in opinion polls plummeted and never recovered.

Other problems added to the Conservatives' difficulties by the time of the 1997 election. King says that the Conservatives had:

> *forfeited their reputation for economic competence – and their reputations for almost everything else besides – and they also managed to give the impression that they did not desperately care about, or were actively opposed to the great public services on which the great majority of the British people depend. (They also managed, in passing, to appear weak, hopelessly disunited, sleazy and disreputable.)*
>
> King, 1998, p. 205

Labour won the election in the sense that they provided an apparently united, moderate and competent alternative to the Conservatives, but they only attracted so much support because the Conservatives had such a poor image.

If King's analysis is correct, then short-term political factors were more important than the changing ideology of the Labour Party, or deep-seated changes in the electorate. However, the loss of the Conservatives' reputation for economic competence could have longer-term repercussions, making it more difficult for them to win successive general elections in the future than it had been in the period from 1979 until 1997.

Sociology, power, politics, the state and values

As in all areas of sociology, those who adopt a particular perspective on power and politics often claim objectivity and accuse their opponents of ideological bias. As Geraint Parry noted, the early elite theorists such as Pareto and Mosca believed they had established 'a neutral, "objective" political science, free from any ethical consideration' (Parry, 1969). From this standpoint, they dismissed Marxism as little more than ideology. Marxists have replied in a similar vein accusing elite theorists of merely

translating ruling-class ideology into sociological jargon. However, it is doubtful whether any perspective has a monopoly on objective truth. It is possible to argue that all views on power, politics and the state owe something to the ideology and values of those who support them.

The ideological basis of Marxism is clearly visible. Marx was not only a sociologist but a political radical committed to the cause of the proletarian revolution. His writings reveal a vehement hatred of what he saw as the oppressive rule of the bourgeoisie. Marxists are committed to the idea of political equality, believing that it can only be realized in an egalitarian society based on communist principles.

From this standpoint, Marxists condemn the representative democracies of Western capitalist societies. Any reform in the political system which leaves the economic base of capitalism unchanged is seen as merely a concession to the proletariat which serves to maintain the status quo. Given their commitment to communism, it is noticeable that many Marxist writers were far more restrained in their criticisms of political inequality in the former USSR than they were in their criticisms of the West.

From the point of view of elite theory, Marxism is merely wishful thinking. Given the inevitability of elite rule, the egalitarian society is an illusion. However, the early elite theorists are just as vulnerable to the charge of ideological bias. Parry suggests that Pareto and Mosca began with a formula that was little more than a statement of conviction. They then scoured the history books selecting information that fitted their preconceived ideas. These ideas owed much to Pareto and Mosca's evaluation of the masses. They regarded the majority of people as generally incompetent and lacking the quality required for self-government.

Elite theory has often been seen as an expression of conservative ideology. With its assertion of the inevitability of elite rule, it can serve to justify the position of ruling minorities. Attempts to radically change the status quo, particularly those aimed at political equality, are dismissed as a waste of time. The removal of one elite will simply lead to its replacement by another.

Thus, as Parry observed, early elite theory 'offered a defence, in rationalistic or scientific terminology, of the political interests and status of the middle class' (Parry, 1969). In fact, Mosca went as far as to suggest that members of the working class were unfit to vote.

Despite their claims to objectivity and neutrality, the early elite theorists were strongly opposed to socialism. T.B. Bottomore argued that 'Their original and main antagonist was, in fact, socialism, and especially Marxist socialism' (Bottomore, 1966). Thus the debate between Marxists and elite theorists can be seen, at least in part, as a battle between rival ideologies.

Pluralism can be seen as an expression of either conservative or liberal ideology, depending on the point of view of the observer. By implying that Western democracies are the best form of representative government that can be hoped for in complex industrial societies, elite pluralists can be seen to advocate the maintenance of the status quo. The inference from their argument is leave well alone. As Bottomore stated, the elite pluralist conception of democracy as representative government is limited and restricted compared to the idea of direct participation.

A commitment to this idea might well result in a very different analysis of Western political systems. This is evident from Bottomore's own work. He regarded the pluralist view of democracy as a poor substitute for the real thing. His belief that direct participation in politics by all members of society is a realistic alternative to representative government may well be influenced by a commitment to this ideal.

Frank Parkin suggested that 'pluralism is quite plausibly regarded as a philosophy which tends to reflect the perceptions and interests of a privileged class' (Parkin, 1972). Pluralism claims that all major interests in society are represented. However, in an unequal society, the interests of the rich and powerful are likely to be better served than those of the underprivileged. With its emphasis on the representation of all interests, pluralism tends to disguise this situation. It is likely to divert attention from the inequalities that result from the operation of the political process. By doing so it may help to maintain the status quo and provide support for the privileged.

While it has often been seen as a reflection of conservative ideology, pluralism has also been interpreted as a liberal viewpoint. Liberalism is a philosophy which accepts the basic structure of Western society while advocating progressive reforms within that structure. These reforms are directed by a concern for individual liberty and a desire to improve the machinery of democratic government.

Many pluralists admit that Western democracies have their faults, and are concerned to correct them. Thus Arnold Rose admits that the USA is not 'completely democratic' (Rose 1967) and looks forward to a number of reforms to make the existing system more representative. But he accepts that the basic framework of American society is sound and therefore does not advocate radical change.

Pluralism has found particularly strong support in the USA, and many of the important pluralist writers, such as Dahl and Rose, are American. To some degree their writings can be seen as a reflection of American culture. Since the Declaration of Independence, American society has emphasized the liberty of the

individual rather than social equality. In this respect, it is significant that the USA has no major socialist party, unlike most of its West European counterparts.

This emphasis on liberty rather than equality is reflected in pluralist theory. From a pluralist perspective, democracy is a system of government which provides freedom for members of society to organize in the defence and promotion of their interests. Westergaard and Resler claim that pluralists 'value liberty more than equality' (Westergaard and Resler, 1976) and see the free-enterprise capitalist system as 'a bulwark of liberty'. The values of liberty and freedom of the individual are enshrined in the 'American Dream'. As a result, the writings of American pluralists may owe more than a little to the ethos of their society.

While Marxists, elite theorists and pluralists have argued over the values implicit in each other's theories, some postmodernists have argued that strongly-held political ideologies are being abandoned. Furthermore, they welcome this development, arguing that political ideologies create more problems than they solve.

Lyotard (1984), for example, rejects all metanarratives (or big stories) about how society is and how it should be run. He believes that a commitment to an ideology is always dangerous. People who are committed to certain political beliefs will commit inhuman acts in support of their ideology. Political leaders such as Stalin (the second leader of communist USSR) have been responsible for the murder of millions in the name of political ideology. Lyotard welcomes a change to a world in which people no longer believe in political metanarratives. Lacking such strong values, people are less likely to be able to justify the murder of others. To Lyotard, in a postmodern world people turn away from claiming to know absolute truths about society and they become more pragmatic. They believe only in those things that work and have a practical value.

Foucault's work also provides a radical departure from more conventional theories of power. By arguing that power/knowledge are inseparable and that power is all around, Foucault implies that the world cannot be changed by the political ideologies of states and governments. Power is highly dispersed, it is everywhere, and the only way to make any changes is in a piecemeal, localized way. This view can be seen as implying fairly conservative values in which radical and widespread change cannot be achieved.

However, some sociologists claim that writers such as Lyotard and Foucault have failed to escape from the grip of value-laden ideologies. By denying the desirability or possibility of pursuing large-scale or radical changes in society, they become conservatives by default. If nothing can, or should, be changed, then the implication is that the status quo must be accepted. Madan Sarup, for example, says:

> *Politically, it is clear that thinkers like Lyotard and Foucault are neo-conservatives. They take away the dynamic on which liberal social thought has traditionally relied. They offer us no theoretical reason to move in one social direction rather than another.*
>
> Sarup, 1988, p. 140

The label of neo-conservatism is not, however, appropriate for all those calling themselves postmodernists. Others, such as Nancy Fraser (1995), remain committed to ideological struggles, and in many ways offer highly radical views supporting extensive changes in society.

However, Fraser rejects the idea that there is one ideology or issue which should subsume all others. She sees class, race and gender issues as all being important. She supports those whom she sees as struggling against class inequality, racism and sexism. Unlike Marxists, however, she does not see the struggle as an economic one, but rather as one to do with discourse – the way people talk and think about these issues.

In their own way, sociologists like Fraser are as committed to values as Marxists. Like Marxists, they believe in radical change and strive for liberation. Unlike Marxists, they are more likely to support a variety of causes (such as anti-racism, feminism, gay liberation and ecology) rather than one (proletarian revolution). As such, they reflect the plurality of new social movements discussed earlier in the chapter (see pp. 643–7).

Despite the recent developments in theories of power and in politics itself, it is still possible to discern a basic division between those influenced by conservative and those influenced by more radical values. Some of the issues and the terminology have changed, but the basic stances have not.

Chapter 14

Methodology

Introduction

Any academic subject requires a methodology to reach its conclusions: it must have ways of producing and analysing data so that theories can be tested, accepted or rejected. Without a systematic way of producing knowledge the findings of a subject can be dismissed as guesswork, or even as common sense made to sound complicated. Methodology is concerned with both the detailed research methods through which data are collected, and the more general philosophies upon which the collection and analysis of data are based.

As we have seen in this book, most areas of sociology are riven with controversy. Methodology is no exception to this general rule. One of the main areas of disagreement concerns – in the most general terms – whether sociology should adopt the same methods as (or similar methods to) those employed in science.

Sociology first developed in Europe in the nineteenth century when industrialization resulted in massive social changes. Accompanying these social changes were intellectual changes during which science started to enjoy a higher reputation than ever before. Science appeared to be capable of producing objective knowledge that could be used to solve human problems and increase human productive capacity in an unprecedented way. It was not surprising, therefore, that many early sociologists chose to turn to science for a methodology on which to base their subject.

However, not all sociologists have agreed that it is appropriate to adopt the methodology of the natural sciences. For these sociologists, studying human behaviour is fundamentally different from studying the natural world. Unlike the subject matter of, for example, chemistry or physics, people possess consciousness, which means (from the point of view of some sociologists) that sociology requires a different type of methodology from science.

In the above terms, it was possible to identify two broad traditions within sociology:

1 Those who advocated the use of scientific and usually quantitative methods (numerical statistical methods).
2 Those who supported the use of more humanistic and qualitative methods.

However, it was never the case that all sociologists fitted neatly into these categories. Furthermore, as will become clear, there are divisions *within* these two broad camps as well as *between* them.

In recent years, some sociologists have questioned the need for such a rigid division between quantitative and qualitative methodology, and have advocated combining the two approaches. Other sociologists have advocated methods associated with critical social science or with postmodernism.

Critical social science tends to favour more qualitative methods but it is not exclusively associated with such methods. The central feature of critical social science is that it links research with trying to transform society. It therefore rejects the view of many sociologists – including many of the advocates of the two approaches discussed above – that researchers should be impartial. Instead, it sides with those it sees as the disadvantaged and oppressed groups in society. It seeks to develop any methods that will help to liberate these groups from their oppression.

Feminists are amongst the most influential of critical social scientists, and some feminists have argued that distinctive feminist methodologies should be adopted.

Postmodernists have developed their approaches to methodology relatively recently. They tend to reject the belief that researchers can ever discover some objective truth about the social world. Instead they believe that all that can be done is to examine the social world from the viewpoint of the different actors within it, and to deconstruct or take apart existing explanations of society. They reject the claims of traditional quantitative, qualitative and critical researchers that it is possible to determine the truth about society. Whatever method is used, researchers will be left with many different accounts of the social world, and no particular account can be singled out as being better than the others.

Critical social science and postmodernism will be examined in detail later in the chapter, but first the contrast between quantitative and qualitative approaches will be discussed in greater depth.

'Scientific' quantitative methodology

As the introduction suggested, some sociologists have tried to adopt the methods of the natural sciences. In doing so they have tended to advocate the use of quantitative methods. The earliest attempt to use such methods in sociology is known as positivism.

Positivism, Durkheim and sociology

The French writer Auguste Comte (1798–1857) was the first person to use the word 'sociology', and he also coined the term 'positive philosophy' (Comte, 1986, first published in the 1840s). Comte believed that there was a hierarchy of scientific subjects, with sociology at the pinnacle of that hierarchy. Comte was confident that scientific knowledge about society could be accumulated and used to improve human existence so that society could be run rationally without religion or superstition getting in the way of progress.

Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) advocated a similar methodology to that of Comte. He has been widely regarded as a positivist. Durkheim's classic study *Suicide* (1970, first published 1897) is often seen as a model of positivist research and it does indeed follow many of the methodological procedures of positivism. Certain aspects of Durkheim's work will be used to illustrate the positivist approach. However, strictly speaking Durkheim was not a positivist. As the discussion below will show, he did not follow the positivist rule which states that sociological study should be confined to observable or directly measurable phenomena.

1 Social facts

First, as a positivist, Comte believed that the scientific study of society should be confined to collecting information about phenomena that can be objectively observed and classified. Comte argued that sociologists should not be concerned with the internal meanings, motives, feelings and emotions of individuals. Since these mental states exist only in the person's consciousness, they cannot be observed and so they cannot be measured in any objective way.

Durkheim agreed that sociologists should confine themselves to studying social facts. He argued that 'The first and most fundamental rule is: *Consider social facts as things*' (Durkheim, 1938, first published 1895). This means that the belief systems, customs and institutions of society – the facts of the social world – should be considered as things in the same way as the objects and events of the natural world.

However, Durkheim did not believe that social facts consisted only of those things that could be directly observed or measured. To Durkheim, social facts included such phenomena as the belief systems, customs and institutions of society. Belief systems are not directly measurable or observable since they exist in the consciousness of humans. Nevertheless, Durkheim saw them as existing over and above individual consciousness. They were not chosen by individuals and they could not be changed at will. Social facts, such as the customs of a particular profession, were external to each individual and constrained their behaviour. That is, each person had their options limited by the existence of customs and practices.

In Durkheim's view, society is not simply a collection of individuals, each acting independently in terms of his or her particular psychology or mental state. Instead, members of society are directed by collective beliefs, values and laws – by social facts which have an existence of their own. Social facts therefore make individuals behave in particular ways. Durkheim's definition and use of the term 'social facts' distinguish him from positivists such as Comte. In many other respects, though, he followed the logic and methods of positivism. (The differences between Durkheim's approach and positivism are further discussed on p. 976.)

2 Statistical data

The second aspect of positivism concerns its use of statistical data. Positivists believed it was possible to classify the social world in an objective way. Using these classifications it was then possible to count sets of observable social facts and so produce statistics. For example, Durkheim (1970) collected data on social facts such as the suicide rate and membership of different religions.

3 Correlation

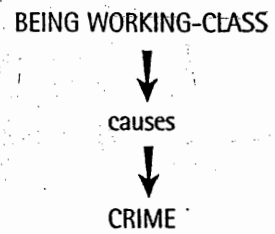
The third stage of positivist methodology entails looking for correlations between different social facts. A correlation is a tendency for two or more things to be found together, and it may refer to the strength of the relationship between them. In his study of suicide Durkheim found an apparent correlation between a particular religion, Protestantism, and a high suicide rate.

4 Causation

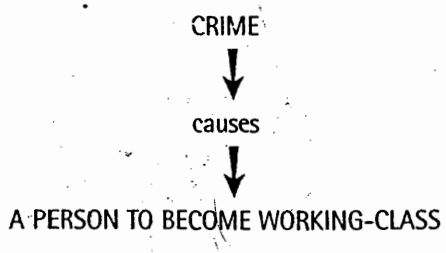
The fourth stage of positivist methodology involves a search for causal connections. If there is a strong

correlation between two or more types of social phenomena, then a positivist sociologist might suspect that one of these phenomena was causing the other to take place. However, this is not necessarily the case, and it is important to analyse the data carefully before any such conclusion can be reached.

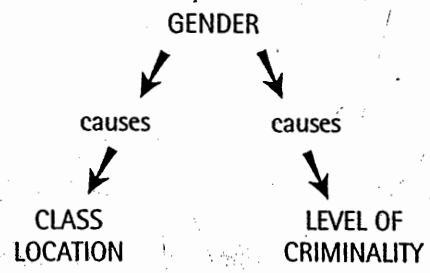
The example of class and criminality can be used to illustrate this point. Many sociologists have noted a correlation between being working-class and a relatively high chance of being convicted of a crime. This has led some (for instance, Robert Merton (1968)) to speculate that being working-class was one factor which might cause people to commit criminal acts. This can be illustrated simply as:



However, there are other possibilities that might explain the correlation. It could be that a similar proportion of criminals come from all social classes but that conviction for crime causes criminals of middle-class origin to be downwardly socially mobile, and to become working-class, since their criminal records might prevent them from obtaining non-manual work. In other words it is being criminal that causes a person to become working-class, and not the other way round. This is illustrated as:



Furthermore, there is the even more serious possibility that an apparent connection between two social phenomena might be a spurious or indirect correlation. This occurs when two or more phenomena are found together but have no direct connection to each other: one does not therefore cause the other. It may be that some third factor has a causal relationship to both the phenomena or factors being examined. For example, it may be that gender is related both to social class and to the likelihood of committing a crime, and that class and crime are not directly connected at all. Men may be more likely to commit crimes than women and may also be more likely to have manual jobs. Thus the original correlation discovered could be a product of the concentration of men in the working class, as the diagram below illustrates:



A further possibility is that the police discriminate against the working class and arrest more members of that class than of the middle class, even though the middle class are just as prone to crime.

Multivariate analysis

In order to overcome the problem of spurious correlation, Durkheim devised a technique known as multivariate analysis. This involves trying to isolate the effect of a particular independent variable upon the dependent variables. The dependent variable is the thing that is caused (in the example used above, crime); the independent variable(s) is/are the factor or factors that cause the dependent variable. In the diagram above, gender is an example of an independent variable.

To assess the influence of a particular independent variable – that is, to see if it is more or less important than another independent variable – it may be possible to produce comparisons where one variable is held constant, and the other is changed. For instance, the effect of gender on criminality could be isolated from the effect of class by comparing working-class men and women to see whether their crime rates were similar or different.

With the aid of computers and sophisticated statistical techniques, quantitative researchers can analyse the relative importance of many different variables. Durkheim had to make do with less sophisticated research procedures, but he used the same logic in his study of suicide. For example, he checked whether or not Protestantism was associated with a high suicide rate regardless of nationality by examining suicide rates in a range of countries.

Laws of human behaviour

Positivists believe that multivariate analysis can establish causal connections between two or more variables. If these findings are checked in a variety of contexts (for example, in different societies at different times), then the researchers can be confident that they have attained the ultimate goal of positivism: a law of human behaviour.

A scientific law consists of a statement about the relationship between two or more phenomena which

is true in all circumstances. Thus Newton's three Laws of Motion were supposed to describe the ways in which matter would always move. Similarly, Comte and Durkheim believed that real laws of human behaviour could be discovered.

Durkheim claimed to have discovered laws of human behaviour that governed the suicide rate. According to Durkheim the suicide rate always rose during a time of economic boom or slump.

Comte believed he had discovered a law that all human societies passed through three stages: the theological, the metaphysical, and the positive. In the first stage humans believed that events were caused by the actions of gods; in the second, events were held to be caused by abstract forces; but, in the third, scientific rationality triumphed so that scientific laws formed the basis of explanation.

Positivists and Durkheim, then, believe that laws of human behaviour can be discovered by the collection of objective facts about the social world in a statistical form, by the careful analysis of these facts, and by repeated checking of the findings in a series of contexts. From this point of view humans have little or no choice about how they behave. What takes place in their consciousness is held to be irrelevant since external forces govern human behaviour: people react to stimuli in the environment in a predictable and consistent way. They may also have little or no awareness of the factors shaping their actions. These can be uncovered through studying statistical patterns. The implication is that humans react directly to a stimulus without attaching a meaning to it first. (A simple example would be that if a motorist saw the stimulus of a red light, he or she would automatically react to it by stopping.) It is this implication of the positivist approach that has attracted the strongest criticism, as will become clear as the chapter develops.

Positivism is based upon an understanding of science that sees science as using a mainly inductive methodology. An inductive methodology starts by collecting the data. The data are then analysed, and out of this analysis theories are developed. Once the theory has been developed it can then be tested against other sets of data to see if it is confirmed or not. If it is repeatedly confirmed, then Durkheim and positivists such as Comte assume they have discovered a law of human behaviour.

Karl Popper – falsification and deduction

Despite the undoubted influence of positivist methodology within sociology, the inductive method on which it is usually based has not, by any means, been accepted by all scientists. Indeed, many scientists now advocate and use an alternative, deductive approach. Although the logic of the deductive approach is similar in many ways to positivism, the differences have important implications.

This alternative methodology in both natural science and sociology is supported by Karl Popper in his book *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (1959). The deductive approach reverses the process of induction. It starts with a theory and tests it against the evidence, rather than developing a theory as a result of examining the data.

Popper argues that scientists should start with a 'hypothesis' or a statement that is to be tested. This statement should be very precise, and should state exactly what will happen in particular circumstances. On the basis of the hypothesis it should be possible to deduce predictions about the future. Thus, for example, Newton's Law of Gravity enables hypotheses to be made about the movement of bodies of a given mass, and these hypotheses can then be used to make predictions which can be tested against future events.

According to Popper it matters little how a scientific theory originates. It does not, as positivists suggest, have to come from prior observation and analysis of data. Scientists can develop theories however they wish – their theories might come to them in dreams or in moments of inspiration. What is important, and what makes them scientific, is their ability to be tested by making precise predictions on the basis of the theory.

Popper differs from positivists in that he denies that it is ever possible to produce laws that will necessarily be found to be true for all time. He argues that, logically, however many times a theory is apparently proved correct because predictions made on the basis of that theory come true, there is always the possibility that at some future date the theory will be proved wrong, or 'falsified'. For example, to Popper, the hypothesis 'all swans are white' is a scientific statement because it makes a precise prediction about the colour of any swan that can be found. But, however many times the statement is confirmed – if five, five hundred or five thousand swans are examined and found to be white – the very next swan examined may prove to be black and the hypothesis will be falsified. Laws, whether of natural science or of human behaviour, do not, from this point of view, necessarily have the permanence attributed to them by positivists.

Popper suggests that scientists have a duty to be objective, and to test their theories as rigorously as possible. Therefore, once they have formulated hypotheses, and made predictions, it is necessary to try constantly to find evidence that disproves or falsifies their theories. In the natural sciences one

method that has been developed in order to falsify theories is the laboratory experiment. This method, and its relevance to sociology, will now be examined. Popper's view of science will be evaluated later in the chapter (see pp. 1023–7).

The laboratory experiment and sociology

The word 'science' conjures up an image of researchers in white coats carrying out experiments in laboratories. This image is not usually associated, however, with sociology. Indeed sociologists very rarely carry out laboratory experiments even if they support the use of 'scientific' methods in their research. The reasons for this will be examined later, but first, why does the laboratory experiment enjoy such popularity in natural science?

The main reason why scientists use the laboratory experiment is because it enables them to test precise predictions in exactly the way that Popper advocates. Laboratories are controlled environments in which the researcher can manipulate the various independent variables however they wish. They can calculate the effects of a single independent variable while removing the possibility that any other factors are affecting the dependent variable they are studying. This is achieved through the use of a control with which to compare the experiment.

For example, if an experimenter wished to determine the importance of the independent variable, light, on the growth of plants, they could set up a laboratory experiment to isolate the effects of light from other independent variables. Thus the experimenter would set up an experiment and a control in which every variable other than the amount of light was held constant. Two sets of identical plants of the same species, age, condition and size would be kept at the same temperature, in an environment of the same humidity, planted in the same type and amount of soil, and given the same amount of water at the same time. The control group of plants would be exposed to a given intensity of light for a given period of time. The experiment group could be exposed to either more or less light than the control group. The results would be observed, measured and quantified. A single variable – light – would have been isolated to find the effects it had, independently of all the other variables.

The laboratory experiment allows researchers to be far more confident that they have isolated a particular variable than they would have been had they observed plants in the wild, where it would not be possible to regulate the various independent variables so tightly. Furthermore, the laboratory experiment facilitates replication: so long as the precise nature of the experiment is recorded, other scientists can reproduce identical conditions to see if the same results are obtained.

From Popper's point of view the experimental method is extremely useful because it allows the sort of precision in the making and repeated testing of predictions that he advocates. Laboratory experiments are quite frequently used in some 'social sciences', particularly psychology, but sociologists almost never make use of them. There are two main reasons for this:

1. Laboratories are unnatural situations. Members of society do not, in the normal course of events, spend their time under observation in laboratories. The knowledge that they are being studied, and the artificiality of the situation, might well affect the behaviour of those involved and distort the results so as to make them of little use.
2. It is impractical to carry out experiments in laboratories on many of the subjects of interest to sociologists. It is not possible to fit a community – let alone a whole society – into a laboratory. Nor is it possible to carry out a laboratory experiment over a sufficiently long time span to study social change.

Field experiments

As a consequence of the above difficulties, when sociologists do carry out experiments they are normally outside a laboratory. Such experiments are known as field experiments. They involve intervening in the social world in such a way that hypotheses can be tested by isolating particular variables.

For example, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) tested the hypothesis that self-fulfilling prophecies could affect educational attainment by manipulating the independent variables of the pupils' IQ (intelligence quotient) scores known to teachers (see p. 846).

In an experiment into gender role socialization carried out at Sussex University, girl babies were dressed up in blue clothes, boy babies in pink, and the reactions of adults to their behaviour were recorded. Not only did the adults assume that the boys were girls, and vice versa, but they interpreted their behaviour differently depending upon the sex they presumed them to be. Thus restless 'boys' (in reality the girls dressed in blue) were regarded as wanting to be active and to play, while restless 'girls' were regarded as being emotionally upset and in need of comfort (reported in Nicholson, 1993).

In another experiment, Sissons observed the reactions of members of the public when they were asked for directions by an actor. The location of the experiment was held constant (it took place outside Paddington station), but the appearance of the actor varied. Halfway through the experiment the actor changed from being dressed as a businessman to being dressed as a labourer. Sissons found that the

public were more helpful when the actor was dressed as a businessman rather than as a labourer (discussed in McNeill, 1985).

Brown and Gay (1985) conducted field experiments in which they made bogus applications for jobs by letter and telephone, identifying themselves as being from different ethnic groups (white, Asian and Afro-Caribbean). They found that the applications from supposedly non-white candidates were less likely to lead to a job interview than those from supposedly white candidates (see pp. 282–3).

Although field experiments overcome the problem of experiments taking place in an unnatural setting, these experiments do have other problems associated with them. First, it is not possible to control variables as closely as it is in the laboratory. Thus in Sissons's experiment, for example, it was not possible to carry out the two experiments at the same time and the same place, and, since they took place at different times, factors such as the weather and the time of day might have affected the results.

Second, in some field experiments the fact that an experiment is taking place can affect the results. This is often known as the Hawthorne Effect, after a famous experiment conducted at the Hawthorne works of the Western Electricity Company in Chicago and analysed by Elton Mayo (1933). The experiment was intended to test various hypotheses about worker productivity. Variables such as room temperature, the strength of the lighting and the length of breaks were varied, but, irrespective of whether working conditions were improved or made worse, productivity usually increased. It appeared that the workers were responding to the knowledge that an experiment was taking place rather than to the variables being manipulated.

To avoid the Hawthorne Effect (which can render the results of experiments worthless), it is necessary that the subjects of experimental research are unaware that the experiment is taking place. This, however, raises a further problem: the morality of conducting experiments on people without their consent. Some sociologists strongly object to doing this. Some experiments, such as Sissons's, may not have great moral implications, but others do. In Rosenthal and Jacobson's experiment (described above) the researchers may have held back the educational careers of some children by lying to their teachers.

Although field experiments open up greater possibilities than laboratory experiments, they are still likely to be confined to small-scale studies over short periods of time. Experimentation on society as a whole, or on large groups in society, is only likely to be possible with the consent of governments. Few governments are willing to surrender their authority to social researchers who are keen to test the theories and hypotheses they have developed! In any case it would cost a fortune and funds for research are limited. In these circumstances sociologists normally rely upon studying society as it is, rather than trying to manipulate it so that their theories can be tested directly.

The comparative method

The comparative method, as its name suggests, involves the use of comparisons. These may be comparisons of different societies, of groups within one or more societies, and comparisons at the same or different points in time. Unlike the experiment, the comparative method is based upon an analysis of what has happened, or is happening in society, rather than upon the situations artificially created by a researcher. The data used in the comparative method may come from any of the primary or secondary sources discussed in detail later in this chapter.

The comparative method overcomes some of the problems involved with experimentation in 'social sciences'. Moral problems are not as acute as in experimentation, since the researcher is not intervening directly in shaping the social world. Furthermore, the researcher is less likely to affect artificially the behaviour of those being studied, since the data, at least in theory, come from 'natural' situations.

The comparative method uses a similar 'scientific' logic to that employed by positivists, or to that used in the deductive approach supported by Popper. Systematic comparisons can be used either to establish correlations and ultimately causal connections and supposed 'laws', or to rigorously test hypotheses.

This method can be used to isolate variables to try to uncover the cause or causes of the social phenomenon being studied. It can be a far less convenient approach than laboratory or field experimentation. There is no guarantee that the available data will make it possible to isolate variables precisely when comparing, for example, the development of two different societies. There may be many ways in which they differ, and determining which independent variables caused the differences in the societies may not be straightforward.

The comparative method is superior to the experiment, though, in that it allows the sociologist to study the causes of large-scale social change over long periods of time. The historical development of societies can be studied; this is not feasible using experiments.

The comparative method has been widely used in sociology, particularly but by no means exclusively by those advocating a 'scientific' quantitative approach to the subject. The major founders of the discipline – Marx, Durkheim and Weber – all employed the comparative method.

Marx (1974) compared a wide variety of societies in order to develop his theory of social change and to support his claim that societies passed through different stages (see Chapter 15 for further details).

Durkheim, too, used the comparative method in his study of the division of labour and the change from mechanical to organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1947, first published 1893) (see pp. 691–3 for further details). Durkheim's study of suicide (which is considered later in this chapter) is a classic example of how detailed statistical analysis – involving the comparison of different societies, different groups within society, and different time periods – can be used to try to isolate the variables that cause a social phenomenon (see pp. 974–6).

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1958, first published 1930) Weber systematically compared early capitalist countries in Western Europe and North America with countries such as China and India to try to show a correlation between early capitalism and Calvinism (see pp. 446–51).

Modern sociologists have followed in the footsteps of Marx, Durkheim and Weber. There are numerous examples of the use of this method throughout this book, including David Martin's comparison of secularization in different countries (see pp. 490–2), Cicourel's comparison of juvenile justice in two Californian cities (see pp. 379–80), Michael Mann's comparison of networks of power in different territories (see pp. 633–5), and Fiona Devine's comparison of affluent workers in Luton in the 1990s and similar workers in the 1960s (see pp. 81–3).

Interpretive and qualitative methodology

Despite the considerable influence of the 'scientific' approaches to sociological methodology described above, an alternative series of interpretive or qualitative approaches has long existed within sociology. These approaches claim either that 'scientific' approaches are inadequate on their own for collecting, analysing and explaining data, or that they are totally inappropriate in a subject that deals with human behaviour. Thus some sociologists who advocate the use of interpretive and qualitative approaches suggest that they should be used to supplement 'scientific' quantitative methodology; others that they should replace 'scientific' approaches.

Qualitative data

Quantitative data are data in a numerical form: for example, official statistics on crime, suicide and divorce rates. By comparison, qualitative data are usually presented in words. These may be a description of a group of people living in poverty, providing a full and in-depth account of their way of life, or a transcript of an interview in which people describe and explain their attitude towards and experience of religion.

Compared to quantitative data, qualitative data are usually seen as richer, more vital, as having greater depth and as more likely to present a true picture of a way of life, of people's experiences, attitudes and beliefs.

The interpretive approach

Sociologists who take an interpretive approach are usually the strongest advocates of qualitative data. They argue that the whole basis of sociology is the interpretation of social action. Social action can only be understood by interpreting the meanings and motives on which it is based. Many interpretive sociologists argue that there is little chance of discovering these meanings and motives from quantitative data. Only from qualitative data – with its greater richness and depth – can the sociologist hope to interpret the meanings that lie behind social action.

Some interpretive sociologists reject the use of natural science methodology for the study of social action. They see the subject matter of the social and natural sciences as fundamentally different. The natural sciences deal with matter. Since matter has no consciousness, its behaviour can be explained simply as a reaction to external stimuli. It is compelled to react in this way because its behaviour is essentially meaningless. Unlike matter, people have consciousness. They see, interpret and experience the world in terms of meanings; they actively construct their own social reality. Meanings do not have an independent existence, a reality of their own which is somehow separate from social actors. They are not imposed by an external society that constrains members to act in certain ways. Instead they are constructed and reconstructed by actors in the course of social interaction.

People do not react automatically to external stimuli as positivists claim. Instead, they interpret the meaning of a stimulus before responding to it. Motorists who see a red light will not automatically stop in response to this stimulus. They will attach a meaning to the stimulus before acting. Motorists might conclude that the light is a decoration on a Christmas tree, and not a traffic signal, or alternatively that it indicates that a nearby building is a brothel. Having established the meaning of the stimulus to their own satisfaction, the motorists will then decide how they wish to respond. Motorists being pursued by the police might jump a red light rather than stop. If the stimulus is regarded as a decoration, motorists might stop to admire it, or continue on their way without giving the light a second thought. Clearly, the motorist who concludes that the red light is advertising a brothel might respond in a variety of ways!

Whatever action is taken by an individual, advocates of interpretive sociology would argue that the causal explanation of human behaviour is impossible without some understanding of the subjective states of the individuals concerned. Thus a positivist might be content to discover what external factors led to a certain type of human behaviour, while an advocate of a more qualitative approach would be interested in the meaning attached to the behaviour by those engaging in it.

It is at this point that opponents of positivist and 'scientific' methods begin to diverge. While some, like Weber, regard the understanding of meaning as necessary to making causal explanations possible, others, such as phenomenologists, regard understanding as the end product of sociological research and they reject the possibility of producing causal explanations at all.

The implications of three qualitative interpretive sociological approaches for methodology will now be briefly examined. They are dealt with in more detail in the next chapter.

1 Max Weber

Weber defined sociology as the study of social action (Weber, in Gerth and Mills (eds), 1948). Action is social when it takes account of other members of society. Weber believed that an explanation of social action necessitated an understanding of the meanings and motives that underlie human behaviour. The sociologist must interpret the meanings given to actions by the actors themselves. For instance, in order to explain why an individual was chopping wood, the sociologist must discover the person's motives for doing so – whether they were doing it to earn money, to make a fire, to work off anger or for some other motive. According to Weber, understanding motives could be achieved through *verstehen* – imagining yourself to be in the position of the person whose behaviour you were seeking to explain.

Weber's emphasis on meanings and motives is obvious throughout his work. For example, in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1958), one of his main concerns was to interpret the beliefs and motives of the early Calvinists (see pp. 446–51). However, he was not simply concerned with understanding meanings and motives for their own sake. Weber wanted to explain social action and social change. He was interested in causality.

This can be seen clearly from The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Using the comparative method, Weber systematically compared the characteristics of early capitalist countries and technologically advanced oriental societies. By doing so he claimed to have isolated 'ascetic' Protestantism as a variable that contributed to the rise of capitalism. He saw the moral and religious beliefs and motives of the early Calvinists as one of the main factors accounting for the emergence of capitalism in the West. (For a fuller account of Weber's methodology, see Chapter 7.)

2 Symbolic interactionism

Symbolic interactionists do not reject the attempt to establish causal relationships within sociology; indeed they see this as an important part of the sociologist's work. However, they tend to believe that statistical data does not provide any great insight into human behaviour. Interactionists see human behaviour as largely governed by the internal processes by which people interpret the world around them and give meaning to their own lives.

In particular, interactionists believe that individuals possess a 'self-concept', or image of themselves, that is built up, reinforced or modified in the process of interaction with other members of society. Thus human beings have an image of what sort of person they are, and they will tend to act in accordance with that image. They might see themselves as caring or tough, honest or dishonest, weak or strong, and their behaviour reflects this sense of their own character.

The responses of others to an individual may make it impossible for him or her to sustain a particular self-concept; the self-concept will change, and in turn the behaviour of the individual will alter accordingly. Thus interactionists have tried to show how the labelling of people as deviant, or as educational successes or failures, can produce self-fulfilling prophecies in which their behaviour comes to live up (or down) to the expectations of others.

(For details of these labelling theories, see pp. 372–9 and 843–9.)

The implications of these views for sociological methodology have been developed by the American interactionist Herbert Blumer (1962). Blumer rejects what he regards as the simplistic attempts to establish causal relationships which characterize positivist methodology.

As an example, Blumer refers to the proposition that industrialization causes the replacement of extended families with nuclear families. He objects to the procedure of isolating variables and assuming that one causes the other with little or no reference to the actor's view of the situation. He argues that data on the meanings and interpretations which actors give to the various facets of industrialization and family life are essential before a relationship can be established between the two factors.

Blumer claims that many sociologists conduct their research with only a superficial familiarity with the area of life under investigation. This is often combined with a preoccupation with aping the research procedures of the natural sciences. The net result is the imposition of definitions on the social world with little regard for their relevance to that world. Rather than viewing social reality from the actor's perspective, many sociologists have attempted to force it into predefined categories and concepts. This provides little chance of capturing social reality, but a very good chance of distorting it.

In place of such procedures Blumer argues that sociologists must immerse themselves in the area of life that they seek to investigate. Rather than attempting to fit data into predefined categories, they must attempt to grasp the actor's view of social reality. This involves 'feeling one's way inside the experience of the actor'. Since action is directed by actors' meanings, the sociologist must 'catch the process of interpretation through which they construct their action'. This means that the researcher 'must take the role of the acting unit whose behaviour he is studying'.

Blumer offers no simple solutions as to how this type of research may be conducted. However, the flavour of the research procedures he advocates is captured in the following quotation:

> *It is a tough job requiring a high order of careful and honest probing, creative yet disciplined imagination, resourcefulness and flexibility in study, pondering over what one is finding, and a constant readiness to test and recast one's views and images of the area.*
>
> Blumer, 1962

(For a detailed discussion of symbolic interactionism see Chapter 15.)

3 Phenomenology

The nature of social reality

Phenomenology represents the most radical departure from the 'scientific' quantitative methodology examined at the start of the chapter. Phenomenologists go further than interactionists in that they reject the possibility of producing causal explanations of human behaviour. They do not believe that it is possible objectively to measure and classify the world. To phenomenologists, human beings make sense of the world by imposing meanings and classifications upon it. These meanings and classifications make up social reality. There is no objective reality beyond these subjective meanings.

Thus, for example, in Cicourel's study of juvenile justice (Cicourel, 1976) (examined on pp. 379–80), police and juvenile officers had the problem of classifying the behaviour of juveniles into the categories: delinquent and non-delinquent. Cicourel did not find this process to be objective: it largely depended on the stereotypes of the 'typical delinquent' held by the officials. As such, the data on convictions for various delinquent acts were a social product based upon the commonsense assumptions of the authorities who created the statistics.

At first sight, Cicourel's study might simply suggest that the statistics were invalid and that further research might well reveal the true rate of delinquency. However, phenomenologists reject this view. All statistics are social products which reflect the meanings of those who created them. The meanings are the reality which sociologists must examine. Crime statistics have no existence outside the meanings and interpretive procedures that produced them. To assume that there is a true crime rate that has an objective reality is to misunderstand the nature of the social world. From a phenomenological perspective, the job of the sociologist is simply to understand the meanings from which social reality is constructed.

Phenomenologists believe that the problem of classification is universal, and not unique to particular types of data. All people, all of the time, make decisions about how to classify things, and these decisions are the product of social processes. For example, on a simple level, what one person might classify as a 'chair' might be classified by another person as a 'wooden object', and by a third person who was involved in a pub brawl as 'a missile'. From this point of view all data are the product of the classification systems used by those who produce them. If the classification system were different, the data would be different.

Furthermore, to phenomenologists there is no way of choosing between different systems of classification and

seeing one as superior to another. It is therefore pointless to use data which rest upon the interpretations of individuals in order to try to establish correlations and causal relationships. Thus, using official statistics to reach the conclusion that being working-class causes a person to commit crimes would not be justified. The figures would only show how crime was defined and classified, rather than what criminal actions had been carried out by particular groups within the population.

Phenomenologists believe that sociologists should limit themselves to understanding the meanings and classifications which people use to give order to and make sense of the world. With their exclusive emphasis upon meanings and the social construction of reality, phenomenologists concentrate almost entirely on the subjective aspects of social life which are internal to the individual's consciousness. They therefore tend to use rather different research methods from the more 'scientific' approaches.

The implications of the different approaches considered so far will now be discussed with reference to a particular area of social life: suicide.

The sociology of suicide

Arguably, the topic of suicide has received a disproportionate amount of attention from sociologists. A large number of books and articles have been written on the subject, whereas other areas of social life that could be seen as equally important – for instance, murder – have not been the subject of so much interest. The main reason for this is the fact that Durkheim used this topic to illustrate his own methodological approach.

Durkheim – *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*

In 1897 Durkheim published his book *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (1970), and many studies of suicide have been, at least in part, a reaction to Durkheim's work. Some sociologists have tried to show how Durkheim's approach was successful in explaining suicide; others have tried to develop and improve his theory; others have rejected his whole approach. Suicide has become an area in which different methodological approaches have been tested and disputed.

Durkheim chose to study suicide for a number of reasons. In late nineteenth-century France, sociology was gradually becoming established as an academic discipline and Durkheim wanted to reinforce this process and show how his particular approach to the subject was superior to others. He wished to use his study to show how there was a sociological level of analysis which was distinct from other disciplines and which made an important contribution to the explanation of social phenomena.

Suicide was, and still is, widely regarded as a highly individual act. For example, it is often explained in terms of an individual's depression. It therefore appeared an unlikely candidate for sociological analysis with its emphasis on the social rather than the individual. There were established psychological theories of suicide. Durkheim attempted to show that suicide could not be fully explained by psychologists. Sociology could explain aspects of suicide which psychology could not.

Durkheim did not deny that particular circumstances would lead to a particular person taking his or her own life, but personal reasons could not account for the *suicide rate*. For example, he tried to show that there was no relationship between the incidence of insanity (which many psychologists associated with suicide) and the suicide rate. He found that Jews had higher rates of insanity than other religious groups, but they had lower rates of suicide.

Durkheim also chose to study suicide because of the availability of suicide statistics from a number of European countries. He regarded these statistics as social facts and so believed that they could be used to find the sociological causes of suicide rates. He could try to establish correlations, and, using the comparative method, could uncover the patterns that would reveal the causal relationships at work in the production of suicide rates. In this way he aimed to demonstrate that sociology was as rigorous a discipline as the natural sciences.

In order to achieve these objectives Durkheim first tried to show that suicide rates were relatively stable in a particular society over a period of time. As Table 14.1 shows, over the periods covered there was a remarkable consistency in the comparative suicide rates of the European societies in question. Durkheim felt able to claim that 'The suicide-rate is therefore a factual order, unified and definite, as is shown by both its permanence and its variability.' Furthermore, as will be discussed shortly, Durkheim found consistent variations in the suicide rate between different groups within the same society. He believed it was impossible to explain these patterns if suicide was seen solely as a personal and individual act.

Table 14.1 Rate of suicides per million inhabitants in different European countries

	Period			Numerical position in period		
	1866–70	1874–5	1874–8	1	2	3
Italy	30	35	38	1	1	1
Belgium	66	69	78	2	3	4
England	67	66	69	3	2	2
Norway	76	73	71	4	4	3
Austria	78	94	130	5	7	7
Sweden	85	81	91	6	5	5
Bavaria	90	91	100	7	6	6
France	135	150	160	8	9	9
Prussia	142	134	152	9	8	8
Denmark	277	258	255	10	10	10
Saxony	293	267	334	11	11	11

Source: Durkheim (1897/1952) *Suicide*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.

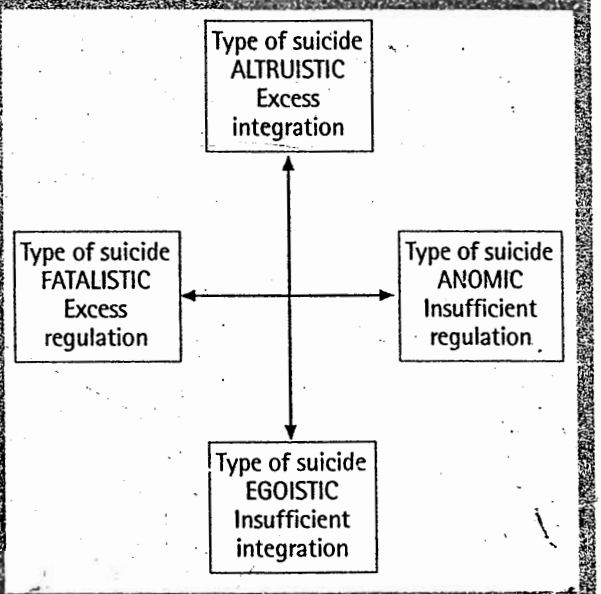
Durkheim then went on to establish correlations between suicides and other sets of social facts. He found that suicide rates were higher in predominantly Protestant countries than in Catholic ones. Jews had a low suicide rate, lower even than Roman Catholics. Generally, married people were less prone to suicide than those who were single, although married women who remained childless for a number of years ended up with a high suicide rate. Durkheim also found that a low suicide rate was associated with political upheaval. The suicide rate in France fell after the *coup d'état* of Louis Bonaparte, for example. War also reduced the suicide rate. After war broke out in 1866 between Austria and Italy, the suicide rate fell by 14 per cent in both countries.

Having established these correlations, Durkheim used multivariate analysis to isolate the most important variables and to determine whether there was a genuine causal relationship between these factors and suicide. For example, Durkheim recognized the possibility that it might be the national culture rather than the main religion of particular countries that accounted for their suicide rate. In order to test whether this was the case he checked on differences within the population of particular countries to see whether these differences supported his views on the importance of religion. The evidence supported Durkheim. For example, Bavaria, the area of Germany with the highest number of Roman Catholics, also had the lowest suicide rate. He also checked the relative importance of different factors: he found that high suicide rates were correlated with high levels of education. However, he established that religion was more important than level of education. Jews had a low suicide rate despite having a high level of education.

Types of suicide

From his analysis of the relationship between suicide rates and a range of social factors, Durkheim began to distinguish types of suicide. He believed that the suicide rate was determined by the relationships between individuals and society. In particular, suicide rates were dependent upon the degree to which individuals were integrated into social groups and the degree to which society regulated individual behaviour. On this basis he distinguished four types of suicide: egoistic, altruistic, anomic and fatalistic, as illustrated in Figure 14.1.

Figure 14.1 Suicide types and the balance of society



Source: D. Rose and B. Newby (1983) *The Problem of Sociology*, Hutchinson, London.

Egoistic suicide resulted from the individual being insufficiently integrated into the social groups and society to which he or she belonged. This, according to Durkheim, accounted for the discrepancy between the suicide rates of Protestants and Roman Catholics. He argued that the Catholic religion integrated its members more strongly into a religious community. The long-established beliefs and traditional rituals of the Catholic Church provided a uniform system of religious belief and practice into which the lives of its members were closely intertwined. The Catholic faith was rarely questioned and the church had strong controls over the conscience and behaviour of its members. The result was a homogeneous religious

community, unified and integrated by uniform belief and standardized ritual.

By comparison, the Protestant Church encouraged its members to develop their own interpretation of religion. Protestantism advocated 'free inquiry' rather than the imposition of traditional religious dogma. In Durkheim's view, 'The Protestant is far more the author of his faith.' As a result, Protestants were less likely to belong to a community that was unified by a commitment to common religious beliefs and practices. Durkheim concluded that the higher rate of suicide associated with Protestantism 'results from its being a less strongly integrated church than the Catholic church'.

Durkheim also related egoistic suicide to 'domestic society' or family relationships. The unmarried and childless were less integrated into a family than the married and those with children. The former group had less responsibility for others and as a consequence were more prone to egoism and a high suicide rate.

Durkheim thought that anomic suicide was the other main type of suicide in industrial societies. Anomic suicides took place when society did not regulate the individual sufficiently. This occurred when traditional norms and values were disrupted by rapid social change which produced uncertainty in the minds of individuals as society's guidelines for behaviour became increasingly unclear. Not surprisingly, Durkheim found that suicide rates rose during periods of economic depression, such as the period following the crash of the Paris Bourse (stock exchange) in 1882. What was more surprising – and at first sight difficult to explain – was the rise in the suicide rate during a period of economic prosperity. The conquest of Rome by Victor-Emmanuel in 1870 formed the basis of Italian unity and led to an economic boom with rapidly rising salaries and living standards, but it also led to a rising suicide rate. Durkheim reasoned that both booms and slumps brought the uncertainty of anomie, and so more suicides.

Durkheim thought that egoism and anomie were problems that affected all industrial societies to a greater or lesser extent. Because of the highly specialized division of labour in such societies they were less integrated than simple or 'primitive' societies.

Pre-industrial societies could suffer from the opposite types of suicide to egoistic and anomic: altruistic and fatalistic.

Altruistic suicide took place when the individual was so well integrated into society that they sacrificed their own life out of a sense of duty to others. In the past, Hindu widows would kill themselves at their husband's funeral (suttee); and in traditional Ashanti society some of the king's followers were expected to commit suicide after the death of the monarch. Individuals were so strongly integrated into their society that they would make the ultimate sacrifice for the benefit of others.

The fourth and final type of suicide, distinguished by Durkheim as fatalistic suicide, occurred when society restricted the individual too much. It was the suicide 'of persons with futures pitilessly blocked and passions violently choked by oppressive discipline'. Durkheim thought that this type of suicide was of little importance in modern societies, but it was of some historical interest, being the cause of high suicide rates among slaves.

Durkheim, suicide and methodology

Durkheim's study of suicide illustrates his views both on society and on methodology. He believed it was essential to achieve the right amount of integration and regulation in society: 'primitive' societies tended to have too much of both; industrial societies too little of either. He used quantitative, 'scientific' methods, employing the comparative method in a highly systematic way. However, he did not simply follow the approach advocated by positivists. He used the supposedly objective statistics available on suicide to support the claim that unobservable forces shaped human behaviour. The total number of suicides was determined by such unobservable 'collective tendencies', which 'have an existence of their own' and are as 'real as cosmic forces'.

According to some of today's sociologists, such as Steve Taylor, Durkheim adopted a realist rather than a positivist view of science (realism is discussed on pp. 1026–7). However it is defined, it is nevertheless Durkheim's methodology in studying suicide that has attracted most attention from supporters and critics alike.

Positivist responses to Durkheim

Sociologists studying suicide who adopt positivist methods have generally praised most aspects of Durkheim's work. As early as 1930 Maurice Halbwachs carried out a review of his work. Halbwachs attempted to refine Durkheim's work and did not challenge the use of a 'scientific' approach in the study of suicide. Indeed he claimed that Durkheim had been able to provide 'a fully comprehensive treatment of the phenomenon of suicide, which could be modified and added to, but which in principle seems unassailable' (Halbwachs, 1930).

Halbwachs could add to and modify Durkheim's work by making use of both the more recent suicide statistics that had become available and new methods of statistical analysis such as the use of correlation coefficients. On the whole he confirmed what Durkheim had found. However, he did argue that

Durkheim had overestimated the importance of religion in determining the suicide rate. Halbwachs claimed to have found that differences between living in urban and rural areas had more impact than differences between Catholics and Protestants.

Jack P. Gibbs and Walter T. Martin (1964) agreed with Durkheim and Halbwachs that suicide should be studied using scientific methods and statistical data. However, they believed that Durkheim himself had failed to use sufficiently rigorous methods. As noted earlier, Durkheim sometimes used concepts that could not be directly observed or measured and thus he did not entirely follow positivist methods. Gibbs and Martin picked up on this and attempted to rectify what they saw as a flaw in Durkheim's otherwise exemplary method. In particular they suggested that Durkheim failed to define the concept of 'integration' in a sufficiently precise and measurable way. They point out that 'one does not see individuals tied to society in any physical sense'. Consequently it was impossible to test the theory that lack of integration led to a high suicide rate.

Gibbs and Martin did not believe that integration itself could be measured directly. The type of data necessary to measure the durability and stability of social relationships was not available. They therefore proposed that 'status integration' could be used as an indicator of social integration. Status integration concerns the extent to which individuals occupy sets of social roles that are commonly found together. People with a high degree of status integration have job, family and other statuses that are commonly grouped together. Those with a high degree of status incompatibility have unusual sets of statuses. Thus, in their theory, an occupation in which 75 per cent of its members are married is compatible with marriage, but if only 35 per cent are married it is not compatible. Individuals with compatible statuses are deemed to be highly integrated since it is assumed that they will have more and stronger social relationships than those with incompatible statuses. To Gibbs and Martin, the greater the degree of status integration in a population, the lower the suicide rate will be.

Gibbs and Martin's theory shows that some commentators criticized Durkheim for being insufficiently positivist and for making too little use of statistical data. The theory itself, though, does not bear close examination. Gibbs and Martin do not provide any evidence to show that status integration can be used to measure the strength of people's social relationships. Nor do they justify the use of statistics alone to identify compatible statuses. Hagedorn and Labowitz point out that male ballet dancers and male lion tamers are both uncommon but the former could be expected to have more incompatible statuses (quoted in S. Taylor, 1982).

Interpretive theories of suicide

Interpretive sociologists tend to make much stronger attacks on Durkheim's study of suicide than positivists. They tend to reject many of the basic principles of Durkheim's approach rather than quibbling about particular details. On the whole, however, they do acknowledge the possibility of explaining the causes of suicide.

J.D. Douglas – *The Social Meanings of Suicide*

One of the best-known interpretive critics of Durkheim is J.D. Douglas (1967). Douglas particularly criticizes the use of official statistics in the study of suicide, questioning their validity. He points out that the decision as to whether a sudden death is suicide is made by a coroner and is influenced by other people, such as the family and friends of the deceased. Douglas suggests that systematic bias may enter the process of reaching a decision, and that this bias could explain Durkheim's findings. For example, when a person is well integrated into a social group, his or her family and friends might be more likely to deny the possibility of suicide, both to themselves and to the coroner. They may feel a sense of personal responsibility which leads them to try to cover up the suicide. With less well-integrated members of society this is less likely to happen. So, while it might appear that the number of suicides is related to integration, in reality the degree of integration simply affects the chances of sudden death being recorded as suicide.

Douglas sees suicide statistics as the result of negotiations between the different parties involved. However, he does suggest that the distortions in the statistics are systematic. By implication, it might be possible to reduce or allow for these distortions to produce more reliable statistics that could be used to explain suicide.

Douglas's second main criticism of Durkheim is that it was ridiculous for Durkheim to treat all suicides as the same type of act without investigating the meaning attached to the act by those who took their own life. Douglas points out that in different cultures suicide can have very different meanings. For example, if a businessman in a modern industrial society kills himself because his business has collapsed, it is a quite different act from the suicide of an elderly Innuit (Eskimo) who kills himself for the benefit of his society at a time of food shortage. Each act has a different motive behind it and a social meaning that is related to the society and context in which it took place.

In order to categorize suicides according to their social meanings Douglas suggests that it is necessary to carry out case studies to discover the meanings of particular suicides. These case studies could be based

upon interviews with those who knew the person well, and upon the analysis of the suicide notes and diaries of the deceased. Although he did not carry out such research, Douglas nevertheless claims that the most common social meanings of suicide in Western industrial society are: transformation of the soul (for example, suicide as a way of getting to heaven); transformation of the self (suicide as a means of getting others to think of you differently); suicide as a means of achieving fellow-feeling (or sympathy); and suicide as a means of getting revenge by making others feel guilty.

In other societies other meanings might be more common.

Jean Baechler – suicide as problem solving

Douglas's approach has been developed further by the French sociologist Jean Baechler (1979). Baechler makes extensive use of case studies of suicide in existing literature, and he classifies suicides according to their meanings. He sees suicidal behaviour as a way of responding to and trying to solve a problem. Suicide is adopted when there seems to be no alternative solution. From this perspective it then becomes possible to classify suicides according to the type of solution they offer and the type of situation they are a response to: in other words, according to the end pursued by the suicidal individual. On this basis, Baechler divides suicides into four main types:

1 Escapist suicides take three forms. Some people take their own lives as a means of flight from an intolerable situation. For others, suicide is a response to grief about the loss of something in particular, perhaps a loved one or even a limb. Suicide may also be a means of self-punishment used by a person when they feel they have done wrong.

2 Aggressive suicides are a way of harming another person or people. There are four types of aggressive suicide. Vengeance suicides are intended to make another person feel guilty or to bring condemnation on them from society. For example, a wife might commit suicide to draw attention to her husband's cruelty. Crime suicides involve killing another person during the suicidal behaviour: for example, when someone shoots a spouse and then turns the gun on themselves. Blackmail suicides are used to persuade someone else to change their behaviour and treat the suicide victim better. Appeal suicides are used to show others that the person concerned is in need of help. Blackmail and appeal are often the ends pursued by those who make suicide attempts that either fail or are not entirely serious.

3 Oblative suicides are ways of achieving something that is particularly valued by the suicide victim. Sacrifice involves giving up your own life to save another person. Transfiguration suicides are used by a person so that they can obtain a more desirable state: for example, to join a loved one in the afterlife.

4 Ludic suicides involve taking deliberate risks that might lead to death. There are two types: the ordeal and the game. Ordeals are ways by which an individual tries to prove themselves to others by showing their bravery. Games involve taking risks 'for the hell of it': for example, playing Russian roulette with nobody else present.

Baechler is more explicit than Douglas in suggesting that causes of suicide can be found. However, unlike Durkheim, he does not believe that suicide can be explained wholly or even mainly in terms of external factors. As Baechler puts it, 'Whatever the external factor considered, it always happens that the number of those who do not commit suicide is infinitely greater than the number of those who do.' Not everyone whose business fails, or whose spouse dies, or who is a Protestant in an urban area, kills themselves. Thus, to Baechler, suicide must always be at least partially explained through 'personal factors' that are particular to an individual.

Baechler's work differs from the studies of suicide examined so far in that he includes attempted suicides under his general definition of 'suicidal behaviour'. Other sociologists have paid even more attention to the implications of attempted suicide (see pp. 980–1).

Criticisms of interpretive theories

Interpretive sociologists have been criticized in a number of ways. Steve Taylor (1989) criticizes both Douglas and Baechler for failing to recognize the value of Durkheim's work. He also questions the worth of schemes that are designed to categorize suicides according to their social meanings. Commenting on Baechler, he points out that individual cases often fit a number of categories, depending on the interpretation the researcher makes of the victim's motives. There is no reason to believe that these interpretations are any more reliable than suicide statistics. Taylor also criticizes Douglas for contradicting himself. At some points Douglas implies that suicide statistics can never be reliable since it is always a matter of judgement whether a death is a suicide. At other times he suggests that causes of suicide can be found. It is difficult to see how this can be if it is impossible to be certain whether an act is a suicide. Phenomenological sociologists have taken this type of criticism to its logical conclusion by denying there can be any objective data on which to base an explanation of suicide.

nologists can be turned against the sociological theories of phenomenologists themselves. If suicide statistics can be criticized as being no more than the interpretations of coroners, then studies such as that done by Atkinson can be criticized as being no more than the interpretation of a particular sociologist. Just as there is no way of checking on the validity of the verdicts reached by coroners, there is no way of checking on the validity of the accounts of how coroners reach their decisions advanced by phenomenological sociologists. Hindess therefore dismisses the work of such sociologists as being 'theoretically worthless', and he says of their work, 'A manuscript produced by a monkey at a typewriter would be no less valuable.' If phenomenological views were taken to their logical conclusion no sociology would be possible, and the attempt to understand and explain suicide would have to be abandoned.

Steve Taylor – beyond positivism and phenomenology

'Persons under trains'

Steve Taylor (1982, 1989, 1990) has tried to move beyond all the approaches that have been examined so far. However, his own study starts by confirming the view of many critics of Durkheim that suicide statistics are unreliable (Taylor, 1982).

Taylor conducted a study of 'persons under trains' – people who met their death when they were hit by tube trains on the London Underground. Over a 12-month period he found 32 cases where there were no strong clues as to the reason for the death. No suicide notes were left and no witnesses were able to state that the victim jumped deliberately. In effect, it was impossible to say with any certainty whether a suicide had taken place or not. Nevertheless, 17 cases resulted in suicide verdicts, 5 were classified as accidental deaths, and the remaining 10 produced open verdicts.

Taylor found that a number of factors made suicide verdicts more likely. People with a history of mental illness and those who had suffered some form of social failure or social disgrace were more likely to have their death recorded as suicide. When a person who had died had no good reason to be at the tube station, suicide verdicts were more likely. Taylor also found that the verdict was strongly influenced by the witnesses who testified to the dead person's state of mind. Where the witness was a close friend or family member they tended to deny that the person had reason to kill themselves and stress reasons why they might want to carry on living. Where the witnesses were less close to the person – for example, in one case their landlady – they were less likely to deny suicidal motives.

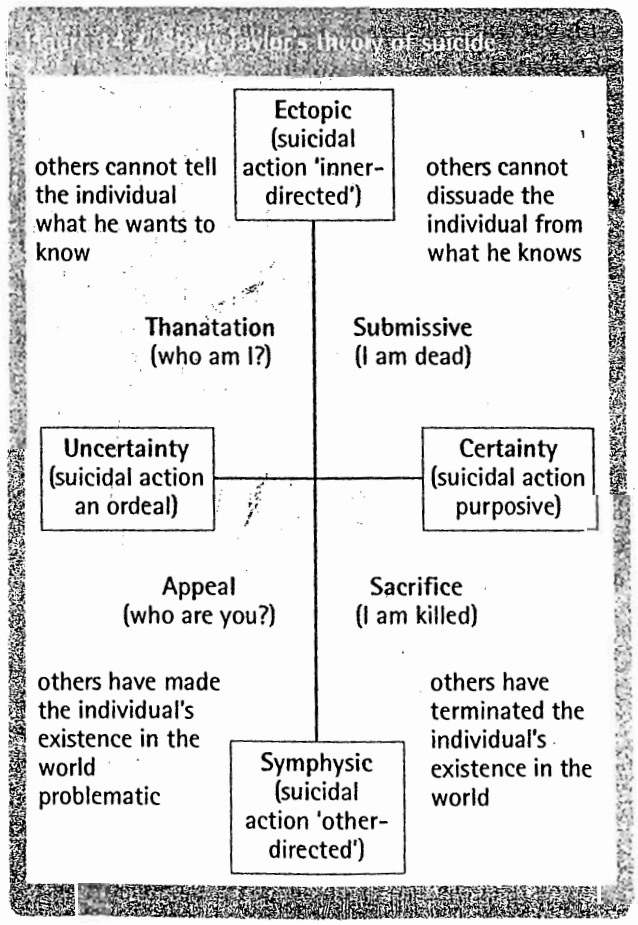
Taylor's methodology

Taylor, then, found strong evidence to support the view that suicide statistics cannot be taken at face value. Specific factors seemed to have influenced the verdicts reached and distorted suicide figures in particular ways. However, Taylor does not follow phenomenologists in arguing that such problems make it impossible to explain suicide. Taylor's own theory is not based upon statistical evidence but upon attempts to discover 'underlying, unobservable structures and causal processes'. This type of approach is based upon a realist conception of science, which is discussed later in this chapter. He develops his theory as an attempt to explain the key features of different types of suicide revealed in case studies.

Types of suicide

Taylor's theory is illustrated in Figure 14.2. He argues that suicides and suicide attempts are either 'ectopic' – they result from what a person thinks about themselves – or 'symphysic' – they result from a person's relationship with others. Suicides and suicide attempts are also related either to certainty or to uncertainty – people are sure or unsure about themselves or about others. Thus, like Durkheim, Taylor distinguishes four types of suicide connected to diametrically opposed situations. In Taylor's theory, however, they are situations faced by partic-

Figure 14.2 Steve Taylor's theory of suicide



J. Maxwell Atkinson – *Discovering Suicide*

Scientific and quantitative methods are completely rejected by some phenomenologists. This can be seen clearly from J. Maxwell Atkinson's study of suicide (Atkinson, 1978). Atkinson does not accept that a 'real' rate of suicide exists as an objective reality waiting to be discovered. Sociologists who proceed with this assumption will end up producing 'facts' on suicide that have nothing to do with the social reality they seek to understand. By constructing a set of criteria to categorize and measure suicide – in scientific language, by 'operationalizing' the concept of suicide – they will merely be imposing their reality on the social world. This will inevitably distort that world.

As Michael Phillipson observes, the positivist methodology employed by Durkheim and other researchers 'rides roughshod over the very social reality they are trying to comprehend' (Phillipson, 1972). Suicide is a construct of social actors, an aspect of social reality. Official statistics on suicide, therefore, are not 'wrong', 'mistaken', 'inaccurate' or 'in error'. They are part of the social world. They are the interpretations, made by officials, of what is seen to be unnatural death. Since the object of sociology is to comprehend the social world, that world can only be understood in terms of the categories, perceptions and interpretations of its members. Thus, with reference to suicide, the appropriate question for sociologists to ask is, in Atkinson's words, 'How do deaths get categorized as suicide?' (Atkinson, 1978).

Categorizing death

Atkinson's research focuses on the methods employed by coroners and their officers to categorize death. His data are drawn from discussions with coroners, attendance at inquests in three different towns, observation of a coroner's officer at work, and a part of the records of one particular coroner.

Atkinson argues that coroners have a 'commonsense theory' of suicide. If information about the deceased fits the theory, they are likely to categorize his or her death as suicide. In terms of this theory, coroners consider the following four types of evidence relevant for reaching a verdict:

1. They take into account whether or not suicide notes were left or threats of suicide preceded death.
2. Particular modes of dying are judged to be more or less likely to indicate suicide. Road deaths are rarely interpreted as an indicator for suicide, whereas drowning, hanging, gassing and drug overdose are more likely to be seen as such.
3. The location and circumstances of death are judged to be relevant. For example, death by gunshot is more likely to be defined as suicide if it occurred in a deserted lay-by than if it took place in the countryside during an organized shoot. In cases of gassing, a suicide verdict is more likely if windows, doors and ventilators have been blocked to prevent the escape of gas.
4. Coroners consider the biography of the deceased, with particular reference to his or her mental state and social situation. A history of mental illness, a disturbed childhood and evidence of acute depression are often seen as reason for suicide. A recent divorce, the death of a loved one or relative, a lack of friends, problems at work or serious financial difficulties are regarded as possible causes of suicide. This, as Atkinson points out, is remarkably similar to Durkheim's notion of social integration.

Referring to the case of an individual found gassed in his car, a coroner told Atkinson, 'There's a classic pattern for you – broken home, escape to the services, nervous breakdown, unsettled at work, no family ties – what could be clearer.' Thus coroners' views about why people commit suicide appear to influence their categorization of death.

Coroners' commonsense theories of suicide contain explanations of the causes of suicide. If information about the deceased's background fits these explanations, then a verdict of suicide is likely. Atkinson provides the following summary of the procedures used to categorize unnatural death. Coroners 'are engaged in analysing features of the deaths and of the biographies of the deceased according to a variety of taken-for-granted assumptions about what constitutes a "typical suicide", a "typical suicide biography"', and so on. Suicide can therefore be seen as an interpretation placed on an event – an interpretation which stems from a set of taken-for-granted assumptions.

This view has serious implications for research that treats official statistics on suicide as 'facts' and seeks to explain their cause. Researchers who look for explanations of suicide in the social background or mental state of the deceased may simply be uncovering and making explicit the taken-for-granted assumptions of coroners. Atkinson found that coroners' theories of suicide were remarkably similar to those of sociologists and psychologists. Since coroners use their theories of the cause of suicide as a means for categorizing suicide, this similarity might be expected. Thus social scientists who look for the causes of suicide in the social situation or mental condition of those officially classified as suicides may simply be revealing the commonsense theories of coroners.

Criticisms of phenomenology

Phenomenological views have themselves been subject to criticism. Barry Hindess (1973) points out that the criticisms of suicide statistics advanced by phenome-

ular individuals and are not related so closely to the wider functioning of society. We will now look at the four types of suicide that Taylor identified.

The first two types are ectopic or inner-directed suicides:

1 Submissive suicide occurs when a person is certain about themselves and their life; they believe that their life is effectively over and see themselves as already dead. Taylor says, 'The world of the submissive is one of constricting horizons; of closing doors, blind alleys and cul-de-sacs.' The terminally ill may commit submissive suicide. In other cases a person may have decided that their life is valueless without a loved one who has died. In this type of suicide the suicide attempt is usually deadly serious – the person is sure they wish to die.

2 Thanatation is a type of suicide, or suicide attempt, which occurs when a person is uncertain about themselves. The suicide attempt is a gamble which may or may not be survived, according to fate or chance. If the attempt does not result in death, the person learns that they are capable of facing death. In some cases the person may be exhilarated by the thrill of the risk taking and they may make several suicide attempts. Taylor gives as examples the novelist Graham Greene, who periodically played Russian roulette with a revolver, and the poet Sylvia Plath, who deliberately risked death by driving her car off the road.

The other two types are symphysic or other-directed suicides:

1 Sacrifice suicides occur when a person is certain that others have made their life unbearable. The person who takes their own life often attributes the blame for their death to others so that they will feel guilty or will suffer criticism from other members of society. For example, Taylor refers to a case in which a 22-year-old man killed himself because his wife was in love with his elder brother and she wanted a divorce. The man left letters making it clear that he felt that his wife and brother were responsible for his death.

2 Appeal suicides and suicide attempts result from the suicidal person feeling uncertainty over the attitudes of others towards them. The suicide attempts are a form of communication in which the victim tries to show how desperate they are, in order to find out how others will respond. Suicide attempts may involve trying to persuade others to change their behaviour, or they may offer them chances to save the victim. Those who make the attempts 'combine the wish to die and the wish for change in others and improvement in the situation; they are acts both of despair and of hope'.

For example, a woman slashed herself with a bread knife in front of her husband after he had discovered her having sex with a neighbour. Her husband took her to hospital and she survived. She later said that she was unsure whether or not she would bleed to death but wanted to show her husband how much she loved him and to appeal for forgiveness through her actions.

In another case a man took an overdose of barbiturates in a car parked in front of his estranged wife's house. He left a note for his wife saying what he had done. However, a dense fog obscured the car so his wife did not see him when she returned to the house and therefore could not save him.

Taylor also refers to Marilyn Monroe's death. She had rung her doctor before taking her fatal overdose, and on previous occasions when she had rung him in an agitated state he had come round to calm her down. His failure to do so on this occasion removed any chance of discovery and rescue.

Evaluation of Taylor

Taylor's theory has some advantages over the other sociological theories examined so far. For example, it helps to explain why some suicide victims leave notes and others do not, why some suicide attempts seem more serious than others, and why some take place in isolation and others in more public places. However, his theory is hard to test. It rests upon the meanings given to suicidal actions by those who take part in them and these meanings can be interpreted in different ways.

For those whose suicide attempts result in death the meanings can only be inferred from circumstantial evidence, since they are no longer able to explain their motives. Individual suicides may result from a combination of motives, with the result that they do not fit neatly into any one category.

Quantitative and qualitative methodology

The preceding sections of this chapter have outlined and illustrated the differences between these two broad approaches to methodology. Ray Pawson has described the impression that such descriptions tend to give to many students. He says that many students 'have their minds firmly fixed upon an image of a methodological brawl in which the beleaguered minority (the phenomenologists) have been for years trying to survive the onslaught of the wicked majority (the positivists)' (Pawson,

1989). He claims that such a view is highly misleading.

Pawson is correct to point out that the distinction between positivism and phenomenology has sometimes been exaggerated, and some of his points will be examined shortly. However, the disputes are real. When Hindess says that 'A manuscript produced by a monkey at a typewriter would be no less valuable' than the work of phenomenologists, he illustrates the strength of some of the methodological battles that have taken place. Nevertheless, a number of points should be made to put these disputes into perspective:

1 Even those who have strongly advocated and are closely associated with either a quantitative or qualitative approach have not necessarily stuck rigidly to their own supposed methodological principles. Douglas (1967) points out how Durkheim in his study of suicide strayed away from basing his analysis entirely on 'social facts', and dealt with the subjective states of individuals. For example, he gave mental sketches of what it felt like to be a Roman Catholic or a Protestant, in order to explain why their suicide rates should be so different.

   At the other extreme, even one of the most ardent critics of quantitative methods, Cicourel (1976), has made extensive use of statistical data. In his study of juvenile justice in two Californian cities he collected statistics on law enforcement in the two cities, and he used a systematic comparison of the cities in order to explain their differing crime rates.

2 It can be argued that the 'methodological brawl' mentioned above has come to an end. Pawson says that the idea that 'positivists and phenomenologists are always at logger heads is a sixties' hangover; nowadays it is much more accurate to describe the relationship between those who do qualitative and those who do quantitative research as one of truce' (Pawson, 1989). Many sociologists get on with actually doing research without worrying too much about the philosophical basis of that research. As the later sections on primary sources will show, practical difficulties have at least as much influence on the choice of research methods as theoretical considerations. Furthermore, many sociologists now advocate methodological pluralism (see pp. 1022–3), where a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods is used.

3 Finally, new philosophies of science and new approaches to methodology have now made the disagreements of positivists and phenomenologists look somewhat outdated. The realist conception of science, which will be discussed in a later section (see pp. 1026–7), does not imply that science should be concerned only with that which can be observed directly. In this respect it does not exclude the use of qualitative methods in a 'social science' such as sociology. Critical social science, particularly feminism, and postmodern sociology offer distinctive perspectives on methodology which do not fit neatly into either camp in the disputes between positivist and interpretive sociologists.

We will now examine critical social science and postmodern approaches to methodology before looking at specific research methods.

Critical social science methodology

Lee Harvey – critical social research

The nature of critical social research

Critical social science embraces all those approaches in sociology which aim to be critical of society in order to facilitate social change. Criticism of some sort is present in most social science but, according to its advocates, critical social science goes beyond simply criticizing. According to Lee Harvey, the key characteristic of critical social science is that 'critique is an integral part of the process ... A critical research process involves more than appending critique to an accumulation of "fact" or "theory" gathered via some mechanical process, rather it denies the (literally) objective status of knowledge' (Harvey, 1990).

This approach does not believe that you can simply discover the truth by using the appropriate quantitative or qualitative methods. Instead it believes that 'knowledge is a process' in which you move towards understanding the social world. Knowledge is never completed, it is never finished, because the social world is constantly changing. Furthermore, knowledge can never be separated from values. As members of the social world, researchers are bound to be influenced by their values and those of society. However, their aim should be to try to get beyond the dominant values of society, to try to see what is going on underneath the surface.

Thus, critical social scientists tend to believe that the way society appears to its members can be misleading. Things that are taken for granted need to be seen in a different light so that the true values underlying them can be revealed. Once this has been done, it may be possible to use the new knowledge to transform society.

Examples of critical social research

Harvey uses the example of feminist studies on housework to illustrate the approach. According to him, feminists have been able to show that housework should be seen as real work, just like paid work. Like paid work it creates things of value and it has a crucial role in the economy. Male-dominated commonsense views of housework have devalued it and seen it as unimportant. By revealing the true nature of housework, feminists have been able to encourage social changes in which women have demanded that the value of their unpaid work is recognized (see pp. 552–63 for a discussion of housework).

Critical research is particularly concerned with revealing oppressive structures so that such structures might be changed. Harvey says that 'It is important that the account be located in a wider context which links the specific activities with a broader social structural and historical analysis.' Thus, an analysis of housework can be linked to changes in the role of women in society with the rise of industrial capitalism (see pp. 144–5) and the development of patriarchy (see pp. 151–6).

There are numerous examples of critical social science. Harvey sees the work of Karl Marx (see, for example, pp. 33–6), C. Wright Mills's work on power elites (see pp. 603–4), and Paul Willis's study of working-class lads in the education system (see pp. 791–4) as examples. He divides critical social science studies into three main types, which concentrate on class, on gender and on ethnicity and racism. Of course, some of the best critical research examines all three simultaneously. However, these categories are by no means exhaustive, and critical social scientists also examine issues such as sexuality and disability – indeed any area where some social groups can be seen as systematically disadvantaged or oppressed.

The main features of critical research

Harvey sees critical research as having the following main features:

1 Abstract concepts and ideology
It uses abstract concepts such as housework but goes beyond simply carrying out empirical studies based on such concepts. Thus, instead of just measuring who does housework tasks, critical research tries to examine how such concepts relate to wider social relationships. Housework is seen as a work relationship rather than as simply a set of tasks to be performed. In this way it tries to get beneath the surface of social reality. This involves trying to overcome the dominant ideology or ideologies. Distorted ideological beliefs may be related to dominant classes or to patriarchal or racist beliefs. They mask the material reality that lies behind these beliefs. In Marxist theory, for example, the ideology of wage labour as a free and fair exchange between employer and employee disguises the material advantages enjoyed by the employer as the owner of the means of production.

2 Totality, structure and history
Each abstract concept and particular belief cannot be examined in isolation. According to Harvey it is necessary to relate each bit of a society to a totality. Harvey says, 'Totality refers to the view that social phenomena are interrelated and form a total whole.' For example, in *The New Criminology* (1973), Taylor, Walton and Young advocate trying to understand the actions of criminals in the context of society as a whole (see pp. 386–8).

Critical social scientists see societies as possessing structures. Structures constrain or limit what people can do, but also make social actions possible. For example, the structures of capitalist societies make it difficult for members of the working class to set up their own businesses to compete with big capitalist companies. On the other hand, they make it possible for some capitalists to make substantial profits.

Structures, though, are not static; they change. Studies of society therefore need to be related to particular historical contexts. You need to examine how particular societies have changed over time in order to understand them at any particular point in time. Thus studies of the working class need to take account of how the economy and the labour market have changed since the advent of capitalism (see pp. 75–88 for examples).

3 Deconstruction, essence and reconstruction
Critical social researchers proceed through a process of deconstruction and reconstruction. In the process of deconstruction the different elements of particular areas of social life are taken apart in order to try to discover an essence. The essence is the 'fundamental concept that can be used as the key to unlocking the deconstructive process'. Thus, for example, the essence of capitalism, according to Marx, is 'the commodity form', while the essence of housework, according to Christine Delphy, is a set of work relationships in the context of family life.

Reconceptualization – thinking of familiar aspects of social life in unfamiliar ways – is the key to discovering essences through deconstruction. This process is never finished. Harvey says that critical research:

> *involves a constant questioning of the perspective and analysis the researcher is building up. It is a process of gradually, and critically, coming to know through constant reconceptualization. This means that the selection of a core concept for analysis is not a once-and-for-all affair.*
>
> Harvey, 1990, p. 30

The process of deconstruction does not follow a pre-set path, as laid down by, for example, positivists. The development and testing of hypotheses and the collection of empirical data can all proceed 'in parallel'. The process involves 'a constant shuttling back and forwards between abstract concept and concrete data; between social totalities and particular phenomena; between current structures and historical development; between surface appearance and essence; between reflection and practice'. Some of the process does involve '"armchair" speculation', but empirical studies can also be carried out by whatever methods are most suitable.

Deconstruction leads to reconstruction. The researcher aims in the end to 'lay bare the essential relationships that are embedded in the structure'. They develop theoretical insights which allow the phenomena under investigation to be seen in a new way. A good example is Paul Willis's study of the transition from school to work among working-class 'lads'. Willis reveals how the 'lads" rebellion at school serves as a preparation for the alienating shop-floor jobs they end up doing. According to Willis the 'lads' thereby actively contribute to maintaining their own oppression (see pp. 791–4 for details).

4 Praxis
Critical social research is not just a theoretical activity, it is also a form of praxis. Harvey defines praxis as 'practical reflective activity. Praxis does not include "instinctive" or "mindless" activity like sleeping, breathing, walking, and so on, or undertaking repetitive work tasks. Praxis is what changes the world.' The point of research is to improve the world. Researchers are interested in whether there is any potential for the oppressed groups being studied to come together to change their situation. If these groups come to understand their situation better, they are more likely to resist or challenge the structures that oppress them. To Harvey, far from being a neutral, uninvolved observer of society, the researcher should be an involved and committed participant in the social world. The involvement should be directed towards developing a radical praxis within oppressed social groups.

Research methods

Critical social science is not tied to any single research method. Critical social scientists have used a full range of methods including questionnaires, interviews, case studies, ethnography and semiology (see pp. 999–1003, 1003–8, 1008–14, 996–7 and Chapter 13 for discussions of these methods). However, this approach does tend to be sympathetic towards methods which allow the social world to be seen from the viewpoint of those who are oppressed.

Some feminists have advocated the use of interviews (see pp. 988–9); Goldthorpe and Lockwood (whom Harvey describes as critical social researchers) used questionnaires (see pp. 79–81); while critical ethnography is perhaps the most popular of all the methods used by such researchers (see pp. 1013–14). Unlike positivist and interpretive approaches to methodology, the emphasis is not so much upon the preferred technique, but upon the purpose of the research. Any method is permissible so long as it allows you to get beneath the surface of social life and has the potential for helping to change society. Harvey concludes that 'Although not susceptible to simple methodic prescriptions critical social research lies at the very heart of emancipatory sociological enquiry.'

Criticisms of critical social research

Martin Hammersley has identified a number of problems with critical social research:

1 First, he believes that there are problems in identifying sources of oppression in order to orientate research. Although critical social researchers identify a range of sources of oppression (principally class, gender and ethnicity) there may be others which they have not identified. Furthermore, it is not clear how they can clearly distinguish oppressor from non-oppressor. Hammersley says, 'many people may be simultaneously oppressor and oppressed' (Hammersley, 1992). If critical research is focused on understanding the viewpoint of the oppressed, it becomes difficult to carry out if oppressors might in some ways be oppressed themselves. It becomes hard to know who to interview or who to observe.

2 Hammersley believes that there are problems with the whole concept of oppression and differing ideas of needs and interests. There might be very different viewpoints on what a group needs and what their interests are. There may also be many different views on, and dimensions of, oppression. Hammersley believes that, in the end, needs, interests and what constitutes oppression are subjective judgements. As it is unlikely that all human needs and preferences can be met in society, some judgement has to be made about which needs and interests are legitimate and which are not.

3 Hammersley believes that critical researchers tend to argue that 'there is a single set of values that everyone would agree on if it were not for the effects of ideology on our thinking'. If this were the case, it might get around the problem of deciding who was oppressed. However, Hammersley argues that this could never be achieved. Individuals, never mind social groups, can be in two (or more) minds about what is just, fair or in their interests. Furthermore, the interests of different oppressed

groups might clash. For example, a religious minority might be oppressed in a society because of their beliefs. However, the religion might be highly patriarchal and oppress women within the religion. In such a case it becomes unclear whether the critical researcher should focus upon revealing the oppression of the religious minority, or of the women within that minority. If they try to do both they risk the contradictory position of arguing both that the religion should be tolerated and that its oppression of women should not be tolerated.

4 According to Hammersley, critical researchers try to establish the truth of their arguments either by getting oppressed groups to agree with their findings, or by showing that the findings have been successful in combating oppression. There are problems with both of these methods.

First, oppressed groups may not be able to evaluate the truth of social science theories because they may be suffering from some sort of false consciousness. How do you know that they have cast off false consciousness and can now see the truth?

Second, you cannot assume that even a correct theory will automatically produce social changes which overcome oppression. Many other factors apart from the production of theories will determine whether oppressed people are emancipated. As Hammersley says:

> *Theories are not simply applied but used in association with practical knowledge. And, if this is the case, the achievement of emancipation depends on much more than the truth of the theory, and so failure to achieve emancipation does not tell us that the theory is false.*
>
> Hammersley, 1992, p. 115

Because of the above points Hammersley denies that critical researchers have succeeded in producing an acceptable alternative to conventional methodology for establishing the truth. If this is the case, then critical research 'becomes simply research directed towards serving the interests of some particular group, whose interests may conflict with others, including those of other oppressed groups'.

Phil Carspecken – a defence of critical research

Despite the sorts of criticism advanced by writers such as Hammersley, some researchers argue that it is possible to produce an acceptable critical social science methodology. Writing in 1996, Phil Carspecken argues that critical researchers had failed to develop a detailed methodology. He attempts to put this right.

Carspecken believes that critical research need not be biased because the researchers engaging in it have value commitments. Critical researchers should not just look for the facts which fit their theories. Like researchers from other traditions they should be open to finding evidence which contradicts their theories and challenges their values. They should always be open to changing their standpoints in the light of what they find during the course of research. Furthermore, research needs to be systematic and careful. It should go through a number of stages to reach conclusions which can be widely accepted as being close to the truth. Carspecken suggests the following stages.

The process of research

1 Compiling the primary record. In the first stage the researcher immerses themselves in the social life of the group or site being studied. They take notes and may use video- or audio-tape. The researcher tries to develop a preliminary understanding of the social world from the viewpoint of those being studied.

2 Preliminary reconstructive analysis. In this stage the researcher starts to analyse what they found in the first stage. They look particularly for 'interaction patterns, their meanings, power relationships, roles, interactive sequences' and so on.

3 Dialogical data generation. At this stage the researcher starts talking to those being studied and discusses his or her preliminary findings with them. The subjects of research have an opportunity to influence the way the researcher is thinking and help him or her decide how convincing the initial ideas are. Carspecken says that this 'democratizes the research process'. Interviews and discussion groups will be used at this stage.

4 Discovering system relations. Once stage 3 is well under way the researcher now begins to broaden the study to try to link his or her specific findings to other parts of social life. For example, the relationships found in a school might be linked to the content of the mass media, the local labour market or changing conceptions of masculinity and femininity.

5 Using system relations to explain findings. Only in the final stage does the researcher being to produce causal explanations of what they have found. Links are made to social structures and particular attention may be made to 'class, race, gender and political structures of society'.

Establishing truth claims

Why, though, should people believe the results of such research? Will it not simply reflect the biases and values that the researcher started with?

Carspecken believes not. First, the features of social life uncovered by researchers are the basis on which the theories are developed. They are not simply based on the researcher's abstract ideas. Second, the subjects of the research have a chance to confirm or contradict the initial understandings developed by the researcher. Third, Carspecken develops a sophisticated analysis of how conclusions may be reached about whether the findings of research are true or not.

Like Popper (see pp. 968–9), Carspecken does not believe that social scientists can produce statements that will necessarily be regarded as true for all time. Even if everyone agreed that something was true, this view might be rejected in some future society. However, in essence, whether something is regarded as true or not ultimately depends upon whether people can agree that it is true. A truth claim – a claim that something is true – is always an act of communication. It is an attempt by one person or group to assert to other people that something is true. Establishing the truth is therefore a communicative process.

The way to check whether a truth claim stands up to scrutiny is to see whether other people agree with it. The only way to do that is to allow others a chance to accept or refute the truth claim. Traditional science considers truth claims by limiting those who are allowed to express an opinion on them to the scientists. Only experts have their views taken seriously. In critical research, those who are being studied have a say as well as other social scientists. In studying social life, the participants – the children in a classroom, the workers in an office, the members of families or whatever – are the experts. Checking whether they can be convinced by the social researchers' theory is a key part of testing whether it is true.

However, there are some problems involved in checking the findings of research by seeing whether people will agree with them or not. People often agree with things not because they believe them, but because of power relationships. Following the work of Habermas (1984), Carspecken believes that communications can be distorted where some of those communicating have power over others involved. To use a simple example, if someone holds a gun to your head and threatens to kill you, you are likely to agree with whatever they say regardless of whether you believe it.

Critical researchers should therefore be aware of these sources of distortion. They should try to ensure that they eliminate, as far as possible, power relationships between themselves and those being studied. Thus Carspecken believes that researchers should:

> *Establish supportive, nonauthoritarian relationships with the participants in your study. Actively encourage them to question your own perceptions. Be sure that participants are protected from any harm that your study could produce, and be sure that they know they are protected.*
>
> Carspecken, 1996, p. 90

However, researchers should also challenge beliefs that may result from power relationships. Thus, for example, women who believe that their husbands or male partners should be able to tell them what to do, could have their beliefs challenged by a researcher. The researcher would have to find out whether the women in question could be persuaded that the relationship was patriarchal.

The subjects of the research are not the only ones who need to be persuaded of the researcher's truth claims. Other social scientists and readers of the research need to be persuaded too. Of course, the research will be evaluated by people whose views are influenced by the power relationships in which the researcher is involved. He or she will therefore be unlikely to persuade everybody of the truthfulness of their work. Nevertheless, their aim should be to make the findings as convincing as possible.

While checks on the validity of truth claims do in the end come down to a matter of opinion, Carspecken does not believe that what people believe is just random. To him, what people will accept is affected by what is real. He argues that 'a single, real, world exists independently from any cultural categories used to describe it and act in relation to it'. This real world 'resists' human actions. People find that it allows them to behave in certain ways, and that in other ways it limits their behaviour. For example, if people believed that broken glass was not sharp, and acted towards it accordingly, they would soon find themselves cut and bleeding. It would be hard to sustain the belief that broken glass was not sharp, and cultural beliefs would be likely to change.

Beliefs tend to fall into line with reality because of people's experiences. Of course this does not always happen. People can believe things in spite of experiences which suggest that the beliefs are mistaken. Furthermore, many beliefs are far more complicated than the above example, and cannot easily be tested against experience. Nevertheless, the idea that a real world exists and that it can resist human actions allows Carspecken to claim that ultimately there can be a sound foundation for people trying to agree on what is true and what is not.

Feminist methodology

Approaches to feminist methodology

Perhaps feminist approaches to critical research are the most developed ones. There have been numerous attempts to develop feminist ways of doing or approaching research, but three approaches have been particularly influential:

1 The attack on 'malestream' research. This involves a criticism of previous, male-dominated, mainstream research. Often referred to by feminists as 'malestream' research, it is criticized for being based upon sexist or patriarchal principles.
2 The claim that there can be distinctive feminist research methods. This approach argues that the more conventional 'scientific' methods used by men are not particularly good at helping the researcher to understand social reality – particularly, though not exclusively, the reality of women.
3 The claim that feminism can reveal a distinctive epistemology, or theory of knowledge, which is superior to other epistemologies.

The attack on 'malestream' research

This is perhaps the least controversial of feminist approaches to methodology. Rather than trying to construct a completely new feminist approach, it tries to rectify the mistakes of previous, dominant and male-orientated research methodologies. From this point of view, research has generally been carried out about men, by men and for men. Pamela Abbott and Claire Wallace provide a comprehensive list of feminist criticisms of 'malestream' sociology. They say:

> *Feminists have made a number of criticisms of sociology.*
> 1 *that sociology has mainly been concerned with research on men and by implication with theories for men;*
> 2 *that research findings based on all-male samples are generalised to the whole population;*
> 3 *that areas and issues of concern to women are frequently overlooked or seen as unimportant;*
> 4 *that when they are included in research they are included in a distorted and sexist way;*
> 5 *that sex and gender are seldom important explanatory variables;*
> 6 *that when sex and gender are included as variables they are just added on, ignoring the fact that the explanatory theories used are ones which have justified the subordination and exploitation of women.*
>
> Abbot and Wallace, 1997, p. 6

A number of examples included in this book can illustrate these points:

- According to Carol Smart (1977), the sociology of crime and deviance was, until the late 1970s, almost exclusively the sociology of male crime and delinquency (see p. 408).
- Studies such as those by Merton, Cohen, Miller and Cloward and Ohlin (see pp. 354–60) almost completely ignored women, yet assumed that they applied to criminals in general and not just male criminals.
- As Ann Oakley (1974) points out, housework was seen as too unimportant to be studied by social scientists until her own pioneering work.
- Michelle Stanworth (1984) criticizes John Goldthorpe's class scheme for, generally, allocating wives to classes based upon their husband's occupation (see p. 111).
- Male social scientists such as Talcott Parsons, sociobiologists and Lombroso and Ferrero have been accused as having sexist, biologically-based explanations of female behaviour (see pp. 132–3, 129–31 and 413).
- Class classification schemes have been accused by Arber, Dale and Gilbert (1986) of being based on male jobs and of being unable to usefully differentiate different types of female employment (see p. 116).

There have also been frequent criticisms of the use of sexist language in social research. For example, Margaret Eichler (1991) points out that terms such as 'men' and 'mankind' have often been used to refer to people in general.

Evaluation

These sorts of criticism of 'malestream' sociology have been very influential and widely accepted. The numbers of sociological studies of women, studies of issues important to women, and studies which examine female perspectives on social life, have proliferated. It has become much less common for sociologists to try to generalize about people of both sexes on the basis of male samples. The sociological study of women, by women and for women has become much more commonplace.

Sexist language in sociology has also become much less common. For example, the British Sociological Association's 'Ethical Guidelines' state that sexist language is unacceptable, and it is banned from the organization's journal *Sociology* (see the 'Notes for contributors' in any edition of this journal).

Although the problems of 'malestream' sociology have certainly not been eliminated, they have been greatly reduced and the arguments advanced for non-sexist sociology have become relatively uncontentious. Other feminist approaches to research methods, though, are much more contentious.

Feminist research methods

Ann Oakley – the masculine model of interviewing

Perhaps the best-known and most influential argument that there should be distinctive feminist research methods is advanced by Ann Oakley (1981). In particular she argues that there is a feminist way of conducting interviews which is superior to a more dominant, masculine model of such research.

By studying the instructions of various methodology books which describe the techniques of interviewing, Oakley is able to discover the main features of the masculine approach to interviewing. She says, 'the paradigm of the "proper" interview appeals to such values as objectivity, detachment, hierarchy and "science" as an important cultural activity which takes precedence over people's more individualised concerns'.

Although they can be friendly in order to establish some minimum rapport, interviewers must maintain their distance to avoid becoming too involved with respondents. Certainly any emotional involvement between interviewer and respondent must be avoided at all costs. The interviewees must be manipulated as 'objects of study/sources of data'. They must always have a passive role, and must never become active in shaping the interview. If the interviewee asks the interviewer questions, the interviewer should not answer and should make it clear that he or she is there to ask questions and not to answer them.

Interviewing of this type emphasizes the importance of producing reliable data that can be repeated and checked. Interviewers have to avoid expressing any opinion of their own. To do so will influence the answers of the respondents and lead to bias in the research.

The feminist approach to interviewing

Having outlined the masculine approach to interviewing, Oakley proceeds to suggest a feminist alternative. She draws upon her own experience of interviewing women about becoming mothers. She conducted 178 interviews, with most women being interviewed twice before the birth of their child and twice afterwards. In some cases Oakley was actually present at the birth. On average each of the women was interviewed for more than nine hours.

Oakley found that the women often wanted to ask her questions. Instead of avoiding answering them, Oakley decided to answer their questions as openly and honestly as she could. Some of the questions were about her and her research, others were requests for information about childbirth or childcare. In some cases the women were anxious about some aspect of childcare or childbirth, and often they had failed to get satisfactory answers from medical staff. In these circumstances Oakley found it impossible to refuse to answer their questions. She was asking a great deal of the interviewees at a difficult time in their lives, and it was only reasonable that she should give something back in return.

Oakley decided to make the research more collaborative. Instead of looking at the women as passive respondents, she wanted them to become her collaborators and friends. Indeed, it was often the interviewees who took the initiative in developing the relationship further. Many expressed an interest in the research and wanted to become more involved. Some rang her up with key pieces of information. Oakley claims that 'the women were reacting to my own evident wish for a relatively intimate and non-hierarchical relationship'.

She tried to make sure that she did not exploit the interviewees. She asked permission to record interviews and use the information. While she was at the mothers' houses she gave them help with childcare or housework if they needed it. She discussed her own experiences of childbirth with the women who were interested, and tried to offer advice on where they could get help with particular problems.

Oakley's objectives in adopting such an approach were not just to give some help to the women and to avoid exploiting them, in return for their participation. She also believed that it improved the quality of the research. It allowed her to get closer to the subjective viewpoints of the women being studied. It also played some role in trying to change and improve the experience of becoming a mother for the women involved. Oakley says:

> *Nearly three-quarters of the women said that being interviewed had affected them and the three most common forms this influence took were in leading them to reflect on their experiences more than they would otherwise have done; in reducing the level of their anxiety and/or in reassuring them of their normality; and in giving a valuable outlet for the verbalization of feelings.*
>
> Oakley, 1981, p. 50

Oakley concludes that interviewing that breaks down the barriers between researchers and their subjects is preferable to masculine, 'scientific' interviewing. She says that a feminist methodology:

requires, further, that the mythology of 'hygienic' research with its accompanying mystification of the researcher and the researched as objective instruments of data production be replaced by the recognition that personal involvement is more than dangerous bias – it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives.

Oakley, 1981, p. 58

Evaluation of Oakley

Oakley's approach to interviewing has been quite influential amongst feminists and her ideas are widely quoted in books about methodology. Although generally sympathetic to her approach, some critics have argued that it is not original or distinctively feminist.

Ray Pawson argues that Oakley simply elaborated on conventional ways of conducting unstructured interviews. He says:

This vision of interviewing-as-fieldwork is precisely that urged from the traditional doctrines of interpretative, phenomenological or humanistic sociology. There is a time-honoured tradition of positivism-bashing in general and structured-interviewing bashing in particular, and this feminist approach is essentially a repetition of this literature.

Pawson, 1992, p. 119

The differences between structured and unstructured interviewing will be discussed later in the chapter (see pp. 1003–4). However, it can be argued that there are some features of Oakley's approach which go beyond conventional approaches to unstructured interviewing. For example, even unstructured interviewing is not normally supposed to involve advising and helping the interviewees, since it is thought that such interventions might affect the findings. Oakley's approach to feminist interviewing incorporates elements of critical research which are not typical of other types of interpretative research.

Feminist standpoint epistemology

Perhaps the most influential of feminist epistemologies is what has been called standpoint epistemology. From this point of view, the way in which women experience social life gives them unique insights into how society works. Sandra Harding says, 'The feminist standpoint epistemologies ground a distinctive feminist science in a theory of gendered activity and social experience' (Harding, 1986). That is, they believe that feminist knowledge can only come from examining the unique experiences of women in societies in which men and women experience social life in different ways.

Standpoint epistemology generally does not deny that it is possible to discover the truth about society. However, instead of believing that the truth can be established through the observation of facts and the discovery of statistical relationships, it seeks to find the truth through understanding women's experiences. Furthermore, it tends to believe that no one version of the truth can explain everything. Although women have certain experiences in common, there are also big differences between groups of women, and their different experiences need to be explored before a full picture of the social world can be produced.

Liz Stanley and Sue Wise are amongst the advocates of standpoint epistemology. They argue in favour of 'theory derived from experience' which is 'constantly subject to revision in the light of that experience' (Stanley and Wise, 1990). They say that feminist research should be 'not only located in, but proceeding from, the grounded analysis of women's experiences'. By examining their experiences the feminist researcher can understand the world.

According to Stanley and Wise, 'all knowledge, necessarily, results from the conditions of its production, is contextually located, and irrevocably bears the marks of its origins'. Generally speaking, sociology has usually expressed 'the practices and knowledge of highly particular white, middle-class, heterosexual men'. Feminist standpoint epistemology replaces this with the view of the world developed through the experiences of oppressed women. Oppressed women are in a special position, able through their experiences to see through the ideology of their male oppressors.

However, Stanley and Wise do not believe that all women experience the world in the same way. For example, black, lesbian and working-class women have different experiences to those of their white, heterosexual and middle-class counterparts. Stanley and Wise therefore support the view that feminist epistemology needs to look at different standpoints and should not try to pretend that one set of knowledge can deal with the experiences of very different groups of women. They are in favour of a plurality of feminist theories deriving from the study of different oppressed groups. No one theory should be allowed to be dominant.

Although Stanley and Wise accept the need for a plurality of theories, they do not go as far as some postmodernists who deny that any methodology can deliver a true picture of social life (see pp. 990–1). To Stanley and Wise the viewpoints of different women need to be examined simply because women do have real, different experiences. Feminist methodology needs to uncover these different and often previously neglected experiences in order to develop a fuller understanding of the social world.

Criticisms of feminist standpoint epistemology

Ray Pawson (1992) argues that such epistemologies run into major problems when those being studied continue to see the world in terms that the researcher finds unconvincing. Thus, for example, feminist researchers are unlikely to give much credence to women's views that it is 'natural' for women to do the housework and for men to be dominant. Sometimes, however much they try to persuade the women being studied to see things differently, the women may stick to beliefs which feminists see as reflecting patriarchal ideology. In such cases researchers may find themselves going against what their respondents believe, or, alternatively, having to accept views which they believe to be untrue.

According to Pawson a further problem with standpoint epistemology is that it puts all the emphasis upon studying the experiences of the oppressed. This effectively rules out studying the oppressors (in this case men), even though studying oppressors might reveal at least as much about the nature of oppression as studying the oppressed.

Pawson is also unpersuaded by the view that you can simply describe a plurality of different viewpoints. Sometimes the viewpoints of groups of women, grounded in different experiences, may contradict one another. Unless the researcher decides to say that one viewpoint is better than another, they end up having to accept contradictory beliefs. This leads them down the path of relativism. They are no longer trying to explain society as it really is; they are reduced to accepting all viewpoints as equally valid. Different feminist views of the world are only true for particular groups of women; none can claim to describe society as it really is for everybody. In these circumstances sociology loses any claim to be able to produce knowledge which is superior to the common-sense knowledge of ordinary members of society.

Pawson's criticisms tend to generalize about feminist methodologies and epistemologies and are not particularly sensitive to variations between them. Not all feminist standpoint epistemologies are relativistic; some do not see the viewpoints of all groups of women as equally valid. Indeed the accusation of relativism could be more justly directed against postmodern methodology (see pp. 990–1) than feminist methodology. Furthermore, as we have seen above, critical social scientists such as Phil Carspecken have tried to deal with some of the apparent problems with methodologies that take the viewpoint of the oppressed seriously (see pp. 985–6).

Critical and feminist approaches to methodology will be discussed further as the chapter develops.

Postmodern methodology

Varieties of postmodern methodology

There is no single type of methodology accepted by all postmodernists. However, it is possible to distinguish three broad positions adopted by the variety of writers who discuss postmodernism:

1 Some postmodernists, such as David Harvey (1990), see postmodernity largely in terms of changes in society. They do not believe that the nature of knowledge has changed or that radical new methodologies are needed to replace old ones. They therefore tend to use conventional methods and conventional sources of data. Thus Harvey analyses statistical economic data and tries to interpret cultural trends from a number of secondary sources. From the viewpoint of such writers, existing methodologies, whether quantitative or qualitative, are quite adequate for the analysis of society.

2 On the other hand, some writers make a sharp distinction between modern and postmodern epistemology. Modern epistemology (or theory of knowledge) tends to claim that the truth can be discovered by the use of the correct techniques. Those who advocate both deductive and inductive methods (see p. 968), and even critical social scientists (see pp. 982–6), believe that procedures can be used to evaluate what is true and what is not. While Popper and critical sociologists may not believe that the final truth can be established, they do at least believe that it is possible to rule out some knowledge as being untrue.

Epistemological postmodernists argue that there is no basis even for ruling out some knowledge as being untrue. Nevertheless, Lyotard (1984), for example, dismisses all knowledge based upon modern epistemologies as deriving from 'metanarratives' (see Chapter 15). Metanarratives are big stories about the world and are essentially opinions rather than objective knowledge.

Lyotard rejects the claims of all 'scientific' subjects and believes that all knowledge is essentially a form of story-telling. He sees all stories as equally valid and offers no way of distinguishing between true and untrue stories. The implication of this view is that postmodern methodology should simply

consist of allowing different people to tell their stories. No attempt should be made to try to establish that any particular stories are better than any others.

Some postmodernists have tried to develop postmodern ethnography as a way of allowing the voices of diverse social groups to be heard (see pp. 1014–15 for a discussion of postmodern ethnography).

3 Postmodern ethnography allows epistemological postmodernists to collect some of their own data. However, much postmodern sociology is not so concerned with creating new knowledge as with attacking existing knowledge. Many such approaches have drawn on the work of Jacques Derrida as a basis for criticizing other sociologists' work (see Kamuf, 1991, for extracts from Derrida).

Derrida believes that language can never truly represent an external, objective reality. Language is simply a self-contained system in which words are defined in terms of other words. Because of this, scientists, sociologists and indeed anyone else should not be believed if they claim to have established the absolute truth. Therefore the work of such writers should be deconstructed.

Deconstruction involves examining texts (anything containing written language) and taking them apart. In this process Derrida believes that the inherent contradictions built into existing knowledge can be revealed (see pp. 159–60 for further details). The technique of deconstruction is often used by postmodernists to attack and try to undermine texts such as existing sociological theories. This strand of postmodern methodology is therefore based around the critique of secondary sources (see pp. 1016–22) rather than the creation of new knowledge.

Postmodern methodology – evaluation

Postmodern methodology has been widely accused of adopting a position of complete relativism. That is, it argues that knowledge simply depends upon your point of view, and that one person's view is as good as any other person's view. Modernist sociologists of various types continue to reject this view. For example, critical social scientists such as Phil Carspecken believe that there are ways of evaluating different truth claims (see above, pp. 985–6). Carspecken does believe that postmodern methodology offers some insights but rejects its claim that there is no basis for producing objective knowledge. He believes that there are ways of convincing others of the validity of knowledge. Carspecken says, 'Few would want to say that their descriptions of society are nothing but interpretations, capable of persuading others only through the exertion of power (persuasion) rather than argument' (Carspecken, 1996).

Ultimately argument is grounded in an external reality and the way that this reality prevents people from doing whatever they choose. Like realist theorists of science (see pp. 1026–7), critical social scientists like Carspecken continue to reject the extreme relativism of some postmodernists.

A number of writers have turned postmodern arguments on postmodernists. They have pointed out that, if there is no way of distinguishing fact from fiction, then there is absolutely no way of showing that postmodernists' stories about the social world are any better (or worse) than other stories (see Chapter 15). Similarly there is no way of showing that postmodern methodologies are any better (or worse) than more conventional methodologies.

Postmodern methodology will be discussed further as the chapter develops.

The research process

This part of the chapter will deal with the major issues involved in actually carrying out research. It begins with a consideration of how researchers go about selecting topics for research, and goes on to examine the practical and theoretical issues involved in collecting and analysing data.

Choosing a topic for research

Before embarking upon research, sociologists have to decide what they are going to study. This choice may be affected by a number of factors.

The values and beliefs of the researcher will obviously play some part. Sociologists are unlikely to devote considerable time and energy to issues that they think are unimportant or trivial. For example, Peter Townsend's values have led him to regard poverty as an important problem in contemporary industrial societies (see pp. 296–300), while Paul Heelas believed that the New Age movement was worthy of attention (see pp. 466–9).

What a researcher believes is important may be influenced by developments within the discipline of sociology, or developments in the wider society. Sociology is a profession as well as a discipline, and many sociologists wish to advance their careers by criticizing or developing the work of fellow sociologists, or by trying to resolve some key

sociological issue. This might explain why so many sociologists have followed Durkheim in studying suicide, while other areas of social life have been comparatively neglected.

Similarly, routine clerical workers have been studied more than some other sections of the stratification system. This group is often seen as a crucial test of Marxist and Weberian theories of stratification. Groups of less theoretical interest to sociologists, such as agricultural labourers, have been studied less often.

In the sociology of religion, apparent examples of religious revival, such as the revival of Islam and the New Christian Right in the USA, have been studied partly in order to evaluate the theory of secularization.

When there are major changes in society, sociologists are likely to study them. Sociology was born in the nineteenth century, largely out of a concern about the changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution. More recently, sociologists have studied apparent social changes in terms of theories and concepts such as postmodernism (see Chapter 15), post-Fordism and high modernity (see pp. 713–17).

Sociologists have also devoted more time in recent decades to studying unemployment than they did in the 1950s and 1960s when rates of unemployment were very much lower. In the sociology of work the impact of information technology has been a focus of attention (see pp. 700–6).

Specific government policies can also stimulate research. Hence, for example, the concern with the 'new vocationalism' in the contemporary sociology of education (see pp. 801–13), and the concern with 'social exclusion' in studies of social policy since the British Labour government established a Social Exclusion Unit (see p. 346).

A very important factor affecting the choice of research topic is the availability or otherwise of grants to finance it. Research funds may come from charitable foundations – such as the Nuffield and Rowntree foundations – from industry, or from government – in Britain usually via the Economic and Social Research Council (or ESRC). The European Union sometimes provides funds for sociological research.

Some small-scale research requires little funding, but major research projects can be very expensive, and the sort of research that gets done can be very strongly influenced by those who hold the purse strings. Payne *et al.* have suggested that the SSRC (the predecessor of the ESRC) 'had no pretensions to being anything other than a government organisation' (Payne *et al.*, 1977). As an important source of funding for British sociology it tended to restrict the amount of sociological research that was critical of the government of the day.

Industrial providers of research grants tend to want some practical benefits from the money they spend, so research into organizations and industrial sociology is most likely to receive funding from this source.

Other practical difficulties apart from money can affect the topics chosen by sociologists for their research. The availability of existing data on a topic or the practicality of collecting data will both have an influence. Durkheim chose to study suicide partly because statistics were available from many European countries (see pp. 974–7). Some important groups in the population – for example, senior politicians and the directors of top companies – rarely form the basis of detailed studies. This is partly due to their unwillingness to reveal their activities to sociological scrutiny. Other relatively powerless groups, such as delinquent gangs, have been subject to detailed and frequent study.

Primary sources

Primary sources of information consist of data collected by researchers themselves during the course of their work. Secondary sources consist of data that already exist. Primary sources would include data collected by researchers using questionnaires, conducting interviews or carrying out participant observation. Secondary sources include official statistics, mass media products, diaries, letters, government reports, other sociologists' work and historical and contemporary records. Secondary sources will be discussed later.

Choosing a primary research method

Some of the factors that influence the choice of research topic can also influence the choice of research method used to study that topic. For example, the source of funding for a proposed project might well specify the type of method to be employed. Many funding bodies support the use of more quantitative methods. Janet Finch, for example, describes the 'dominance achieved by quantitative

methods, and the (at best) secondary place which qualitative methods were accorded' (Finch, 1986) in the development of British social policy research. However, the most important factors influencing the choice of research method are the topic to be studied and the theoretical and practical considerations.

Some topics lend themselves more readily to the use of quantitative techniques such as questionnaires: for example, research into voting in Great Britain tends to involve large-scale studies using quantitative statistical techniques because of the sheer numbers necessarily involved in the research if the data are to be of any use. Other topics, such as behaviour in classrooms, lend themselves more readily to qualitative methods.

As the earlier sections of this chapter have shown, those who support a particular theoretical approach tend to use either quantitative or qualitative methods. This commitment may well be the major influence on their choice of research method.

Reliability

Many of the debates about the merits of particular research methods focus on questions of reliability and validity. In the natural sciences, data are seen to be 'reliable' if other researchers using the same methods of investigation on the same material produce the same results. By replicating an experiment it is possible to check for errors in observation and measurement. Once reliable data have been obtained, generalizations can then be made about the behaviour observed. No sociologist would claim that the social sciences can attain the standards of reliability employed in the natural sciences. Many would argue, however, that sociological data can attain a certain standard of reliability.

Generally speaking, quantitative methods are seen to provide greater reliability. They usually produce standardized data in a statistical form: the research can be repeated and the results checked. Questionnaires can be used to test precise hypotheses which the researcher has devised.

Qualitative methods are often criticized for failing to meet the same standards of reliability. Such methods may be seen as unreliable because the procedures used to collect data can be unsystematic, the results are rarely quantified, and there is no way of replicating a qualitative study and checking the reliability of its findings.

Validity

Data are 'valid' if they provide a true picture of what is being studied. A valid statement gives a true measurement or description of what it claims to measure or describe. It is an accurate reflection of social reality. Data can be reliable without being valid. Studies can be replicated and produce the same results but those results may not be a valid measure of what the researcher intends to measure. For instance, statistics on church attendance may be reliable but they do not necessarily give a true picture of religious commitment.

Supporters of qualitative methods often argue that quantitative methods lack validity. Statistical research methods may be easy to replicate but they may not provide a true picture of social reality. They are seen to lack the depth to describe accurately the meanings and motives that form the basis of social action. They use categories imposed on the social world by sociologists – categories that may have little meaning or relevance to other members of society. To many interpretive sociologists, only qualitative methods can overcome these problems and provide a valid picture of social reality.

Practicality

Researchers are sometimes attracted to quantitative methods because of their practicality. Quantitative methods are generally less time-consuming and require less personal commitment. It is usually possible to study larger and more representative samples which can provide an overall picture of society. Qualitative research often has to be confined to the study of small numbers because of practical limitations. It is more suited to providing an in-depth insight into a smaller sample of people.

These points will be developed in the following sections.

Choosing a sample

Once a sociologist has chosen a topic for research and a method to carry out that research, she or he needs to decide upon a 'sample': that is, the actual individuals to be studied. All research involves some sort of sampling, some selection of who or what to study. Those researchers who advocate 'scientific' quantitative methods tend to support the use of sophisticated sampling techniques and often claim to be able to generalize on the basis of their findings. Those who support interpretive qualitative methods tend to study smaller numbers of people, so their studies are less likely to require complex sampling techniques.

A sample is a part of a larger population. It is usually selected to be representative of that population: those included in the sample are chosen as a cross-section of the larger group. The use of samples saves the researcher time and money since it reduces the number of individuals to be studied. If the sample is chosen carefully, it is possible to generalize from it: that is, to make statements about the whole relevant population on the basis of the sample.

The first stage in sampling involves identifying the relevant population. A population in this sense includes all the relevant sampling units. The sampling unit is the individual person or social group in that population. In a study of voting in Britain the relevant population would be all those entitled to vote, and the sampling unit would be the individual voter.

Having determined the sampling unit and the population, the researcher might then try to obtain or to produce a sampling frame. In a study of voting there is a ready-made sampling frame – the electoral register – since a sampling frame is simply a list of all the relevant sampling units in the population. It is important that the sampling frame is as comprehensive as possible: if it is not, the sample might be seriously distorted. Researchers have sometimes used telephone directories as a sampling frame for the population of a particular area, but the directory would not include those who have ex-directory numbers and those without a telephone. Since the latter would probably be people on low incomes, the results of a study on (for example) voting intentions based upon this sampling frame might be seriously misleading.

Often, even apparently comprehensive sampling frames contain omissions. For example, the electoral register does not include all adults living in Britain. Foreign nationals (except for some citizens of Eire), those who have failed to register as voters, and members of the House of Lords are among those who would be excluded. The introduction of the Poll Tax in the early 1990s led to large numbers of people avoiding enrolment on the electoral register in an attempt to get out of paying the tax.

Studies use imperfect sampling frames. The early *British Crime Surveys* used the electoral register (see pp. 366–8 for details of these surveys). Pat Mayhew (quoted in McNeill, 1988), the Principal Research Officer responsible for the Surveys, admits that the most comprehensive sampling frame now available is not the electoral register, but the Postcode Address File. Mayhew notes that the electoral register does not include many people in institutions (such as mental hospitals and prisons) who may be particularly prone to being the victims of crime.

Later *British Crime Surveys* did start using the Postcode Address File. However, even that is not perfect. A sample using this as a sampling frame would be likely to under-represent the homeless. Furthermore, researchers usually rely upon the 'Small User File' of the Postcode Address File and this excludes addresses which normally receive 25 or more items of mail per day. As Sara Arber (1993) points out, a few households which receive unusually large volumes of mail will not be included on samples using this sampling frame.

One government study, the census, avoids the problems of sampling by studying all, or very nearly all, members of a large population. By law every household in Britain has to complete a census form, although some individuals (including many of the homeless) may slip through the net.

Sociologists lack the resources to carry out such comprehensive studies as the census, and so they usually try to select a sample that contains the same proportions of people with relevant characteristics as are present in the population under consideration. If that population contains 60 per cent women and 40 per cent men, then the sample should contain 60 per cent women and 40 per cent men. Other important characteristics such as age, occupation, ethnic origin and religion are often taken into account by researchers as they select their sample.

Other, more specialized factors may be taken into account, depending upon the nature of the research. Opinion polls on voting intentions usually use a sample from a variety of constituencies chosen according to the share of the vote won by the major parties in those constituencies at the previous election. Thus a number of 'safe' Labour, 'safe' Conservative and more marginal seats would be included. Clearly the results would be distorted if the sample was chosen entirely from safe Labour seats.

In a study of education the researcher might wish to select the sample so as to ensure that the types of schools attended by those in the sample reflect the proportions in the population as a whole.

If sampling has been carried out satisfactorily, researchers should be able to generalize on the basis of the results. This means that they should be able to make statements about the whole population without having conducted research into every member of that population. For example, opinion pollsters often claim to be able to predict the results of an election in Britain to within a couple of percentage points on the basis of a sample of perhaps one or two thousand people.

Different methods of producing a sample will now be examined.

Types of sampling

Random and systematic sampling

This is the simplest way to select a large sample. Using random sampling the researcher ensures that each sample unit has an equal chance of being chosen to take part in the research. This is often achieved by assigning numbers to each sample unit and selecting members of the sample by using a random number table. The nearest everyday equivalent to this is picking numbers out of a hat.

A less time-consuming, though slightly less random, method is to select, say, every tenth or twentieth number on a list. Since this method is not truly random it is known as systematic sampling.

Random sampling is not ideal. It relies on statistical probability to ensure the representativeness of the sample. In simple terms, it is based upon the so-called 'law of averages', and a relatively large sample is needed for the researcher to be confident that the sample will be genuinely representative. Researchers therefore generally prefer to use the method we will discuss next: stratified random sampling.

Stratified random sampling

Stratified random sampling involves the division of the sampling frame into groups in order to ensure that the sample is representative. The researcher identifies the important variables that need to be controlled and allocates the sampling units to different groups according to these variables.

For example, the researcher might identify gender and class as important variables. In this case the population would be divided into working-class males, working-class females, middle-class males, middle-class females, upper-class males and upper-class females. The sample would then be selected at random from each of these groups ensuring that the proportions of the sample in each category were the same as the proportions in the population as a whole. If 20 per cent of the population were found to be working-class females, 20 per cent of the sample would be working-class females.

This is an effective method of choosing a representative sample because it allows the researcher to control the variables that are seen as important. It requires a smaller sample size to ensure representativeness than random sampling. However, stratified random sampling is often not practicable. Even if a sampling frame is available, it often does not contain the information necessary to divide the population into groups. Opinion pollsters can use the electoral register as a sampling frame but it does not provide information such as the occupations of the electorate. For this reason it cannot be used to produce a stratified random sample.

Quota sampling

Quota sampling allows researchers to control variables without having a sampling frame. When quota sampling is used, the interviewers are told how many respondents with particular characteristics to question, so that the overall sample reflects the characteristics of the population as a whole. For example, an interviewer might be required to administer a questionnaire to ten married females and ten married males aged between 20 and 35, five unmarried men and women of the same age group and so on. Once the quota for a particular category has been filled, responses will not be collected from those in that category.

This is a particularly useful method of sampling when the overall proportions of different groups within a population are known. Government population statistics could be used to set the quota for a representative sample of different age groups in the British population. As Sara Arber (1993) points out, it is also generally quicker and cheaper than using probability sampling. There is no need to revisit those chosen in your sample if they are not available on the first visit. If someone refuses to cooperate, you can simply find someone else with the same characteristics. When speed is of the essence – for example, if you want to conduct an opinion poll on voting on the day of an election – then quota sampling may be the only practical option.

Despite the simplicity of quota sampling, it does have both theoretical and practical drawbacks in some circumstances. Quota sampling is not truly random because each person within the population does not have an equal chance of being chosen. For example, a researcher stopping people on a particular street at a particular time can only question people who happen to be in that place at that time. The lack of genuine randomness may distort the results. For example, a researcher for a political opinion poll who questions people at 11 o'clock on Tuesday morning in a city centre would be unlikely to gain much response from those who work in the surrounding rural area.

Stopping people in the street may lead to a low response rate. Many people could refuse to cooperate, and those who do cooperate might be untypical of the population as a whole in a way that was not anticipated when the original quotas were set up.

Quota sampling usually requires the researcher to ask a number of personal questions to determine whether the respondent has the characteristics of a quota group on which information is required. Asking such questions at the start of an interview might put some interviewees off, and put others on their guard so that their responses are not as open and honest as they might otherwise have been.

Furthermore, practical problems can arise in filling quotas. In some circumstances people who have full-time jobs might prove more difficult to interview than people without jobs.

Despite these limitations quota sampling continues to be used because there are circumstances when random or stratified random sampling is not possible.

Multi-stage sampling

Multi-stage sampling can save the researcher time and money, although it reduces the extent to which the sample is genuinely random. It simply involves

selecting a sample from another sample. It is often used in opinion polls on voting intentions. In the first stage a few constituencies, which, on the basis of previous research, appear to represent a cross-section of all constituencies, are selected. Some rural and some urban constituencies would be included and previous election results used to check that the constituencies selected are a reasonable mixture in terms of party support. In the second stage individual respondents are chosen from within these constituencies.

If multi-stage sampling was not used in this sort of research, opinion poll organizations would incur the prohibitive expense of sending researchers to every constituency in the country, to interview a mere three or four people in each to get an overall sample of 2,000. However, in multi-stage sampling the loss of randomness may be accompanied by an increase in sampling error.

Snowballing

Snowballing is a very specialized type of sampling and is usually only used when other methods are not practical. It involves using personal contacts to build up a sample of the group to be studied. For example, it was used by Laurie Taylor (1984) when he persuaded John McVicar, a former criminal, to obtain introductions to members of the London underworld of professional crime. Taylor then used these contacts to obtain introductions to more criminals. Clearly, such samples cannot be representative since, to have any chance of being included, those studied must be part of a network of personal contacts. But for groups such as professional criminals it is not easy to use other ways of obtaining a sample.

Non-representative sampling

Sociologists do not always try to obtain representative cross-sections of the population they wish to study. In terms of Popper's views of science (see pp. 968–9), researchers should try to disprove or falsify their theories. This means looking for untypical examples of a phenomenon which does not fit a particular theory. For example, in examining the view that differences in the behaviour of men and women are primarily shaped by biological rather than cultural differences, sociologists such as Ann Oakley have tried to find untypical examples of human behaviour (see p. 133). Feminist sociologists claim to have falsified the biological arguments about the behaviour of men and women by finding examples of societies in which women behave in ways more usually associated with men and vice versa. (For examples, see p. 133.)

Goldthorpe *et al.*'s rejection of the embourgeoisement hypothesis (see pp. 79–81) provides an interesting example of the use of a non-representative sample (Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1968a, 1968b, 1969). The embourgeoisement hypothesis stated that large numbers of affluent workers were becoming middle-class as a result of their rising living standards. On the basis of available evidence, Goldthorpe *et al.* doubted this claim. To test the embourgeoisement hypothesis they selected a sample from the most affluent manual workers. If any manual workers were becoming middle-class, it would be members of this 'untypical' group. The research results showed little or no evidence of embourgeoisement. Having chosen the group most likely to confirm the hypothesis, Goldthorpe *et al.* felt confident in rejecting the theory of embourgeoisement.

Fiona Devine (1992, 1994) used a sample of similar workers in a later study of Luton workers which examined how far the working class had changed in the intervening period (see pp. 81–3).

Some sociologists have argued that it is important to study the best-informed members of social groups rather than a cross-section of a group. Thus, the interactionist Herbert Blumer thought that you should seek and question the most acute observers of a group or aspect of social life since 'A small number of such individuals, brought together as a discussion group, is more valuable many times over than any representative sample' (Blumer, 1969).

Case studies and life histories

Case studies

In general, case studies make no claims to be representative. A case study involves the detailed examination of a single example of something. Thus a case study could involve the study of a single institution, community or social group, an individual person, a particular historical event, or a single social action.

Howard Becker has described one aim of case studies as the attempt 'to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the group under study' (Becker, 1970). Ken Pryce's participant observation study of a single West Indian community in the St Paul's area of Bristol attempted, at one level, simply to understand that particular community (Pryce, 1979). Shane Blackman (1997) conducted a detailed ethnographic study of the homeless in Brighton in order to understand how that group experienced and saw the social world (see pp. 332–3).

However, case studies can be used, as Becker claims, 'to develop more general theoretical statements about regularities in social structure and process'. As mentioned above, a case study of a particular society can be used to falsify a general theory about social life. Thus Gough's study of Nayar

society showed that family structures based upon a marital bond are not universal (Gough, 1959) (see pp. 504–5). Steve Craine's study of school leavers in Manchester was able to falsify the belief of some theorists that an underclass culture was passed down from generation to generation (Craine, 1997) (see pp. 330–2).

Case studies can also be used to produce typologies, or a set of categories defining types of a social phenomenon. Douglas (1967) suggests that case studies can be used to discover the different types of suicide by uncovering the different social meanings of suicide.

Case studies may be useful for generating new hypotheses which can then be tested against other data or in later studies. Paul Willis's study of a single school has produced a number of hypotheses about the relationship between education and capitalist societies, which have proved to be a useful focus for research and the development of theories by other sociologists of education (Willis, 1977) (see pp. 791–4). Dick Hobbs and Colin Dunninghan (1998) used their case studies of individuals involved in organized crime to develop hypotheses about the changes in the nature of local and global relationships in criminal networks (see pp. 406–7).

A major drawback of case study research is that it is not possible to generalize on the basis of its findings. It is impossible to determine how far the findings of a study into one example of a social phenomenon can be applied to other examples. Alan Bryman (1988) suggests that one way to overcome this problem is to carry out or use a number of case studies of the same type of phenomenon. An example is the work of P.K. Edwards and Hugh Scullion (1982) who conducted case studies of seven British factories in order to develop a more general theory about factors affecting industrial conflict (see pp. 736–7). Similarly Shoshana Zuboff (1988) carried out case study research in eight organizations in order to try to make generalizations about the impact of information technology (see pp. 700–3).

However, as Bryman points out, it may be difficult to make direct comparisons of the results of studies carried out either by different people, or by the same person at different times. The data are likely to be more systematic if a single researcher, or group, collects data on a number of social groups at the same time. However, if this is done, the research ceases to be a case study as such.

Life histories

Life histories are a particular type of case study – the whole study concerns one individual's life. They can be carried out using a variety of methods but most frequently use extended, unstructured interviews. Some life histories make considerable use of personal documents. The following are some examples: a study of the life of a Polish peasant conducted by Thomas and Znaniecki; Gordon Allport's 'Letters from Jenny', a study of an ageing woman; and Robert Bogdan's study of Jane Fry, a transsexual. (All of these examples are discussed in Plummer, 1982.)

Like case studies, life histories, by their very nature, use an untypical sample. However, Ken Plummer argues that they have a number of uses and can be of considerable value in developing sociological theory.

Plummer suggests that life histories can be used as a 'sensitizing tool'. They can help the researcher develop an understanding of the meaning of concepts used by those she or he is studying. The 'rich detail' of life-history data can help cut through the 'dense jargon' that makes so much theoretical sociology difficult to comprehend. The life history allows the researcher to see the world from the social actor's point of view. This viewpoint is one that may challenge the assumptions and preconceptions of outsiders. For example, Plummer claims that Bogdan's study shows how transsexualism can seem a rational and reasonable choice from the actor's point of view, rather than a sickness, as it appears to be to some psychiatrists.

Like case studies in general, life histories can be used to falsify existing theories or to inspire new ones. A number of life histories can be used together to develop a theory, test it and refine it, and then test it again. Plummer refers to this theoretical approach as 'analytic induction'. The first life history allows the researcher to make preliminary hypotheses. These can be tested in subsequent life-history research. Where the hypotheses are found wanting, they can be modified to fit the extra cases. As research proceeds, the sociologist develops increasingly useful theories and generalizations. (This approach is similar to the 'grounded theory' advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) (see p. 1012 for further details).

Some feminist researchers argue that life-history research is useful for helping women to understand their situation, and, once they have understood, helping them to change it. Thus Maria Mies found that discussing life histories with female victims of violence helped the women to understand 'that their own experience of violence was not just their individual bad luck, or even their fault, but there is an objective social basis for this private violence by men against women and children' (Mies, 1993).

For critical researchers generally, life-history research can help to raise people's consciousness and awareness of their own exploitation by encouraging them to reflect upon the factors that have shaped their life experiences.

Pilot studies

Having selected a research method and chosen a method of selecting a sample, some sociologists carry out a pilot study before embarking upon the main research project. A pilot study is a small-scale preliminary study conducted before the main research in order to check the feasibility or to improve the design of the research. Pilot studies are not usually appropriate for case studies, but they are frequently carried out before large-scale quantitative research in an attempt to avoid time and money being wasted on an inadequately designed project. A pilot study is usually carried out on members of the relevant population, but not on those who will form part of the final sample. This is because it might influence the later behaviour of research subjects if they had already been involved in the research.

Pilot studies can be useful for a number of reasons:

1 If interviews or questionnaires are to be used, the questions may be tested to make sure that they make sense to respondents – that is, they produce the sort of information required and are unambiguous. Michael Young and Peter Willmott (1961) used a pilot study involving over a hundred interviews before carrying out their research into family life in Bethnal Green. They found the pilot interviews useful for developing questions that returned to particular themes so that they could try to check the consistency of answers to reveal if any respondents were being untruthful.

   Pilot studies were carried out in the Economic and Social Research Council's *Social Change and Economic Life Initiative* study (which studied social change in six British local labour markets). They were used for 'testing questionnaire items, the placing of the work history schedule, interview length, and the contact procedure' (Gallie, 1994). The researchers believed that this helped them to improve the reliability and response rate of their research.

2 Pilot studies may help researchers develop ways of getting the full cooperation of those they are studying. In a pilot study for her research into housebound mothers, Hannah Gavron (1966) found that it was necessary to establish a rapport with the respondent if she was to get full, open and honest answers. She therefore spent some time chatting to the respondent informally before starting the interview.

3 Pilot studies may be used to develop the research skills of those taking part. When Rex and Moore (1979) studied immigrants in Birmingham they used their pilot study to train the amateur interviewers they were using.

4 The pilot study may determine whether or not the research goes ahead. The researchers might discover insurmountable practical problems which lead to them dropping the project. In some cases a pilot study might be used to convince a funding organization of the usefulness of a particular project. If the pilot study is unsuccessful, the full study may be abandoned.

Social surveys

Social surveys can be defined as research projects which collect standardized data about large numbers of people. The data are usually in a statistical form, and the most practical way of collecting such data is through the use of questionnaires. Other types of research method, such as unstructured interviewing or observation, would be less suitable for collecting standardized information about large groups because they would be both time-consuming and difficult to translate into a statistical form.

Stephen Ackroyd and John A. Hughes (1981) have distinguished three main types of survey:

1 The first type, the factual survey, is used to collect descriptive information. The government census can be seen as a type of factual survey. The pioneering research done by Rowntree in his studies of poverty in York (see pp. 293–4) is a more sociological example. Rowntree's research was designed primarily to document the extent of poverty rather than to explain it, and this also applies to the more recent research on poverty by Mack and Lansley (1985, 1992) (see pp. 300–3 for further details of this study).

2 The second type, the attitude survey, is often carried out by opinion poll organizations. Instead of producing descriptive information about the social world, this type of survey attempts to discover the subjective states of individuals. Many polling organizations collect information about attitudes to political policies and personalities. Information on attitudes is often collected by sociologists interested in voting, for example Heath, Jowell and Curtice (1985, 1994) (see pp. 658–61). Sociologists who study stratification, such as Marshall, Newby, Rose and Vogler (1988), sometimes collect data on attitudes in order to examine the issue of class consciousness (see pp. 88–9 for further details).

3 The third type of survey, the explanatory survey, is more ambitious than the other types, since it goes beyond description and tries to test theories and hypotheses or to produce new theories. Most sociological surveys contain some explanatory element. Marshall *et al.* (1988), for example, tested the theory that routine white-collar workers had become proletarianized (see p. 69).

   Surveys such as that carried out by Townsend into poverty are designed to be both descriptive and explanatory. Townsend used survey data both to measure the extent of poverty and to develop theories to explain it (Townsend, 1979, 1993; Townsend, Corrigan and Kowarzik, 1985).

Researchers usually want to be able to generalize from social surveys, and so surveys are usually based on carefully selected samples. The success of any survey depends ultimately on the quality of the data it produces. Most social surveys use questionnaires as a means of data collection. The advantages and disadvantages of this method and the reliability and validity of the data it produces will now be examined.

Questionnaires

A questionnaire consists simply of a list of pre-set questions. In questionnaire research the same questions are usually given to respondents in the same order so that the same information can be collected from every member of the sample.

Administering questionnaires

Questionnaires may be administered in a number of ways. Often they are given to individuals by interviewers, in which case they take the form of structured interviews. This method was used by Goldthorpe *et al.* (1968a, 1968b, 1969) in their affluent worker study, and by Young and Willmott in their survey of family life in London, conducted in 1970 (Young and Willmott, 1973). (See Chapter 8, pp. 529–31.) It was also used by Gordon Marshall and colleagues in their study of class (Marshall *et al.*, 1988), and in the ESRC *Social Change and Economic Life Initiative* (Scott, 1994) (see p. 729).

Structured interviews have the advantage of having a trained interviewer on hand to make sure that the questionnaire is completed according to the instructions and to clarify any ambiguous questions. But questionnaires administered by interviewers involve the problem of interviewer bias. This means that the responses given are influenced by the presence of the researcher. (See pp. 1006–7 for a discussion of interviewer bias.) In addition, this method is expensive compared to the following alternatives.

The postal questionnaire, as its name suggests, is mailed to respondents with a stamped addressed envelope for return to the researcher. It provides an inexpensive way of gathering data, especially if respondents are dispersed over a wide geographical area. The return rate, though, does not often exceed 50 per cent of the sample population and is sometimes below 25 per cent. This may seriously bias the results since there may be systematic differences between those who return questionnaires and those who do not. For example, the main response to a postal questionnaire on marital relationships might come from those experiencing marital problems and wishing to air their grievances. If most non-respondents were happily married, the researcher would be unjustified in making generalizations about married life on the basis of the returns.

A second way, and one that obtains a far higher return rate, is when questionnaires are administered to a group, such as a class of students or workers at a union meeting. This method is less expensive than dealing with individual respondents while maintaining the advantages of the presence of an interviewer. However, the interviewer must ensure that respondents do not discuss questions within the group since this might affect their answers.

A third way of administering a questionnaire is to ask the questions over the telephone. This is often done by market research firms or marketing departments of companies, but it is not usually regarded as satisfactory by sociologists. Unless the researcher specifically wants a sample of people who have a telephone, the sample is unlikely to be representative of the population being studied.

Producing questionnaires and analysing the data

Questionnaires tend to be used to produce quantitative data. Sometimes researchers may not have very clear hypotheses and will ask a wide range of questions on a topic. However, they must have some idea of what factors are important or interesting before they can start to construct a questionnaire.

In the process of choosing questions, researchers have to operationalize concepts. In other words abstract concepts have to be translated into concrete questions which make it possible to take measurements relating to those concepts. Sociologists classify the social world in terms of a variety of concepts. For instance, social class, power, family, religion, alienation and anomie are concepts used to identify and categorize social relationships, beliefs, attitudes and experiences which are seen to have certain characteristics in common. In order to transpose these rather vague concepts into measuring instruments, a number of steps are taken.

First, an operational definition is established. This involves breaking the concept down into various components or dimensions in order to specify exactly what is to be measured. Thus, when Robert Blauner (1964) attempted to operationalize the concept of alienation, he divided it into four components – powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation and self-estrangement (see pp. 694–7). Similarly, when Gordon Marshall and colleagues (1988) operationalized the concept of class, they adopted the definitions of class categories used by E.O. Wright and John Goldthorpe (see pp. 111–17).

Once the concept has been operationally defined in terms of a number of components, the second step involves the selection of indicators for each

component. Thus an indicator of Blauner's component of powerlessness might be an absence of opportunities for workers to make decisions about the organization of work tasks. Marshall *et al.* selected indicators of class consciousness such as attitudes towards social inequality and towards industrial conflict.

Third, indicators of each dimension are put into the form of a series of questions that will provide quantifiable data for measuring each dimension. Thus indicators of class consciousness became questions such as 'Do you think the distribution of income and wealth is a fair one?' and 'Do you think there are any important issues which cause conflicts between those who run industry and those who work for them' (Marshall *et al.*, 1988).

Researchers have a number of choices to make during the process of operationalizing concepts in questionnaires. First they have to decide what form of question to ask.

Questions may be open-ended, such as: 'Under what circumstances do you think a person could move from one class to another?' Open-ended questions allow the respondents to compose their own answers rather than choosing between a number of given answers. This may be more likely to provide valid data since respondents can say what they mean in their own words. However, this kind of response might be difficult to classify and quantify. Answers must be interpreted carefully before the researcher is able to say, for example, that a certain percentage of respondents attribute good industrial relations to effective management, an efficient union, high pay or whatever.

A second type of question, sometimes known as a closed or fixed-choice question, requires a choice between a number of given answers. For example, the following question was asked to white people in Britain:

If a close relative were to marry an ethnic minority person would most white people -
Would not mind
Would mind a little
Would mind very much
Can't say

Modood *et al.*, 1997, p. 316

Sometimes the respondent is asked to choose between two stated alternatives. For example:

In the past there was a dominant class which largely controlled the economic and political system, and a lower class which had no control over economic or political affairs. Some people say that things are still like this, others say it has now changed. What do you think? Has it changed, or stayed the same?

Marshall *et al.*, 1988, pp. 294–5

A similar type of question requires the respondent to agree or disagree with a particular statement. For example:

A number of ideas have been put forward in order to overcome Britain's economic problems. (For each one indicate whether you agree or disagree.)

a. Leaving it to market forces to revive the economy.
b. Income policies which increase the wages of the low paid rather than the high paid.
c. Increasing income tax in order to increase welfare benefits.
d. Import controls to protect Britain from competition from abroad.
e. Increased taxes on the profits of successful companies in order to maintain jobs in declining industries.
f. Increased government spending to revive the economy.

Marshall *et al.*, 1988, p. 293

Compared to the open-ended type, fixed-choice questions provide responses that can be more easily classified and quantified. It requires relatively little time, effort and ingenuity to arrive at statements describing the percentages of respondents who gave different answers. However, fixed-choice questions do not allow the respondent to qualify and develop their answers. It is therefore difficult for researchers to know exactly what they are measuring. For example, when respondents agree that there are issues which divide management and workers, it is not clear what the respondents think those issues are. They might be quite different to the sorts of issues the researchers think might be divisive. Other questions can be added to clarify what respondents mean, but some sociologists would argue that in-depth, unstructured interviews would be better than structured ones for determining the extent and strength of class consciousness.

If open-ended questions are used, and the researcher wants the data to be in a statistical form, it becomes necessary to code the answers. Coding involves identifying a number of categories into which answers can be placed. The researcher usually examines the answers given and establishes the principal types of answer that have been provided. Thus, in the *British Crime Survey* of 1998, the answers to an open-ended question on the reasons why people had not reported crimes were put into classifications such as: 'Too trivial', 'Police couldn't do anything', 'Dealt with ourselves', Dislike/fear of police', 'Inconvenient to report', 'Police would not be interested', 'Fear of reprisal', 'Reported to other authorities' and 'Other answers' (Mirrlees-Black *et al.*, 1998).

Once the data have been collected and classified, it is necessary to analyse them. In an explanatory

survey this often involves using multivariate analysis to determine the relationships between the variables. For example, in their study of educational achievement, A.H. Halsey and colleagues tried to measure the relative importance of cultural and material factors in producing educational success or failure (Halsey *et al.*, 1980) (see pp. 842–3 for further details).

Questionnaires are often designed to test a particular hypothesis. Goldthorpe *et al.* (1968a, 1968b, 1969) used questionnaires to test the embourgeoisement thesis; while Marshall *et al.* (1988) used them to test various theories of stratification. In such cases the data are analysed in relation to the hypotheses that are being tested. The analysis of data from descriptive or attitude surveys is often more straightforward. Sometimes it involves little more than statements about the percentages of respondents who gave particular replies.

The advantages of questionnaires

Questionnaire research is certainly a practical way to collect data. Although designing the questionnaire and carrying out pilot studies may take some time, once in use questionnaires can be used to collect large quantities of data from considerable numbers of people over a relatively short period of time. Thus Mack and Lansley (1985) in their initial study of poverty used a sample of 1,174 people (see pp. 300–3 for further details), while the *British Crime Survey* of 1998 (discussed on pp. 366–8) used a sample of 14,947 households (Mirrlees-Black *et al.*, 1998). Such large samples cannot be studied using more in-depth research methods without incurring prohibitive costs.

Even when questionnaires are administered by interviewers this involves relatively little personal involvement, or danger or sacrifice on the part of the researcher, when compared with some participant observation studies. The results of questionnaire research can be relatively easily quantified, and with the assistance of computers the data can be analysed quickly and efficiently. Using computers, the relationships between many different variables can be examined. Many sociological and other social science researchers use the *Statistical Package for Social Sciences* computer programme, which can rapidly produce complex statistical analyses.

To some quantitative researchers, however, the theoretical advantages are more important than the practical ones. Although relatively few sociologists today claim to be positivists, a considerable number support the use of quantitative data on the grounds that it can be analysed more 'scientifically' and objectively than qualitative data. Quantitative data can be considered more reliable than qualitative data. Since each individual respondent answers precisely the same questions in the same order, they are all responding to the same stimuli. Any differences in response should, in theory, reflect real differences between respondents. Furthermore the figures produced can be checked by other researchers, and their reliability should therefore be high.

Only when the data are quantified by means of reliable measuring instruments can the results of different studies be directly compared. Thus studies of British elections over several decades have produced data that can be used to determine changing patterns of voting and changing social attitudes within the British electorate. Heath, Jowell and Curtice (1985, 1994) in their two studies of British elections were able to use data from their own and other election studies to reveal ideological shifts in the electorate, and to check the claim that class was becoming less important in determining voting behaviour (see pp. 655–7 and 667–70 for details).

From a positivist point of view, statistical data from questionnaires can be analysed so that new theories can be produced. More typically, however, such data are used to test existing hypotheses, since the researcher must have a reasonably clear idea of the sort of information that is important before they set the questions. Whether questionnaires are used inductively (as in the former case) or deductively (as in the latter), they can be used to try to establish causal relationships through multivariate analysis. Ivor Crewe (1987a) used statistical data to check his theory that housing tenure, among other factors, had an influence on voting behaviour independent of social class (see p. 658). Many sociologists regard questionnaires as a suitable method for testing precise hypotheses in a rigorous manner: for example, Marshall *et al.* (1988) used questionnaire data to back up their claim that they had falsified the proletarianization thesis (see p. 69).

As has already been mentioned, questionnaire research can generally use larger samples than qualitative methods. For this reason, sociologists who have carried out a social survey tend to feel more justified in generalizing about a wider population than those who have carried out an in-depth study of a smaller number of people. This is particularly likely where a questionnaire is used in conjunction with sophisticated sampling techniques so that the researcher can be confident that the sample is representative. Researchers into such areas of social life as poverty, voting, crime and stratification, who have carried out social surveys using questionnaires, have not hesitated to make claims about the British population as a whole, not just those questioned during the research.

Despite the importance of the theoretical points discussed above, questionnaires are not just used by

positivists or those who strongly believe in the advantages of quantitative data. In many circumstances they are used when resources are limited and data are needed on large numbers of people. They are particularly useful when straightforward descriptive data are required. However, the validity of the statistical data, particularly when produced for explanatory surveys, has been questioned by some sociologists who advocate a more interpretive, qualitative approach. These criticisms will now be examined.

The disadvantages of questionnaires

Interpretive sociologists vary in their views on survey research and the data it produces. Weber's methodological position implies that such data can be one – but only one – of the types of data required in sociological research. Interactionists often see statistical data as inadequate for producing sociological explanations of human behaviour. Phenomenologists go further, for they see the data produced as an artificial creation of the researcher. Above all, critics argue that, despite the reliability of questionnaire data, it lacks validity. To phenomenologists in particular, the methodological assumptions on which questionnaires are based are entirely false. They put forward six main objections:

1 It cannot be assumed that different answers to the same question reflect real differences between respondents. However much care is taken with the wording of questions, respondents may interpret them differently. People who choose the same response may not mean the same thing. People who choose different responses may not mean different things. This may result from the wording of questions. For example, the word 'uptight' in low-income black American areas usually refers to a close relationship between friends, but when it entered the vocabulary of mainstream America it changed its meaning to anxious and tense. Even common words and phrases carry different associations for different groups. As Irwin Deutscher observes, 'Within a society, as well as between societies, the sociologist seeks information from and about people who operate verbally with different vocabularies, different grammars and different kinds of sounds' (Deutscher, 1977). Thus a questionnaire, which provides little opportunity to qualify meaning, might not provide comparable data when administered to members of different social groups.

2 In designing the questionnaire researchers assume that they know what is important. Respondents cannot provide information that is not requested, they cannot answer questions that are not asked. For this reason, it is difficult to develop hypotheses during the course of the research and researchers are limited to testing those theories that they have already thought of.

3 Questionnaire research involves the operationalization of concepts, and some interpretive sociologists argue that such procedures produce a distorted picture of the social world. The process of breaking down a concept so that it can be quantified imposes sociological constructs, categories and logic on the social world. Thus, when Blauner sought to measure alienation (see pp. 694–7) he employed a concept which might have had no reality in the social world he sought to understand. Indeed Blauner admits that: 'It is difficult to interpret a finding that 70 per cent of factory workers report satisfaction with their jobs because we do not know how valid or reliable our measuring instrument is' (Blauner, 1964). The workers were not allowed to reveal their attitudes to their work in their own way. As the phenomenologist Michael Phillipson observes, 'the instruments of the observer create the very order they are supposedly designed to reveal' (Phillipson, 1972).

4 The validity of the data may be reduced by the unwillingness or inability of respondents to give full and accurate replies to questions. Quite simply, respondents may lie. Attempts to check the accuracy of self-report studies on crime (see pp. 368–9) have found that some 20 per cent of respondents do not tell the truth. Even if respondents want to tell the truth they may be unable to do so because of faulty memory or because they lack the relevant information. Thus the *British Crime Surveys* may have underestimated the amount of unreported crime because victims may have been unaware or may have forgotten that they had been the victims of crime.

   Furthermore, even when respondents are honest, and not hampered by ignorance or forgetfulness, there are some types of questions where the validity of the answers can still be queried. This is particularly true of questions about attitudes. It cannot be assumed that stated attitudes will be translated into actual behaviour.

   For instance, in the 1930s La Pierre (1934) travelled to 251 establishments – such as restaurants, hotels and campsites – in the USA with two Chinese people. They were refused service or accommodation at only one of these places, yet when the same establishments were sent a questionnaire a few months later, only one said that they would accept Chinese customers.

   When observation or participant observation is used, the researcher relies less on respondents' accounts and may therefore have more chance of producing valid data.

5 A fifth reason for doubting the validity of questionnaire data is the distance maintained between the researcher and the subject of the research, particularly in the case of postal questionnaires. As Alan Bryman puts it:

> *The quantitative researcher adopts the posture of an outsider looking in on the social world. He or she applies a preordained framework on the subjects being investigated and is involved as little as possible in that world. This posture is the analogue of a detached scientific observer.*
>
> Bryman, 1988

To a positivist this approach encourages objectivity, but to an interpretive sociologist it precludes the possibility of understanding the meanings and motives of the subjects of the research. Unlike participant observation, the researcher does not undergo similar experiences to the subjects of the research, and so cannot draw so easily on experience to understand the behaviour of those being studied. Using questionnaires it is not possible to see how people act and react towards each other, nor is it possible to examine the way in which self-concepts change during the course of interaction. Interactionists in particular do not believe that the researcher can gain genuine insights into the subjective states underlying the behaviour of those being studied unless the researcher gets close to those they are studying.

Some feminists and critical social scientists also object to questionnaire research on similar grounds. They believe that it is important to involve the subjects of research in the research process. This has a number of advantages. It allows the subjects to contribute to evaluating the research; it allows the researcher to avoid exploiting them; and it enables the consciousness of exploitation to develop.

For example, Victor Jupp and Clive Norris comment that critical researchers in criminology have a 'theoretical and political aversion to the highly formal quantitative and positivist approaches of conventional criminology' (Jupp and Norris, 1993). They associate such methods with using data to control criminals and deviants, whereas their aims are more directed at liberating people from the controls which restrict them. They see this as better achieved through methods which are 'qualitative, naturalistic and non-positivist and include life-history and other informal interviews, observational methods, especially participant observation, case studies and social history research'.

6 Finally, when open-ended questions are used, and the researcher requires quantitative data, the coding of answers will take place. As in the operationalization of concepts this involves researchers imposing their own order on the data. The differences in the precise answers given to questions are glossed over as answers which are not identical are placed together in a single category. This process obscures the differences that do exist between the answers.

Questionnaire research – conclusions

Despite the strength of these criticisms it is increasingly accepted by most sociologists that there is a place for survey research in sociology. After all, there would be little point in carrying out participant observation or in-depth interviewing to discover the percentages of males and females who watched television every evening.

Furthermore, even some feminists believe that quantitative questionnaire research has its uses. For example, Toby Epstein Jayaratne (1993) points out that quantitative research, such as that which uses questionnaires, has been useful in documenting the extent of sexism in certain institutions. The critical social scientist Lee Harvey (1990) sees some questionnaire research (such as that undertaken by Goldthorpe *et al.*) as falling within the tradition of critical research.

It is usually when statistical data from questionnaires is used to try to establish causal relationships that opponents of quantitative research become most concerned about the validity of the data being used. However, such research does often provide useful data on social structures which may shape behaviour without individuals being aware of it. Thus studies of social class and social mobility produce findings about people's life chances which could not be produced using other methods (see pp. 97–105 for examples). When used alongside qualitative methods, questionnaire research can certainly make a crucial contribution towards developing as full a picture as possible of social life.

Interviews

Types of interview

Interviews take a number of forms depending upon how structured they are. A completely structured interview is simply a questionnaire administered by an interviewer who is not allowed to deviate in any way from the questions provided. The interviewer simply reads out the questions to the respondent. At the other extreme, a totally unstructured interview takes the form of a conversation where the interviewer has no predetermined questions. Most interviews fall somewhere between these two extremes.

Interviews of a more structured variety may allow the interviewer to probe the respondents' answers so that they can, if necessary, be clarified. The interviewer may also be allowed to prompt the interviewee, that is, give them extra guidance to help them answer the question. For example, Goldthorpe *et al.*'s team of researchers were able to prompt interviewees who could not decide how to answer a question about whether they had actively done anything to find a different job, by suggesting that they might have read job adverts in local newspapers (Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1968a).

In more unstructured interviews the conversation develops naturally, unless the respondent fails to cover an area in which the researcher is interested. Eventually the interviewer will direct the conversation back to the areas he or she wishes to cover. Marjorie DeVault, for example, in her study *Feeding the Family*, had some questions which she made sure every interviewee answered, but she also allowed them to talk freely around one general question. She

told them that she wanted to talk about 'all the housework that has to do with food: cooking, planning, shopping, cleaning up' (DeVault, 1991).

Some interviewers have a schedule of topics they wish to cover and they make sure that at some point the conversation comes back to these topics.

Some feminist researchers, such as Ann Oakley, are advocates of very unstructured interviews in which the researcher and person being interviewed become collaborators in the research and sometimes friends (see pp. 988–9). Critical social researchers also usually prefer unstructured interviewing.

As highly-structured interviews are very similar to questionnaires, the rest of our discussion of interviews will concentrate on interviews of a less structured variety.

Interviewing styles

Having a conversation with somebody is extremely common in human interaction, and it might be thought that interviewing requires no special preparation. However, the sociological researcher needs to overcome the problems of making contact with – and gaining the cooperation of – respondents. Having made contact, and persuaded a person to take part in the interview, the researcher then needs to try to ensure that the respondent gives full, honest and open answers.

Interviewers have used a variety of methods to make contact with respondents. They have telephoned in advance, written letters and turned up at interviewees' houses. At the initial point of contact it is important that the interviewers establish why they wish to carry out the interview and what the information is to be used for. They may also need to explain how the interviewee was selected and why they are suitable for research. Gavron (1966) used letters of introduction from the interviewee's doctor in order to establish contact. When she met them she explained the nature and purpose of her research.

The most common way of conducting interviews is to be non-directive: to refrain from offering opinions, to avoid expressions of approval and disapproval. Often an interviewer will spend some time trying to establish rapport or understanding between themselves and the interviewee. They may do this simply by talking informally before the interview proper starts. Once the interviewee feels that he or she is not going to be criticized or judged, that they can talk freely and can rely upon a sympathetic audience, it is hoped that they will talk with honesty and openness. Since the respondent does not have to answer the questions (and since they may be asked about private or personal aspects of their lives which they would not usually discuss with a stranger), it is often argued that non-directive interviewing is the most effective type of interviewing.

In contrast, Howard Becker suggests that interviewers may be inhibited by adopting this relatively passive approach and a 'bland, polite style of conversation' (Becker, 1970). He suggests that on certain occasions a more active and aggressive approach can provide much fuller data. This involves the interviewer taking 'positions on some issues' and using 'more aggressive conversational tactics'.

Becker adopted these tactics in his interviews with Chicago schoolteachers (discussed on p. 845). He claims that American schoolteachers believe they have a lot to hide from what they regard as a 'prying, misunderstanding, and potentially dangerous public'. They are therefore unlikely to volunteer certain information. By adopting an aggressive stance, being sceptical, and at times even pretending to be stupid, Becker managed to prise out much of this information. In particular, he claimed to have uncovered the ways that teachers categorized and evaluated students in terms of their class and ethnic backgrounds – information they would have preferred to have kept hidden for fear of being accused of prejudice and discrimination. Becker states: 'I coerced many interviewees into being considerably more frank than they had originally intended.'

Becker suggests that this approach is particularly useful for one-off interviews. Similar information can be picked up more subtly over a series of interviews without running the risk of antagonizing respondents. The apparent success of Becker's rather unorthodox tactics suggests that there is no one best way of interviewing.

Some sociologists who, like Becker, reject non-directive interviewing believe that interviewers should be empathetic towards interviewees rather than aggressive. Thus the feminist researcher Ann Oakley (1981), in her study of childbirth and childcare, became closely involved with the women she was studying. She advised them and sometimes even gave them help, and she encouraged them to become actively involved in the research process (see pp. 988–9 for details).

Individual and group interviews

It is normal for a single interviewer to interview a single respondent. This has a number of advantages. It may be easier to establish rapport, confidentiality can be ensured, and the respondent is not distracted or influenced by the presence of other interviewees. In some circumstances, though, sociologists have carried out group interviews.

For example, Paul Willis (1977), in his study of education, interviewed several of the 'lads' together

(see pp. 791–4 for further details). It can be argued that this might be more likely to produce valid data than a one-to-one interview. The lads' activities usually took place in a group context, and a group interview would reflect this. In group interviews Willis was able to observe interaction between the 'lads', and they felt more at ease than when talking alone to an older and middle-class interviewer.

James Holstein and Jaber Gubrium argue that group interviews are valuable because they 'allow diverse categorizations and sentiments to emerge, showing how participants flesh out, alter, or reconstruct viewpoints in response to challenges' (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). They believe that having many voices present (which they call multivocality) broadens interviews and can make the participants more reflexive. They think more deeply about their answers and reflect critically upon them in their responses to others.

This view of interviewing is rather different to the view that sees interviews as simply uncovering the facts – as untainted by the interview process as possible. Instead it sees the interview as an active process in which knowledge is created through interaction. This type of group interview tends, therefore, to be favoured by interactionist, interpretive and critical sociologists.

A similar style of interview – the focus group – is also used by political parties who want more in-depth data on public opinion than that provided by opinion polls.

Interviews are not natural social situations. Some sociologists have sought ways to minimize the extent to which respondents may see them as artificial or unnatural, in the belief that this is essential for valid data to be obtained. Others believe that more valid data can be obtained by emphasizing and using the process of interaction that takes place within the interview.

The advantages of interviews

Interviews are seen as a useful research method by many different types of sociologist. Although they represent something of a compromise between more structured research methods like questionnaires and the more in-depth methods such as participant observation, they can be adapted to suit both the practical needs and theoretical preferences of different sociologists.

Those who support the use of more quantitative methods tend to prefer interviews to participant observation. Compared to participant observation, interviews can utilize larger samples, so generalizations are more justified. With some coding of responses it is possible to produce statistical data from interviews, and it is easier to replicate the research and check results. Because there is usually some degree of structure in an interview it is easier to make direct comparisons than it is by using data from participant observation.

To sociologists who prefer more qualitative methods, interviews have clear advantages over questionnaires. The concepts and words used by interviewer and interviewee alike can be clarified; the researchers' concepts are less likely to be imposed on the social world; issues can be explored in greater depth; and the researcher does not limit the responses to fixed choices. For these reasons interviews can be useful for generating new hypotheses and theories which the researcher would not otherwise have thought of.

For example, when Elizabeth Bott (1971) started her interviews with 20 families in her investigation into conjugal roles, she had not considered the possibility that friendship networks might affect the type of conjugal relationship that developed. Had she been using questionnaires she would not have included the questions that would have been necessary to discover the information which she needed to formulate her theory.

The above arguments, though, do not explain why sociologists should sometimes choose to use interviews in preference to all other research methods. They are not as reliable as questionnaires and they are not as likely to produce valid data as participant observation. A major reason for the widespread use of interviews is their sheer practicality. There is no other method which allows access to so many different groups of people and different types of information. As Ackroyd and Hughes put it:

> *Using as data what the respondent says about himself or herself potentially offers the social researcher access to vast storehouses of information. The social researcher is not limited to what he or she can immediately perceive or experience, but is able to cover as many dimensions and as many people as resources permit.*
>
> Ackroyd and Hughes, 1981

In short, interviews are more flexible than any other research method. They can be used to extract simple factual information from people. They can be used to ask people about their attitudes, their past, present or future behaviour, their motives, feelings and other emotions that cannot be observed directly. Interviewers can explore each question or issue in as much depth or superficiality as they wish. The range of information available from interviews can be demonstrated from the following examples.

In their study of schizophrenia R.D. Laing and A. Esterson (1970) used in-depth interviews to study the past behaviour and emotional states of people with schizophrenia and their families (see pp. 510–12). The family is such a small and closed social grouping that participant observation is almost impossible without changing the family's behaviour.

Howard Becker (1963) used interviews to study 50 marijuana smokers. Via interviews he was able to try to explore the whole of the 'deviant career' of the drug users, from the time they first tried the drug to when they became regular users involved with a subculture of marijuana smokers. Interviewing allowed Becker to discuss the motives and circumstances that led to them trying the drug and continuing to use it.

Interviews are often used to carry out research into groups who might not otherwise consent to being the subject of research. Laurie Taylor (1984) could only produce data about professional crime in Britain because he was able to gain the trust of the criminals he interviewed. Clearly, participant observation would have been out of the question, and he would have been unlikely to have obtained a satisfactory response rate using postal questionnaires. Furthermore, because of Taylor's lack of familiarity with professional criminals he might have had difficulty deciding what questions to ask them. Once again, the flexibility and practicality of interviews are evident. Similar comments are applicable to the studies of criminal networks by Dick Hobbs and Colin Dunninghan (1998) (see pp. 406–7), which used life-history interviews with professional criminals connected with one particular locality.

Apart from their practicality, there are some theoretical advantages to interviews compared with other methods. From the viewpoint of some feminist and critical researchers, interviews allow close collaboration between interviewer and interviewee so that they can become partners in the research. Interviews allow the opportunity for critical reflection by all those involved, so that they can examine and sometimes change the perspectives through which they see the world. This is important for critical researchers, whose objective is to change the social world. Such opportunities may not always be possible in participant observation studies where the flow of social life limits time for reflection. Some sociologists have gone as far as arguing that the interviewing process itself creates new knowledge rather than just revealing data that was previously present in the interviewees' heads (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995).

The disadvantages of interviews

Stephen Ackroyd and John A. Hughes have observed that:

> *The foundations of interviewing are to be found in the mundane observation that people can report on what they feel, tell others about aspects of their lives, disclose what their hopes and fears are, offer their opinions, state their beliefs, answer questions about who they see regularly, what they did last week, how much they spend on food, and so on, to put it simply they can impart masses of information about themselves.*
>
> Ackroyd and Hughes, 1981

The problem is that these masses of information may be neither valid nor reliable. Interviews have many of the same drawbacks as questionnaires: the responses given may not be accurate and may not reflect real behaviour. Respondents may lie, may forget, or may lack the information required.

To give a simple example, some of the criminals interviewed by Laurie Taylor (1984) later claimed that they had made up fanciful stories about their escapades in order to see how gullible Taylor was.

However, even if respondents are not handicapped by forgetfulness or ignorance, and have no wish to deceive, they may still not give valid answers. As critics of questionnaire data have pointed out, interviewees may not act in accordance with their stated beliefs. When reflecting on past events they may alter their interpretation in the light of subsequent experience. Because interviews are artificial, Cicourel has asked whether they 'capture the daily life, conditions, opinions, values, attitudes, and knowledge base of those we study as expressed in their natural habitat' (quoted in Bryman, 1988).

David Matza's work on delinquents in the USA can illustrate the sort of problem that arises with interview data (Matza, 1964) (see pp. 361–3 for further details). Matza interviewed 100 delinquents in training school and found that a surprisingly large number of them disapproved of most crimes. Matza concluded that delinquents did not, on the whole, strongly reject society's values. Critics, however, have pointed out that, apart from the question of how truthful the delinquents were, Matza failed to take account of the possibility that they had modified their views as a result of their punishment. At the time of their offences they may have regarded the laws they were breaking contemptuously and only later did they change their minds.

Interviewees may also be influenced by the presence of the researcher. The answers given may be influenced by the way the interviewees define the situation. William Labov (1973), for instance, found

that young black American children responded differently when interviewed in different contexts.

Interviewed by a white interviewer in a formal setting, the children said little when asked to describe a toy jet plane. This type of evidence had led some psychologists to conclude that these children were linguistically deprived and that this deprivation contributed to their failure in education. However, Labov produced evidence to show that the apparent linguistic deprivation was the result of interviewing techniques and not a genuine reflection of the children's linguistic ability. When the children were interviewed by a black interviewer in a formal setting they were more forthcoming. When the children sat on the floor with the interviewer, and they were able to bring their best friend with them, they opened up and became fluent and articulate.

Labov argued that when children defined the situation as hostile they were unable to demonstrate their real abilities. When they defined the situation as friendly they were able to give a much better account of themselves. Clearly such factors as the age, skin colour, sex, clothing and accent of the interviewer may affect the interviewees' definition of the interview, and so affect their behaviour.

A further problem with unstructured interviews is that there is more opportunity for the interviewer (usually without realizing it) to direct the interviewee towards giving certain types of response. Consciously or unconsciously, respondents might give the sort of answers that they believe the interviewer wants to hear, rather than saying what they truly believe. This problem is known as interviewer bias. It can never be totally eliminated from interview research simply because interviews are interaction situations.

Interviewer bias is demonstrated in a study conducted by Stuart A. Rice in 1914 (discussed in Deming, 1971). Two thousand destitute men were asked, among other things, to explain their situation. There was a strong tendency for those interviewed by a supporter of Prohibition to blame their decline on alcohol; but those interviewed by a committed socialist were much more likely to explain their plight in terms of the industrial situation. The interviewers apparently had their own views on the reasons for destitution, which they communicated to the respondents.

In order to conduct an interview successfully and interpret the responses correctly the interviewer must also be aware of the social conventions of those being interviewed. For example, certain activities may be regarded as more 'socially desirable' by members of one group than by members of another. As a result there may be differences between social groups in terms of their members' willingness to admit to particular activities.

The importance of this can be seen from a study conducted by Bruce Dohrenwend in New York to investigate the relationship between mental health and ethnicity (discussed in Phillips, 1971). Respondents were asked whether or not they had experienced a list of symptoms associated with mental illness. Compared with Jews, Irish and blacks, Puerto Ricans reported experiencing more of the symptoms and therefore appeared to have a higher rate of mental illness. Yet Dohrenwend found that the symptoms were regarded as less undesirable by Puerto Ricans than by members of the other ethnic groups. As a result they were more ready to admit to them. Such findings cast serious doubt on the validity of interview data and therefore on the use to which those data are put.

Interviews – conclusion

In all research methods the procedures used by the researcher influence the sort of data produced. Interviews are no exception. Nigel Fielding (1993b) argues that there are three main perspectives on the merits of interview data:

1. Positivists believe that interviews can produce valid and fairly reliable data so long as standardized interviews are used and care is taken to avoid interviewers letting their own views become known to interviewees. The greater the detachment and impartiality of the researcher, the more valid and reliable the data will be.
2. Symbolic interactionists, on the other hand, recognize 'No clear-cut distinction between research interviews and other forms of social action ... For interactionists, the data are valid when a deep mutual understanding has been achieved between interviewer and respondent.' From this viewpoint, the interactive nature of interviews helps the production of valid knowledge, rather than gets in the way.
3. From the viewpoint of ethnomethodologists, interviews 'do not report on an external reality displayed in respondents' utterances but on the internal reality constructed as both parties contrive to produce the appearance of a recognisable interview'. Interviews then become the objects of study rather than sources of data.
   Ethnomethodologists can study them to reveal the informal tacit understandings which shape the way interviews are conducted.

A fourth perspective – that of critical researchers and feminists – is not mentioned by Fielding. It can be argued that this perspective comes close to that of interactionists. However, in addition, critical and feminist researchers also see interviews as an opportunity for interviewers and interviewees to see through the ideologies of social life, to reflect together on the social world being studied, and,

ultimately, to begin to change that reality so that it becomes less exploitative.

Despite the problems associated with interviews, they are unlikely to be abandoned as sources of data by sociological researchers. As the above perspectives suggest, they can be adapted to fit the theoretical preferences of different sociologists. Furthermore, as David Silverman points out, conversations are an integral part of social life, and as one of the main ways in which people communicate they are invaluable as a way of trying to understand society. Silverman says:

> *They offer a rich source of data which provides access to how people account for their troubles and good fortunes. Human beings can never fully see the world through the eyes of another person, but talking to other people can certainly provide insights into their perspectives on social life. Perhaps only through participant observation can researchers develop greater insights.*
>
> Silverman, 1985

Observation and participant observation

Observation

All sociological research involves observation of some sort. The use of observation is not confined to researchers advocating any particular methodological approach. Thus positivists believe that the social world can be objectively observed, classified and measured. Observation has also been frequently used by qualitative social researchers: numerous interactionist sociologists have observed interaction in the classroom when studying education. Similarly, in studying suicide, the ethnomethodologist J. Maxwell Atkinson (1978) observed the process of decision making in coroners' courts. However, there are limits to the situations in which social life can be observed in 'natural' settings without affecting the validity of the data produced.

There are a considerable number of social situations in which the presence of an observer is prohibited, or is unlikely to be allowed. Sociologists who study politics are not allowed to observe the deliberations of the British Cabinet, nor can they observe private conversations between members of the government and their senior officials. Sociologists interested in family life are unlikely to be allowed to observe interaction between married coupies in the bedroom, nor is it likely that sociologists who study work will be able to observe the board meetings of large companies.

Even when observation is allowed, the researcher's presence might alter the behaviour of those being observed to such an extent that the data is of little use. In small, closely-knit social units such as families the observed can hardly be expected to act naturally with an observer present.

Despite this, in certain situations sociologists might judge that some useful and valid data can still be produced. For example, in his study of secondary schooling, David Hargreaves (1967) found that some teachers he observed altered their behaviour considerably. Some refused to talk to the class as a whole when he was present. But others appeared to carry on as normal, and Hargreaves believed that some of his data were therefore valid (see p. 848 for further details of Hargreaves's study). In such situations the longer the researcher observes, the more likely those being studied are to forget about his or her presence, and the more likely they are to act naturally.

Given the danger that the researcher will influence those being studied, valid data can most reasonably be expected to result when the presence of passive outsiders is quite normal. Thus, in courtrooms, in the Visitors' Gallery of the House of Commons, or on the terraces at a football match, a sociological researcher is able to blend into the background without any great difficulty. In other circumstances it may be necessary for the observer to get involved in the activities of those being studied. To be accepted, she or he will have to become a participant observer.

Ethnography and participant observation

Ethnography is the study of a way of life. It was first introduced into the social sciences by anthropologists who studied small-scale, pre-industrial societies. Bronislaw Malinowski's study of the Trobriand Islands (Malinowski, 1954) (pp. 433–4) is an example of an ethnographic study. Anthropologists increasingly recognized the need to get as close as possible to the societies they were investigating. More recently, the same approach has been applied to the study of groups within industrial society.

Ethnography can take various forms and is used by sociologists of different types. It is widely used by symbolic interactionists, and critical ethnography is a common type of study amongst critical social scientists (see pp. 1013–14). Ethnography can use different qualitative research methods, but the most common are in-depth interviews, participant observation, and the use of qualitative documents. It may also involve collecting some quantitative data. However, participant observation is often the most important single method used in ethnographic studies.

As a means for gathering data, participant observation has a long history in sociology. It has been used by researchers with widely differing theoretical perspectives. As such it is a research technique that has been adapted to meet the require-

ments of sociologists with various views on the nature of social reality. However, it has been particularly associated with the work of symbolic interactionists such as Herbert Blumer, Howard Becker and Erving Goffman. This method became widely employed in the USA in the 1960s and since then has been regarded by many sociologists as the most appropriate way of obtaining qualitative data.

Joining the group, collecting and recording the data

One of the most important decisions that participant observers have to make is how to approach the social group they wish to join. Researchers may decide to be an overt participant observer, where they declare their true identity and purpose, or a covert participant observer, where the fact that they are a researcher is not revealed. Sometimes researchers choose to be partially open but do not provide those being studied with the full story.

Some researchers strongly advocate being open from the start, arguing that it is both morally and practically the best way to carry out participant observation. The American sociologist Ned Polsky, in his study of *Hustlers, Beats and Others* (1967), suggests that it is morally correct to be truthful, and that the research can easily be ruined if the covert participant observer is uncovered. Another advantage is that the open researcher may be able to avoid participation in distasteful, immoral, or illegal behaviour. (For example, Howard Parker (1974), when studying Liverpool delinquents, could refuse to take part in the theft of car radios without damaging his relationship with the people he was studying.)

Furthermore, the researcher is free to ask questions without arousing suspicion. In a study of female sexuality and its relationship to masculinity among a group of students at a further education college, Beverley Skeggs was open about her research and argued that her 'age, clothing, attitude and marginal status as a part-time teacher enabled the students not to see me as part of the establishment' (Skeggs, 1991).

Sometimes researchers are less open without actually lying to those they are studying. William Foote Whyte (1955), in a classic study of an Italian American slum, simply described himself as a writer without elaborating further. Ken Pryce (1979), in his study of the West Indian community in Bristol, found that he could be quite open with some of the groups, but with others (such as those engaged in illegal activities) he had to be more guarded.

The main disadvantage of being open is that it may affect the behaviour of those being studied. 'Doc', one of the key members of the street-corner gang studied by Whyte, said to him, 'You've slowed me up plenty since you've been down here. Now, when I do something, I would have to think that Bill Whyte would want to know about it and how to explain it. Before I used to do things by instinct' (Whyte, 1955). The knowledge that they are being observed can influence people's behaviour as they become more self-conscious and think about their actions.

An obvious advantage of covert participant observation is that the members of the group being studied are not likely to change their behaviour as a result of being studied, since they are kept in ignorance of the fact that they are being observed for research purposes. Some studies may not be possible without participant observation being covert, either because the group would change its behaviour too much, or because the researcher would not be allowed to join in the first place.

For example, Jason Ditton (1977) wanted to study thefts by bread van salesmen during the course of their work. Clearly the salesmen might have become much more cautious if they knew that they were being observed; indeed they might have stopped stealing altogether. Nigel Fielding (1993a) argues that he would not have been able to conduct his study of the National Front (a very right-wing and racist political party in Britain) without conducting covert research, because of the members' hostility to sociology. Another researcher, who called himself 'James Patrick', had to keep even his name secret as he feared for his personal safety when studying violent Glasgow gangs (Patrick, 1973). Similarly, William Chambliss (1978) needed to maintain secrecy when conducting a study of organized crime in Seattle (see pp. 383–4). Researchers have also had to keep their work secret when studying such groups as the Masons and certain religious sects.

If secrecy is maintained, then the researcher has little choice but to become a full participant in the group. However, if the researcher is open, there is an element of choice in the degree of involvement. Some researchers remain fairly detached. Others become much more involved. Ken Pryce found himself going to clubs and blues dances, drinking with and talking to local residents well past midnight during his study of West Indian life in Bristol (Pryce, 1979).

Becoming too much of a participant can cause difficulties. In particular the researcher may have the problem of 'going native'. They may become so much a part of the group that they are unable to stand back and analyse the situation objectively. Nigel Fielding argues that, in collecting data, 'One must maintain a certain detachment in order to take that data and interpret it.' On the other hand, those who experience this problem have at least achieved complete acceptance by the group and they may well have a true insider's view. Perhaps the most complete insider's view can be provided by those who become

sociological researchers, and use their own experiences as a source of data. Simon Holdaway (1983) was a police officer for a number of years before becoming a sociologist, and could genuinely claim to provide a view from *Inside the British Police*.

The more detached participant observer can perhaps be more objective, but may not understand the behaviour of those being studied quite as well. Fielding comments that there can be a problem in some overt research of '"not getting close enough", of adopting an approach which is too superficial and which merely provides a veneer of plausibility for an analysis to which the researcher is already committed'. In other words the researcher avoids risking challenging their own preconceived ideas by not digging too deeply into the social world of those being studied. However, very often the researcher cannot predict how involved they will become. It depends to some extent upon how much rapport they build up with the subjects of their research.

To be successful, the participant observer must gain the trust of those observed. In his study of black 'street-corner' men in Washington DC (see pp. 321–2), Elliot Liebow (1967) had to win over Tally, the leader of the group. Only when Liebow had gained Tally's trust did Tally admit that he had lied to him at the start of their acquaintance.

The close and relatively long-lasting relationships established through participant observation provide greater opportunities for developing trust than are provided by other research techniques. Interviews and questionnaire surveys usually involve one-off, short-lived encounters. Particularly with groups such as low-income blacks and teenage gangs, a relationship of trust is necessary to secure cooperation. As Lewis Yablonsky notes from his research on teenage gangs, 'Their characteristic response to questionnaires investigating the gang's organization or personal activities is one of suspicion and distrust. To the gang boy every researcher could be a "cop"' (Yablonsky, 1973). In this type of situation participant observation is more likely to provide valid data than other research techniques.

Once the researcher has entered the group and gained its trust, he or she must then go about collecting the data and recording it. Much of this involves watching and waiting, and taking part where necessary, but some participant observers have supplemented the data gained in this way with some interviewing. This has the advantage of allowing the researcher to request the precise information required, without waiting for it to crop up in normal conversation. It is obviously only possible where the research is overt. Whyte (1955) used interviews with a 'key informant', 'Doc', to gain most of the background information required. Pryce (1979) made extensive use of formal and informal interviews.

Recording the data from interviews can be relatively straightforward: Pryce used a tape recorder. Recording data from participant observation is more difficult. Tape recorders would probably inhibit the natural behaviour of those being studied. Taking notes could have a similar effect, and may in any case be impracticable. Most researchers have to opt for the best means available: committing what has taken place to memory, and writing it down as soon as possible. Ditton (1977) used to retire to the lavatory to take notes in private. Pryce had to wait until he got home. He said:

> *I had to rely heavily on memory, my method was to write down these observations as soon as possible after hearing or observing them. The rule of thumb I constantly exercised was to record them while they were still fresh in my mind, generally the same day ... I believe most of the information I recorded in this way was fairly accurate, if not accurate word for word, accurate in tone, flavour and in the emotions expressed.*
>
> Pryce, 1979

Not all sociologists, though, would accept Pryce's claim.

The advantages of participant observation

Supporters of participant observation have argued that, compared to other research techniques, it is least likely to lead to sociologists imposing their reality on the social world they seek to understand. It therefore provides the best means of obtaining a valid picture of social reality.

With a structured interview (a predetermined set of questions which the interviewee is requested to answer) or a questionnaire (a set of printed questions to which the respondent is asked to provide written answers) sociologists have already decided what is important. With preset questions they impose their framework and priorities on those they wish to study. By assuming that the questions are relevant to the respondents they have already made many assumptions about their social world.

Although participant observers begin the work with some preconceived ideas (for example, they will usually have studied the existing literature on the topic to be investigated), at least they have the opportunity to directly observe the social world.

The value of this opportunity is clear from Whyte's observations: 'As I sat and listened, I learned the answers to questions I would not have had the sense to ask if I had been getting my information solely on an interviewing basis' (Whyte, 1955). Intensive observation over a period of years provided Whyte with a picture of what was important in the lives of the Italian Americans he

studied. Without this exposure to their daily routine he would have remained ignorant of many of their priorities. Had he relied solely on interviews, this ignorance would have prevented him from asking important and relevant questions.

Liebow was particularly concerned about the danger of distorting the reality he wished to observe. He states that, from the outset of his research, 'there were by design, no firm presumptions of what was or was not relevant' (Liebow, 1967). He did his best simply to look and listen and to avoid any preconceptions of what was or was not important. Liebow chose participant observation because he believed that the method would provide a 'clear, firsthand picture' of the 'life of ordinary people, on their grounds and on their terms'. By observing what was said and done, where, when and by whom, he hoped to discover how a group of black street-corner men saw and organized their lives. Liebow claims that 'Taking this inside view makes it easier to avoid structuring the material in ways that might be alien to the material itself.'

In participant observation, it is also more difficult for the people being studied to lie or mislead the researcher than it is in other research methods. The researcher is on the spot and witnesses actual behaviour rather than relying upon people's accounts of their lives.

Where the researcher gains data from talking to those being studied, the validity of the data may be greater than in informal interviews. For example, the feminist researcher Beverley Skeggs argues that she was able to obtain valid data on the sexuality of young women because of the closeness of the relationship she developed with them. She says:

> *Their comments on their own sexual responses came from small soirées in my flat or their bedrooms. The discussions often became so intimate and animated that I think the idea that they were speaking for research purposes became lost in the desire to discuss contentious issues in a safe situation.*
>
> Skeggs, 1991, p. 128

Participant observation is a particularly appropriate method for symbolic interactionists because it allows an understanding of the world from the subjective point of view of the subjects of the research. Because researchers experience many of the same events as the observed, they are better able to put themselves in their position and to understand why they interact with others in particular ways.

Pryce felt that participant observation allowed him to understand and explain the subjective views of some West Indians in Bristol. He said, 'There is a tendency to either ignore or disregard the subjective feelings of members of the West Indian minority.' One of those subjective feelings was the belief of some that there was no point in trying to earn a living through ordinary employment, which was dismissed as 'slave labour' and 'shit work' (Pryce, 1979).

Howard Parker (1974) also believed that he could see the world through the eyes of those he studied – he felt justified in calling his book *View from the Boys.*

Interactionists believe that behaviour is largely governed by the self-concept held by an individual. Self-concepts are not fixed and static, but change during the course of interaction. Similarly, the meanings people attach to their own behaviour change as the context in which that behaviour takes place alters. Participant observation studies are often carried out over an extended period of time and it is therefore possible to study the process through which such changes happen.

This can be illustrated by Jock Young's study of marijuana smokers in Notting Hill (Young, 1971). He found that the behaviour, the meaning attached to that behaviour, and the self-concepts of those involved altered in response to police attempts to discourage marijuana smoking. The drug users in the area became more secretive, attached more importance to taking the drug, and in response to what they saw as persecution they saw themselves as being in opposition to some of society's values. (For further details, see p. 374.) Such changes and the way they came about would have been difficult to identify and explain on the basis of interview or questionnaire data.

Many interactionists see observation or participant observation as the best means of studying interaction. Much interaction takes place almost instinctively, and those involved cannot be expected to recall precise details if asked in an interview. Furthermore, it is difficult for complete participants to be detached and objective when discussing their relationships with others. It is easier, for example, for an outsider to comment on group relationships. Parker (1974) was able to describe in detail the relationships between members of delinquent gangs he studied. In St Paul's, Pryce (1979) was able to distinguish a number of different subcultures which a resident of the area might not have been fully aware of.

Critics of participant observation argue (as will be discussed later) that the findings of such studies lack objectivity, that they are unreliable and depend too much upon the interpretations of the observer. Defenders of this research method generally believe that these objections can be overcome, and that participant observation can be made sufficiently systematic to be regarded as being a reliable as well as valid research method.

Finally, participant observation provides in-depth studies that can serve a number of useful purposes. In particular, participant observation is useful for generating new hypotheses. Rather like unstructured interviews, participant observation can go in unexpected directions and so can provide sociologists with novel insights and ideas. Although less useful for testing hypotheses, because the type of data produced is not entirely under the control of the researcher, it may be useful for falsifying theories. Thus Parker's study of British delinquents (Parker, 1974) could be used to test how far Albert Cohen's explanation of American delinquency (see pp. 357–8) is applicable to Britain.

The limitations and disadvantages of participant observation

Participant observation has many practical disadvantages. It is often very time-consuming. Cicourel (1976) spent four years studying juvenile justice in California. Beverley Skeggs (1997) spent a total of 12 years conducting ethnographic research following the lives of women who had been on a 'caring' course at a further education college in England.

The researcher can usually only study a very small group of people and has to be physically present for the research to proceed. In personal terms such research may be highly inconvenient and demanding. The researcher may be required to move house, to live in an area they would not otherwise choose, and to mix with people they would rather avoid. They may find it necessary to engage in activities they dislike in order to fit in with the group, and they may even face personal danger. 'James Patrick' left Glasgow in a hurry when the gang violence began to sicken him and he felt concerned for his own safety (Patrick, 1973).

There are also limits on who can be studied using this method. Higher-class and more powerful groups in society, in particular, may exclude participant observers. Individual researchers may lack the skills, knowledge or personality to be accepted by a particular group.

More serious, though, are the theoretical objections that have been raised.

First, to quantitative researchers, the samples used in participant observation are too small and untypical for generalizations to be made on the basis of the findings. Any conclusions can only apply to the specific group studied. Thus Pryce (1979) would not have been justified in making generalizations about all West Indians in Britain on the basis of a study of Bristol.

Second, such studies cannot be replicated, so the results cannot be checked. It is therefore difficult to compare the results with the findings of other studies. The data from participant observation rely upon the particular interpretations of a single individual, and are specific to a particular place and time.

Cicourel (1976) admits that his participant observation study relied heavily upon his own observational and interpretive skills. If the reader has little faith in Cicourel's skills, then he or she will have little reason to accept his findings. It is quite possible that a different researcher would have reached quite different conclusions. As Whyte admits, 'To some extent my approach must be unique to myself, to the particular situation, and to the state of knowledge existing when I began research' (Whyte, 1955).

Moreover the account of social life produced by participant observation is the result of a highly selective method of data collection. The participant observer usually records only a small fraction of all possible data that he or she could have used. The observer selects what to record and what to omit and imposes a framework upon the data in the process of interpreting it. Martyn Hammersley points out that an ethnographer could have produced many different descriptions of the same setting. He says, 'there are multiple, non-contradictory, true descriptions of any phenomenon' (Hammersley, 1992). In this situation it may be difficult to accept a particular researcher's description as reflecting anything more than a personal perspective.

A third theoretical objection is that the validity of the data is bound to be affected by the presence of the researcher, since the group being studied will not act naturally. This point is rejected by many participant observers. Whyte, for example, felt that eventually he was able to blend into the background so that social life carried on as normal around him.

To critics – particularly those who support the use of positivist methods – participant observation is simply 'unscientific'. It is not systematic or rigorous, its findings cannot be checked, the research cannot be replicated, it is a subjective rather than objective research method. However, some interactionist sociologists have suggested that this sort of qualitative research need not lack rigour.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) claim that qualitative research can be used to generate and refine what they called grounded theory. The whole process of collecting and analysing qualitative data can be systematic. Theories can be produced which are grounded in the data and in the real social world. In the early stages the researcher starts to develop categories and then further data are collected to see if they fit with these categories. Hypotheses begin to emerge as the initial hunches of the researcher are backed up or refuted by the data that is being produced. Causal explanations can be produced, and may be tested in follow-up studies.

Becker (1970) showed how this sort of approach can be used when he was studying the behaviour of medical students. From observing the behaviour and listening to the comments of medical students he began to distinguish between 'cynical' and 'idealistic' attitudes to medicine. In the former case, patients tended to be regarded as little more than animated visual teaching aids; in the latter, as human beings whose pain and suffering the students felt a duty to relieve. Having found that these categories seemed to work, Becker went on to observe how often and in what circumstances the students were cynical or idealistic. Noting that students tended to be idealistic when talking to other students, Becker advanced the hypothesis that 'Students have "idealist" sentiments' but 'group norms may not sanction their expression'. Becker says that it is perfectly possible to check the hypotheses produced by participant observation, and that this research method need not be unsystematic. He says of participant observation that 'the technique consists of something more than merely immersing oneself in data and having "insights"'.

In a book edited by Anslem Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1997) a range of individual studies apply grounded theory to research on topics as diverse as understanding chronic pain, cancer research, the activities of headhunting companies, abusive relationships and contemporary Japanese society.

However, writers such as Hammersley still question the ability of ethnographic research to develop theoretical understanding. Hammersley says, 'Grounded theorising seeks both to represent concrete situations in their complexity and to produce abstract theory. It thus operates under conflicting requirements' (Hammersley, 1992).

Descriptive accounts can concentrate on the unique features of a particular social situation, but developing theory does require making some generalization beyond the setting being studied. According to Hammersley this is only possible if a number of cases are studied to see whether they conform to a theory. Yet very few ethnographers have even attempted to compare a range of case studies using ethnographic methods, and those who have done so generally rely upon interviews rather than participant observation.

Furthermore, Hammersley believes that the claim of some ethnographers that they are developing theories 'presupposes that there are scientific laws of human social life ... Yet few ethnographers today believe there are such laws.' To Hammersley, then, there is little basis for arguing that ethnography can be used to develop theory. However, this position is totally rejected by advocates of critical ethnography.

Critical ethnography

Critical ethnography is the sort of ethnography advocated by supporters of critical social science (see pp. 982–6). Unlike Hammersley, critical ethnographers believe that ethnography can be used both to develop and to test theories, including theories that examine the structure of society as a whole.

Paul Willis's study of the transition from school to work among a group of working class 'lads' is sometimes seen as the first example of a critical ethnography (Willis, 1977) (see pp. 791–4). Willis relied largely upon data from interviews, but often other critical ethnographers have made use of participant observation and other methodologies.

Since Willis's study there have been numerous examples of critical ethnographies. These include Sallie Westwood's study of female factory workers (Westwood, 1984), Beverley Skeggs's study of working-class women who had been to a further education college (Skeggs, 1997), and Mairtan Mac an Ghaill's study of the development of masculinity in an English state secondary school (Mac an Ghaill, 1994).

As discussed earlier in the chapter, critical social scientists believe that research should involve close collaboration between researchers and their subjects; that studying oppressed groups can help to reveal the hidden and oppressive structures of unequal societies; and that research can be instrumental in changing society. Steven Jordan and David Yeomans (1995) see critical ethnography as providing a way for researchers to understand the way oppression is experienced by the oppressed by sharing some of the same experiences. Carspecken argues that critical ethnographers are 'concerned about social inequalities, and we direct our work towards positive social change'. He goes on: 'We use our research, in fact, to refine social theory rather than merely to describe social life' (Carspecken, 1996).

Mairtan Mac an Ghaill's study *The Making of Men* (1994) illustrates the main features of critical ethnography. Mac an Ghaill tries to develop theories of masculinity (particularly those of R.W. Connell, discussed on pp. 191–6) by studying 11 heterosexual young men in a British state secondary school in the Midlands, and a second group of homosexual young men from a range of educational institutions in the same area. He tries to use elements of feminist methodology and argues for an approach to research based on 'collaboration, reciprocity and reflexivity'.

Mac an Ghaill tries to use the research process to challenge the assumption that heterosexuality is preferable to homosexuality, and he also encourages the young men to question dominant ideas on what makes you a true man. For example, he discusses with the homosexual students the way in which

conventional ideas of masculinity largely prevent emotional closeness between men. In the course of his research he seems to have some success in encouraging the gay students to positively value their conceptions of masculinity, rather than being defensive in the face of hostility from heterosexuals. The study tries to relate changes in conceptions of masculinity to changes in the British education system and in the wider society.

An evaluation of critical ethnography

As with grounded theory and critical social research in general, Martyn Hammersley (1992) is hostile to critical ethnography. As discussed above, he sees problems in basing research around the concept of oppression and he questions the belief that the validity of theories can be checked by the subjects of research. However, some critical ethnographers have tried to develop rigorous approaches that overcome the sorts of objections commonly directed at this research method. One such approach has been developed by Patti Lather (1986).

Lather accepts that critical ethnography can sometimes be criticized for using circular arguments. The ethnographic description is used both for developing theory and for testing it. Experience comes to be interpreted in terms of the theory, yet the experience is also used to confirm the theory. To break out of the circle Lather recommends four procedures:

1 Triangulation involves the use of different research methods to cross-check the validity of the data. Thus, for example, participant observation can be used to check the validity of data gained from interviews (see pp. 1022–3 for a discussion of triangulation).
2 Construct validity involves a 'ceaseless confrontation with and respect for the experiences of people in their daily lives to avoid theoretical imposition' (Lather, 1986). From Lather's point of view this is only possible in ethnographic research; questionnaire-type research tends to be guilty of imposing theoretical constructs on the explanation of behaviour without examining whether they have real relevance in understanding people's lives (see criticisms of questionnaire research, pp. 1002–3).
3 Face validity is achieved through recycling your findings through at least some of those being studied, while being aware that they may be suffering from false consciousness. Although Hammersley is critical of doing this, Lather believes that it is useful as *one* check on the validity of findings. It helps ensure that the researcher has not fundamentally misunderstood the viewpoint of those being studied and therefore completely failed to grasp the framework within which they choose how to act.
4 Catalytic validity refers to 'the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energizes participants towards knowing reality in order to transform it'. Again, this objective is rejected by critics of this type of research, but it does perhaps provide one indication of whether the research has gone beyond the commonsense understandings of the people being studied.

Critical ethnography certainly retains problems despite attempts by some sociologists to develop it and overcome objections. As Irlam Siraj-Blatchford (1995) points out, critical ethnography does tend to assume that you should study the oppressed. It therefore neglects the study of oppressors, who might be able to offer even more insight than the oppressed into the way oppression works.

Furthermore, critical ethnography has by no means overcome all the problems in testing the validity and reliability of data. However, the same is true of other research methods. Critical ethnographers such as Patti Lather and Phil Carspecken use the subjects of research as an additional check on data rather than as an alternative to conventional checks on the data.

Postmodern ethnography

While critical ethnography hopes to penetrate beyond common sense to reveal hidden structures of oppression, postmodern ethnography has no such aims. Some postmodernists do see themselves as opposing oppression, but they do so by undermining all claims to discover the truth, rather than by trying to replace commonsense truths with an analysis of oppressive structures.

Postmodern ethnography rejects any claim to trying to produce objective descriptions of social life, never mind explanations. However, it does follow critical ethnography in emphasizing cooperation with those being studied. Stephen A. Tyler describes postmodern ethnography as:

> *a cooperatively evolved text consisting of fragments of discourse intended to evoke in the minds of both reader and writer an emergent fantasy of a possible work of common-sense reality, and thus to provoke an aesthetic integration that will have a therapeutic effect.*
>
> Tyler, 1997, first published 1986, p. 254

Tyler seems to be arguing that postmodern ethnography should act very much like a work of literature. It is designed to stimulate the imagination, to make people think about the lives of other people, not to describe reality in any objective way. Indeed he argues that it is 'in a word, poetry – not in its textual

form but in its return to the original context and function of poetry ... [which] evoked memories of the ethos of community'.

To Tyler this type of ethnography should acknowledge that there can be many different viewpoints within a social group. It is not the ethnographer's job to decide between these different viewpoints and produce a single account, but to record the variety of perspectives. A postmodern ethnography may take a form in which different versions are published together (as in the different gospels in the Bible), but the precise form it will take cannot be decided in advance. Instead, the researcher and those who are being studied must work together and find a format that will preserve the diversity of views in the social group.

The author is much less important than in traditional sociological studies. The author is not seen as being in a privileged, superior position to those being studied. She or he is not seen as having any special ability to make an analysis of social reality which can rise above the subjective views of those being studied. Tyler says, 'The whole ideology of representational significance is an ideology of power. To break its spell we would have to attack writing, totalistic representational signification, and authorial authority.' Like Jean-François Lyotard (see Chapter 15), Tyler seems concerned that any claims to have discovered the truth will be used to produce metanarratives – big stories about truth and fiction, right and wrong. These in turn may be used to dominate and oppress groups of humans.

Tyler admits that postmodern ethnography will not produce a coherent account of social life. It will be 'fragmentary' and will not be 'organized around familiar ethnological categories such as kinship, economy and religion'. However, he does not see this as a particular problem. For Tyler, the fragmentary nature of postmodern ethnography is desirable because 'We confirm in our consciousness the fragmentary nature of the post-modern, for nothing so defines our world as the absence of a synthesizing allegory.' In other words, people experience the social world as fragmented and cannot find any single way of understanding it. An individual's social life is experienced as many different stories which are not closely linked to one another. Tyler concludes that 'Post-modern ethnography captures the mood of the post-modern world, for it, too, does not move toward abstraction, away from life, but back to experience. It aims not to foster the growth of knowledge but to restructure experience.'

Postmodern ethnography – an evaluation

For an approach which advocates a move away from abstraction and back to experience, Tyler's description of postmodern ethnography is highly abstract. He provides no concrete example of postmodern ethnography and no detailed suggestions as to how to conduct it. Furthermore his approach seems somewhat contradictory. He argues that postmodern ethnography should be more than 'an edited collection of authored papers' written by participants in social life, yet he wishes to give no special privileges to the ethnographer. Indeed it is unclear why an ethnographer is needed at all, since the opinions of the author are seen to be no better than those of the people being studied.

Furthermore, if ethnography should act like a poem, stimulating the imagination, it is again unclear why it is needed. Fiction can perform the task of stimulating the imagination at least as well as writing that claims to have some basis in real experience. Tyler's arguments could, therefore, be seen as self-defeating. By arguing that ethnography is really no different to fiction he makes a case for abandoning ethnography altogether.

Postmodern ethnography suffers from the same problem of extreme relativism (in which no view is better than any other) which afflicts a number of other versions of postmodernism (see Chapter 15).

Longitudinal research

In most sociological studies, researchers study a group of people for a relatively short period of time. They analyse their data, produce a report on their research and move on to new endeavours. However, some researchers study a group over an extended period, collecting data on them at intervals. Such studies are known as longitudinal or panel studies.

Longitudinal studies were first used by researchers in the USA in the 1940s to measure changes in public attitudes. It was seen as more reliable to follow a particular sample over a period of time when measuring changing attitudes, than to select a new sample from time to time. By using a 'panel' the researcher could be sure that changes in the attitudes measured would not result from changes in the composition of the sample.

Longitudinal studies originated as extended attitude surveys. Since then, they have usually been used to collect quantitative data in social surveys, though not necessarily about attitudes. Sometimes a particular age group or cohort is followed over a number of years. The *Child Health and Education Survey* has tried to follow the development of every child born in Britain between the 3rd and 9th of March 1958. Another longitudinal study was carried out by J.W.B. Douglas. In *The Home and the School* (1964) he followed the educational progress of a sample of children through their school careers (see pp. 830–1).

Another example is provided by D.J. West and D.P. Farrington's *Who Becomes Delinquent?* (1973). This study was concerned with 411 London schoolboys. It followed their development from age 8 to 18 in order to determine what factors were associated with delinquency.

Longitudinal studies are usually large-scale quantitative studies, but some qualitative studies also extend over considerable periods of time. Alan Bryman commented, 'There is an implicit longitudinal element built into much qualitative research, which is both a symptom and a cause of an undertaking to view social life in processual, rather than static terms' (Bryman, 1988). In other words, methods such as participant observation are based upon the assumption that social life should be explained in terms of an unfolding story. Parker's study of Liverpool delinquents provides a good example of this (Parker, 1974). Parker showed how the type of delinquency engaged in by 'the boys' changed as the research developed and the boys grew older.

A major advantage of any longitudinal study is its ability to pick up such changes; a study extending over a shorter time span cannot, and so the results can be misleading. Beverley Skeggs's study of a group of young women during and after studying at a further education college followed the women for a total of 12 years (Skeggs, 1991, 1997).

Supporters of longitudinal studies also see them as more likely to provide valid data than other types of research. As W.D. Wall and H.L. Williams (1970) point out, retrospective studies which ask people to report on past events in their lives rely upon fallible human memories. Wall and Williams also say, 'Human beings naturally seek for causes and may unconsciously fabricate or exaggerate something to account for the present state of affairs.' Longitudinal studies help to overcome this problem because recent events are less likely to have been reinterpreted in the light of subsequent consequences.

Quantitative longitudinal studies often examine a large number of variables because the researchers are unsure what data may prove to be important or required later in the research. For example, West and Farrington (1973) collected information relating to no less than 151 variables in their study of delinquency. Although the researcher still has to decide what variables to study, examination of so many limits the extent to which they impose their own theories upon the research.

Longitudinal studies do, of course, have disadvantages. It may be necessary to select people who are accessible and willing to cooperate over an extended period. Furthermore, the size of the sample is liable to fall as some individuals become unwilling to continue to take part, or prove impossible to trace. Douglas's original sample of 5,362 children in 1957 was reduced to 4,720 by 1962 (Douglas, 1964). Since those who were lost may not have been representative of the sample as a whole, the results may have been distorted.

More serious criticisms question the overall validity of the data. Quantitative longitudinal studies collect data using such research methods as questionnaires and interviews. As earlier sections have shown, some sociologists question the validity of data collected in this way. A particular problem with longitudinal studies is that the subjects of the research are conscious of the fact that their behaviour is being studied. This may influence them and change their behaviour because they think more carefully about their actions.

Secondary sources

Secondary sources consist of data that have already been produced, often by people other than sociologists. Secondary data produced by the government are often used by sociologists. Organizations such as trade unions, companies and charities are a useful source of data, as are documents such as letters, diaries and autobiographies produced by individuals. The secondary sources used by sociologists may be contemporary or historical, and the data available from them may be primarily qualitative or quantitative. When sociologists refer to existing sociological studies by other writers in their own research, these become secondary sources.

Sociologists often use secondary sources for practical reasons. They can save time and money and they may provide access to historical data that cannot be produced using primary research because the events concerned took place before current members of society were born.

Secondary sources are invaluable to sociologists but have to be used with great caution. Their reliability and validity are open to question, and often they do not provide the exact information required by a sociologist.

Specific types of secondary sources will now be examined. At the end of the section there will be a general discussion on how to evaluate all types of secondary sources.

Official statistics

A vast range of statistics are produced by the government. In recent years the Government Statistical Service (which was set up in 1941) has coordinated the production of government statistics, but the production of large-scale statistical data goes back at least to 1801, when the first census was conducted.

Sociologists interested in demography have used statistical data from the census and elsewhere to examine a wide range of topics, which include birth and death rates, marriage and fertility patterns, and divorce. Sociologists who study deviance have used official crime and suicide statistics. The many official economic statistics are of interest to sociologists concerned with work. Figures on inflation, unemployment and employment, strikes and productivity have also been used. Indeed, almost every area of sociological research has found some use for official statistics.

Some statistics, such as unemployment figures, are published monthly; others, such as crime statistics, annually. Information from the census is produced once every decade. Other statistical surveys are carried out on an irregular basis: for example, the *British Crime Surveys*. One of the reference books that is most frequently consulted by sociologists in Britain is *Social Trends*, which has been produced annually since 1970 and summarizes statistical data on society.

Much of the statistical information made available by the government would not exist if it were left to sociologists. They lack the resources and power to carry out the work that goes into producing these data. For example, each household is compelled by law to return a census form, and has a legal duty to provide accurate information; it would be impossible for sociologists to obtain this information independently.

Official statistics are easily accessible and cost sociologists nothing to produce. Sociologists generally acknowledge that such statistics are useful, but they do not necessarily agree about what use can be made of them. Some sociologists do not accept the reliability and validity of official statistical data, while others are prepared to place more trust in them.

In the past, some positivists tended to accept official statistics uncritically. Durkheim (1970) believed that suicide statistics were sufficiently reliable and valid to measure the extent and social distribution of suicide (see pp. 974–7). Using official statistics, he tried to establish correlations between suicide and other 'social facts', and ultimately to discover causal relationships and laws of human behaviour.

Similarly, many of the early structural and subcultural theories of crime were based upon the assumption that the official crime statistics accurately identified the working class as the group most prone to criminal activity (see pp. 354–61).

Today sociologists are more cautious about the use of official statistics in areas of social life such as suicide and crime, but most would accept the reliability and validity of statistics from the census. (Earlier parts of this book have shown how inaccurate some official statistics can be – for instance, many crimes remain unreported and as such cannot be recorded in official data (see pp. 363–72).)

Victimization and self-report studies

Despite this, many researchers believe that problems like these can be overcome. For example, victimization or self-report studies use questionnaires administered to members of the population in order to determine the extent of reported and unreported crime. The British Crime Surveys provide examples of victimization studies (for example, Mirrlees-Black *et al.*, 1998) (see pp. 366–8 for further details). D.J. West and D.P. Farrington's longitudinal study of delinquency in London (West and Farrington, 1973) included a self-report study in which members of the sample were asked 38 questions about delinquent acts they might have carried out.

It is sometimes argued that on the basis of such studies it is possible to estimate the real amount of crime in society as a whole, and to calculate the extent of criminality in social groups. The figures can be used to determine the accuracy of official figures, and appropriate adjustments can then be made to them. Even so, as Peter Eglin points out, 'The question remains, however, whether an error estimate calculated for some set of, say, national statistics in some given year will be generalizable to other times or other places' (Eglin, 1987).

An even more serious problem concerns the question of the validity of the answers given by respondents in surveys. Stephen Box (1981) has noted that in self-report studies respondents may exaggerate their criminality, or alternatively they might be unwilling to admit to their crimes. In effect, self-report studies measure how many crimes people say they have committed, rather than the actual number.

Furthermore, in measuring the criminality or delinquency of an individual, the researcher has to decide what offences or actions to include in the list of questions. Among West and Farrington's 38 questions, for instance, respondents were asked about stealing school property worth more than 5p, and about annoying, insulting or fighting other people (strangers) in the street. The precise wording and number of questions included in the questionnaire ultimately determine the amount of crime or delinquency uncovered – and in any case respondents may interpret the questions in different ways.

Whether or not an offence is included in the statistics depends upon the choices made by the researcher. In the *British Crime Surveys* the researchers discounted certain events because they did not believe that they constituted crimes. The statistics produced by such studies are therefore of dubious validity.

However, several sociologists believe that self-report and victimization studies provide some indication of the real extent of crime, and that they help to correct the misleading impression (provided by the official figures) that crime is an overwhelmingly working-class phenomenon.

A phenomenological view

Ethnomethodologists and phenomenologists reject the use of statistics for measuring or determining the causes of the social facts to which they claim to refer. As earlier parts of this book show, sociologists such as Cicourel (1976) and Atkinson (1978) believe that statistics are the product of the meanings and taken-for-granted assumptions of those who construct them. Thus Cicourel claims that the stereotypes held by the police and juvenile officers lead to youths from lower social classes being more likely to be seen as delinquent. Justice is negotiable and statistics produced by official agencies are socially created (see pp. 379–80). Similarly, Atkinson has described how the commonsense theories held by coroners influence the way they categorize sudden deaths (see pp. 979–80). Both Cicourel and Atkinson regard official statistics as social creations.

This does not mean that official statistics are of no sociological interest. Indeed phenomenological sociologists believe they are important: they can be studied in order to discover how they are produced. This helps the sociologist to understand the commonsense theories, taken-for-granted assumptions, stereotypes and categorization procedures of officials involved in the production of the statistics. To writers such as Cicourel, this is the only use that can be made of official statistics, including those such as census statistics, which appear to be based upon far more objective categories. To Cicourel, all statistics involve classifying things as 'this' or 'that', and such decisions are subjective.

Cicourel's views may become less convincing, though, when applied to such data as the age and sex distribution of a population. There may be considerable room for interpretation when considering whether an act is criminal or a sudden death is a suicide. There is less room for interpretation when deciding whether somebody is male or female.

A conflict view

In response to both positivist and phenomenological views, a number of conflict sociologists have developed alternative perspectives on official statistics. They argue that official statistics are neither hard facts, nor subjective meanings. Instead they consist of information which is systematically distorted by power structures in society. Ian Miles and John Irvine argue that official statistics are 'developed in support of the system of power and domination that is modern capitalism – a system in which the state plays a particularly important role' (Miles and Irvine, 1979).

Miles and Irvine do not believe that statistics produced by the government are complete fabrications, because, as they point out, such a viewpoint would be unable to explain why the state frequently publishes figures that are embarrassing to the government. For instance, figures on inflation, crime and unemployment often seem to suggest that government policies are not working. The statistics are not complete distortions, but they are manipulated through the definitions and collection procedures used so that they tend to favour the interests of the powerful. Miles and Irvine say that official statistics are produced according to the needs of the various state agencies for information to coordinate their activities and justify their programmes. They are related to a single ideological framework underpinning the concepts and categories employed.

This view appeared to be supported when the Thatcher government appointed Derek Rayner in 1980 to review the British government's statistical services. Rayner proposed considerable cut-backs in the statistics produced and wanted them confined strictly to information directly needed by the government. Most of his recommendations were implemented. In the wake of the changes introduced following the report, 'The government was repeatedly accused of delaying, suppressing, abolishing and manipulating data for its own ends' (Levitas, 1996). Ruth Levitas mentions a number of examples.

The basis for calculating unemployment figures was frequently changed, almost always with the effect of reducing recorded levels of unemployment (see pp. 737–9 for a discussion of unemployment statistics). Figures on public expenditure were also manipulated. Income from the sale of public assets was artificially used to reduce recorded levels of expenditure, rather than being treated as income. Waiting lists for NHS patients were reduced by removing from the lists those who were unable to keep appointments for operations. Certain figures which might be damning to the government were not produced or published. For example, census statistics no longer included deaths by social class, which might have revealed a growing gap between the life expectancies of different classes. The government changed the data it produced on poverty, making it difficult to compare poverty rates with previous years (see pp. 305–9).

Levitas comments that 'By the end of the 1980s, public confidence in official statistics was at an all-time low.' Although some attempts have been made in the 1990s to make British official statistics less politically biased, critics continue to believe that they still reflect the ideology of the government. In the 1995 edition of the Central Statistical Office's annual publication *Social Trends*, an editorial by Muriel Nissel (the first editor of the publication), which was critical of government manipulation of statistical services, was withdrawn by the Office's director, Bill McLennan.

Conflict sociologists often question the categories used in official statistics. Thus, Theo Nichols (1996) argues from a Marxist point of view that the categories used in the census and other official statistics disguise the true nature of class in capitalism. Most have been based on the Registrar General's scale, which uses status as an indicator of social class. To Nichols (as a Marxist) class is based upon the relationship to the means of production. Thus the official statistics give the impression of a status hierarchy and disguise the existence of classes that are in opposition to each other as exploiters and exploited. (New classifications will be used for the census of 2001. These will be based on a largely Weberian view of class and, like the previous scheme, will include no separate category for a ruling class.)

Like phenomenologists, conflict sociologists tend to believe that official statistics are invalid for measuring the things they refer to, but that they do reveal something about those who produce them. However, rather than seeing them as based merely upon subjective meanings, conflict sociologists see them as reflecting the ideological frameworks that are produced by dominant social groups. Official statistics can therefore be analysed to uncover those frameworks and the power structures that produce them.

Historical sources

Historical documents are of vital importance to sociologists who wish to study social change which takes place over an extended period of time. There are limits to the period over which a sociological study using primary sources can extend, and past events may be important in understanding how contemporary patterns of social life came about.

One area in which historical statistical sources have been of considerable importance is the study of family life. Chapter 8 showed how the development of family life since before the Industrial Revolution has been a major topic of sociological inquiry. Peter Laslett (1972, 1977) made extensive use of parish records in order to discover how common nuclear and extended families were in pre-industrial England. Such data have been most useful in correcting the assumption that extended family households were the norm in pre-industrial Britain (see p. 527). However, findings based upon such secondary sources need to be used with caution. Many parish records have not survived, and the documents that Laslett used relate only to particular villages which happened to have complete records. It may therefore be dangerous to accept generalizations based upon such findings.

Michael Anderson's research on the family (see pp. 527–8) is based upon early census statistics which are more readily available (Anderson, 1971). Nevertheless, Anderson chose to concentrate on one town, Preston, so the patterns of family life described are again not necessarily representative. Anderson also points out that census statistics do not provide an in-depth picture of family relationships. He lists the sort of descriptive, qualitative data that can be used to supplement statistical data in the historical study of the family as:

> *tracts, reports of missionary and charitable societies, descriptions of crimes, newspaper investigations into the condition of the people, parliamentary investigations and the evidence of some witnesses to them, speeches in parliamentary debates and some aspects of novels.*
>
> Anderson, 1980

Like qualitative data from primary research, qualitative secondary sources may be unreliable and are open to a number of interpretations. Many of the secondary sources mentioned above are highly subjective and are likely to reflect the ideologies of those who produced them. Nevertheless, they do reveal something of the perspectives of their producers.

Whatever the problems of historical research, without using historical documents sociologists would be confined to producing a rather static view of social life. Without such documents, Max Weber (1958) would have been unable to consider the influence of religion on the development of capitalism (see pp. 447–51), and Michael Mann (1986) would not have had the opportunity to discuss the relationship between different sources of social power throughout history (see pp. 633–5).

Life documents

Life documents are created by individuals and record details of that person's experiences and social actions. They are predominantly qualitative and may offer insights into people's subjective states. They can be historical or contemporary and can take a wide variety of forms. Ken Plummer illustrates this diversity when he says:

People keep diaries, send letters, take photos, write memos, tell biographies, scrawl graffiti, publish memoirs, write letters to the papers, leave suicide notes, inscribe memorials on tombstones, shoot films, paint pictures, make music and try to record their personal dreams.

Plummer, 1982

All of these sources, along with many others, have the potential to be useful to sociologists.

The use of life documents has a long history in sociology. Their use was popularized by W.I. Thomas and F. Znaniecki in their study *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1919). Thomas and Znaniecki made use of 764 letters, a lengthy statement by one Polish peasant about his life, reports from social work agencies, court reports and articles from Polish newspapers. From such sources they tried to understand and explain the experience of migration for the hundreds of thousands of Polish people who moved to America in the early years of the twentieth century.

The study was widely regarded as a classic at the time but, according to Plummer (1982), it is now rarely mentioned and infrequently read. This is partly because life documents themselves have fallen out of favour as a source for sociologists. Those who favour more quantitative methods tend to regard life documents as an inadequate source of data. They are difficult to obtain and the ones that exist are likely to cover an unrepresentative sample of the population.

Like all data, personal documents are open to interpretation. They may say more about the subjective states of individuals than the events they are describing. It is unlikely that the husband, wife, or political opponent of a diary writer would describe events in quite the same way. Personal documents that are meant to be read by others (such as letters and autobiographies) may be written with an audience in mind. As Ponsonby once commented, 'letters may be said to have two parents, the writer and the recipient' (quoted in Plummer, 1982). Such documents may be designed more to justify actions than to make a real attempt to explain the writer's feelings or motives.

Diaries, when they are available, may have greater validity if they are not intended for public consumption. One way of overcoming the scarcity of diaries and the unrepresentative nature of examples that exist, is for the researcher to prompt those being studied to keep diaries. Young and Willmott (1973) asked the subjects of their research into family life in London to keep diaries, recording how much time they spent on different activities and how they felt about them. Oscar Lewis (1961), studying poverty in Mexico, persuaded a number of families to keep detailed diaries recording the events of a single day. Such diaries may be more systematic than those obtained by chance; however, they may be less valid. The awareness that they will be used for research might influence the details included by their writers.

Despite these limitations, Plummer believes that personal documents should play a crucial role in sociology. Using them as a source avoids a preoccupation with abstract theories 'which can kill off any concern for the joy and suffering of active human beings'. Compared to other secondary sources, personal documents allow much greater insight into the subjective states of individuals, which in turn shape their behaviour.

Plummer supports symbolic interactionist approaches to studying social life. From this point of view some sort of participant observation may be the ideal method for studying social life. Where this type of research is not possible, life documents are the best alternative since they offer insights into the 'ordinary ambiguous personal meanings' that shape people's actions in their everyday lives. (More details of Plummer's theoretical standpoint are included in the section on case studies and life histories – see pp. 996–7.)

The mass media and content analysis

Many parts of the mass media are notoriously inaccurate. Sociologists would, for example, be unlikely to turn solely to a national newspaper for an objective account of social life in Britain. Although some parts of the mass media may provide sociologists with useful data, their main importance is as objects of study. Rather like the official statistics, mass media reports can be used to analyse the ideologies of those who produce them. Some sociologists have been highly critical of parts of the mass media for producing distorted images of society which might mislead the public or adversely affect the socialization of children.

There are a number of different approaches to carrying out content analysis, in which researchers analyse the content of documents. These may be largely quantitative, largely qualitative, or combine both approaches. Ray Pawson (1995) identifies four main approaches to carrying out content analysis:

1 Formal content analysis. Here the emphasis is upon objectivity and reliability. A systematic sample of texts is collected for study, a classification system is devised to identify different features of these texts, and these features are then counted. For example, G. Lobban (1974) conducted a study of the portrayal of gender roles in children's reading schemes. She listed and counted the toys and pets that children had, the

activities they engaged in, the skills they learned, and the roles that adults were shown in. The technique is reliable because other researchers can repeat the same techniques to check the findings. The same methods can also be replicated to carry out comparative studies. For example, Lesley Best (1993) repeated Lobban's research in the 1990s (see pp. 854–5).

The simplicity and reliability of quantitative content analysis makes it appealing. However, it is not without its problems. Simply counting the number of items tells you nothing about their significance, and the meanings of the texts or images being studied can only be implied. As Ray Pawson points out, there is an assumption that the audience are simply passive consumers of the message, and no attempt is made to examine how they actually interpret the messages in the text.

2 Thematic analysis. The second approach identified by Pawson is thematic analysis. Pawson says:

> *The idea is to understand the encoding process, especially the intentions that lie behind the production of mass media documents. The usual strategy is to pick on a specific area of reportage and subject it to a very detailed analysis in the hope of unearthing the underlying purposes and intentions of the authors of the communication.*
>
> Pawson, 1995

Thematic analysis is sometimes aimed at discovering the ideological biases of journalists and others involved in the production of mass media documents. Pawson cites the example of Keith Soothill and Sylvia Walby's study of newspaper reporting of sex crimes such as rape (Soothill and Walby, 1991). Soothill and Walby found that the reporting tended to emphasize the danger of being raped in public places and the pathological nature of individual rapists. It tended to ignore the prevalence of rape by partners and friends of victims, and the wider context of patriarchal power within which sex crimes take place. According to Pawson the main method involved in such studies is simply the repetition of examples.

Critics of such studies argue that they rarely use scientific samples, and they therefore tend to use examples selectively to fit the preferred interpretation of the researchers. Like formal content analysis there is no attempt to check whether consumers of the media interpret the messages in the same way as the researchers.

3 Textual analysis. Pawson describes this approach as involving examining the 'linguistic devices within the documents in order to show how texts can be influential in encouraging a particular interpretation'. This approach, for example, looks at how different words are linked together so that readers will interpret stories in a particular way. An example is the Glasgow Media Group's study of television reporting of strikes (Glasgow Media Group, 1976). It found that strikers tended to be described using verbs such as 'claim' or 'demand', while management tended to have verbs such as 'offer' or 'propose' applied to them. This meant that readers tended to view strikers as actively causing the strikes and being unreasonable, while managers were portrayed as being more reasonable and as the passive victims of the strikers. The linking of visual images and words can also be studied in this way.

As with thematic analysis, the main methodological problem with textual analysis is that it relies heavily upon the researcher's interpretation. This may not correspond to the interpretation of members of the audience or of other researchers. The method therefore lacks reliability.

4 Audience analysis. This approach overcomes some of the problems of earlier approaches by focusing on the responses of the audience as well as the content of the mass media. This then provides some check on the researcher's interpretation of the message and it recognizes that audiences actively interpret messages rather than just being passive. Sometimes audiences reject the messages apparently being advanced by the media.

Pawson discusses an early example of this approach, provided by a study of *Nationwide* (a British news programme) conducted by Morley (1980). He found, for example that groups such as shop stewards tended to be more critical and sceptical about *Nationwide*'s coverage of the news than groups such as bank managers.

Critics argued that Morley's study, which involved viewing and talking about *Nationwide* in groups, created a rather artificial research setting. Furthermore there is no guarantee that people are fully open and honest in discussing their reactions to the mass media with researchers. The messages of the media may have a long-term influence on people's interpretations of the social world around them, and such effects are difficult to pick up in audience research.

More thorough studies may try to combine a range of methods. The work of the Glasgow Media Group (1976) illustrates some of the benefits of combining methods. In their first study they combined formal, thematic, and textual analysis. They used quantitative counts to analyse the words used in newscasts and also looked in great detail at particular sentences. Their findings were used to develop a thematic understanding of the coverage of industrial relations. They did not carry out audience research, but there is no reason why such research could not be complemented by studies of the audience as well.

John Scott – assessing secondary sources

John Scott (1990a, 1990b) has provided some useful guidelines for evaluating secondary sources (or, as he calls them, documents). The criteria can be applied to all secondary sources, including existing sociological research. They offer systematic ways of trying to ensure that researchers use secondary sources with as much care as they employ in producing primary data.

Scott identifies four criteria:

1 Authenticity – this refers to the question of how genuine a document is. There are two aspects of authenticity: soundness and authorship. Scott says, 'A sound document is one which is complete and reliable. It should have no missing pages or misprints and, if it is a copy of an original it should be a reliable copy without errors of transcription' (Scott, 1990a). When the document is not sound, the researcher needs to consider carefully how far the omissions detract from its reliability and validity.

   The question of authorship concerns who it was written by. Many documents are not actually produced by those to whom they are attributed. For example, many letters signed by the prime minister may have been written by civil servants and might reveal little about the prime minister's own views. The most extreme problem of authenticity occurs when documents are faked, as in the case of the so-called 'Hitler Diaries' which were originally authenticated as the work of the former German leader but which later proved not to be genuine.

2 Credibility – this issue relates to the amount of distortion in a document. Any distortion may be related to sincerity or accuracy. In a sincere document the author genuinely believes what they write. This is not always the case. The author may hope to gain advantage from deceiving readers. For example, politicians may distort accounts of their actions or motives in their diaries or memoirs to justify what they have done. Inaccuracy might result from unintended distortions, such as when an account is written some time after the events described and faulty memory makes absolute accuracy impossible.

3 Representativeness – Scott points out that 'Sampling of documents must be handled as carefully and as systematically as the sampling of respondents in a survey.' A researcher must be aware of how typical or untypical the documents being used are, 'in order to be able to assign limits to any conclusions drawn'.

   Two factors which may limit the possibility of using representative documents are: survival and availability. Many documents do not survive because they are not stored, and others deteriorate with age and become unusable. This is obviously a particular problem when doing historical research in sociology. Other documents are deliberately withheld from researchers and the public gaze, and thus do not become available. For example, many official documents are not made available for 30 years; others which are classified as secret may never be made public. Individuals and private organizations may also be unwilling to make many of their documents available to researchers.

4 Meaning – this concerns the ability of a researcher to understand the document. At one level the researcher may have difficulty with literal understanding. It may be in a foreign language, in old-fashioned handwriting, or it could use archaic vocabulary which is difficult to comprehend.

   Interpretative understanding is even more difficult to achieve: it involves 'understanding of what the document actually signifies'. For example, there has been a long-standing debate about whether suicide statistics signify more about suicides or about the officials who define certain acts as suicides (see pp. 974–81).

   Some of the problems involved in deciphering meaning are discussed in the section on the mass media (see pp. 1020–1). Whether quantitative content analysis or qualitative semiotic analysis is chosen, interpretative understanding is always open to debate.

Scott shows that all secondary sources need to be evaluated and used with great care. Research using them needs to be as systematic and rigorous as research which produces primary data. The same care should be employed when reading and using existing sociology books and studies. In particular, as Scott points out, 'readers must always be aware of the interests and commitments of authors', since these may influence the way that secondary and other sources are interpreted and used.

Triangulation

As an earlier section indicated (pp. 981–2), it is difficult to see quantitative and qualitative methods as mutually exclusive. Increasingly sociologists are combining both approaches in single studies. As Bryman puts it:

> *The rather partisan, either/or tenor of debate about quantitative and qualitative research may appear somewhat bizarre to an outsider, for whom the obvious way forward is likely to be a fusion of the two approaches so that their respective strengths might be reaped.*
>
> Bryman, 1988

In reality, the degree to which quantitative and qualitative approaches are different has been exaggerated. Bryman points out that 'Most researchers rely primarily on a method associated with one of the two research traditions, but buttress their findings with a method associated with the other tradition.' The practice of combining quantitative and qualitative research has a long history, and is evident in the approach advocated by Weber (see p. 972).

Bryman has suggested a number of ways in which using a plurality of methods – a practice known as triangulation – can be useful:

1 Qualitative and quantitative data can be used to check on the accuracy of the conclusions reached on the basis of each.
2 Qualitative research can be used to produce hypotheses which can then be checked using quantitative methods.
3 The two approaches can be used together so that a more complete picture of the social group being studied is produced.
4 Qualitative research may be used to illuminate why certain variables are statistically correlated.

The following examples illustrate the advantages of combining research methods.

In her study of the Unification Church, or Moonies, Eileen Barker used participant observation, questionnaires and in-depth interviewing. She claimed that this combination of methods allowed her to 'see how the movement as a whole was organized and how it influenced the day-to-day actions and interactions of its members' (Barker, 1984). She tried to test hypotheses formulated from qualitative data using questionnaires.

Quantitative techniques have been used to systematically analyse data from observation or participant observation. For example, Delamont (1976) used the Flanders Interaction Analysis Categories in her studies of classroom interaction. These allowed her to categorize the different types of interaction and to time them in order to determine differences in the educational experience of boys and girls. She used qualitative data to explain the reasons for the quantitative relationships she found.

Amanda Coffey and Paul Atkinson (1996) note that qualitative data can be analysed in many different ways. Amongst them is the systematic coding of different types of data so that related pieces of data can be easily found and linked together. Furthermore, computer programmes such as *Ethnograph, QUALPRO and ATLAS/ti* are now sometimes used to make the analysis of qualitative data easier and more systematic.

The combination of methods is not just confined to the use of primary data. In a study of secondary schooling, Paul Corrigan (1981) used interviews, observation and historical and contemporary documents. These enabled him to place his analysis of school life within the context of the historical development of the education system in Britain.

Bryman (1988) believes that both qualitative and quantitative research have their own advantages. Neither can produce totally valid and completely reliable data, but both can provide useful insights into social life. He argues that each has its own place, and they can be most usefully combined. Generally, quantitative data tends to produce rather static pictures, but it can allow researchers to examine and discover overall patterns and structures in society as a whole. Qualitative data is less useful for discovering overall patterns and structures, but it does allow a richer and deeper understanding of the process of change in social life. Bryman says, 'A division of labour is suggested here in that quantitative research may be conceived of as a means of establishing the structural element in social life, qualitative research the processual.'

As the next section will show, the view that sociology should use both qualitative and quantitative methods does not necessarily preclude the possibility that it can be scientific.

Sociology and science

Scientific methodology

The early parts of this chapter described how sociologists have adopted varying views on the relationship between sociology and science. Positivists claim that science uses established methods and procedures, and that these methods and procedures can be applied to the social sciences. They believe that social facts can be observed objectively, measured and quantified. Analysis of statistics can reveal correlations, causes and ultimately laws of human behaviour. From this point of view, sociological studies using such methods can be considered to be scientific. Positivists see the use of scientific methods as highly desirable, and they tend to be critical of those sociologists who study subjective and unobservable mental states.

Popper (1959) also sees it as highly desirable that sociology should be scientific, but argues that science

is a deductive rather than inductive methodology. Scientists should make precise predictions on the basis of their theories so that they can strive conscientiously to falsify or disprove them. Popper rejects many sociological theories as being unscientific because they are not sufficiently precise to generate hypotheses that can be falsified. He is particularly critical of Marxism for failing to make precise predictions: for example, for failing to specify exactly when and under what circumstances a proletarian revolution would take place in capitalist societies. Marxism cannot be falsified since the day of the proletarian revolution and the dawning of the truly communist society is pushed further into the future. Marxism is an article of faith rather than a scientific theory.

Like positivists, then, Popper believes that it is possible for 'social sciences' in general, and sociology in particular, to become scientific by following a particular set of methodological procedures. He parts company with positivists in denying that science can deliver the final, incontrovertible truth, since the possibility of falsification always exists. Instead he believes that the longer a theory has stood the test of time, the more often researchers have failed to falsify it, the closer it is likely to be to the truth.

Phenomenologists reject the view that natural science methodology is appropriate to sociology. To phenomenologists, objective observation and measurement of the social world are not possible. The social world is classified by members of society in terms of their own stereotypes and taken-for-granted assumptions. In these circumstances the social world cannot be measured objectively; statistics are simply the product of the categorization procedures used. The best that sociologists can hope to do is to study the way that members of society categorize the world around them. They cannot collect meaningful statistical data and establish correlations, causal connections and laws. Indeed, phenomenologists reject the whole possibility of finding laws of human behaviour.

The social context of science

All of the views discussed so far are based upon the assumption that there are established methods and procedures that characterize science. However, as Kaplan (1964) has pointed out, it is necessary to distinguish between 'reconstructed logics' and 'logics in use'. Reconstructed logics consist of the methods and procedures scientists claim to use. Both positivism and Popper's methodological approach represent reconstructed logics. However, there is no guarantee that scientists actually do follow such guidelines. Logics in use refer to what scientists actually do during their research, and this may depart considerably from their reconstructed logics.

Michael Lynch (1983) has conducted research in a psycho-biological laboratory, which illustrates how scientists may be less objective than they claim. The scientists studied brain functioning by examining thin slices of rats' brains under microscopes. Photographs and slides of the brain slices were examined to see how useful they were in developing theories of brain functioning. Sometimes unexplained features were found in the photographs. Very often these were put down to some error in the production of the photograph or slide: they were seen as artefacts, rather than being a real feature of the rat's brain. (An artefact is something produced by the research process which does not exist in the phenomenon being studied.) Some of these features were held to be an error in staining, others were believed to be the result of scratching of the specimen when it was being sliced.

There was much discussion in the laboratory about whether these features were artefacts or not. In reaching their conclusions, the scientists were influenced by their existing theories, the types of features they were looking for and expected to find. If the visible marks on the slide or photograph did not fit their theories of how rats' brains functioned, they were much more likely to dismiss the marks as errors. Their interpretations of the data were guided by their theories. Far from following Popper's methodology and striving to falsify their theories, the researchers tried to use the evidence to confirm them. Many scientists may be reluctant to dismiss perhaps years of intellectual effort and research because a single piece of evidence does not support the theory that they have developed.

The social context of Darwin's theory of evolution

It may also be the case that the sorts of theories that are developed in the first place – and which scientists try to confirm rather than falsify – are influenced by social factors rather than the detached pursuit of objective knowledge. Roger Gomm (1982) has used Darwin's theory of evolution as an example to illustrate this.

Darwin claimed that species developed and evolved by a process of natural selection. Most followers of Darwin believed that this process took place gradually. Natural selection occurred through adaptation to the environment. Genetic differences between members of a species make some better-suited to survival in a particular environment. Those that have a better chance of survival are more likely to produce offspring and so shift the species towards their genetic characteristics. For example, giraffes with longer necks may have been more likely to survive and produce offspring than those with shorter necks because they were able to feed off leaves which

other species and certain members of their own species could not reach.

Gomm points out that the ideas of natural selection and gradual evolution are not supported by all of the evidence. According to Gomm, Darwin himself did not believe that evolution was a gradual process, but that it was initiated by sudden genetic changes or mutations. Fossil records do not support the gradualist theory of evolutionary change; instead there appear to be rapid periods of genetic change and eras of mass extinction. Gomm claims that the popularity of 'gradualism' was not the result of careful interpretation of the evidence but 'because it lined up with a preference for gradual social and political change among the dominant social groups of the time'. Darwin's theories were often misused – for example, by the English functionalist sociologist Herbert Spencer – to indicate how societies should be run. Those in power did not want it to appear that revolutionary change was the answer to society's problems, because it could undermine their dominance.

The idea of natural selection suggests, as Herbert Spencer put it, 'survival of the fittest'. The weak – those unsuited to survival in a particular environment – must perish to ensure the healthy genetic development of a species. In this theory, competition is the key to genetic and evolutionary progress.

However, as Gomm points out, 'the idea of natural selection as a red in tooth and claw struggle for survival is only a half truth at best. It leaves out of account the extent to which individuals within a species cooperate with each other.'

In his book *Mutual Aid* (published in 1902) the Russian anarchist Prince Peter Kropotkin amassed a wealth of evidence to show that cooperation rather than conflict allowed animals to survive in flocks, herds or other groups. Many animals are best able to resist predators, or at least ensure that casualties are minimized, in such groupings.

Why then was Darwin's competitive vision of the natural world preferred to Kropotkin's equally carefully-argued cooperative vision? Gomm argues that it was because Darwin's views fitted more closely with the ideologies of dominant social groups in Victorian Britain:

1 It justified the free-market capitalist system and did not support socialist ideas which argued for state intervention in the economy.
2 It legitimated harsh social policies which saw the poor as 'unfit' and therefore as not worthy of much assistance. (See pp. 316–17 for details of Herbert Spencer's Darwinist views on poverty.)
3 Since evolution allowed species to be seen as superior or inferior, it allowed groups within the species to be placed on an evolutionary scale. Gomm argues that the idea of evolution as progress 'allowed the Victorians to lay out the peoples of the world on an evolutionary ladder, with Australian Aboriginals at the bottom (least evolved) and Victorian intellectual males at the top'. It therefore justified the colonization of non-Western people on the grounds that the British Empire would civilize them.

A similar use of a scientific theory to legitimate the domination of one group by another (that is women by men) is provided by sociobiology (see pp. 129–31).

Thomas Kuhn – paradigms and scientific revolutions

The preceding section argues that the interpretation of evidence is governed by the theories that scientists hold, and that these theories themselves may be influenced by social and ideological factors. This suggests that in practice scientists operate in very different ways from those advocated by Popper or positivists.

Thomas Kuhn (1962) has developed an analysis of science which also sees it as being far from the objective pursuit of knowledge. In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn argues that science is characterized by a commitment to a scientific paradigm. A paradigm consists of a set of beliefs shared by a group of scientists about what the natural world is composed of, what counts as true and valid knowledge, and what sort of questions should be asked and what sort of procedures should be followed to answer those questions. A paradigm is a complete theory and framework within which scientists operate. It guides what evidence is collected, how that evidence is collected, and how it should be analysed and explained. When scientists work within a paradigm, they tend to look for data that supports and refines that paradigm. The way that scientists perceive the world around them is also governed by the paradigm – they see the world in ways that are consistent with the paradigm.

Kuhn does not believe that the same methods and procedures are found throughout scientific history; rather they are specific to particular sciences at particular times. Nor does Kuhn believe that scientists are entirely objective – paradigms are not accepted or rejected on the basis of evidence alone. Each paradigm has a social base, in that it is grounded in a community of scientists committed to a particular view of the world or some part of it. Established scientists trained to think within the framework provided by an established paradigm find it difficult to see the world in any other way. Furthermore, they have a vested interest in maintaining it, for their academic reputations and

careers rest upon the work they have done within that paradigm. Consequently, scientists may ignore evidence that does not fit 'their' paradigm.

Scientific revolutions

Scientific beliefs do change, but, according to Kuhn, rather than changing gradually they are changed by scientific revolutions. In a scientific revolution one scientific paradigm is replaced by another: for instance, when Newton's paradigm in physics was replaced by Einstein's. Change in science is not a gradual process of accumulating new knowledge, but a sudden move from one paradigm to another. This occurs when an accepted paradigm is confronted by so many 'anomalies', or things it cannot explain, that a new paradigm is developed, which does not suffer from the same anomalies. A community of scientists may resist the change, but, once a new generation of scientists who have been trained within the new paradigm start practising, the new paradigm is accepted. A science then returns to its 'normal' state in which the paradigm is elaborated and developed, but the framework that it lays down is largely unquestioned.

Kuhn's work raises serious questions about other views of science. To Kuhn a scientific subject is one in which there is, at least most of the time, an agreed paradigm. There is no guarantee, however, that the accepted paradigm is correct: it may well be replaced by a new paradigm in the future. Scientific training has more to do with learning to see the physical world in a particular way than it has to do with a commitment to discovering the truth through objective research.

If Kuhn's view of science is accepted, then it is doubtful if sociology can be seen as a science. The sociological community has not accepted one paradigm, or, in sociological vocabulary, one 'perspective'. Marxists, functionalists, feminists, interactionists, ethnomethodologists and postmodernists all see the social world in different ways: they ask different questions and get different answers. Even within a perspective there is a lack of consensus. There are many variations within Marxism and feminism, while within functionalism Durkheim and Parsons reached different conclusions on many issues, and they did not analyse societies in the same ways.

In this situation, sociology can be regarded as 'pre-paradigmatic' – a single paradigm has not yet been accepted – and, as such, sociology is pre-scientific. It could, of course, become scientific if sociologists were to agree upon a perspective that all practitioners of the subject could accept. Given the present state of the subject, such an outcome seems highly unlikely.

Whether it is desirable for sociology to become a science is questionable. Sociology seems to exist almost in a permanent state of revolution, but the constant conflict may help to push the subject forward at a rapid pace.

Criticisms of Kuhn

Although influential, Kuhn's work has been criticized. It has been seen as having little relevance to social science and as being based upon inadequate evidence. Anderson, Hughes and Sharrock argue that Kuhn is doing no more than describing natural science, and his views have little relevance to sociology. Furthermore, they believe that he has underestimated the degree to which there is conflict and disagreement in natural science. Most of the time alternative paradigms are debated. Anderson *et al.* claim that a careful examination of the history of science shows that 'The periods of revolution grow in size while those of settled "normality" contract' (Anderson *et al.*, 1986).

The realist view of science

From the discussion so far, it would appear that it is either impossible or undesirable for sociology to be a science. Despite the claims of positivists and Popper, it seems inappropriate for a subject that deals with human behaviour to confine itself to studying the observable, to ignore the subjective, to try to falsify theories or to make precise predictions. However, partly in response to such problems, the realist theory of science – which stresses the similarities between social and natural science – has been developed. Realists such as Roy Bhaskar (1979), Russell Keat and John Urry (1982), and Andrew Sayer (1984) argue that none of the above points disqualifies sociology from being a science. They believe that positivists, Popper, and indeed Kuhn, are mistaken about the nature of science.

'Closed' and 'open' systems

Sayer (1984) argues that there is a difference between closed and open systems as objects of scientific study. Within closed systems all the relevant variables can be controlled and measured. In scientific laboratory experiments closed systems may be produced; and certain branches of science such as physics and chemistry have much more scope for the study of closed systems than others.

There are many areas of science in which all the relevant variables cannot be controlled or measured. As a result it is not possible to make the precise predictions advocated by Popper. For example, doctors cannot predict with certainty who will become ill; seismologists cannot predict exactly when an earthquake will occur; and meteorologists cannot predict the weather with anything like absolute precision. In all of these cases the reasons for the

lack of precision are similar – some of the variables cannot be measured, or the processes involved are too complex for accurate predictions to be made.

Sociology has similar problems. Within society as a whole, or within a social group, innumerable variables may influence what happens. Thus sociologists cannot be expected to predict exactly what the divorce rate will be in five years' time, or whether a revolution will occur within a given period of time.

Human consciousness

However, even if it is accepted that a science does not need to make predictions, this still leaves the problem of human consciousness to be dealt with. As outlined earlier, positivists believe that a science should confine itself to the study of the observable, whereas interpretive sociologists believe that reference must be made to internal and unobservable meanings and motives in explaining human behaviour. Realists point out, though, that science itself does not confine itself to studying observable phenomena. As Keat and Urry say, scientists may 'postulate the existence of entities which have not been observed, and may not be open to any available method of detection' (Keat and Urry, 1982).

Viruses, sub-atomic particles and magnetic fields all form part of scientific theories, despite the impossibility (at present) of directly observing them. Scientists cannot easily observe continental drift, because it takes place too slowly, nor can they see the mechanisms that produce it, because they are below the earth's surface. Darwin could not observe evolution, because it took place too slowly.

Causality

To realists, then, both Popper and positivists have failed to define science accurately, and so the objections raised by interpretive sociologists to seeing sociology as a science become irrelevant. Realists see science as the attempt to explain the causes of events in the natural or social world in terms of underlying and often unobservable structures, mechanisms and processes. Realists produce causal explanations and explain them in terms of such structures, mechanisms and processes. An example of a mechanism or process in science would be Darwin's idea of natural selection. In sociology, examples include ideas on the concentration of capital and the pauperization of the proletariat.

To realists, explaining the mechanisms through which events take place is a vital part of causal explanation. This requires the researcher to specify which factors or variables determine whether these mechanisms operate. For example, in different conditions the concentration of capital might be slowed down, speeded up or halted. Similarly, in Darwin's theory of evolution the actual consequences of the operation of natural selection depend upon the precise and changing environmental conditions in which species evolve.

According to realists, events take place and mechanisms operate within the context of structures. Keat and Urry argue that a structure is a 'system of relationships which underlie and account for the sets of observable social relationships and those of social consciousness' (Keat and Urry, 1982). Similarly, Sayer defines structures as 'sets of internally related objects or practices' (Sayer, 1984). Sayer uses the example of the relationship between landlords and tenants to illustrate a structure in society. The existence of a landlord depends upon the existence of tenants, and 'The landlord tenant relation itself presupposes the existence of private property, rent, the production of an economic surplus and so on; together they form a structure.'

Structures impose limitations or constraints upon what happens, but mechanisms and the variables that affect them determine the actual course of events. For example, the structure of relationships between landlords and tenants does not determine which individual occupies the property being rented, but it does determine that the tenant pays rent and the landlord does not. Structures are often unobservable, but a natural or social scientist can work out that they are there by observing their effects. Social classes cannot be seen, nor can the infrastructure and superstructure of society, but to a Marxist they are real.

Science and sociology

According to the realist view of science, much of sociology is scientific. To realist sociologists such as Keat and Urry (1982), Marxist sociology is scientific because it develops models of the underlying structures and processes in society, which are evaluated and modified in the light of empirical evidence. Unlike positivists, realists do not automatically reject interpretive sociology as unscientific, because they believe that studying unobservable meanings and motives is perfectly compatible with a scientific subject.

From this point of view there is relatively little difference between social and natural sciences. Some branches of natural science which have the luxury of studying 'closed' systems can be more precise than sociology, but others face the same difficulty as sociology in trying to deal with highly complex open systems. Both natural sciences and sociology have common aims: they try to develop models and theories that explain the world as objectively as possible on the basis of the available evidence.

Whether sociology can be completely objective is the subject of the final section.

Sociology, methodology and values

One of the reasons that sociologists have been so concerned with the question of whether sociology is a science is the widespread assumption that science is objective, or value-free. Robert Bierstedt has stated:

> Objectivity *means that the conclusions arrived at as the result of inquiry and investigation are independent of the race, colour, creed, occupation, nationality, religion, moral preference, and political predisposition of the investigator. If his research is truly objective, it is independent of any subjective elements, any personal desires, that he may have.*
>
> Bierstedt, 1963

However, even Bierstedt's own definition of objectivity may reveal his values. By assuming that the investigator is male, Bierstedt could be accused of having a patriarchal bias in his work. The quest for objectivity may not be as straightforward as it first appears.

Many of the founders of sociology believed that sociology could and should be value-free. Early positivists such as Comte and Durkheim argued that objectivity was attainable by adopting a 'scientific' methodology. Marx also believed that his sociology was objective and 'scientific', although he saw society very differently. Weber did not think complete value-freedom was possible, but he did believe that, once a topic for research had been chosen, the researcher could be objective. He argued that sociologists should not make value judgements, that is, they should not state what aspects of society they found desirable or undesirable.

Despite the claims of these important sociologists, it is doubtful whether their own work met the criteria necessary for complete value-freedom. The concluding sections of Chapters 2–13 have shown that the values of sociologists have influenced their work, whatever area of social life they have studied.

Functionalists in general have been accused of holding politically conservative views in assuming that existing social institutions serve a useful purpose. This implies that anything other than slow evolutionary change is harmful to society.

Durkheim accepted the need for certain changes in society, but his personal values are evident in his belief that the inheritance of wealth should be abolished and professional associations should be established (see pp. 691–3).

Few would claim that Marx's sociology was free from his political and moral beliefs. Marx's desire for proletarian revolution influenced most aspects of his work.

Weber's work often appears more value-free than that of functionalists or Marxists, but there is little doubt that his personal values influenced his research. Weber's writings on bureaucracy (see Chapter 15) are strongly influenced by his fear that bureaucratic organizations would stifle human freedom. In his words, 'What can we oppose to this machinery in order to keep a portion of mankind free from this parcelling-out of the soul, from this supreme mastery of the bureaucratic way of life' (quoted in Nisbet, 1967).

Even if it is true that such eminent sociologists allowed their values to influence their research, it does not necessarily follow that it is impossible to achieve value-freedom in sociology. To many contemporary sociologists, there is, however, no prospect of a completely value-free sociology. According to this view, total objectivity is impossible because values inevitably enter every stage of the production of sociological knowledge.

Weber recognized that values would influence the choice of topics for study. He argued that the sociologist had to have some way of choosing from the almost infinite number of possible areas of social life that could be studied. Weber believed that 'value relevance' would influence the choice. Researchers would choose to research topics which they thought were important, and, more significantly, which they thought were of central importance to society. Weber himself chose to study the advent of capitalism and the nature of bureaucracy, because he saw them as the most important developments in Western societies.

The values of other sociologists have also been evident in their choice of topics for research. Peter Townsend demonstrated his belief that poverty is a serious problem by devoting years of his life to its study (see pp. 296–300). Marxists have shown the importance they attach to inequality in their studies of wealth, income and stratification. Feminists have revealed their values by deciding that it is important to study such aspects of social life as domestic violence, rape and housework. Simply by selecting an issue to study, sociologists reveal what aspects of society they believe are significant.

Having selected a topic, sociologists then choose what aspects of that topic to study, and what approach they are going to adopt. According to Alvin Gouldner this involves making 'domain assumptions' (Gouldner, 1971). These are the basic assumptions that sociologists make about the nature of social life and human behaviour. Gouldner says:

Domain assumptions about man and society might include, for example, dispositions to believe that men are rational or irrational; that society is precarious or fundamentally stable; that social problems will correct themselves without planned intervention; that human behaviour is unpredictable; that man's true humanity resides in his feelings and sentiments.

Gouldner, 1971

Gouldner believes that in practice all sociologists tend to commit themselves to a particular set of domain assumptions, and these direct the way that research is conducted and conclusions are reached. Without some starting point, research cannot proceed and sociological knowledge cannot be created. Domain assumptions about human behaviour – such as whether it is governed by external or internal stimuli and whether it is rational or irrational – will tend to determine whether quantitative or qualitative methods are adopted.

In designing and carrying out research all researchers have to be selective. When producing a questionnaire or planning an interview some questions have to be chosen and others excluded. The choice will be influenced by the theories and hypotheses to which a particular researcher attaches credibility. Once the data have been collected, researchers need to interpret the results, and very often the results do not speak for themselves.

For example, in the debate about secularization, the development of sects, cults and new religious movements has been variously interpreted both as evidence for and as evidence against the theory of secularization, depending on the standpoint of the researchers (see pp. 485–6).

Similarly, the proletarianization thesis has guided much of the research into routine non-manual workers, and Marxists and non-Marxists have tended to produce different types of data, which they have interpreted in different ways, and which have led them to very different conclusions (see pp. 66–9).

Interpretive sociologists have tended to be very critical of those using quantitative methods. They have argued that many sociologists simply impose their own views of reality on the social world. As a result they distort and misrepresent the very reality they seek to understand. Research techniques such as interviews, questionnaires and social surveys are a part of this process of distortion. They come between the sociologist and the social world and so remove any opportunity he or she might have of discovering social reality.

From this point of view, direct observation of everyday activity provides the most likely, if not the only, means of obtaining valid knowledge of the social world. This at least allows researchers to come face to face with the reality they seek to understand. Since the social world is seen to be a construction of its members, that world can only be understood in terms of members' categories and constructs. Thus Jack Douglas argues that sociologists must 'study the phenomena of everyday life on their own terms', they must 'preserve the integrity of that phenomena' (Douglas, 1971).

While phenomenologists might be looking in the right direction, the problem of validity remains unsolved. Though face-to-face with social reality, the observer can only see the social world through his or her own eyes. No two sociologists will see that world in exactly the same way. A participant observer cannot note and record everything that happens in their presence and, like the sociologist devising a questionnaire, has to be selective. In these circumstances the researcher's values will influence what events they believe to be important.

Critical researchers believe it is important to understand how the social world is seen from the viewpoint of those being studied. However, they do not accept that this alone will produce objective knowledge. To them it is also important to look beyond the commonsense knowledge of people to uncover the structures of oppression which lie behind everyday life (see pp. 982–6). However, critics believe that the oppressive structures they discover simply reflect their own prejudices: feminists will always find patriarchal oppression, Marxists will find class exploitation, critical gay sociologists will find homophobia, and anti-racists will find racism.

Because of these sorts of considerations, Derek Phillips argues that 'An investigator's values influence not only the problems he selects for study but also his methods for studying them and the sources of data he uses' (Phillips, 1973). In 'Anti-Minotaur: the myth of a value free sociology' (1975), Gouldner makes a similar point. He argues that, just as the bull and the man in the mythical Minotaur cannot be separated, so facts and values cannot be separated in sociological research.

Weber argued that sociologists' values should be kept out of their research, and that they should not make value judgements – judgements about right or wrong. Gouldner regards this as dishonest. Since sociologists must have values, they should be open about them so that others can decide for themselves to what degree values have influenced the research. Gouldner says:

If sociologists ought not to express their personal values in the academic setting, how then are students to be safeguarded against the unwitting influence of these values which shape the sociologist's selection of problems, his preferences for certain hypotheses or conceptual schemes, and

his neglect of others. For these are unavoidable and, in this sense, there is and can be no value-free sociology. The only choice is between an expression of one's values, as open and honest as it can be ... and a vain ritual of moral neutrality which, because it invites men to ignore the vulnerability of reason to bias, leaves it at the mercy of irrationality.

Gouldner, 1975

Some postmodernists such as Lyotard (1984) reject altogether the possibility of producing any objective knowledge. To Lyotard the creation of knowledge is just a language game which can only be judged in terms of its saleability. There is no way of distinguishing between true and untrue knowledge, no way of being objective. For many postmodern writers, knowledge simply reflects the viewpoint and the values of different social groups. No one viewpoint and set of values can be seen as superior to any other. As Martyn Hammersley says, postmodernism involves 'a sustained scepticism and distrust of all claims to knowledge' (Hammersley, 1995).

Given these problems, sociology might appear to consist of little more than personal opinions. If this were the case there would seem little point in the subject existing. However, some sociologists believe that it is positively desirable for sociologists to be committed to certain values. For example, Phil Carspecken, along with other critical social scientists, believes that sociologists should be committed to changing the world.

Nevertheless, this does not prevent sociologists from trying to avoid bias in their research. Although humans might view the world differently, there is an objective world which 'resists' human action. For example, a person cannot walk through a brick wall whether they think it exists or not. The way the material world resists our actions provides some basis for reaching agreement about objective statements. Truth claims – claims that you have made an objective statement – are based upon reaching such agreements about what does and does not exist. These agreements in turn can be used to evaluate the claims of different theories. A critical researcher cannot therefore find whatever they want to find.

Empirical investigations, which are more than the subjective interpretations of individuals, mean that sociology can be more than just value-laden opinions. Truth claims, even if accepted now, may be rejected at some point in the future. A consensus about what is and is not true may break down. However, because they are based upon reaching agreements about what is true, they have a more solid foundation than individual interpretations.

Carspecken even argues that, up to a point, values can be evaluated as well. He uses the example of somebody arguing that poverty is not bad because 'there has always been poverty and always will be; it is natural' (Carspecken 1996). In this case the value claim that poverty is not bad can be critically examined by using examples of societies which have no poverty, and by trying to show that some things which are natural are not necessarily good. Carspecken says, 'We might point to many things in nature that are morally repugnant to human beings and claim that humans must alter nature and establish morality through their own efforts.'

Such arguments can only proceed by finding some sort of common ground – something which all those discussing the issue can agree is good or bad. Such common ground may not always be attainable, but often it is, and some rational evaluation of values becomes possible.

If Carspecken's views are correct, then values are integral to sociology and indeed to all disciplines, but that does not prevent rational debate and the empirical testing of theories. Sociology can make claims about the truth and hope to gain acceptance for them. From this viewpoint, sociologists should also accept and welcome a commitment to using the production of sociological knowledge to try to improve society.

Chapter 15

Sociological theory

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Sociological theory

Introduction

A theory is a set of ideas that provides an explanation for something. A sociological theory is a set of ideas that provides an explanation for human society. Critics of sociology sometimes object to the emphasis that sociologists place on theory, and suggest it might be better to let 'the facts' speak for themselves. But there are no facts without theory. For example, in Western society, the generally accepted facts that the world is round and that it orbits the sun are inseparable from theories that explain the nature and movement of heavenly bodies. However, in some non-Western societies whose members employ different theories, the view that the world is flat and the solar system revolves around it is accepted as a statement of fact. Clearly the facts do not speak for themselves.

Like all theory, sociological theory is selective. No amount of theory can hope to explain everything, or account for the infinite amount of data that exist, or encompass the endless ways of viewing reality. Theories are therefore selective in terms of their priorities and perspectives and the data they define as significant. As a result, they provide a particular and partial view of reality.

There are a wide variety of sociological theories, and they can be grouped together according to various criteria. One of the most important of these is the distinction between structural perspectives and social action perspectives. This distinction will form the framework for the early parts of this chapter. However, there is also an important distinction between modern and postmodern perspectives in sociology. This distinction will be discussed in detail later in the chapter.

Structural versus social action theories

Structural perspectives and social action perspectives differ in the way they approach the analysis of society. Structural, or macro, perspectives analyse the way society as a whole fits together. Thus, despite their differences, both functionalism and Marxism use a model of how society as a whole works. Many functionalists base their model of society around the assumption of functional prerequisites or basic needs, and go on to explain how different parts of society help to meet those needs. Marxists, on the other hand, see society as resting upon an economic base or infrastructure, with a superstructure rising above it. They see society as divided into social classes which have the potential to be in conflict with each other.

The main differences between functionalist and Marxist perspectives, then, concern the ways in which they characterize the social structure. Functionalists stress the extent to which the different elements of the social structure fit together harmoniously. Marxists stress the lack of fit between the different parts, particularly social classes, and so emphasize the potential for social conflict.

Marxism is one example of a conflict perspective. There are a variety of interpretations and adaptations of Marx's work, and some neo-Marxists question some of the concepts used by Marx, while accepting his overall approach. Other conflict theorists agree with Marx and neo-Marxists that there is conflict in society, but disagree about the causes and types of conflict. They draw upon the work of Max Weber, who argued that many groups, apart from classes, can be in conflict for the scarce resources in society (see pp. 36–9).

Not all sociological perspectives base their analysis upon an examination of the structure of society as a whole. Rather than seeing human behaviour as being largely determined by society, they see society as being the product of human activity. They stress the meaningfulness of human behaviour, denying that it is primarily determined by the structure of society.

These approaches are variously called social action approaches, interpretive sociology, or micro sociology. Max Weber was the first sociologist to advocate a social action approach (although he also uses elements of a structural approach in parts of his work). In contemporary sociology there are two main varieties of this type of sociology.

Symbolic interactionists try to explain human behaviour and human society by examining the ways in which people interpret the actions of others,

develop a self-concept or self-image, and act in terms of meanings. They do not deny the existence of some elements of a social structure: for example, they acknowledge the presence of social roles, and some interactionists also use the concept of social class. However, they believe that the social structure is fluid and constantly changing in response to interaction.

Ethnomethodology moves even further from a structural approach by denying the existence of a social structure as such. To ethnomethodologists, the social world consists of the definitions and categorizations of members of society. These subjective meanings are social reality. The job of the sociologist, in their view, is to interpret, describe and above all to understand this subjective reality.

It is not possible to provide clear dividing lines between sociological perspectives. There are many approaches that do not fit neatly even into such broad categories as structural or social action perspectives. For example, the description of Marx's social theories later in this section will show that elements of a social action approach can be found within his work; and Weber's work also uses elements of both types of perspective. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to divide much sociology into these two categories, because the emphasis within perspectives like functionalism and Marxism is so different from that found within interactionism and ethnomethodology.

Some sociologists have made a conscious attempt to bridge the apparent gulf between social action and structural perspectives. Max Weber was arguably the first sociologist to try to combine an analysis of the structures of society with analysis of individual social actions; more recently, the sociologist Paul Willis has tried to combine Marxist analysis with an interactionist approach to social action; and Anthony Giddens, another sociologist, has also tried to bridge the gap that seems to separate structural and social action approaches.

Some of the most recent approaches within sociology have not been particularly concerned with issues to do with the difference between structural and social action perspectives. Postmodernism in particular defies categorization in these terms. Much of the inspiration for postmodernism comes from the post-structuralist perspectives discussed in Chapter 12 (see pp. 913–16). Post-structuralism takes the analysis of language as its starting point, rather than the analysis of social structures or social action. However, most postmodernists tend to be hostile to structural perspectives that claim to be able to explain how society works. Postmodernists generally reject the claim that any single theory is able to explain the social world.

This brief summary cannot do justice to the subtleties and complexities of sociological theory. Some of these complexities will be examined later in this chapter, but it is important to note that the chapter is far from comprehensive. There are a number of other perspectives that have not been included. Furthermore, sociology is a developing discipline and sociological perspectives are continually being refined and developed in the light of theoretical debate and empirical investigation. Nevertheless, it is possible to outline the central features of the most influential perspectives in the discipline.

Functionalism

Functionalist analysis has a long history in sociology. It is prominent in the work of Auguste Comte (1798–1857) and Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), two of the founding fathers of the discipline. It was developed by Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) and refined by Talcott Parsons (1902–79). During the 1940s and 1950s functionalism was the dominant social theory in American sociology. Since that time it has steadily dropped from favour, partly because of damaging criticism, partly because other approaches are seen to answer certain questions more successfully, and partly because it simply went out of fashion.

Society as a system

Functionalism views society as a system: that is, as a set of interconnected parts which together form a whole. The basic unit of analysis is society, and its various parts are understood primarily in terms of their relationship to the whole. The early functionalists often drew an analogy between society and an organism such as the human body. They argued that an understanding of any organ in the body, such as the heart or lungs, involves an understanding of its relationship to other organs and, in particular, its contribution towards the maintenance of the organism. In the same way, an understanding of any part of society requires an analysis of its relationship to other parts and, most importantly, its contribution to the maintenance of society. Continuing this analogy, functionalists argued that, just as an organism has certain basic needs that must be satisfied if it is to survive, so society has basic needs that must be met if it is to continue to exist. Thus social institutions such as the family and religion are analysed as a part of the

social system rather than as isolated units. In particular, they are understood with reference to the contribution they make to the system as a whole.

Functional prerequisites

These basic needs or necessary conditions of existence are sometimes known as the functional prerequisites of society. Various approaches have been used to identify functional prerequisites. Some sociologists have examined a range of societies in an attempt to discover what factors they have in common. For example, Davis and Moore (1967) claimed that all societies have some form of social stratification, and George Peter Murdock (1949) maintained that the family exists in every known human society. From these observations it is assumed that institutional arrangements, such as social stratification and the family, meet needs that are common to all societies. Thus, from the universal presence of social stratification, it is argued that all societies require some mechanism to ensure that social positions are adequately filled by motivated persons. From the universality of the family, it is assumed that some mechanism for the reproduction and socialization of new members is a functional prerequisite of society.

However, the problem with this approach is its assumption that the presence of the same institution in every society indicates that it meets the same need. Simply because a form of stratification exists in all societies does not necessarily mean that it reflects 'the universal necessity which calls forth stratification in any social system', as Davis and Moore claim. Put another way, it cannot be assumed that stratification systems perform the same function in all societies. (Davis and Moore's theory of stratification is outlined in Chapter 2, pp. 27–8.)

An alternative approach to the identification of functional prerequisites involves an analysis of those factors that would lead to the breakdown or termination of society. Thus Marion J. Levy (1952) argued that a society would cease to exist if its members became extinct, if they became totally apathetic, if they were involved in a war of all against all, or if they were absorbed into another society. Therefore, in order for a society to survive, it must have some means of preventing these events from occurring. These means are the functional prerequisites of society.

For example, to ensure that members of society do not become extinct, a system for reproducing new members and maintaining the health of existing members is essential. This involves role differentiation and role assignment. Individuals must be assigned to produce food and to reproduce and care for new members of society. In order for these essential services to be maintained, individuals must be sufficiently motivated to perform their roles. If they were totally apathetic, the social system would collapse through lack of effort. A system of goals and rewards is necessary to motivate members of society to want to do what they have to do in order to maintain the system. By specifying the factors that would lead to the termination of society, Levy claimed to have identified the basic requirements that must be met if society is to survive.

The problem with this approach to the specification of functional prerequisites is its reliance on common sense and ingenuity. In the case of a biological organism it is possible to identify basic needs, since it can be shown that if these needs are not met, the organism dies. However, societies change rather than die. As a result, it is not possible to identify unequivocally those aspects of a social system that are indispensable to its existence. Functionalists using Levy's approach have drawn up lists of functional prerequisites that are often similar in content but never quite the same.

A related approach involves the deduction of functional prerequisites from an abstract model of the social system. For example, if society is viewed as a system, certain survival needs can be deduced from an abstract model of the system. Any system is made up of interconnected parts. If a system is to survive, there must be a minimum amount of integration between its parts. There must be some degree of fit, which requires an element of mutual compatibility of the parts. From this type of analysis, the functional prerequisites of society may be inferred. Thus any social system requires a minimum amount of integration between its parts.

From this assumption, functional analysis turns to an examination of the parts of society, to investigate how they contribute to the integration of the social system. In this respect, religion has often been seen as a powerful mechanism for social integration. Religion is seen to reinforce the basic values of society. Social norms, which derive from these values, structure and direct behaviour in the various institutions of society. The parts of the social system are integrated in that they are largely infused with the same basic values. Were the various institutions founded on conflicting values, the system would tend to disintegrate. Since religion promotes and reinforces social values, it can be seen as an integrating mechanism. But the problem with deducing functional prerequisites such as integration from an abstract model of the social system is that they are inferred rather than unequivocally identified.

The concept of function

The concept of 'function' in functionalist analysis refers to the contribution of the part to the whole. More specifically, the function of any part of society

is the contribution it makes to meeting the functional prerequisites of the social system. Parts of society are functional in so far as they maintain the system and contribute to its survival. Thus a function of the family is to ensure the continuity of society by reproducing and socializing new members. A function of religion is to integrate the social system by reinforcing common values.

Functionalists also employ the concept of 'dysfunction' to refer to the effects of any social institution which detract from the maintenance of society. However, in practice, they have been primarily concerned with the search for functions, and relatively little use has been made of the concept of dysfunction.

The ideology of functionalism

Functionalist analysis has focused on the question of how social systems are maintained. This focus has tended to result in a positive evaluation of the parts of society. With their concern for investigating how functional prerequisites are met, functionalists have concentrated on functions rather than dysfunctions. This emphasis has resulted in many institutions being seen as beneficial and useful to society. Indeed some institutions, such as the family, religion and social stratification, have been seen as not only beneficial but indispensable. This view has led critics to argue that functionalism has a built-in conservative bias which supports the status quo. The argument that certain social arrangements are beneficial or indispensable provides support for their retention, and a reason to reject proposals for radical change. Responses to this criticism will be examined in a later section (see pp. 1039–40). (For various views on the ideological basis of functionalism, see the concluding sections of Chapters 2 to 12.)

This section has presented a brief outline of some of the main features of functionalist analysis. The sections that follow will consider the views of some of the major functionalist theorists.

Emile Durkheim

Social facts as constraints

Critics of functionalism have often argued that it pictures the individual as having little or no control over his or her own actions. Rather than constructing their own social world, members of society appear to be directed by the system. For example, they are organized into families and systems of stratification because society requires these social arrangements in order to survive. Many have questioned the logic of treating society as if it were something separate from its members, as if it shaped their actions rather than being constructed by them.

Durkheim (1938, first published 1894) rejected such views. He argued that society has a reality of its own over and above the individuals who comprise it. Members of society are constrained by 'social facts', by 'ways of acting, thinking and feeling, external to the individual, and endowed with a power of coercion, by reason of which they control him'. Beliefs and moral codes are passed on from one generation to the next and shared by the individuals who make up a society. From this point of view it is not the consciousness of the individual that directs behaviour, but common beliefs and sentiments that transcend the individual and shape his or her consciousness. Having established to his own satisfaction that social facts can, at least for purposes of analysis, be treated separately from social actors, Durkheim is free to treat society as a system which obeys its own laws. He is now in a position to 'seek the explanation of social life in the nature of society itself'.

The causes and functions of social facts

Durkheim argues that there are two ways of explaining social facts. In both cases the explanation lies in society. The first method involves determining the cause of a social fact, seeking to explain its origin. In Durkheim's view, 'The determining cause of a social fact should be sought among the social facts preceding it and not among the states of individual consciousness.' As was discussed in Chapter 14 (see pp. 974–81), the causes of variations in suicide rates are to be found in social facts, in society rather than in the individual (Durkheim, 1970, first published 1897). However, the explanation of a social fact also involves an analysis of its function in society, of its contribution to 'the general needs of the social organism', of its 'function in the establishment of social order'. Durkheim assumes that the explanation for the continuing existence of a social fact lies in its function, that is, in its usefulness for society.

Durkheim is at pains to point out the distinction between cause and function. Thus the cause of the Christian religion lies in the specific circumstances of its origin among a group of Jews under Roman rule. Yet its functions – the reasons for its retention over a period of nearly 2,000 years – require a different form of explanation. Durkheim argues that 'if the usefulness of a fact is not the cause of its existence, it is generally necessary that it be useful in order that it might maintain itself'. Social facts therefore continue in existence because they contribute in some way to the maintenance of society, because they serve 'some social end'.

Social order and human nature

Much of Durkheim's work is concerned with functional analysis, with seeking to understand the

functions of social facts. He assumes that society has certain functional prerequisites, the most important of which is the need for social order. This is necessary because of human nature. Durkheim has a 'homo duplex' model of human nature: that is, he believes that humans have two sides to their nature. One side is selfish or egotistical. Humans are partly driven by selfish biological needs, such as the need to satisfy hunger. Inevitably this means that they tend to look after their own interests, which makes it difficult for individuals to be integrated into society. However, there is another side to human nature: the ability to believe in moral values. Society has to make use of this side of human nature if social life is to be possible. But how is social life to be achieved? This question still needs to be answered.

The collective conscience and social stability

Durkheim sees the answer in consensus, in a 'collective conscience' consisting of common beliefs and sentiments. Without this consensus or agreement on fundamental moral issues, social solidarity would be impossible and individuals could not be bound together to form an integrated social unit. Without social obligations backed by moral force, the cooperation and reciprocity that social life requires would be absent. If narrow self-interest rather than mutual obligation were the guiding force, conflict and disorder would result. In Durkheim's words, 'For where interest is the only ruling force each individual finds himself in a state of war with every other.' The collective conscience constrains individuals to act in terms of the requirements of society. Since the collective conscience is a social fact and therefore external to the individual, it is essential that it be impressed upon him or her. Thus Durkheim argues that, 'society has to be present in the individual'.

Durkheim's functionalism is set in the framework of the above argument. It may be illustrated by his analysis of the functions of religion (Durkheim, 1961, first published 1912).

Threats to social solidarity

Durkheim was aware of the possibility that societies might not function smoothly. This is evident in his work on the division of labour (Durkheim, 1947, first published 1893) (see pp. 691–3), which suggests that industrial societies based on organic solidarity might break down. They could be undermined if egoism or anomie started to reduce the control that society had over the individual. Although Durkheim saw the possibility of conflict within industrial society, he believed that it could be kept within manageable limits through the existence of professional associations, the teaching of moral values in the education system, and through society functioning in a way that treated all its members fairly.

Talcott Parsons

The problem of social order

The name of Talcott Parsons is synonymous with functionalism. Over a period of some 50 years, Parsons published numerous articles and books, and during the 1940s and 1950s he became the dominant theorist in American sociology. This section will briefly examine aspects of his work.

Like Durkheim, Parsons (1951) began with the question of how social order is possible. He observed that social life is characterized by 'mutual advantage and peaceful cooperation rather than mutual hostility and destruction'. A large part of Parsons's sociology is concerned with explaining how this state of affairs is accomplished. He started with a consideration of the views of the seventeenth-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who claimed to have discovered the basis of social order.

According to Hobbes, humanity is directed by passion and reason. Its passions are the primary driving force, reason being employed to devise ways and means of providing for their satisfaction. If people's passions were allowed free rein, they would use any means at their disposal, including force and fraud, to satisfy them. The net result would be 'the war of all against all'. However, fear of this outcome is generated by the most basic of human passions, that of self-preservation. Guided by the desire for self-preservation, people agree to restrain their passions, give up their liberty and enter into a social contract with their fellows. They submit to the authority of a ruler or governing body in return for protection against the aggression, force and fraud of others. Only because of this sovereign power is the war of all against all prevented, and security and order established in society.

Hobbes presented a picture of humans as rational, self-interested and calculating. They form an ordered society with their fellows through fear of the consequences if they do not. This is very different from Durkheim's view of people acting in response to moral commitments and obeying social rules because they believe them to be right.

Parsons shared Durkheim's views. He argued that Hobbes's picture of people pursuing personal ends, restrained only by sovereign power, fails to provide an adequate explanation for social order. Parsons believed that only a commitment to common values provides a basis for order in society.

Parsons illustrated this point by reference to social relationships, which at first sight would appear to exemplify Hobbes's view of people as self-interested

and calculating. He examined transactions in the market place. In a business transaction, the parties concerned form a contract. In order for the conduct of business to be orderly, it is essential that contracts be bound by a 'system of regulatory, normative rules'. In Parsons's view, fear of the consequences is insufficient to motivate people to obey the rules. A moral commitment is essential. Thus, rules governing business transactions must ultimately derive from shared values which state what is just, right and proper. Order in the economic system is therefore based on a general agreement concerning business morality. From this agreement stem rules which define a contract as valid or invalid. For example, a contract obtained by force or fraud is not binding. Parsons argued that the world of business, like any other part of society, is, by necessity, a moral world.

Value consensus

Value consensus forms the fundamental integrating principle in society. If members of society are committed to the same values, they will tend to share a common identity, which provides a basis for unity and cooperation. From shared values derive common goals. Values provide a general conception of what is desirable and worthwhile. Goals provide direction in specific situations. For example, in Western society, members of a particular workforce will share the goal of efficient production in their factory – a goal which stems from the general view of economic productivity. A common goal provides an incentive for cooperation.

Roles provide the means whereby values and goals are translated into action. A social institution consists of a combination of roles. For instance, a business firm is made up of a number of specialized roles that combine to further the goals of the organization. The content of roles is structured in terms of norms, which define the rights and obligations applicable to each particular role. Norms can be seen as specific expressions of values. Thus the norms that structure the roles of manager, accountant, engineer and shop-floor worker owe their content partly to the value of economic productivity. Norms tend to ensure that role behaviour is standardized, predictable and therefore orderly. This means that from the most general level – the central value system – to the most specific – normative conduct – the social system is infused with common values. This provides the basis for social order.

Social equilibrium

The importance Parsons placed on value consensus led him to state that the main task of sociology is to analyse the 'institutionalization of patterns of value orientation in the social system'. When values are institutionalized and behaviour is structured in terms of them, the result is a stable system. A state of 'social equilibrium' is attained, the various parts of the system being in a state of balance. There are two main ways in which social equilibrium is maintained. The first involves socialization, by means of which society's values are transmitted from one generation to the next and internalized to form an integral part of individual personalities. In Western society, the family and the education system are the major institutions concerned with this function. (See Chapter 11, pp. 779–80, for Parsons's views on the functions of education, and Chapter 8, pp. 509–10, for his views on the functions of the family.)

Social equilibrium is also maintained by the various mechanisms of social control which discourage deviance and so maintain order in the system. The processes of socialization and social control are fundamental to the equilibrium of the social system and therefore to order in society.

Functional prerequisites

Parsons viewed society as a system. He argued that any social system has four basic functional prerequisites – adaptation, goal attainment, integration and pattern maintenance. These can be seen as problems that society must solve if it is to survive. The function of any part of the social system is understood as its contribution to meeting the functional prerequisites. Solutions to the four survival problems must be institutionalized if society is to continue in existence. In other words, solutions must be organized in the form of ordered, stable social institutions which persist through time.

The first functional prerequisite, adaptation, refers to the relationship between the system and its environment. In order to survive, social systems must have some degree of control over their environment. At a minimum, food and shelter must be provided to meet the physical needs of members. The economy is the institution primarily concerned with this function.

Goal attainment refers to the need for all societies to set goals towards which social activity is directed. Procedures for establishing goals and deciding on priorities between goals are institutionalized in the form of political systems. Governments not only set goals but allocate resources to achieve them. Even in a so-called free enterprise system, the economy is regulated and directed by laws passed by governments.

Integration refers primarily to the 'adjustment of conflict'. It is concerned with the coordination and mutual adjustment of the parts of the social system. The law is the main institution that meets this need. Legal norms define and standardize relations between individuals and between institutions, and so reduce the potential for conflict. When conflict does arise, it

is settled by the judicial system and does not therefore lead to the disintegration of the social system.

Pattern maintenance refers to 'the maintenance of the basic pattern of values, institutionalized in the society'. Institutions that perform this function include the family, the educational system and religion. In Parsons's view, 'the values of society are rooted in religion'. Religious beliefs provide the ultimate justification for the values of the social system. (See Chapter 7, pp. 434–5, for Parsons's analysis of the functions of religion.)

Parsons maintained that any social system can be analysed in terms of the functional prerequisites he identified. Thus, all parts of society can be understood with reference to the functions they perform in the adaptation, goal attainment, integration and pattern maintenance systems.

Social change

Functionalism has often been criticized for failing to provide an adequate explanation for social change. If the system is in equilibrium, with its various parts contributing towards order and stability, it is difficult to see how it changes. Parsons approached this problem by arguing that, in practice, no social system is in a perfect state of equilibrium, although a certain degree of equilibrium is essential for the survival of societies. The process of social change can therefore be pictured as a 'moving equilibrium'.

This may be illustrated in the following way. The adaptation, goal attainment, integration and pattern maintenance systems are inter-related; a change in one will therefore produce responses in the others. For example, a change in the adaptation system will result in a disturbance in the social system as a whole. The other parts of the system will operate to return it to a state of equilibrium. In Parsons's words, 'Once a disturbance has been introduced into an equilibrated system there will tend to be a reaction to this disturbance, which tends to restore the system to equilibrium.' This reaction will lead to some degree of change, however small, in the system as a whole. Although social systems never attain complete equilibrium, they tend towards this state. Social change can therefore be seen as a 'moving equilibrium'.

Social evolution and pattern variables

Parsons viewed social change as a process of 'social evolution' from simple to more complex forms of society. He regarded changes in adaptation as a major driving force of social evolution. The history of human society from the simple hunting and gathering band to the complex nation-state represents an increase in the 'general adaptive capacity' of society. As societies evolve into more complex forms, control over the environment increases. While economic changes might provide an initial stimulus, Parsons believed that, in the long run, cultural changes – that is, changes in values – determine the '*broadest* patterns of change'. For example, he argued that the structure of modern societies owes much to values inherited from ancient Israel and classical Greece.

Parsons identified two sets of cultural values, which he called pattern variables A and B. These pattern variables consist of the ways that society answers basic questions such as: 'How should rewards be allocated to individuals?' and 'Should members of society look after their own interests or those of the social groups to which they belong?'

The two sets of pattern variables are summarized in Table 15.1.

Table 15.1 Talcott Parsons's concept of pattern variables

Pattern variables A	Pattern variables B
Ascription Status is ascribed; it is determined by the type of family into which a person is born.	**Achievement** Status is achieved through a person's own efforts: for example, through hard work.
Diffuseness People enter into relationships with others to satisfy a large range of needs: for example, the relationship between mother and child.	**Specificity** People enter into relationships with others to satisfy particular needs: for example, the relationship between a customer and shopkeeper.
Particularism Individuals act differently towards particular people: for example, they are loyal to their family but not to strangers.	**Universalism** Individuals act according to universal principles: for example, everyone is equal before the law, so a policewoman would arrest her husband if necessary.
Affectivity Gratification is immediate. People act to gratify their desires as soon as possible.	**Effective neutrality** Gratification is deferred: for example, saving money to put a deposit on a house in the future.
Collective orientation People put the interests of the social groups to which they belong before their own interests.	**Self-orientation** People pursue their own interests first, rather than those of the social group to which they belong.

According to Parsons, with the exception of family life, pattern variables A are typical of simple societies; pattern variables B are typical of advanced industrial societies. Social change therefore requires a movement towards the adoption of pattern variables B. If a society fails to do this it will stagnate, for pattern variables A stop a society from developing. For example, in the traditional Hindu caste system a person's role in society was ascribed at birth. This prevented the most able individuals from filling the most important social roles. The caste system therefore meant that society was not run efficiently and social progress was held back. Parsons accepted that pattern variables A will not disappear completely even in the most advanced societies. They are retained within the family, because they provide the emotional security that is necessary for the successful socialization of children (see pp. 509–10).

Social differentiation

Social evolution involves a process of social differentiation. The institutions and roles that form the social system become increasingly differentiated and specialized in terms of their function. Thus, religious institutions become separated from the state, and the family and the economy become increasingly differentiated, each specializing in fewer functions. This produces a problem of integration. As parts of society become more and more specialized and distinct, it becomes increasingly difficult to integrate them in terms of common values. This problem is solved by the generalizing of values – a process discussed in Chapter 7 with reference to religion (pp. 481–2).

Values become more general and diffuse, less specific and particular. In Western society, for example, the highly generalized values of universalism and achievement can be applied to all members of society despite the wide variation in their roles. Universal standards of achievement are generally accepted and provide the basis for differential reward and role allocation. Thus, despite increasing social differentiation, social integration and order are maintained by the generalizing of values.

Parsons admitted that his views on social evolution represented little more than a beginning. However, they do offer a possible solution to the problem of explaining social change from a functionalist perspective.

Robert K. Merton

In a closely reasoned essay, originally published in 1949, the American sociologist Robert K. Merton (1968) attempted to refine and develop functionalist analysis. He singled out three related assumptions that have been employed by many functionalists and questioned their utility.

The problem of functional unity

The first assumption he termed the 'postulate of the functional unity of society'. This assumption states that any part of the social system is functional for the entire system. All parts of society are seen to work together for the maintenance and integration of society as a whole. Merton argued that, particularly in complex, highly differentiated societies, this functional unity is doubtful. He provided the example of religious pluralism to illustrate this point. In a society with a variety of faiths, religion may tend to divide rather than unite.

Merton argued that functional unity is a matter of degree. Its extent must be determined by investigation rather than simply beginning with the assumption that it exists. The idea of functional unity implies that a change in one part of the system will automatically result in a change in other parts. Again Merton argued that this is a matter for investigation. It should not simply be assumed at the outset. He suggested that, in highly differentiated societies, institutions may well have a high degree of 'functional autonomy'. Thus a change in a particular institution may have little or no effect on others.

Functions, dysfunctions and non-functions

Merton referred to the second assumption as the 'postulate of universal functionalism'. This assumption states that 'all standardized social or cultural forms have positive functions'. Merton argued that the assumption that every aspect of the social system performs a positive function is not only premature, it may well be incorrect. He suggested that functionalist analysis should proceed from the assumption that any part of society may be functional, dysfunctional or non-functional. In addition, the units for which a particular part is functional, dysfunctional or non-functional must be clearly specified. These units may be individuals, groups or society as a whole. Thus, poverty may be seen as dysfunctional for the poor but functional for the non-poor and for society as a whole. Merton suggested that the postulate of universal functionalism should be replaced by 'the provisional assumption that persisting cultural forms have a *net balance of functional consequences* either for the society considered as a unit or for subgroups sufficiently powerful to retain these forms intact, by means of direct coercion or indirect persuasion'.

The problem of indispensability

Merton's third criticism was directed towards the 'postulate of indispensability'. This assumption states that certain institutions or social arrangements are

indispensable to society. Functionalists have often seen religion in this light. For example, Davis and Moore (1967) claim that religion 'plays a unique and indispensable part in society'. Merton questioned the assumption of indispensability, arguing that the same functional prerequisites may be met by a range of alternative institutions. Thus there is no justification for assuming that institutions such as the family, religion and social stratification are a necessary part of all human societies.

To replace the idea of indispensability, Merton suggested the concept of 'functional equivalents' or 'functional alternatives'. From this point of view, a political ideology such as communism can provide a functional alternative to religion. It can meet the same functional prerequisites as religion. However, Merton was still left with the problem of actually identifying functional prerequisites.

Merton argued that the postulates of the functional unity of society, universal functionalism and indispensability are little more than articles of faith. They are matters for investigation and should not form prior assumptions. Merton claimed that his framework for functionalist analysis removed the charge that functionalism is ideologically based. He argued that the parts of society should be analysed in terms of their 'effects' or 'consequences' on society as a whole and on individuals and groups within society. Since these effects can be functional, dysfunctional or non-functional, Merton claimed that the value judgement present in the assumption that all parts of the system are functional was therefore removed.

Functionalism – a critique

Teleology

Functionalism has been subjected to considerable criticism. Part of this criticism is directed at the logic of functionalist enquiry. In particular, it is argued that the type of explanation employed is teleological. A teleological explanation states that the parts of a system exist because of their beneficial consequences for the system as a whole. The main objection to this type of reasoning is that it treats an effect as a cause. Thus Davis and Moore's theory of stratification outlines the positive effects or functions of social stratification and then proceeds to argue that these effects explain its origin (Davis and Moore, 1967). But an effect cannot explain a cause since causes must always precede effects. Therefore, the effects of stratification cannot occur until a system of social stratification has already been established. It may be argued that members of society unconsciously respond to social needs, and so create the institutions necessary for the maintenance of society. However, there is no evidence of the existence of such unconscious motivations.

Assessing effects

Functionalism is on stronger logical ground when it argues that the continued existence of an institution may be explained in terms of its effects. Thus, once an institution has originated, it continues to exist if, on balance, it has beneficial effects on the system. But there are problems with this type of explanation. It is extremely difficult to establish that the net effect of any institution is beneficial to society. A knowledge of all its effects would be required in order to weigh the balance of functions and dysfunctions. As the debate on the functional merits and demerits of stratification indicates, there is little evidence that such knowledge is forthcoming (see Chapter 2, pp. 26–9).

The problems involved in assessing the effects of a social institution may be illustrated in terms of the analogy between society and a physical organism. Biologists are able to show that certain parts of an organism make positive contributions to its maintenance, since, if those parts stopped functioning, life would cease. Since societies change rather than die, sociologists are unable to apply similar criteria. In addition, standards exist in biology for assessing the health of an organism. In terms of these standards, the contribution of the various parts can be judged. There are no comparable standards for assessing the 'health' of a society. For these reasons there are problems with the argument that a social institution continues to exist because, on balance, its effects are beneficial to society.

Value consensus and social order

Functionalists such as Parsons who see the solution to the problem of social order in terms of value consensus, have been strongly criticized. First, their critics argue that consensus is assumed rather than shown to exist. Research has failed to reveal unequivocally a widespread commitment to the various sets of values that are seen to characterize Western society.

Second, the stability of society may owe more to the absence, rather than the presence, of value consensus. For example, a lack of commitment to the value of achievement by those at the bottom of stratification systems may serve to stabilize society. Thus Michael Mann argues that, in a society where members compete for unequal rewards, 'cohesion results precisely because there is no common commitment to core values' (quoted in Mennell, 1974). If all members of society were strongly committed to the value of achievement, the failure in terms of this value of those at the base of the stratification system might well produce disorder.

Third, consensus in and of itself will not necessarily result in social order. In fact it may

produce the opposite result. As Pierre van den Berghe notes, 'consensus on norms such as extreme competition and individualistic *laissez-faire*, or suspicion and treachery ... or malevolence and resort to witchcraft is hardly conducive to social solidarity and integration' (quoted in Mennell, 1974). Therefore, the content of values rather than value consensus as such can be seen as the crucial factor with respect to social order.

Determinism

Functionalism has been criticized for what many see as its deterministic view of human action. Its critics have argued that, in terms of functionalist theory, human behaviour is portrayed as determined by the system. In particular, the social system has needs, and the behaviour of its members is shaped to meet these needs. Rather than creating the social world in which they live, people are seen as creations of the system. Thus David Walsh argues that Parsons treats human action 'as determined by the characteristics of the system per se' (Walsh, 1972). By means of socialization, humanity is programmed in terms of the norms and values of the social system; it is kept on the straight and narrow by mechanisms of social control that exist to fulfil the requirements of the system; its actions are structured in terms of social roles that are designed to meet the functional prerequisites of society. Humanity is pictured as an automaton, programmed, directed and controlled by the system.

Walsh rejects this view of humanity. Arguing from a phenomenological perspective he claims that humanity actively constructs its own social world rather than being shaped by a social system that is somehow external to its being. Walsh maintains that the concept of a social system represents a 'reification' of the social world. Functionalists have converted social reality into a natural system external to social actors. In doing so, they have translated the social world into something that it is not. They have tended to portray the social system as the active agent, whereas, in reality, only human beings act.

Coercion and conflict

Critics of functionalism have argued that it tends to ignore coercion and conflict. For example, Alvin Gouldner states, 'While stressing the importance of the ends and values that men pursue, Parsons never asks *whose* ends and values these are. Are they pursuing their own ends or those imposed upon them by others?' (Gouldner, 1971). Few functionalists give serious consideration to the possibility that some groups in society, acting in terms of their own particular interests, dominate others. From this point of view, social order is imposed by the powerful, and value consensus is merely a legitimation of the position of the dominant group.

In his criticism of one of Parsons's major works, *The Social System*, David Lockwood argues that Parsons's approach is 'highly selective in its focus on the role of the normative order in the stabilization of social systems' (Lockwood, 1970). In focusing on the contribution of norms and values to social order, Parsons largely fails to recognize the conflicts of interest that tend to produce instability and disorder. Lockwood argues that, since all social systems involve competition for scarce resources, conflicts of interest are built into society. Conflict is not simply a minor strain in the system which is contained by value consensus. Instead it is a central and integral part of the system itself.

Functionalism reconsidered

Despite the widespread criticism of functionalism, it should not be rejected out of hand. Durkheim's work, for example, has provided insights that have helped modern sociologists to understand contemporary societies. Jonathon H. Turner and Alexandra Maryanski (1979) argue that, although functionalism has many flaws, it remains useful. Many of its basic assumptions still guide much sociological research: for example, the assumption that society should be seen as an integral whole; that its parts are interdependent; that social institutions exist and they do have effects; and that society is structured and the social structure directs human behaviour.

Conflict perspectives

There are many varieties of conflict perspectives within sociology. This section will deal with some of the more influential ones. Despite their differences, all have a model of society as a whole, and all adopt a structural approach. Furthermore, all conflict perspectives use, in one form or another, the notion that there are groups in society that have different interests. In this respect they believe that social arrangements will tend to benefit some groups at the expense of others. Because of the existence of different interests, the potential for, and likelihood of, conflict is always present. Different groups pursuing their separate interests are likely to clash and produce some degree of instability in society.

Conflict theorists tend to agree that the existence of groups with different interests does not mean that they will be in conflict all the time. There may be periods of truce, or it may be that some social groups are persuaded that their interests are not different from those of other groups. Nevertheless, periods of harmony do not last for ever, and eventually conflict will return.

Conflict theories differ from functionalism in stressing the existence of competing groups, while functionalists stress cooperation between social groups. (Most functionalists believe that all members of society share the same interests and that there is a consensus over society's values.)

Conflict theories also differ from each other in important respects. Some theories stress conflict between particular social groups. For example, most forms of feminism see conflict between men and women as the central feature of society. (Feminism was discussed in detail in Chapter 3.) The racism approach to explaining ethnic disadvantage focuses on conflict between ethnic groups (see pp. 237–49).

Many conflict theories take their inspiration from the work of Karl Marx or Max Weber. Marxist and Weberian conflict theories tend to disagree over the precise basis on which society is divided into different groups, and the exact nature of the conflict that results from these divisions.

Marxism

This section will focus on certain major themes in the work of Karl Marx (1818–83). Marx's views on various aspects of society have been examined in other chapters of the book. This section will seek to combine them into an overall perspective (see particularly Marx and Engels, 1950a, 1950b, Marx, 1974, Bottomore and Rubel (eds), 1963).

The volume of Marx's writings over a period of about 40 years was enormous. Many of his major projects remained unfinished, and part of the material published after his death was drawn from rough notes outlining future projects. Marx's writings contain inconsistencies, ambiguities and changes in emphasis. For these reasons there are many and varied interpretations of his work. This section, therefore, represents a particular interpretation of his ideas.

The historical perspective

Marx regarded people as both the producers and the products of society. They make society and themselves by their own actions. History is therefore the process of human self-creation. Yet people are also a product of society: they are shaped by the social relationships and systems of thought that they create. An understanding of society therefore involves a historical perspective which examines the process whereby humanity both produces, and is produced by, social reality.

A society forms a totality and can only be understood as such. The various parts of society are interconnected and influence each other. Thus, economic, political, legal and religious institutions can only be understood in terms of their mutual effect. Economic factors, however, exert the primary influence and largely shape other aspects of society.

The history of human society is a process of tension and conflict. Social change is not a smooth, orderly progression which gradually unfolds in harmonious evolution. Instead it proceeds from contradictions built into society, which are a source of tension and ultimately the source of open conflict and radical change.

Dialectical materialism

It is often argued that Marx's view of history is based on the idea of the dialectic. Dialectical movement represents a struggle of opposites, a conflict of contradictions. Conflict provides the dynamic principle, the source of change. From this viewpoint, any process of change involves tension between incompatible forces. The struggle between incompatible forces grows in intensity until there is a final collision. The result is a sudden leap forward, which creates a new set of forces on a higher level of development. The dialectical process then begins again, as the contradictions between this new set of forces interact and conflict, and propel change.

The idea of dialectical change was developed by the German philosopher Hegel. Hegel applied it to the history of human society, and in particular to the realm of ideas. He saw historical change as a dialectical movement of human ideas and thoughts. Hegel believed that society is essentially an expression of these thoughts. Thus, in terms of the dialectic, conflict between incompatible ideas produces new concepts that provide the basis for social change.

Marx rejected the priority Hegel gave to thoughts and ideas. He argued that the source of change lies in contradictions – in the economic system in particular, and in society in general. As a result of the priority he gives to economic factors – to 'material life' –

Marx's view of history is often referred to as dialectical materialism. Since people's ideas are primarily a reflection of the social relationships of economic production, they do not provide the main source of change. It is in contradictions and conflict in the economic system that the major dynamic for social change lies. Since all parts of society are interconnected, however, it is only through a process of interplay between these parts that change occurs.

The material basis of social life

History begins when humans actually produce their means of subsistence, when they begin to control nature. At a minimum this involves the production of food and shelter. Marx argued that, 'The first historical act is, therefore, the production of material life.' Production is a social enterprise since it requires cooperation. People must work together to produce the goods and services necessary for life. From the social relationships involved in production develops a 'mode of life' which can be seen as an expression of these relationships. This mode of life shapes human nature. In Marx's words, 'As individuals express their life so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, with what they produce and how they produce it.' Thus the nature of humanity, and the nature of society as a whole, derive primarily from the production of material life.

The emergence of contradictions

The major contradictions that propel change are found in the economic infrastructure of society. At the dawn of human history, when humans supposedly lived in a state of primitive communism, those contradictions did not exist. The means of production and the products of labour were communally owned. Since each member of society produced both for themselves and for society as a whole, there were no conflicts of interest between individuals and groups.

However, with the emergence of private property and, in particular, private ownership of the means of production, the fundamental contradiction of human society was created. Through its ownership of the means of production, a minority is able to control, command and enjoy the fruits of the labour of the majority. Since one group gains at the expense of the other, a conflict of interest exists between the minority who owns the means of production and the majority who perform productive labour. The tension and conflict generated by this contradiction are the major dynamic of social change.

For long periods of history, people are largely unaware of the contradictions that beset their societies. This is because their consciousness – their view of reality – is largely shaped by the social relationships involved in the process of production. Marx maintained that 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness.'

The primary aspect of an individual's social being is the social relationships they enter into for the production of material life. Since these relationships are largely reproduced in terms of ideas, concepts, laws and religious beliefs, they are seen as normal and natural. Thus, when the law legitimizes the rights of private property, when religious beliefs justify economic arrangements, and the dominant concepts of the age define them as natural and inevitable, members of society will be largely unaware of the contradictions they contain. In this way the contradictions within the economic infrastructure are compounded by the contradiction between human consciousness and objective reality. This consciousness is false. It presents a distorted picture of reality since it fails to reveal the basic conflicts of interest that exist in the world that humanity has created.

For long periods of time, humanity is, at most, vaguely aware of these contradictions; yet even a vague awareness produces tension. This tension will ultimately find full expression and be resolved in the process of dialectical change.

Alienation

The course of human history involves a progressive development of the means of production – a steady increase in human control over nature. This is paralleled by a corresponding increase in human alienation, an increase that reaches its height in capitalist society. Alienation is a situation in which the creations of humanity appear to humans as alien objects. Such creations are seen as independent from their creators and invested with the power to control them. People create their own society but will remain alienated until they recognize themselves within their own creation. Until that time humans will assign an independent existence to objects, ideas and institutions and be controlled by them. In the process they lose themselves, become strangers in the world they created: they become alienated.

Religion provides an example of human alienation. In Marx's view, 'Man makes religion, religion does not make man.' However, members of society fail to recognize that religion is of their own making. They assign to the gods an independent power, a power to direct their actions and shape their destiny. The more people invest in religion, the more they lose themselves. In Marx's words, 'The more man puts into God, the less he retains of himself.' In assigning their own powers to supernatural beings, people become alienated from themselves. Religion appears as an external force controlling human

destiny, whereas, in reality, it is human-made. Religion, though, is a reflection of a more fundamental source of alienation. It is essentially a projection of the social relationships involved in the process of production. If people are to find themselves and abolish illusions of religion, they must 'abandon a condition which requires illusions'. Humanity must therefore eradicate the source of alienation in the economic infrastructure. (Marxist views on religion are examined in Chapter 7, pp. 436–9.)

In Marx's view, productive labour is the primary, most vital human activity. In the production of objects, people 'objectify' themselves; they express and externalize their being; then they lose themselves in the object. The act of production then results in human alienation. This occurs when people regard the products of their labour as commodities, as articles for sale in the market place. The objects of their creation are then seen to control their existence. They are seen to be subject to impersonal forces, such as the law of supply and demand, over which they have little or no control. In Marx's words, 'the object that labour produces, its product, confronts it as an alien being, as a power independent of the producer'. In this way people are estranged from the objects they produce; they become alienated from the most vital human activity – productive labour.

Alienation and capitalism

Alienation reaches its height in capitalist society where labour is dominated by the requirements of capital, the most important of which is the demand for profit. These requirements determine levels of employment and wages, the nature and quantity of goods produced, and their method of manufacture.

Workers see themselves as prisoners of market forces over which they have no control. They are subject to the impersonal mechanisms of the law of supply and demand. They are at the mercy of the periodic booms and slumps that characterize capitalist economies. The workers therefore lose control over the objects they produce and become alienated from their product and the act of production. Their work becomes a means to an end, a means of obtaining money to buy the goods and services necessary for their existence. Unable to fulfil their being in the products of their labour, the workers become alienated from themselves in the act of production. Therefore, the more the workers produce, the more they lose themselves. In Marx's words, 'the greater this product the less he is himself'. (Alienation and labour in capitalist society are examined in Chapter 10, pp. 687–9.)

In Marx's view, the market forces that are seen to control production are not impersonal mechanisms beyond the control of humanity: they are human-made. Alienation is therefore the result of human activity rather than external forces with an existence independent of humanity. If the products of labour are alien to the worker, they must belong to somebody else. This somebody else is the capitalist who owns and controls the means of production and the products of labour, who appropriates the wealth that labour produces. Alienation therefore springs not from impersonal market forces but from relationships. Alienation will come to an end when the contradiction between human consciousness and objective reality is resolved. Then people will realize that the situation in which they find themselves is human-made and therefore subject to change by human action.

Communism

Given the priority Marx assigns to economic factors, an end to alienation involves a radical change in the economic infrastructure. In particular, it requires the abolition of private property and its replacement by communal ownership of the means of production – that is, the replacement of capitalism by communism. Marx saw communism as 'the positive abolition of private property and thus of human self-alienation and therefore the real reappropriation of the human essence by and for man. This is communism as the complete and conscious return of man himself as a social, that is human being.'

In communist society conflicts of interest will disappear and antagonistic groups such as capitalists and workers will be a thing of the past. The products of labour will no longer be appropriated by some at the expense of others. With divisions in society eradicated, humans will be at one with their fellows, truly social beings. As such they will not lose themselves in the products of their labour. They will produce both for themselves and others at one and the same time. In this situation 'each of us would have doubly affirmed himself and his fellow man'. Since individuals are at one with their fellows, the products of their labour, in which they objectify themselves, will not result in the loss of self. In productive labour each member of society contributes to the well-being of all and so expresses both their individual and social being. The objects that they produce are owned and controlled at once by themselves and their fellow humans.

Class

In Marx's view, humans are essentially social beings. He writes that 'society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of inter-relations, the relations within which these individuals stand'.

An understanding of human history therefore involves an examination of these relationships, the most important of which are the relations of production.

Apart from communities based on primitive communism at the dawn of history, all societies are divided into social groups known as classes. The relationship between classes is one of antagonism and conflict. Throughout history, opposing classes have stood in 'constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight that each time ended either in a revolutionary reconstruction of society at large, or in the common ruin of contending classes'.

Class conflict forms the basis of the dialectic of social change. In Marx's view, expressed in the opening line of the *Communist Manifesto*, 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of the class struggle' (Marx and Engels, 1950, first published 1848).

The two-class model

Class divisions result from the differing relationships of members of society to the means of production. The structure of all societies may be represented in terms of a simplified two-class model, consisting of a ruling and a subject class. The ruling class owes its dominance and power to its ownership and control of the means of production. The subjection and relative powerlessness of the subject class are due to its lack of ownership and therefore lack of control of the means of production. The conflict of interest between the two classes stems from the fact that productive labour is performed by the subject class, yet a large part of the wealth so produced is appropriated by the ruling class. Since one class gains at the expense of another, the interests of their members are incompatible. The classes stand opposed as exploiter and exploited, oppressor and oppressed. The labour of the subject class takes on the character of 'forced labour'. Since its members lack the necessary means to produce for themselves, they are forced to work for others.

Although Marx saw capitalism as characterized by a central struggle between two main classes – the bourgeoisie and the proletariat – he did recognize the existence of other classes. Some classes were left over from previous eras (such as the landowning aristocracy and peasants), and there were intermediate classes (such as the petty bourgeoisie of the self-employed and people with their own small businesses). Marx also recognized that there was a growing middle class of administrative workers in capitalist businesses, although he made little attempt to discuss the implications of this. (See articles such as 'The class struggles in France' and 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' – both in Marx and Engels, 1950 – for examples of Marx's more complex views on class.) However, to Marx, these complications merely obscured the central importance of the two-class struggle, which would be at the heart of capitalism as it developed.

Class and consciousness

Members of both the main social classes are largely unaware of the true nature of their situation, of the reality of the relationship between ruling and subject classes. Members of the ruling class assume that their particular interests are those of society as a whole; members of the subject class accept this view of reality and regard their situation as part of the natural order of things. This false consciousness is due to the fact that the relationships of dominance and subordination in the economic infrastructure are largely reproduced in the superstructure of society. In Marx's words, the relations of production constitute 'the real foundation on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life.' Ruling class dominance is confirmed and legitimated in legal statutes, religious proscriptions and political legislation. The consciousness of all members of society is infused with ruling-class ideology which proclaims the essential rightness, normality and inevitability of the status quo.

While the superstructure may stabilize society and contain its contradictions over long periods of time, this situation cannot be permanent. The fundamental contradictions of class societies will eventually find expression and will finally be resolved by the dialectic of historical change. A radical change in the structure of society occurs when a class is transformed from a 'class in itself' to a 'class for itself'. A 'class in itself' refers to members of society who share the same objective relationships to the means of production. Thus, as wage labourers, members of the proletariat form a class in itself.

However, a class only becomes a 'class for itself' when its members are fully conscious of the true nature of their situation; when they are fully aware of their common interests and common enemy; when they realize that only by concerted action can they overthrow their oppressors; and when they unite and take positive, practical steps to do so. When a class becomes a class for itself, the contradiction between the consciousness of its members and the reality of their situation is ended.

Social change

The transition from feudalism to capitalism

A class becomes a class for itself when the forces of production have developed to the point where they cannot be contained within the existing relations of production. In Marx's words, 'For an oppressed class to be able to emancipate itself, it is essential that the existing forces of production and the existing social relations should be incapable of standing side by side.' Revolutionary change requires that the forces of production, on which the new order will be based, have developed in the old society. Therefore the 'new higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society'.

This process may be illustrated by the transition from feudal to capitalist society. Industrial capitalism gradually developed within the framework of feudal society. In order to develop fully, it required 'the free wage labourer who sells his labour-power to capital'. This provides a mobile labour force that can be hired and fired at will, and so efficiently utilized as a commodity in the service of capital. However, the feudal relations of production, which involved 'landed property with serf labour chained to it', tended to prevent the development of wage labourers. Eventually, though, the forces of production of capitalism gained sufficient strength and impetus to lead to the destruction of the feudal system. At this point the rising class, the bourgeoisie, became a class for itself, and its members united to overthrow the feudal relations of production. When they succeeded, the contradiction between the new forces of production and the old relations of production was resolved.

Once a new economic order is established, the superstructure of the previous era is rapidly transformed. The contradiction between the new infrastructure and the old superstructure is now ended. Thus the political dominance of the feudal aristocracy was replaced by the power of the newly enfranchised bourgeoisie. The dominant concepts of feudalism, such as loyalty and honour, were replaced by the new concepts of freedom and equality. In terms of the new ideology, the wage labourer of capitalist society is free to sell his or her labour power to the highest bidder. The relationship between employer and employee is defined as a relationship between equals: the exchange of labour for wages as an exchange of equivalents.

But the resolution of old contradictions does not necessarily mean an end to contradictions in society. As in previous eras, the transition from feudalism to capitalism merely results in the replacement of an old set of contradictions by a new set.

The transition from capitalism to communism

The predicted rise of the proletariat is not strictly analogous with the rise of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie formed a privileged minority of industrialists, merchants and financiers who forged new forces of production within feudal society. The proletariat forms an unprivileged majority which does not create new forces of production within capitalist society.

Marx believed, however, that the contradictions of capitalism were sufficient to transform the proletariat into a class for itself and bring about the downfall of the bourgeoisie. He saw the magnitude of these contradictions and the intensity of class conflict steadily increasing as capitalism developed. Thus there is a steady polarization of the two major classes as the intermediate strata are submerged into the proletariat. As capital accumulates, it is concentrated more and more into fewer hands – a process accompanied by the relative pauperization of the proletariat.

Production assumes an increasingly social and cooperative character as larger and larger groups of workers are concentrated in factories. At the same time the wealth produced by labour is appropriated by fewer and fewer individuals, as greater competition drives all but the larger companies out of business.

Such processes magnify and illuminate the contradictions of capitalism and increase the intensity of conflict. It is only a matter of time before members of the proletariat recognize that the reality of their situation is the alienation of labour. This awareness will lead the proletariat to 'a revolt to which it is forced by the contradiction between its humanity and its situation, which is an open, clear and absolute negation of its humanity'. (Marxist views on class and class conflict are outlined in Chapter 2, pp. 33–6.)

The communist society, that Marx predicted would arise from the ruins of capitalism, will begin with a transitional phase, 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'. Once the communist system has been fully established, the dictatorship's reason for being (and therefore its existence) will end. Bourgeois society represents 'the closing chapter of the prehistoric stage of human society'. The communist society of the new era is without classes, without contradictions. The dialectical principle now ceases to operate. The contradictions of human history have now been negated in a final harmonious synthesis.

Marxism – a critique

Judging from the constant reinterpretations, impassioned defences and vehement criticisms of Marx's work, his ideas are as alive and relevant today as they ever were. Specific criticisms of Marx's views on society have been examined in previous

chapters and will not therefore be covered in detail in this section.

Many of his critics have argued that history has failed to substantiate Marx's views on the direction of social change. Thus they claim that class conflict, far from growing in intensity, has become institutionalized in advanced capitalist society. They see little indication of the proletariat becoming a class for itself. Rather than moving towards a polarization of classes, they argue that the class structure of capitalist society has become increasingly complex and differentiated. In particular, a steadily growing middle class has emerged between the proletariat and bourgeoisie.

Turning to communist society, critics have argued that history has not borne out the promise of communism contained in Marx's writings. Significant social inequalities are present in communist regimes, and there are few, if any, signs of a movement towards equality. The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s suggests that the promise of communism has been replaced by the desire for Western-style democracies.

Particular criticism has been directed towards the priority that Marx assigned to economic factors in his explanation of social structure and social change.

Max Weber's study of ascetic Protestantism argued that religious beliefs provided the ethics, attitudes and motivations for the development of capitalism. Since ascetic Protestantism preceded the advent of capitalism, Weber maintained that, at certain times and places, aspects of the superstructure can play a primary role in directing change (see Chapter 7, pp. 447–51).

However, as previous chapters have indicated, Marxism is sufficiently flexible to counter such criticism, and to provide explanations for historical changes that have occurred since Marx's death.

Economic determinism

This section closes with a brief examination of what many see as the central issue of Marxism – the question of 'economic determinism'. Critics have often rejected Marxism on this basis, although they admit that the charge of economic determinism is more applicable to certain of Marx's followers than to Marx himself.

It is possible to select numerous quotations from Marx's writings that support the views of his critics. In terms of these quotations, history can be presented as a mechanical process directed by economic forces which follow 'iron laws'. Humans are compelled to act in terms of the constraints imposed by the economy, and passively respond to impersonal forces rather than actively construct their own history. Thus the proletariat is 'compelled' by its economic situation to overthrow the bourgeoisie. The contradictions in the capitalist infrastructure will inevitably result in its destruction. The superstructure is 'determined' by the infrastructure, and human consciousness is shaped by economic forces independent of human will and beyond humanity's control. In this way, Marx can be presented as a crude positivist who sees causation solely in terms of economic forces.

A defence of Marx

On closer examination, however, Marx's writings prove more subtle and less dogmatic than many of his critics have suggested. Marx rejected a simplistic, one-directional view of causation. Although he gave priority to economic factors, they form only one aspect of the dialectic of history. From this perspective, the economy is the primary but not the sole determinant of social change. The idea of the dialectic involves an interplay between the various parts of society. It rejects the view of unidirectional causation proceeding solely from economic factors. Instead it argues that the various parts of society are inter-related in terms of their mutual effect.

Marx described the economic infrastructure as the 'ultimately determinant element in history'. Yet Engels argued that:

> *if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract and senseless phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure ... also exert their influence upon the course of the historical struggle and in many cases preponderate in determining their form.*
>
> Marx and Engels, 1950b, p. 443

Thus the various aspects of the superstructure have a certain degree of autonomy and a part to play in influencing the course of history. They are not automatically and mechanically determined by the infrastructure.

Marx consistently argued that 'man makes his own history'. The history of human society is not the product of impersonal forces; it is the result of people's purposive activity. In Marx's view, 'It is not "history" which uses men as a means of achieving – as if it were an individual person – its own ends. History is *nothing* but the activity of men in pursuit of their ends' (Marx, in Bottomore and Rubel (eds), 1963). Since people make society, only people can change society. Radical change results from a consciousness of reality and direct action. Thus members of the proletariat must be fully aware of their situation and take active steps in order to change it. Although a successful revolution depends ultimately on the economic situation, it requires human initiative. People must make their own utopia.

Neo-Marxism

Neo-Marxists are sociologists whose work has been inspired by Marx's theories, but who nevertheless have developed a distinctive approach of their own. In one way or another they have broken with conventional Marxist theory in order, as they see it, to understand society more adequately. There is no clear dividing line between Marxists and neo-Marxists. As the last section indicated, there are various interpretations of Marx's work, and it is possible for Marxists to disagree without rejecting Marx's overall approach. Nevertheless, some sociological theories that might be described as Marxist are sufficiently different from Marx's own work to merit the description of 'neo-Marxist'.

Antonio Gramsci

Most neo-Marxist perspectives are characterized by the use of some concepts that are different from those that Marx used. Generally they reject the extent to which Marx concentrated upon economic, material factors in determining the historical development of societies. An example of neo-Marxism, the work of Antonio Gramsci, was examined in Chapter 9 (see pp. 615–17).

Gramsci (1891–1937) suggested that ownership of the means of production was not sufficient to guarantee that a ruling class would monopolize power in a society. In order to maintain its leadership and dominance, or, as he called it, 'hegemony', a ruling class had to actively try to win support from other members of society. He did not believe that the ruling class could ever rely upon false class consciousness to guarantee its position, since all members of the subject classes had some awareness of their exploitation. The ruling class needed to make some real concessions to other groups in society in order to win their support. Thus the state could not always act exclusively in the interests of the owners of the means of production.

Gramsci also differed from Marx in placing greater emphasis on the importance of divisions within classes as well as between classes. Thus, for example, agricultural and industrial workers might to some extent have different interests, and the state might exploit the existence of these divisions in order to maintain ruling-class hegemony.

Like many neo-Marxists, Gramsci attached rather more importance than Marx to the culture of a society, and to the institutions of the superstructure, such as the church, the mass media, and the education system. He also placed more stress upon the role of ideas in maintaining political stability.

Marxism and other perspectives

Some neo-Marxists have tried to develop Marxism by drawing upon other sociological perspectives. For example, Paul Willis (1977), in his study of the transition from school to work (see pp. 791–4), combined a Marxist analysis of society with a study of small-scale interaction that owes much to an interactionist perspective. Similarly, Ian Taylor, Paul Walton and Jock Young in *The New Criminology* (1973) argued that the insights of various sociological perspectives were necessary in order to produce a 'fully social theory' of crime. Taylor *et al.* nevertheless claimed that their theory would only make sense if the insights of other perspectives were related to an overall Marxist framework for the analysis of society.

Neo-Marxism – a critique

Much of the appeal of Marx as a sociologist lies with the simplicity of his basic theory. This simplicity is both its principal strength and its main weakness. On the one hand, it provides the basis for a study of society that has a clear starting point. From this starting point it is possible to develop logically connected arguments and to make predictions about the development of societies. On the other hand, it leaves Marx open to the criticism that he has ignored important factors that influence social life.

Neo-Marxism has developed as a response both to the criticisms levelled at Marx, and to developments in societies since his death which seem to undermine his theory. Neo-Marxists have been able to overcome some criticisms of Marx, but in doing so have left themselves open to the claim that they have developed no clear alternative approach to understanding society. Neo-Marxists reduce the role of the economy in their theories, and attach more importance to cultural and ideological aspects of society. But they are generally unable to specify when, and in what circumstances, cultural or economic factors are more important in shaping society. Some neo-Marxists move so far away from Marx that their views seem little different to some of the theories that will now be examined.

Conflict theory

Conflict theory has its origins in the work of Max Weber. As Chapter 2 indicated (see pp. 36–8), Weber rejected the view that the division between the owners and non-owners of property was the only significant division between groups in society. He argued that there could be numerous divisions within the two basic classes, depending upon the 'market situation' of individuals (Weber, 1978).

Furthermore, he suggested that people could be divided by their status situation and political interests as well as by their economic position. 'Parties' could be formed on the basis of status groupings or classes, but it was also possible for them to cut across class or status groups.

Weber's views on classes, status groups and parties reflect the main themes of conflict theory. Conflict theorists argue that the social structure is much more complex than Marx's work suggests. It consists of many different groups, not just two classes. Furthermore, although conflict theorists accept that these groups have different interests, these interests are not just economic. For example, a particular group might strive for greater prestige or status rather than greater economic power.

In a neat summary of conflict theory, Ian Craib describes it in the following way: 'Society is like a more or less confused battle ground. If we watch from on high, we can see a variety of groups fighting each other, constantly forming and reforming, making and breaking alliances' (Craib, 1984).

Conflict theory has strongly influenced the work of John Goldthorpe on stratification (see pp. 114–17). However, in order to illustrate and evaluate conflict theory, the work of another sociologist, Ralph Dahrendorf, will now be examined.

Ralf Dahrendorf – authority and conflict

Post-capitalism

Dahrendorf's conflict theory arose out of a critical evaluation of the work of Karl Marx (Dahrendorf, 1959). Dahrendorf accepted that Marx's description of capitalism was generally accurate in the nineteenth century when Marx was writing, but he argued that in the twentieth century it had become outdated as a basis for explaining conflict. Dahrendorf argued that important changes had taken place in countries such as Britain and the USA. They were now 'post-capitalist' societies.

Dahrendorf claimed that, far from the two main classes becoming polarized, as Marx had predicted, the opposite had happened. The proportion of skilled and semi-skilled workers had grown, as had the size of the 'new middle class' of white-collar workers, such as clerks, nurses and teachers. Inequalities in income and wealth had been reduced, partly because of changes in the social structure, and partly because of measures taken by the state. Social mobility had become more common, and, crucially, the link between ownership and control in industry had been broken. Managers, rather than owners, exercised day-to-day control over the means of production.

In these circumstances, Marx's claim that conflict was based upon the ownership or non-ownership of wealth was no longer valid. This was because there was no longer a close association between wealth and power. Shareholders, for example, might own the wealth of a company, but in practice they did not exercise close control over the management.

In view of these changes, Dahrendorf argued that conflicts were no longer based upon the existence of the two classes identified by Marx, nor were they based upon economic divisions. Instead, Dahrendorf saw conflict as being concerned with authority.

Authority

To Dahrendorf, authority is legitimate power attached to the occupation of a particular social role within an organization. Thus, for example, a manager in a company, or a teacher in a classroom, has the right to take certain decisions regardless of the wishes of the workforce or pupils. A manager has the authority to instruct workers to arrive on time, and a teacher has the authority to instruct pupils to do homework. All organizations – or associations, as Dahrendorf calls them – have positions of domination and subjection. Some are able to take decisions legitimately and issue commands, and others are not. It is this situation which Dahrendorf saw as the basis for conflict in 'post-capitalist' societies.

Authority and quasi-groups

Dahrendorf believed that the existence of dominant and subordinate positions produces a situation in which individuals have different interests. Those occupying dominant positions have an interest in maintaining a social structure that gives them more authority than others. Those in subordinate positions, on the other hand, have an interest in changing a social structure that deprives them of authority. This conflict of interests is present in a much wider range of social relationships than the economic conflict of interests between the ruling

class and the subject class that Marx identified as the basis for conflict in society.

As a consequence, there are many different 'quasi-groups' or potential groups that could be in conflict with each other. Some of these quasi-groups will join together and act to pursue their common interests. Individuals may belong to a whole variety of different groups, and they are not necessarily confined in all areas of social life to subordinate or dominant groups. Dahrendorf said, 'Since domination in industry does not necessarily involve domination in the state, or a church, or other associations, total societies can present the picture of a plurality of competing dominant (and, conversely, subjected) aggregates.' Thus, a person who is a manager and has a position of authority in a company will tend to act to maintain that authority; but if, for example, the same person has a subordinate position in a religious organization, they may try to change the organization to increase their own authority.

Dahrendorf and conflict theory – a critique

Not surprisingly, Marxists do not accept Dahrendorf's view that Marx's theory is no longer applicable to contemporary societies. For example, the British Marxist John Westergaard (1997) believes that Britain is still fundamentally divided between two classes, and he denies that inequality between rich and poor has been decreasing in recent decades.

More importantly, though, some sociologists question whether Dahrendorf's approach can actually explain conflict. Ian Craib (1984) points out that Dahrendorf admits that subordinate groups may defer to the authority of dominant groups as well as challenging it. Thus members of a workforce may work conscientiously or they may strike, but Dahrendorf fails to explain adequately why they will follow one course rather than another. Craib suggests that Dahrendorf's only answer is to suggest that it is a matter of individual choice, but this does not actually explain why on some occasions there is conflict – for example, a strike – and on others there is none.

More generally, conflict theory, whether Dahrendorf's or that of other writers, produces a rather confused picture of the social structure. Society is portrayed as consisting of so many different groups, all of which may be in conflict with each other, that it is difficult to get a clear picture of how society works. It is not clear what the end result of the conflict will be: who will win and who will lose. Nor does conflict theory provide an adequate explanation of why one group will be successful and another will not. Marxism and neo-Marxism give more coherent answers to these types of question. On the other hand, conflict theory is able to encompass conflict between such groups as men and women, which does not fit neatly into a Marxist framework for understanding society.

Conflict theory represented an important break from Marxism and helped to provide the basis for the development of some later theories. In particular, post-structuralists and postmodernists have gone much further in arguing that there are numerous types of social division and sources of inequality. Indeed, post-structuralists and postmodernists think more in terms of *difference* than division and inequality (see pp. 1068–75 for a discussion of postmodernism).

Social action and interpretive perspectives

Sociologists who adopt social action or interpretive perspectives usually reject the view that society has a clear structure that directs individuals to behave in certain ways. Some social action theorists do not deny the existence of a social structure, but see this structure as rising out of the action of individuals. Thus Weber, who to some extent spans the gap between structural and social action perspectives, acknowledges the existence of classes, status groups and parties, but he challenges the view of Durkheim that society exists independently of the individuals who make up society. Symbolic interactionists accept the existence of social roles, but deny that these roles are fixed and inflexible, or determined by the supposed 'needs' of the social system. Phenomenology and ethnomethodology represent a much more radical rejection of structural perspectives. They deny the existence of any sort of social structure.

All of these perspectives argue that sociologists need to understand and interpret human behaviour and discover the meanings that lie behind it. Phenomenology and ethnomethodology claim that sociology can go no further than reaching an understanding of the meanings that individuals attach to the world around them.

These perspectives will now be examined in detail.

Max Weber

The German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) is widely regarded as one of the three great founders of sociology, with Marx and Durkheim. Although Weber

identified aspects of the social structure such as class, parties, status groups and bureaucracies, all of these groupings were made up of individuals carrying out social actions. Furthermore, it was social actions which, according to Weber, should be the focus of study in sociology.

Social action

In one of his most important works, *Economy and Society* (1978, first published in the 1920s), Weber said, 'Sociology (in the sense in which this highly ambiguous word is used here) is a science concerning itself with the interpretive understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences.' By making this statement Weber was trying to spell out the precise limits of what could and could not be explained in sociological terms.

To Weber, a social action was an action carried out by an individual to which a person attached a meaning; an action which, in his words, 'takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course'. Thus, an action that a person does not think about cannot be a social action. For example, an accidental collision of bicycles or an involuntary cry of pain are not social actions because they are not the result of any conscious thought process. Furthermore, if an action does not take account of the existence and possible reactions of others, it is not social. If a person prays in private, in secrecy, it cannot be a social action – nobody knows about it and the actor could not be taking account of the possible actions of others.

Social action and *Verstehen*

Having identified the subject matter of sociology, Weber went on to suggest how social action could be explained. Before the cause of a social action could be found, it was necessary to understand the meaning attached to it by the actor. He distinguished two types of understanding.

First, he referred to *aktuelles Verstehen*, which can roughly be translated as direct observational understanding. For example, it is possible to understand that someone is angry by observing their facial expression. Similarly, it is possible to understand what is happening when a woodcutter hits a piece of wood with an axe – that is, the woodcutter is chopping wood. However, this is not, to Weber, a sufficient level of understanding to begin to explain social action.

The second type of understanding is *erklärendes Verstehen*, or explanatory understanding. In this case the sociologist must try to understand the meaning of an act in terms of the motives that have given rise to it. Thus *erklärendes Verstehen* would require an understanding of why the woodcutter was chopping wood. Was it in order to earn a wage, to make a fire, or to work off anger? To achieve this type of understanding it is necessary to put yourself in the shoes of the person whose behaviour you are explaining. You should imagine yourself in their situation to try to get at the motives behind their actions.

Causal explanations

Even this level of understanding is not sufficient to explain a series of actions or events. For a full causal explanation it is necessary to determine what has given rise to the motives that led to the actions. Here Weber advocated the use of methods closer to a positivist approach. He attempted to discover connections between events and to establish causal relationships. This can be seen from his study, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1958) (see pp. 447–51).

Weber tried to show that there was a relationship between ascetic Protestantism and capitalism. He claimed that ascetic Protestantism preceded capitalism and was found almost exclusively in those countries that became capitalist. Nevertheless, this was not sufficient to convince Weber that there was a causal connection between the two, because it did not establish how or why ascetic Protestantism contributed to the rise of capitalism. In order to establish this link, Weber tried to understand the motives of ascetic Protestants for adopting capitalist behaviour. He believed that their main motive was to convince themselves that they were predestined to go to heaven.

Weber's work on the rise of capitalism illustrates his belief that social actions, particularly those involving large numbers of people behaving in similar ways, could lead to large-scale social changes such as the advent of capitalism. Furthermore, even when Weber sounds rather like a structuralist sociologist, he usually insists that he is really describing a type of social action. Thus, while society might contain institutions and social groups, these institutions and social groups are composed of individuals engaged in social action. Weber said:

> *when reference is made in a sociological context to a state, a nation, a corporation, a family or an army corps, or to similar collectivities, what is meant is ... only a certain kind of development of actual or possible social actions of individual persons.*
>
> Weber, 1958

Social action and bureaucracy

Weber's general views on the relationship between institutions and social action can be illustrated by his important work on bureaucracies. Bureaucracies

might be seen as institutions that closely control and direct human behaviour or social actions. Although Weber was aware of, and indeed concerned about, the power of bureaucracies in restricting human freedom, he nevertheless saw them as composed of individuals carrying out social actions. Thus he believed that bureaucracies consisted of individuals carrying out rational social actions designed to achieve the goals of bureaucracies.

Significantly, Weber saw the whole development of modern societies in terms of a move towards rational social action. Thus, to Weber, modern societies were undergoing a process of rationalization, as affective or emotional action and action directed by custom and tradition (traditional action) became less important. Weber's views on bureaucracy will now be examined in detail.

Bureaucracy and rationalization

Weber believed that bureaucratic organizations were the dominant institutions of industrial society (Weber, 1964). We will examine Weber's definition of bureaucracy in detail shortly but, briefly, he saw it as an organization with a hierarchy of paid, full-time officials who formed a chain of command. A bureaucracy is concerned with the business of administration: with controlling, managing and coordinating a complex series of tasks. Bureaucratic organizations are increasingly dominating the institutional landscape: departments of state, political parties, business enterprises, the military, education and churches are all organized on bureaucratic lines.

To appreciate the nature of modern society, Weber maintained that an understanding of the process of bureaucratization is essential. Marxists see fundamental differences between capitalist and socialist industrial societies. To Weber their differences are minimal compared to the essential similarity of bureaucratic organization. This is the defining characteristic of modern industrial society.

Bureaucracy and rational action

Weber's view of bureaucracy must be seen in the context of his general theory of social action. He argued that all human action is directed by meanings. Thus, in order to understand and explain an action, the meanings and motives that lie behind it must be appreciated. Weber identified various types of action that are distinguished by the meanings on which they are based. These include 'affective' or 'emotional action', 'traditional action' and 'rational action':

1 Affective or emotional action stems from an individual's emotional state at a particular time. A loss of temper which results in verbal abuse or physical violence is an example of affective action.
2 Traditional action is based on established custom. Individuals act in a certain way because of ingrained habit: because things have always been done that way. They have no real awareness of why they do something; their actions are simply second nature.
3 By comparison, rational action involves a clear awareness of a goal: it is the action of a manager who wishes to increase productivity or of a builder contracted to erect a block of flats. In both cases the goal is clearly defined. Rational action also involves a systematic assessment of the various means of attaining a goal and the selection of the most appropriate means to do so. Thus, if a capitalist in the building trade aimed to maximize profit, she or he would carefully evaluate factors such as alternative sites, raw materials, building techniques, labour costs and the potential market, in order to realize her or his goal. This would entail a precise calculation of costs and the careful weighing up of the advantages and disadvantages of the various factors involved. The action is rational since, in Weber's words, rational action is 'the methodical attainment of a definitely given and practical end by means of an increasingly precise calculation of means'.

Weber believed that rational action had become the dominant mode of action in modern industrial society. He saw it expressed in a wide variety of areas: in state administration, business, education, science, and even in Western classical music. He referred to the increasing dominance of rational action as the 'process of rationalization'.

Bureaucratization is a prime example of this process. A bureaucratic organization has a clearly defined goal. It involves the precise calculation of the means to attain this goal and systematically eliminating those factors that stand in the way of the achievement of its objectives. Bureaucracy is therefore rational action in an institutional form.

Bureaucracy and control

Bureaucracy is also a system of control. It involves a hierarchical organization in which superiors strictly control and discipline the activities of subordinates. Weber argued that, in any large-scale task, some people must coordinate and control the activities of others. He stated that 'the imperative coordination of the action of a considerable number of men requires control of a staff of persons'. In order for this control to be effective, it must be regarded as legitimate. There must be a 'minimum of voluntary submission' to higher authority.

Legitimacy can be based on various types of meanings. For example, it can result from traditional or rational meanings, and therefore can take the form of traditional authority or rational authority. The *form* of the organizational structure derives from

the *type* of legitimacy on which it is based. In Weber's words:

> *According to the kind of legitimacy which is claimed, the type of obedience, the kind of administrative staff developed to guarantee it and the mode of exercising authority, will all differ fundamentally.*
>
> Weber, 1978, p. 213

To understand bureaucracy, it is therefore necessary for us to appreciate the type of legitimacy on which bureaucratic control is based.

Weber identified three forms of legitimacy, which derive from the three types of social action discussed above. Affective, traditional and rational actions each provide a particular motive for obedience, a motive based respectively on emotion, custom and rationality. These types of legitimate control are 'charismatic authority', 'traditional authority' and 'rational–legal authority'. Each results in a particular form of organizational structure. Weber constructed models to represent each type of authority.

1 Charismatic authority and organizational structure

Organizational structures that derive from charismatic authority are fluid and ill-defined. Those who occupy positions of authority either share the charisma of the leader or possess a charisma of their own. They are not selected on the basis of family ties to the leader or on the basis of technical qualifications. There is no fixed hierarchy of officials and no legal rules govern the organization of leaders and followers. Jesus's disciples provide an example of leadership positions in a charismatic movement.

There is no systematically organized economic support for the movement; its members typically rely on charity or plunder. Since charismatic authority depends for its control on the person of the leader, it is necessarily short-lived. After the leader's death, the movement must become 'routinized' in terms of either traditional or rational–legal authority, if it is to survive. Thus the organizational control of the Christian church is no longer directly based on the charisma of its founder. Instead it has been routinized in terms of both traditional and rational–legal authorities.

2 Traditional authority and organizational structure

The organizational structure that derives from the second type of authority, traditional authority, takes two main forms: the first is a household that includes relatives, favourites and servants who are dependent on the head of the household; the second is a system of vassals such as feudal lords who swear an oath of loyalty to the king or queen and hold land on this basis. The duties of both the household retainers and the vassals are defined by custom but may be changed according to the inclination of the particular ruler. This organizational structure is of little importance in contemporary societies.

3 Rational–legal authority and organizational structure

Like other forms of authority, rational–legal authority produces a particular kind of organizational structure. This is bureaucracy, which Weber defined as 'A hierarchical organization designed rationally to coordinate the work of many individuals in the pursuit of large-scale administrative tasks and organizational goals.'

Weber constructed an ideal type of the rational–legal bureaucratic organization. He argued that bureaucracies in modern industrial society are steadily moving towards this 'pure' type. The ideal type of bureaucracy contains the following elements:

1. 'The regular activities required for the purposes of the organization are distributed in a fixed way as official duties' (Gerth and Mills (eds), 1948). Each administrative official has a clearly defined area of responsibility. Complex tasks are broken down into manageable parts, with each official specializing in a particular area. For example, state administration is divided into various departments such as education, defence and the environment. Within each department every official has a clearly defined sphere of competence and responsibility.
2. 'The organization of offices follows the principle of hierarchy; that is every lower office is under the control and supervision of a higher one' (Weber, 1978). A chain of command and responsibility is established whereby officials are accountable to their immediate superior both for the conduct of their own official duties and those of everybody below them.
3. The operations of the bureaucracy are governed by 'a consistent system of abstract rules' and the 'application of these rules to particular cases' (Gerth and Mills (eds), 1948). These rules clearly define the limits of the authority held by various officials in the hierarchy. Obedience to superiors stems from a belief in the correctness of the rules. The rules also lay down fixed procedures for the performance of each task. They impose strict discipline and control, leaving little room for personal initiative or discretion.
4. The 'ideal official' performs his or her duties in 'a spirit of formalistic impersonality ... without hatred or passion' (Weber, 1978). The activities of the bureaucrat are governed by the rules, not by personal considerations such as feelings towards colleagues or clients. The actions are therefore

rational rather than affective. Business is conducted 'according to *calculable rules* and "without regard for persons"' (Weber, 1978).

5 Officials are appointed on the basis of technical knowledge and expertise. Weber stated that 'Bureaucratic administration means fundamentally the exercise of control on the basis of knowledge. This is the feature of it which makes it specifically rational.' Thus officials are selected in terms of the contribution their particular knowledge and skills can make to the realization of organizational goals. Once appointed, the official is a full-time paid employee and his or her occupation constitutes a career. Promotion is based on seniority or achievement or a combination of both.

6 Bureaucratic administration involves a strict separation of private and official income. Officials do not own any part of the organization for which they work, nor can they use their position for private gain. In Weber's words, 'Bureaucracy segregates official activity as something distinct from the sphere of private life.'

The 'technical superiority' of bureaucracy

The ideal type of bureaucracy is never completely achieved in reality. Several of its characteristics are found in the state administrations of Ancient Egypt, China and the later stages of the Roman Empire. The ideal type is most closely approximated in capitalist–industrial society where it has become the major form of organizational control.

The development of bureaucracy is due to its 'technical superiority' compared to organizations based on charismatic and traditional authority. Weber argued that 'The decisive reason for the advance of bureaucratic organization has always been its purely technical superiority over any other form of organization.' This technical superiority stems from the combination of specialist skills subordinated to the goals of the organization. Personal emotions and interests, which might detract from the attainment of those goals, are excluded; while a set of rational rules is designed specifically to further the objectives of the organization. Compared to other forms of organization, tasks in a bureaucracy are performed with greater precision and speed, and with less friction and lower costs.

Bureaucracy and freedom

Although Weber appreciated the technical advantages of bureaucratic organization, he was also aware of its disadvantages. He saw the strict control of officials restricted to very specialized tasks as a limitation of human freedom. The uniform and rational procedures of bureaucratic practice largely prevent spontaneity, creativity and individual initiative. The impersonality of official conduct tends to produce 'specialists without spirit'. Bureaucratic organization produces an iron cage which imprisons and restricts people.

Weber foresaw the possibility of people being trapped in their specialized routines, with little awareness of the relationship between their jobs and the organization as a whole. He wrote, 'It is horrible to think that the world would one day be filled with little cogs, little men clinging to little jobs and striving towards the bigger ones.'

Weber also foresaw the danger of bureaucrats becoming preoccupied with uniformity and order, losing sight of all else and becoming dependent on the security provided by their highly structured niche in the bureaucratic machine. He believed it was as if:

> *we were deliberately to become men who need 'order' and nothing but order, become nervous and cowardly if for one moment this order wavers, and helpless if they are torn away from their total incorporation in it.*
>
> Weber, 1978, p. 1401

To Weber, the process of rationalization, of which bureaucracy is the prime expression, is basically irrational. It is ultimately aimless since it tends to destroy the traditional values that give meaning and purpose to life. For him, the 'great question' is 'what can we oppose to this machinery in order to keep a portion of mankind free from this parcelling-out of the soul, from this supreme mastery of the bureaucratic way of life?' (quoted in Nisbet, 1967).

Despite his forebodings, Weber thought that bureaucracy was essential to the operation of large-scale industrial societies. In particular, he believed that the state and economic enterprises could not function effectively without bureaucratic control. It therefore made little sense to try to dispense with bureaucracies. However, Weber was fearful of the ends to which bureaucratic organization could be directed. It represented the most complete and effective institutionalization of power so far created. In Weber's eyes, 'bureaucracy has been and is a power instrument of the first order – for the one who controls the bureaucratic apparatus' (Weber, 1978).

Weber was particularly concerned about the control of state bureaucratic administration. He saw two main dangers if this control was left in the hands of bureaucrats themselves:

1 Particularly in times of crisis, bureaucratic leadership would be ineffective. Bureaucrats are trained to follow orders and conduct routine operations rather than to make policy decisions and take initiatives in response to crises.

2 In capitalist society, top bureaucrats may be swayed by the pressure of capitalist interests and tailor their administrative practices to fit the demands of capital.

Weber argued that these dangers could only be avoided by strong parliamentary control of the state bureaucracy. In particular, professional politicians must hold the top positions in the various departments of state. This would encourage strong and effective leadership since politicians are trained to take decisions. In addition it would help to open the bureaucracy to public view and reveal any behind-the-scenes wheeling and dealing between bureaucrats and powerful interests. Politicians are public figures, open to public scrutiny and the criticism of opposition parties. They are therefore accountable for their actions.

Bureaucrats and politicians

Even with politicians at the head of state bureaucracies, problems remain. Weber observed that 'The political master always finds himself *vis-à-vis* the trained official, in the position of a dilettante facing the expert.' Professional politicians lack the technical knowledge controlled by the bureaucracy and may have little awareness of its inner workings and procedures. They are largely dependent on the information supplied by bureaucrats and upon their advice as to the feasibility of the measures the politician wishes to take. The politician may well end up being directed by the bureaucrat.

Weber believed that only strong parliamentary government could control state bureaucracy. He suggested that state bureaucrats should be made directly and regularly accountable to Parliament for their actions. The procedure for doing this was the parliamentary committee, which would systematically cross-examine top civil servants. In Weber's view, 'This alone guarantees public supervision and a thorough inquiry.'

Weber's view of bureaucracy is ambivalent. He recognized its 'technical superiority' over all other forms of organization. He believed that it was essential for the effective operation of large-scale industrial society. While he saw it as a threat to responsible government, he believed that this threat could be countered by strong political control. However, he remained pessimistic about the consequences of bureaucracy for human freedom and happiness.

Materialism and idealism

Given the importance that Weber attached to social action, it is not surprising that he also attached considerable importance to the role of ideas in shaping social life. Weber was very much opposed to what he saw as the one-sided materialism of Marxism. He denied that human beliefs were entirely shaped by material or economic forces; indeed, his work on Protestantism suggested that religious beliefs could transform an economic system.

However, Weber was equally concerned to reject a one-sided idealism that saw human history as directed by the ideas and beliefs held by people. Instead, Weber maintained that both material factors and beliefs were important. He believed that religious beliefs could develop quite independently of material factors – for example, through theological arguments within a church. On the other hand, new beliefs would only be taken up if circumstances made them likely to thrive. Thus, material circumstances might affect whether or not ideas became widely accepted, but they did not determine what ideas were produced in the first place.

Weber adopted a similar type of argument to explain the role of religion in the advent of capitalism. To Weber, before capitalism could fully develop it was necessary to have both the appropriate beliefs, and the appropriate material circumstances. In a simple tribal society neither would be present. According to Weber, many oriental societies had the economic conditions that could have led to capitalism, but they lacked a religion that encouraged rational activity. Countries such as Britain and the USA had both the material conditions and the beliefs of ascetic Protestantism, which were necessary preconditions for the development of capitalism.

Weber – a critique

Weber has undoubtedly made a great contribution to the development of modern sociology, although, like the other classical sociologists, his work has been hotly debated.

A central weakness of Weber's sociology can be identified. He has been accused of 'methodological individualism' – a criticism summed up by David Lee and Howard Newby in the following way: 'Weber was willing to treat all social forces and pressures as if they could be explained (or reduced) to the actions and purposes of seemingly isolated individuals' (Lee and Newby, 1983). The structural approaches examined earlier, particularly those of Durkheim and Marx, were strongly opposed to any such view. Furthermore, in Weber's own work, his social action approach exists rather uneasily alongside his views on particular types of social institution. Thus it is hard to reconcile his view that bureaucracies could severely restrict human freedom, or that society was divided into social classes, with his claim that society simply consisted of individuals choosing courses of action according to their motives.

Weber's views on bureaucracy and the importance of rationalization to the development of modernity have been the subject of extensive discussion. Postmodernists generally argue that bureaucratic organizations are no longer the dominant institutions in contemporary societies. They believe that

organizations have become much more flexible, less governed by rules and less hierarchical. For example, Stewart Clegg (1992) argues that post-Fordist flexible firms are far less rigid than traditional bureaucracies. He sees the trend towards this type of work organization as evidence of a shift towards postmodern organizations (see pp. 713–17 for a discussion of post-Fordism and flexible firms).

From a different perspective, some interpreters of Weber have argued that there are reasons to suppose that bureaucratic domination is not inevitable even within modern societies. Thus Larry Ray and Michael Reed (1994) believe that the 'iron cage' of bureaucracy can be challenged. Organizations are not always successful in persuading people that what they are doing can be justified simply in terms of its rationality. In modern societies people may question the *ends* that are being pursued rationally.

According to Ray and Reed, such ends would only be regarded as legitimate if people had agreed to them. There were therefore at least two directions in which modern societies could develop: 'the iron cage on the one hand, and the expansion of discursive rational legitimation on the other' (Ray and Reed, 1994). In other words, there could be increasing emphasis on democratic control of organizational ends. If Ray and Reed are correct, then perhaps pessimistic interpretations of the consequences of bureaucracy may be misplaced or exaggerated.

Whatever the merits of Weber's views on bureaucracy, they have proved enormously influential. His views have shaped much of the debate within the sociology of organizations, and his claims about rationalization have been central to debates about modernity and postmodernity (see pp. 1068–75 for a discussion of modernity and postmodernity).

Symbolic interactionism

Symbolic interactionism (usually referred to as interactionism in earlier chapters) is a distinctly American branch of sociology. It developed from the work of a group of American philosophers who included John Dewey, William I. Thomas and George Herbert Mead. Like Max Weber, symbolic interactionists are concerned with explaining social actions in terms of the meanings that individuals give to them. However, they tend to focus on small-scale interaction situations rather than large-scale social change.

George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) is generally regarded as the founder of symbolic interactionism. His views will now be examined.

George Herbert Mead

Symbols

In Mead's view, human thought, experience and conduct are essentially social (Mead, 1934). They owe their nature to the fact that human beings interact in terms of symbols, the most important of which are contained in language. A symbol does not simply stand for an object or event: it defines them in a particular way and indicates a response to them. Thus the symbol 'chair' not only represents a class of objects and defines them as similar, it also indicates a line of action: that is, the action of sitting.

Symbols impose particular meanings on objects and events and, in doing so, largely exclude other possible meanings. For example, chairs may be made out of metal, cane or wood, and on this basis be defined as very different objects. However, such differences are rendered insignificant by the fact that they are all categorized in terms of the symbol 'chair'. Similarly, chairs can be stood on, used as a source of fuel or as a means for assaulting someone; but the range of possible activities that could be associated with chairs is largely excluded by the course of action indicated by the symbol 'chair'. Symbols provide the means whereby humans can interact meaningfully with their natural and social environment. They are human-made and refer not to the intrinsic nature of objects and events but to the ways in which people perceive them.

Without symbols there would be no human interaction and no human society. Symbolic interaction is necessary since humans have no instincts to direct their behaviour. Humans are not genetically programmed to react automatically to particular stimuli. In order to survive they must therefore construct and live within a world of meaning. For example, they must classify the natural environment into categories of food and non-food in order to meet basic nutritional requirements. In this way humans define both the stimuli and their response to them. Thus, when hunters on the African savannah categorize antelope as a source of food, they define what is significant in the natural environment and their response to it. Via symbols, meaning is imposed on the world of nature, and human interaction with that world is thereby made possible.

Role-taking

Social life can only proceed if the meanings of symbols are largely shared by members of society. If this were not the case, meaningful communication would be impossible. However, common symbols provide only the means by which human interaction can be accomplished. In order for interaction to proceed each person involved must interpret the meanings and intentions of others. This is made possible by the existence of common symbols, but actually accomplished by means of a process that Mead termed 'role-taking'.

The process of role-taking involves one person taking on the role of another by imaginatively placing themselves in the position of the person with whom they are interacting. For example, if a person observes another smiling, crying, waving a hand or shaking a fist, they will put themselves in that person's position in order to interpret the intention and meaning. On the basis of this interpretation they will make their response to the action of the other. Thus, if an individual observes someone shaking a fist, they may interpret this gesture as an indication of aggression but their interpretation will not automatically lead to a particular response. They may ignore the gesture, respond in kind, attempt to defuse the situation with a joke, and so on. The person with whom they are interacting will then take their role, interpret their response and either continue or close the interaction on the basis of this interpretation. In this respect human interaction can be seen as a continuous process of interpretation, with each taking the role of the other.

The self

Mead argued that, through the process of role-taking, individuals develop a concept of 'self'. By placing themselves in the position of others they are able to look back upon themselves. Mead claimed that the idea of a self can only develop if the individual can 'get outside himself (experientially) in such a way as to become an object to himself'. To do this they must observe themselves from the standpoint of others. Therefore, the origin and development of a concept of self lie in the ability to take the role of another.

Mead distinguished two aspects of the self. The 'me' is your definition of yourself in a specific social role. For example, you might see yourself as a 'good parent' or a 'loyal friend'. The 'I' is your opinion of yourself as a whole. The 'I', which can also be called your 'self-concept', is built up from the reactions of others to you, and the way you interpret those reactions. It can exercise considerable influence over your behaviour. For example, if you see yourself as cowardly on the basis of the self-concept you have built up, you are unlikely to act bravely in dangerous situations.

The notion of self is not inborn, it is learned during childhood. Mead saw two main stages in its development. The first, known as the play stage, involves children playing roles that are not their own. For example, children may play at being a parent, a doctor or a nurse. In doing so they become aware that there is a difference between themselves and the role they are playing. Thus the idea of a self is developed as the child takes the role of a make-believe other.

The second stage in the development of self is known as the game stage. In playing a game, children come to see themselves from the perspective of the various participants. In order to play a game such as football or cricket, children must become aware of their relationship to the other players. They must place themselves in the roles of the others in order to appreciate their own particular role in the game. In doing so, they see themselves in terms of the collective viewpoint of the other players. In Mead's terminology, they see themselves from the perspective of 'the generalized other'.

In Mead's view, the development of a consciousness of self is an essential part of the process of becoming a human being. It provides the basis for thought and action, and the foundation for human society. Without an awareness of self, the individual could not direct action or respond to the actions of others. Only by acquiring a concept of self can the individual take the role of self. In this way, thought is possible, since in Mead's view the process of thinking is simply an 'inner conversation'. Thus, unless individuals are aware of the self, they will be unable to converse with themselves and thought will be impossible.

By becoming 'self-conscious', people can direct their own action by thought and deliberation. They can set goals for themselves, plan future action and consider the consequences of alternative courses of action. With an awareness of self, individuals are able to see themselves as others see them. When they take the role of others, they observe themselves from that standpoint and become aware of the views of themselves that others hold.

This provides the basis for cooperative action in society. Individuals will become aware of what is expected of them and will tend to modify their actions accordingly. They will be conscious of the general attitudes of the community, and judge and evaluate themselves in terms of this generalized other. From this perspective, thought becomes 'an inner conversation going on between this generalized other and the individual'. Thus people are constantly asking what other people will think and expect when they reflect upon themselves. In this way conduct is regulated in terms of the expectations and attitudes of others. Mead argued that 'It is in the form of the

generalized other that the social process influences the behaviour of the individuals involved in it ... that the community exercises control over the conduct of its individual members.'

Culture, social roles and institutions

Mead accepted that a society has a culture, and that this culture suggests appropriate types of behaviour for particular social roles. For example, a culture might specify that the role of doctor should not involve anything that might harm patients. People will tend to act in ways that are consistent both with the expected behaviour in a particular role, and with that person's concept of self. From Mead's point of view, social institutions such as the family or the state have an existence, in the sense that particular social roles are attached to them. Thus the institution 'the family' consists of the social roles of mother, father, daughter, son, sister, brother and so on.

Although the existence of a culture and social roles does shape human behaviour to some extent, humans still have considerable choice as to how they behave. Mead gave a number of reasons why this is so:

1 Many cultural expectations are not specific. Society may, for example, demand that people wear clothes, but there is usually considerable freedom as to which clothes to wear.
2 Individuals have considerable choice as to which roles they enter: for example, they have an element of choice in what job they do.
3 Some social roles encourage a diversity of behaviour: for example, fashion designers are encouraged to develop novel designs.
4 Society does not have an all-embracing culture. Subcultures exist and people can choose which of them to join.
5 Many cultural meanings indicate possibilities rather than requirements. Thus the symbol 'chair' suggests the possibility that people can sit on the object, but they are not compelled to do so.
6 At times it may be impossible to act in accordance with a social role: for example, parents may find themselves unable to care adequately for their children. In such circumstances new and innovative behaviour is necessary.

Social roles are not therefore fixed or unchanging; in reality they are constantly being modified in the course of interaction.

The individual and society

Mead's view of human interaction sees humans as both actively creating the social environment and being shaped by it. Individuals initiate and direct their own action while at the same time being influenced by the attitudes and expectations of others in the form of the generalized other. The individual and society are regarded as inseparable, for the individual can only become a human being in a social context. In this context individuals develop a sense of self, which is a prerequisite for thought. They learn to take the roles of others, which is essential both for the development of self and for cooperative action. Without communication in terms of symbols whose meanings are shared, these processes would not be possible. Humanity therefore lives in a world of symbols that give meaning and significance to life and provide the basis for human interaction.

Herbert Blumer

The basic premises of symbolic interactionism

Blumer, a student of George Herbert Mead, systematically developed the ideas of his mentor (Blumer, 1962). In Blumer's view, symbolic interactionism rests on three basic premises:

1 Human beings act on the basis of meanings that they give to objects and events, rather than simply reacting either to external stimuli such as social forces, or to internal stimuli such as organic drives. Symbolic interactionism therefore rejects both societal and biological determinism.
2 Meanings arise from the process of interaction rather than simply being present at the outset and shaping future action. To some degree, meanings are created, modified, developed and changed within interaction situations rather than being fixed and pre-formed. In the process of interaction actors do not slavishly follow pre-set norms or mechanically act out established roles.
3 Meanings are the result of interpretive procedures employed by actors within interaction contexts. By taking the role of the other, actors interpret the meanings and intentions of others. By means of 'the mechanism of self-interaction', individuals modify or change their definition of the situation, rehearse alternative courses of action and consider their possible consequences. Thus the meanings that guide action arise in the context of interaction via a series of complex interpretive procedures.

Blumer argues that the interactionist perspective contrasts sharply with the view of social action presented by mainstream sociology. He maintains that society must be seen as an ongoing process of interaction, involving actors who are constantly adjusting to one another and continuously interpreting the situation. By contrast, mainstream sociology, and functionalism in particular, have tended to portray action as a mechanical response to the constraints of social systems. This view fails to see 'the social actions of individuals in human society as being constructed

by them through a process of interpretation. Instead action is treated as a product of factors which play on and through individuals.' Rather than actively creating their own social world, humans are pictured as passively responding to external constraints. Their actions are shaped by the needs of social systems and the values, roles and norms that form a part of those systems. Blumer rejects this view, arguing that:

> *the likening of human group life to the operation of a mechanical structure, or to the functioning of a system seeking equilibrium, seems to me to face grave difficulties in view of the formative and explorative character of interaction as the participants judge each other and guide their own acts by that judgement.*
>
> Blumer, 1962

Social action and social systems

Although he is critical of those who see action as a predictable and standardized response to external constraints, Blumer accepts that action is to some degree structured and routinized. He states that 'In most situations in which people act towards one another they have in advance a firm understanding of how to act and how other people will act.' However, such knowledge offers only general guidelines for conduct. It does not provide a precise and detailed recipe for action that is mechanically followed in every situation. Within these guidelines there is considerable room for manoeuvre, negotiation, mutual adjustment and interpretation.

Similarly, Blumer recognizes the existence of social institutions and admits that they place limits on human conduct; but even in situations where strict rules prevail, such as in bureaucratic organizations, there is still considerable room for human initiative and creativity. Even when action appears particularly standardized and structured, this should not be taken as an indication that actors are merely responding to external forces. Blumer argues that:

> *The common repetitive behaviour of people in such situations should not mislead the student into believing that no process of interpretation is in play; on the contrary, even though fixed, the actions of the participating people are constructed by them through a process of interpretation.*
>
> Blumer, 1962

Thus, standardized action is constructed by social actors, not by social systems.

Much of Blumer's work has been concerned with developing an appropriate methodology for his view of human interaction. This aspect of his work is discussed in Chapter 14 (see p. 973).

Examples of interactionist sociology can be found on pp. 843–9 and 372–9.

Symbolic interactionism – a critique

Interaction in a vacuum

Interactionists have often been accused of examining human interaction in a vacuum. They have tended to focus on small-scale face-to-face interaction, with little concern for its historical or social setting. They have concentrated on particular situations and encounters, with little reference to the historical events leading up to them or the wider social framework in which they occur. Since these factors influence the particular interaction situation, the scant attention they have received has been regarded as a serious omission. Thus, in a criticism of Mead, Ropers argues that 'The activities that he sees men engaged in are not historically determined relationships of social and historical continuity; they are merely episodes, interactions, encounters, and situations' (quoted in Meltzer, Petras and Reynolds, 1975).

The origin of norms

While symbolic interactionism provides a corrective to the excesses of societal determinism, many critics have argued that it has gone too far in this direction. Although they claim that action is not determined by structural norms, interactionists do admit the presence of such norms. However, they tend to take them as given rather than explaining their origin. As William Skidmore (1975) comments, interactionists largely fail to explain 'why people consistently choose to act in given ways in certain situations, instead of in all the other ways they might possibly have acted'.

In stressing the flexibility and freedom of human action, interactionists tend to downplay the constraints on action. In Skidmore's view, this is due to the fact that 'interactionism consistently fails to give an account of social structure'. In other words it fails to adequately explain how standardized normative behaviour comes about and why members of society are motivated to act in terms of social norms.

The source of meanings

Similar criticisms have been made with reference to what many see as the failure of interactionists to explain the source of the meanings to which they attach such importance. As the chapters on education and crime and deviance have shown, interactionism provides little indication of the origins of the meanings in terms of which individuals are labelled by teachers, police and probation officers (see Chapter 11, pp. 843–9, and Chapter 6, pp. 372–9). Critics argue that such meanings are not spontaneously created in interaction situations. Instead they are systematically generated by the social structure.

Thus Marxists have argued that the meanings that operate in face-to-face interaction situations are largely the product of class relationships. From this viewpoint, interactionists have failed to explain the most significant thing about meanings: their origin.

Interactionism and American culture

Symbolic interactionism is a distinctly American branch of sociology and, to some, this partly explains its shortcomings. Thus Leon Shaskolsky (1970) has argued that interactionism is largely a reflection of the cultural ideals of American society. He claims that 'Symbolic interactionism has its roots deeply imbedded in the cultural environment of American life, and its interpretation of society is, in a sense, a "looking glass" image of what that society purports to be.' Thus the emphasis on liberty, freedom and individuality in interactionism can be seen in part as a reflection of America's view of itself.

Shaskolsky argues that this helps to explain why the interactionist perspective finds less support in Europe, since there is a greater awareness in European societies of the constraints of power and class domination. By reflecting American ideals, Shaskolsky argues that interactionism has failed to face up to, and take account of, the harsher realities of social life. Whatever its shortcomings, however, many would agree with William Skidmore that, 'On the positive side, it is clearly true that some of the most fascinating sociology is in the symbolic interactionist tradition' (Skidmore, 1975).

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a branch of European philosophy that was first developed by Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), and which was developed along more sociological lines by Alfred Schutz (1899–1959). Shutz was a pupil of Husserl's who moved to the USA with the rise of fascism in Europe.

Phenomenology differs from the social action approaches that have been examined so far in that it denies the possibility of explaining social action as such. Its emphasis is upon the internal workings of the human mind and the way that humans classify and make sense of the world around them. It is not concerned with the causal explanation of human behaviour in the same way as other perspectives. Phenomenologists try to understand the meaning of phenomena or things, rather than explaining how they came into existence.

Making sense of sensory experience

According to phenomenologists, individuals only come into contact with the outside world through their senses: touch, smell, hearing, sight and taste. It is not possible to know about the outside world except through these senses. Simply possessing senses, though, is not enough for a person to be able to make any sense out of the world. If humans took their sense experiences at face value, they would be confronted by an unintelligible mass of impressions – of colours, lights, sounds, smells, feelings and tastes that were meaningless.

In order to overcome this problem, humans begin to organize the world around them into phenomena; they classify their sense experiences into things that appear to have common characteristics. For example, a distinction may be made between animate and inanimate objects. This distinction may be refined by dividing animate objects into mammals and non-mammals. Mammals may be divided into different species and species subdivided into different breeds. Thus humans have a series of shorthand ways of classifying and understanding the world external to their own consciousness. For example, a small white animal making a barking noise may be identified as a poodle.

Husserl (1931) did not believe that this process was in any sense objective; the classification of phenomena was entirely a product of the human mind, and could not be evaluated in terms of whether it was true or false. He did not deny the existence of physical objects beyond and outside the human mind, but he argued that, since people could only come into contact with them through their senses, they could never be sure about their true nature. Thus, in trying to secure knowledge, humans had to 'bracket' reality and commonsense beliefs: that is, put them, as it were, inside brackets and forget about whether they were true or false.

Once they had done this, they could turn their attention to a phenomenological understanding of the world. Husserl argued that, in order to understand social life, phenomenologists should study the way that humans placed the external world into categories by distinguishing particular phenomena. In doing so it would be possible to understand the meaning of a phenomenon by discovering its essence. What Husserl meant by this was that the researcher could find the distinguishing features (the essence) of a

group of things (or phenomena) which humans classed together. Thus, for example, it might be found that a distinguishing feature – part of the essence – of a boat, was that it could float.

In Chapter 14 the description of Atkinson's work on suicide (pp. 979–80) shows how he tried to understand the nature of the phenomenon suicide by investigating how coroners distinguished it from other types of death.

Alfred Schutz – the phenomenology of the social world

The general approach adopted by phenomenology is a type of philosophy of knowledge, rather than a sociological perspective. Alfred Schutz (1972, first published 1932) was the first to try to explain how phenomenology could be applied to develop insights into the social world. Schutz's main contribution was to insist that the way that humans classified and attached meaning to the outside world was not a purely individual process. Humans developed what he called 'typifications' – the concepts attached to classes of things that are experienced. Thus, a 'bank manager', a 'football match', 'dusting' and 'a tree', are examples of typifications. These typifications are not unique to each person, but are shared by members of a society. They are passed on to children through learning a language, reading books or speaking to other people.

By the use of typifications, people are able to communicate with others on the basis of the assumption that they see the world in the same way. Gradually, a member of society builds up a stock of what Schutz calls 'common-sense knowledge', which is shared with other members of society and allows humans to live and communicate together. Schutz believes that such knowledge is essential to accomplish practical tasks in everyday life. For example, he describes the way in which a simple act such as posting a letter rests upon commonsense knowledge and the existence of shared typifications. The person posting the letter assumes that another person (a postal worker whom they may never have met) will be able to recognize the piece of paper with writing on it as a letter, and, along with other postal workers, will deliver it to the address on the envelope. People also assume that the recipient of the letter – again someone they might not have met – will have commonsense knowledge similar to their own, and will therefore be able to understand the message, and react in an appropriate way.

Although Schutz stresses that knowledge is shared, he does not think that it is fixed and unchanging. Indeed, commonsense knowledge is constantly modified in the course of human interaction. Schutz acknowledges that each individual has a unique biography, and interprets and experiences the world in slightly different ways; but the existence of a stock of commonsense knowledge allows humans to understand, at least partly, each other's actions. In doing so, they convince themselves that there are regular and ordered patterns in the world, and in social life. From this point of view, humans create between themselves the illusion that there is stability and order in society, when in reality there is simply a jumble of individual experiences that have no clear shape or form.

Ethnomethodology

Ethnomethodology was first developed in the 1960s. Many of the concerns of ethnomethodology have reflected the type of approach developed by Schutz. Schutz, however, did not carry out detailed research into social life; he merely speculated about the nature of society. Ethnomethodologists have applied phenomenological ideas in carrying out research.

In 1967 Harold Garfinkel first coined the term 'ethnomethodology'. Roughly translated, ethnomethodology means a study of the methods used by people. It is concerned with the methods used by people (or 'members', as ethnomethodologists refer to them) to construct, account for and give meaning to their social world.

Social order as a fiction

Ethnomethodologists follow Schutz in believing that there is no real social order, as other sociological perspectives assume. Social life appears orderly to members of society only because members actively engage in making sense of social life. Societies have regular and ordered patterns only because members perceive them in this way. Social order therefore becomes a convenient fiction – an appearance of order constructed by members of society. This appearance allows the social world to be described and explained, and so made knowable, reasonable, understandable and accountable to its members. It is made accountable in the sense that members of society become able to provide descriptions and explanations of their own

actions, and of the society around them, that are reasonable and acceptable to themselves and others. Thus, in Atkinson's study of suicide, coroners were able to justify and explain their actions to themselves and to others in terms of the commonsense ways they went about reaching a verdict.

The point of ethnomethodology, according to Zimmerman and Wieder (1971), is to explain 'how members of society go about the task of seeing, describing, and explaining order in the world in which they live'. Ethnomethodologists have therefore conducted investigations into the techniques that are used by members to achieve the appearance of order. Two studies will now be examined in detail to illustrate the above points.

Harold Garfinkel

The documentary method

Garfinkel (1967) argues that members employ the 'documentary method' to make sense of and account for the social world, and to give it an appearance of order. This method consists of selecting certain aspects of the infinite number of features contained in any situation or context, defining them in a particular way, and seeing them as evidence of an underlying pattern. The process is then reversed and particular instances of the underlying pattern are used as evidence for the existence of the pattern. In Garfinkel's words, the documentary method:

> *consists of treating an actual appearance as 'the document of', as 'pointing to', as 'standing on behalf of' a presupposed underlying pattern. Not only is the underlying pattern derived from its individual documentary evidences, but the individual documentary evidences, in their turn, are interpreted on the basis of 'what is known' about the underlying pattern. Each is used to elaborate the other.*
>
> Garfinkel, 1967

For example, in the case of Atkinson's study of coroners, those deaths defined as suicide were seen as such by reference to an underlying pattern. This pattern is the coroner's commonsense theory of suicide. However, at the same time, those deaths defined as suicide were seen as evidence for the existence of the underlying pattern. In this way, particular instances of the pattern and the pattern itself are mutually reinforcing and are used to elaborate each other. Thus the documentary method can be seen as 'reflexive'. The particular instance is seen as a reflection of the underlying pattern and vice versa.

Garfinkel argues that social life is 'essentially reflexive'. Members of society constantly look at particular activities and situations in terms of presumed underlying patterns, and in turn confirm the existence of those patterns by referring to particular expressions of them in activities and situations. In this way, members produce accounts of the social world that not only make sense of and explain, but actually constitute, that world. Thus, in providing accounts of suicide, coroners are actually producing suicide. Their accounts of suicide constitute suicide in the social world. In this respect, accounts are a part of the things they describe and explain. The social world is therefore constituted by the methods and accounting procedures in terms of which it is identified, described and explained. Thus the social world is constructed by its members by the use of the documentary method. This is what Garfinkel means when he describes social reality as 'essentially reflexive'.

An experiment in counselling

Garfinkel claims to have demonstrated the documentary method and its reflexive nature by an experiment conducted in a university department of psychiatry. Students were invited to take part in what was described as a new form of psychotherapy. They were asked to summarize a personal problem on which they required advice and then ask a counsellor a series of questions. The counsellor sat in a room adjoining the student; they could not see each other and communicated via an intercom. The counsellor was limited to responses of either 'yes' or 'no'. Unknown to the student, the adviser was not a counsellor and the answers received were evenly divided between 'yes' and 'no', their sequence being predetermined in accordance with a table of random numbers.

In one case a student was worried about his relationship with his girlfriend. He was Jewish and she was a Gentile. He was worried about his parents' reaction to the relationship and the problems that might result from marriage and children. His questions related to these concerns. Despite the fact that the answers he received were random and given without reference to the content of questions, and sometimes contradicted previous answers, the student found them helpful, reasonable and sensible. Similar assessments of the counselling sessions were made by the other students in the experiment.

From comments made by students on each of the answers they received, Garfinkel draws the following conclusions. Students *made* sense of the answers where no sense existed; they imposed an order on the answers where no order was present. When answers appeared contradictory or surprising, the students assumed that the counsellor was unaware of the full facts of their case. The students constructed an appearance of order by using the documentary method. From the first answer they perceived an

underlying pattern in the counsellor's advice. The sense of each following answer was interpreted in terms of the pattern, and at the same time each answer was seen as evidence for the existence of the pattern. Thus the students' method of interpretation was reflexive. Not only did they produce an account of the counselling session, but the account became a part of, and so constituted, the session. In this way the accounting procedure described and explained, and also constructed and constituted social reality at one and the same time.

Garfinkel claims that the counselling experiment highlights and captures the procedures that members are constantly using to construct the social world in their everyday lives.

Indexicality

This experiment can also be used to illustrate the idea of 'indexicality', a central concept employed by Garfinkel and other ethnomethodologists. Indexicality means that the sense of any object or activity is derived from its context; it is 'indexed' in a particular situation. As a result any interpretation, explanation or account made by members in their everyday lives is made with reference to particular circumstances and situations. Thus the students' sense of the counsellor's answers was derived from the context of the interaction. From the setting – a psychiatry department – and the information they were given, the students believed that the counsellor was what he claimed to be and that he was doing his best to give honest and sound advice. His answers were interpreted within the framework of this context. If identical answers were received from fellow students in a coffee bar, the change of context would probably result in a very different interpretation. Such responses from fellow students might have been seen as evidence that they had temporarily taken leave of their senses, or were having a joke at their friend's expense, or they were drunk and so on.

Garfinkel argues that the sense of any action is achieved by reference to its context. Members' sense of what is happening depends on the way they interpret the context of the activity concerned. In this respect their understanding and accounts are indexical: they make sense in terms of particular settings.

Disrupting the social world

Garfinkel encouraged his students actually to disrupt the social world in order to reveal the way that members made sense of it and reached understandings. For example, he suggested they go into supermarkets and haggle over the price of goods, or go back to their own homes and act as if they were lodgers. In such ways they would demonstrate the fragile nature of social order. The victims of these experiments found it difficult or impossible to index them in the situation in which they took place. Thus parents, faced with a child acting as a lodger in their own home, became perplexed or angry, and desperately tried to make sense of their child's actions by, for example, believing that the child must be ill.

Don H. Zimmerman – 'The practicalities of rule use'

As indicated earlier in this chapter, Weber placed great emphasis on the importance of rules in bureaucracies (see pp. 1051–5). The bureaucrat is usually seen as strictly conforming to formal rules or else acting in terms of a system of informal rules. In either case the behaviour is seen to be governed by rules. Zimmerman's study suggests an alternative perspective (Zimmerman, 1971). Rather than seeing behaviour as governed by rules, Zimmerman suggests that members employ rules to describe and account for their activity. Part of this activity may be in direct violation of a stated rule, yet it is still justified with reference to the rule. This paradox will be explained shortly.

Rules and rule violations

Zimmerman studied behaviour in a US Bureau of Public Assistance. Clients applying for assistance were assigned to caseworkers by receptionists. Officially, the assignment procedure was conducted in terms of a simple rule. If there were four caseworkers, the first four clients who arrived were assigned one to each caseworker. The next four clients were assigned in a similar manner, providing the second interview of the day for each caseworker, and so on. However, from time to time the rule was broken. For example, a particular caseworker may have had a difficult case and the interview may have lasted far longer than usual. In this situation a receptionist might reorganize the assignment list and switch the next client to another caseworker.

Justifying rule violations

Such rule violations were justified and explained by the receptionists in terms of the rule. In their eyes, by breaking the rule they were conforming to the rule. This paradox can be explained by the receptionists' view of the intention of the rule. From their viewpoint, the rule was meant to keep clients moving with a minimum of delay, so that all had been attended to at the end of the day. Thus, violating the rule to ensure this outcome can be explained as following the rule. This was the way the receptionists justified and explained their conduct to themselves and to their fellow workers. By seeing their activity as conforming to a rule, they created an appearance of order.

However, rather than simply being directed by rules, Zimmerman argues that the receptionists were constantly monitoring and assessing the situation and improvising and adapting their conduct in terms of what they saw as the requirements of the situation. Zimmerman claims that his research indicates that 'the actual practices of using rules do not permit an analyst to account for regular patterns of behaviour by invoking the notion that these practices occur because members of society are following rules'. He argues that the use of rules by members to describe and account for their conduct 'makes social settings appear orderly for the participants and it is this *sense and appearance* of order that rules in use, in fact, provide and what the ethnomethodologists in fact study'.

Zimmerman's research highlights some of the main concerns of ethnomethodology. It provides an example of the documentary method and illustrates the reflexive nature of the procedures used by members to construct an appearance of order. The receptionists interpreted their activity as evidence of an underlying pattern – the intent of the rule – and they saw particular actions, even when they violated the rules, as evidence of the underlying pattern.

Ethnomethodology and mainstream sociology

Garfinkel (1967) argues that mainstream sociology has typically portrayed man as a 'cultural dope' who simply acts out the standardized directives provided by the culture of his society. Garfinkel states that, 'By "cultural dope" I refer to the man-in-the-sociologist's-society who produces the stable features of society by acting in compliance with preestablished and legitimate alternatives of action that the common culture provides.' In place of the 'cultural dope', the ethnomethodologist pictures the skilled member who is constantly attending to the particular, indexical qualities of situations, giving them meaning, making them knowable, communicating this knowledge to others and constructing a sense and appearance of order. From this perspective, members construct and accomplish their own social world rather than being shaped by it.

The nature of social reality

Ethnomethodologists are highly critical of other branches of sociology. They argue that 'conventional' sociologists have misunderstood the nature of social reality. They have treated the social world as if it has an objective reality that is independent of members' accounts and interpretations. Thus they have regarded aspects of the social world such as suicide and crime as facts with an existence of their own. They have then attempted to provide explanations for these 'facts'. By contrast, ethnomethodologists argue that the social world consists of nothing more than the constructs, interpretations and accounts of its members. The job of the sociologist is therefore to explain the methods and accounting procedures that members employ to construct their social world. According to ethnomethodologists, this is the very job that mainstream sociology has failed to do.

The documentary method and mainstream sociology

Ethnomethodologists see little difference between conventional sociologists and the person in the street. They argue that the methods employed by sociologists in their research are basically similar to those used by members of society in their everyday lives. Members employing the documentary method are constantly theorizing, drawing relationships between activities and making the social world appear orderly and systematic. They then treat the social world as if it had an objectivity separate from themselves. Ethnomethodologists argue that the procedures of conventional sociologists are essentially similar. They employ the documentary method, theorize and draw relationships, and construct a picture of an orderly and systematic social system. They operate reflexively like any other member of society. Thus, when functionalists see behaviour as an expression of an underlying pattern of shared values, they also use instances of that behaviour as evidence for the existence of the pattern. By means of their accounting procedures, members construct a picture of society. In this sense the person in the street is their own sociologist. Ethnomethodologists see little to choose between the pictures of society that people create and those provided by conventional sociologists.

Ethnomethodology – a critique

Alvin Gouldner (1971) pours scorn upon ethnomethodology for dealing with trivial aspects of social life, and revealing things that everybody knows already. He gives an example of the type of experiment advocated by Garfinkel. An ethnomethodologist might release chickens in a town centre during the rush hour, and stand back and observe as traffic was held up and crowds gathered to watch and laugh at police officers chasing the chickens. Gouldner goes on to explain that Garfinkel might say that the community has now learned the importance of one hitherto unnoticed rule at the basis of everyday life: chickens must not be dropped in the streets in the midst of the rush hour.

More seriously, critics have argued that the members who populate the kind of society portrayed

by ethnomethodologists appear to lack any motives and goals. As Anthony Giddens remarks, there is little reference to 'the pursuance of practical goals or interests' (Giddens, 1977). What, for example, motivated the students in Garfinkel's counselling experiment or the receptionists in Zimmerman's study? There is little indication in the writings of ethnomethodologists as to why people want to behave or are made to behave in particular ways. Nor is there much consideration of the nature of power in the social world and the possible effects of differences in power on members' behaviour. As Gouldner notes:

> *The process by which social reality becomes defined and established is not viewed by Garfinkel as entailing a process of struggle among competing groups' definitions of reality, and the outcome, the common-sense conception of the world, is not seen as having been shaped by institutionally protected power differences.*
>
> Gouldner, 1971

Critics have argued that ethnomethodologists have failed to give due consideration to the fact that members' accounting procedures are conducted within a system of social relationships involving differences in power. Many ethnomethodologists appear to dismiss everything that is not recognized and accounted for by members of society. They imply that, if members do not recognize the existence of objects and events, they are unaffected by them. But, as John H. Goldthorpe pointedly remarks in his criticism of ethnomethodology, 'if for instance, it is bombs and napalm that are zooming down, members do not have to be oriented towards them in any particular way, or at all, in order to be killed by them' (Goldthorpe, 1973). Clearly members do not have to recognize certain constraints in order for their behaviour to be affected by them. As Goldthorpe notes, with reference to the above example, death 'limits interaction in a fairly decisive way'.

Finally, the ethnomethodologists' criticism of mainstream sociology can be redirected towards themselves. As Giddens remarks, 'any ethnomethodological account must display the same characteristics as it claims to discern in the accounts of lay actors'. Ethnomethodologists' accounting procedures therefore become a topic of study like those of conventional sociologists or any other member of society. In theory, the process of accounting for accounts is never-ending. Carried to its extreme, the ethnomethodological position implies that nothing is ever knowable.

Whatever its shortcomings, however, ethnomethodology asks interesting questions.

Uniting structural and social action approaches

The earlier parts of this chapter have shown how sociology can be divided into two types of approach. Structural approaches, such as functionalism and some versions of Marxism, emphasize the way that the structure of society directs human behaviour. Social action or interpretive approaches (such as those advocated by Weber), and symbolic interactionists and ethnomethodologists, argue that humans create society through their own actions. This distinction is not neat and clearcut: most perspectives in sociology show some concern with both social structure and social action; but most perspectives emphasize one aspect of social life at the expense of another.

However, many sociologists have argued that it would be desirable to produce a sociological theory that combined an understanding of social structure and social action. C. Wright Mills, for example, claimed that 'The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and external career of a variety of individuals' (Mills, 1959). It has often seemed as though sociologists could only understand one of these elements at a time. They might try to understand the 'larger historical scene' using a structural perspective; or alternatively they might try to understand the life of individuals using a social action approach. Generally they do not attempt to understand both simultaneously.

Anthony Giddens – the theory of structuration

The duality of structure

The British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1977, 1979, 1984) has attempted to overcome the division between structure and action. Although the details of his argument are complex, his basic point is simple. Giddens claims that structure and action are two sides of the same coin. Neither structure nor action can exist independently; both are intimately related. Social actions create structures, and it is through social actions that structures are produced and reproduced, so that they survive over time. Indeed he uses a single word, 'structuration', to describe the way that structures relate to social

actions, so that certain sets of social relationships survive over space and time (Giddens, 1984). Giddens talks about the 'duality of structure', to suggest both that structures make social action possible, and at the same time that social action creates those very structures. He says that 'structure has no existence independent of the knowledge that agents have about what they do in their day-to-day activity'. In other words, it is you, I, and every other individual, that create structures.

The clearest way that Giddens explains this is using the examples of language and speech. The English language is, to Giddens, a structure; it is a set of rules about how to communicate, which seems independent of any individual. The grammar and vocabulary of English cannot simply be changed at will by members of society. Yet, if the language is to be reproduced, if it is to survive, it must be spoken or written by individuals in ways that follow its existing rules. Thus, Giddens says, 'when I utter a grammatical English sentence I contribute to the reproduction of the English language as a whole'.

The structure of the language ultimately depends upon the people who use it. For the most part, competent English speakers will follow the rules of English and reproduction will take place. However, this is not inevitable. Languages change: new words are invented and accepted by being used; some old words are forgotten and fall into disuse. Human agents, by their actions, can therefore transform as well as reproduce structures.

Rules and resources

In social life in general, Giddens identifies two aspects of structure: 'rules' and 'resources'.

Rules are procedures that individuals may follow in their social life. Sometimes interpretations of these rules are written down: for example, in the form of laws or bureaucratic rules. Such written expressions are not the rules themselves. Thus a rule might state that shopping involves paying a shop assistant; while the written interpretation of a rule of this sort might be the law of theft. Such structural rules can either be reproduced by members of society or they can be changed through the development of new patterns of interaction.

The second aspect of structure, resources, also come into being through human actions and can be changed or maintained by them. Resources take two forms: allocative and authoritative.

'Allocative resources' include raw materials, land, technology, instruments of production and goods. For Giddens, such resources are never just there, given by nature; they only become resources through human actions. Thus land is not a resource until someone farms it or puts it to some other use.

'Authoritative resources' are non-material resources that result from some individuals being able to dominate others. In other words, they involve the ability to get others to carry out a person's wishes, and in this way humans become a resource that other individuals may be able to use. As in other parts of his theory, Giddens insists that authoritative resources only exist in so far as they are produced by human interaction. Authority is not something a person has unless they are actually using it.

Social systems

Having discussed what he means by structure, Giddens goes on to explain what he sees as the nature of social systems and institutions. A social system, he argues, is simply a pattern of social relations that exists over a period of time and space. Thus, for example, nineteenth-century Britain is a social system because it was a geographically defined space, over a particular period of time, where there were certain reproduced sets of social relationships and social practices. Of course, Giddens would not believe that Britain was the same 'system' in 1899 as it was in 1801; social relationships and practices would have changed continually as patterns of interaction changed. Similarly, institutions such as the state or bureaucracies are seen by Giddens as patterns of behaviour that display some continuity over time, but which may also change as time passes.

Agency and reproduction

Giddens's views on structures, systems and institutions are closely tied in with his idea of human action (or 'agency' as he usually refers to it) since they are all part of the 'duality of structure'. According to Giddens, human agents are constantly intervening in the world by their actions, and in doing so they have the capacity to transform it. He would not, though, accept the view that individuals just create society, any more than he would accept that society determines individual behaviour. Structure affects human behaviour because of the knowledge that agents have about their own society. There is a large stock of 'mutual knowledge' of 'how to go on', or 'how to get things done'.

From what they have learnt, agents know how to go about their everyday lives and accomplish objectives. For example, 'competent' members of society know how to go to a bar and order a round of drinks, just as other competent members know how to serve the customer ordering the drinks. Routine, mundane behaviour like this is constantly carried out and much of it requires little thought. This is so because the agents involved are drawing upon their knowledge of the rules of society, which exist in the structure of society. At the same time

they are making use of resources that are also part of the structure of society. They make use of material commodities – like money, drinks and glasses – and authoritative resources, such as the right of the bar staff to demand payment – a right that is recognized by the customers.

Giddens seems to think that humans have a basic desire for some degree of predictability in social life. They have a need for what he calls 'ontological security' or 'confidence and trust that the natural and social worlds are as they appear to be'. He suggests tentatively that this may be connected to the human 'basic security system', essentially a natural concern with the physical survival of the body. Thus it would be unsettling if people did not know whether they were expected to have to give money to, or take money from, bar staff, and even more unsettling if they were to worry that the bar staff were not what they seemed, and were a group of mass murderers intent upon poisoning their customers.

Agency and transformation

According to Giddens, the existence of mutual knowledge, and a need for ontological security, tend to produce regulations in social life. Patterns of behaviour are repeated, and in this way the structure of society, the social system and the institutions are all reproduced. However, this whole process also involves the ever-present possibility that society can be changed. Agents do not have to behave as others do, nor do they necessarily act in accordance with their habits forever. Giddens describes 'the reflexive monitoring of actions' in which humans are constantly able to think about what they are doing and consider whether their objectives are being achieved. If they are not being achieved, then agents may start to behave in new ways, patterns of interaction may change, and with them the social structure.

For Giddens the very concepts of 'agent' and 'agency' involve people having the ability to transform the world around them through their actions, as well as being able to reproduce it. That does not mean that agents necessarily transform society, or for that matter reproduce it in ways that they intend. Human actions may well have consequences that were not anticipated by the agents involved. He gives the example of going home and switching on a light in order to illuminate a room. An unintended consequence of this might be that a burglar is alerted and flees the house, and in doing so is apprehended by the police, and ultimately ends up spending several years in prison. Such unintended consequences can also result in patterns of social life that were not necessarily intended to be produced by any individual. Thus, for example, decisions by individuals in society about where to live might produce a situation, which nobody had actually intended, in which some inner-city areas start to decay and develop a concentration of social problems.

Determinism and voluntarism

In his theory of the duality of structure, Giddens tries to show how the traditional distinction between social structure and social action does not necessitate seeing society in terms of one or the other: structure and agency are locked together in the processes through which social life is reproduced and transformed. In a similar fashion, he tries to resolve the dispute between determinists – who believe that human behaviour is entirely determined by outside forces – and voluntarists – who believe that humans possess free will, and can act as they wish. Giddens believes neither theory to be true, but he sees both as having some element of truth. He believes that only in very exceptional circumstances are humans completely constrained.

Complete constraint only occurs where physical force is used – for example, where a person is unwillingly knocked to the ground by someone else. In all other circumstances, even where people claim to 'have no choice', there are options open to them. Thus, if a person holds a gun to someone's head and threatens to shoot them if they do not hand over some money, the option of refusing is still open, even though there is a risk of death by making that choice. In other words it is nearly always possible to 'do otherwise', to do something different. Constraints, according to Giddens, do not therefore determine actions, but operate 'by placing limits upon the range of options open to an actor'.

In society humans are constrained by the existence of power relationships. Giddens sees all social action as involving power relationships. He sees power as the ability to make a difference, to change things from what they would otherwise have been, or, as he puts it, 'transformative capacity'. For him, the idea of human agency involves the idea of transformation capacity, and this capacity of power may be used to change things, or the actions of other people. It can therefore be used to exercise power over other people, and so constrain people and reduce their freedom. At the same time, though, power also increases the freedom of action of the agents who possess it. What restricts one person, enables another to do more.

Most of Giddens's work is highly abstract, and he offers few examples of how his theory of structuration could be applied to the study of society. However, he does praise Paul Willis's book *Learning to Labour* (1977). (For details of the study, see pp. 791–4.) Giddens claims that Willis's work shows how structures can be actively reproduced by the action of

agents as an unintended consequence of the actions. Thus, by their rejection of school and their determination to do manual jobs, 'the lads' in Willis's study reproduce some general features of capitalist-industrial labour. Furthermore, constraints are not simply experienced as external forces of which they are passive recipients. Instead 'the lads' are actively involved in making the decisions that come to constrain them. Because they choose not to work hard at school, they end up with very limited options in later life when they are choosing what work to do.

Giddens claims that, if sociology is to progress beyond the division between action and structure, it requires more studies like Willis's, which show how structures are reproduced by purposeful human agents.

Criticisms of Giddens

Although Giddens's ideas are still developing, they have been the subject of some criticism. Margaret S. Archer (1982) criticizes Giddens for locking agency and structure too tightly together. She suggests that the concepts have different implications. The idea of structure tends to stress the limits on human action; the idea of agency stresses the existence of free will; and the two are never reconciled. In her view, Giddens puts too much emphasis on the ability of agents to transform structures simply by changing their behaviour. Giddens's work implies that, if people were to start acting differently tomorrow, then all of society's structures would immediately be changed.

According to Archer this is not the case. The possibilities for changing social structures, and the extent to which humans have the ability to transform the social world, depend upon the nature of the social structures. She uses the example of Fidel Castro's policy on illiteracy when he took power in Cuba. He wanted to conquer illiteracy by getting each literate person to teach an illiterate to read. Archer points out that literacy could not be achieved overnight, and, furthermore, how quickly it could be achieved depended upon a structural feature of Cuban society: the percentage of the population who were literate. Thus, if 1 per cent of the population were literate, a much more lengthy period would be involved than if 50 per cent of the population were literate. This demonstrates to Archer that structural features of society cannot just be changed at will, at least not on the time scale that the actors involved might wish for.

Archer similarly takes Giddens to task for suggesting that 'material resources' only enter social life and exercise a constraining influence on social actions when humans choose to make use of them. For example, a flood or volcanic eruption, or a shortage of land, is not the product of human will, but it exercises a real, material constraint on options, regardless of human actions. To give another example, once all the coal in the ground has been burned, it cannot be burned again.

In short, Archer suggests that people cannot just change or reproduce society as they wish. Some structural features of society are beyond their control and constrain behaviour. She accepts that humans have both some degree of freedom and some limits on how they act, but a theory that does not move beyond this generalization says little. Giddens notes both the possibility of freedom of action and social change, and the constraints and the reproduction of social institutions. What Giddens does not do, though, is explain which of these will happen in particular circumstances. Archer says, 'The theory of structuration remains incomplete because it provides an insufficient account of the mechanisms of stable replication versus the genesis of new social forms.'

Modernity, postmodernity and postmodernism

Introduction

The distinction between modernity and postmodernity and the theory of postmodernism have become increasingly important in recent times. Theorists such as Durkheim, Weber and Marx have been seen by some as epitomizing modern sociology. Modern theories claimed to be able to provide a comprehensive and definitive theory of society. Postmodern theorists deny that this is possible.

Before considering these issues in detail, it is useful to distinguish between modern theories and postmodernism on the one hand, and theories of modernity and postmodernity on the other.

Modern theories and postmodernism use different *theoretical approaches* to studying sociology. For example, modern sociological theory, such as that of Weber, Marx and Durkheim, believes that it is possible to find out the objective truth about society, whereas postmodernism does not.

Modernity and postmodernity are terms used to describe different eras in the development of human societies. While some people believe that Western societies have moved from modernity to postmodernity, others do not agree. Thus the debate about modernity, postmodernity, modernism and postmodernism is a debate both about the extent to which

society has changed *and* about the sort of theoretical approach that should be used in sociology.

This section will first examine what is meant by the idea of modernity before going on to consider theories of postmodernity and postmodernism. It will conclude by considering the arguments of sociologists who believe that modern sociological theories and theories of modernity remain preferable to postmodernism and theories of postmodernity.

Modernity

Pre-modern and modern

Many of the classic nineteenth-century sociologists, such as Comte, Durkheim, Weber and Marx, shared a common intellectual interest in the social changes associated with industrialization. They all saw these changes as having shaped modernity. Comte and Weber, in particular, saw such changes as involving the progressive triumph of scientific rationality. Comte believed that modern society would be dominated by science. The influence of religion, superstition and philosophy would be replaced by 'positivist' science (see p. 469). Weber believed that the modern age would be increasingly shaped by rationalization and bureaucracy as affective and traditional actions became less important (see pp. 1051–5). Marx and Durkheim put less emphasis on scientific and rational thinking, but both had strong beliefs that society was developing progressively: in Marx's case, towards a communist utopia (see p. 1046); in Durkheim's case, towards a complex society based upon organic solidarity (see pp. 691–3). All of them believed that they had used scientific analysis to uncover the big story (called 'metanarrative' by some postmodernists) of human development. All thought they could outline the future direction of social change.

The belief in progress and the faith placed in science can both be seen as characteristic of modern thinking. Many sociologists would suggest that in pre-modern societies, such as simple tribal societies, religion, superstition and tradition formed the basis of social life. There was little conception of social change as progressive. Instead, following the seasons, social change was seen as circular (see pp. 7–8 for a description of pre-modern societies).

The Enlightenment

Modern ways of thinking are usually seen as having their origins in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. This was a broad European intellectual movement that sought to sweep away the prejudices of previous generations, and replace them with a more rational basis for social life. David Harvey, a commentator on postmodernism, describes the Enlightenment in the following way:

> *The idea was to use the accumulation of knowledge generated by many individuals working freely and creatively for the pursuit of human emancipation and the enrichment of daily life. The scientific domination of nature promised freedom from scarcity, want, and the arbitrariness of natural calamity. The development of rational forms of social organization and rational modes of thought promised liberation from the irrationalities of myth, religion, superstition, release from the arbitrary use of power as well as from the dark side of our own human natures.*
>
> Harvey, 1990, p. 12

The hopes of Enlightenment thinkers were reflected in the French Revolution, and inherited by the nineteenth-century sociologists mentioned above.

Postmodernism and the Enlightenment

Postmodern theorists tend to argue that the Enlightenment 'project' (the aims of Enlightenment thinkers) has been abandoned in contemporary societies. People no longer believe in the inevitability of progress, the power of science to solve all problems, the perfectibility of humanity or the possibility of running societies in a rational way. People are more pessimistic about the future and much less willing to believe that the truth can be found in grand theories or ideologies such as Marxism. There is now a much wider variety of beliefs and most people are unwilling to accept that one set of ideas gives the absolute truth and all others are false. They see no simple recipe for solving the world's problems. Postmodernists welcome these changes.

Postmodernism and architecture

These changes are reflected in architecture, where the term postmodernism was first adopted. Modern architecture was characterized by the use of new, cheap and efficient materials to mass-produce housing or offices for urban populations. The application of scientific knowledge, using such materials as steel, concrete and glass, would enable problems of accommodating people to be solved. The Swiss-born modern architect Le Corbusier saw architecture as producing 'machines for modern living'. He advocated the building of the type of functional high-rise tower block that was to become a common feature of towns and cities throughout the world. However, by the 1970s, tower blocks were beginning to fall out of favour. Charles Jencks (quoted in Harvey, 1990) dates the end of modernism in architecture from the destruction of the Pruitt-Igoe housing development in St Louis in 1972.

According to some theorists, modern architecture has given way to postmodern architecture. This

distrusts the scientific and idealistic approach of modern architecture and, instead of looking to a high-tech future, borrows from the past. According to Harvey, examples of postmodern architecture include 'imitation medieval squares and fishing villages, custom-designed or vernacular housing, renovated factories and warehouses, and rehabilitated landscapes of all kinds'. Prince Charles's denunciations of modern architecture for defacing cities such as London can be seen as a typical postmodern attitude.

According to the theory of postmodernism, we have lost faith in all grand plans for the future of humanity, not just in architecture but in all areas of social life. Diversity is the order of the day. We have entered an era in which anything goes, all styles and fashions are permissible so long as none is taken too seriously. If this is true, then it seems to challenge the assumptions on which the foundations of sociology were laid.

The next sections will outline the claims of some postmodern theorists in more detail, starting with those who give strongest support to the concept and its implications. These writers do not just believe that we have entered an era of postmodernity, they also believe that all modern theories of society are unacceptable and outdated.

Jean-François Lyotard – postmodernism and knowledge

Language-games

The French theorist Lyotard (1984) argues that post-industrial society and postmodern culture began to develop at the end of the 1950s, although the rate of development and the stage reached vary between and within countries. Lyotard sees these developments as related to technology, science and some social developments, but, most importantly, to changes in language. The key concept he uses is that of 'language-games'. Lyotard seems to see social life as being organized around these language-games. Language-games serve to justify or legitimate people's behaviour in society. They are games in which the participants can try to assert certain things to be true or right. Each statement or utterance is a 'move' that may aid the participant in trying to win the game – to get their version of what is true or right accepted.

Narrative

In simple or pre-industrial societies such as the South American tribe Cashinahua, narrative – the telling of stories, myths, legends and tales – is the principal language-game. The narrator establishes their right to speak and the legitimacy of what they are saying according to who they are. They start the story by giving their Cashinahua name to show that they are an authentic member of the tribe who has had the story passed down to them. It is therefore an example of self-legitimation: what they say should be accepted because of who they are. Narratives help to convey the rules on which social order is based; they play a key role in socialization.

Science and metanarratives

With the Enlightenment, narrative language-games were largely replaced by scientific 'denotative' games. The scientist sees narrative as 'belonging to a different mentality: savage, primitive, underdeveloped, backward, alienated, composed of opinions, custom, authority, prejudice, ignorance, ideology'. In denotative language-games it is irrelevant who is speaking; statements are judged as to whether they are true or false. Scientific statements are scrutinized and are 'subject to argumentation or proof' by other participants in the game. Evidence and rational argument are employed to establish whether a statement should be accepted or rejected.

However, probing deeper, Lyotard argues that science is unable to rid itself entirely of narrative knowledge. Science tries to maintain distance between itself and social conventions so that it can remain objective. But this raises the question of the purpose of science. How can the vast expenditure on science be justified if it is kept separate from social life? In the end science rests upon 'metanarratives' – narratives that give meaning to other narratives. Metanarratives give a sense of purpose to scientific endeavour and a sense of direction to social life. They suggest that humans can progress, through science, towards defeating ignorance and oppression. Science can help humans to conquer nature and become more self-conscious.

These metanarratives have had a major influence on Western thought, from the French Revolution to twentieth-century Marxism. Knowledge is also justified as being good in itself, enabling human beings to fulfil their potential. (This is reflected in the liberal ideal of education examined on pp. 780–2.)

Postmodernism

According to Lyotard, metanarratives of human emancipation, self-fulfilment and social progress are undermined by the advent of postmodernism. An 'incredulity towards metanarratives' develops. People no longer believe that reason can conquer superstition, that humans can be perfected or that communism can produce a perfect society.

The postmodern era has two main characteristics. First, the search for truth is abandoned as denotative language-games fall into disrepute. Knowledge fragments into a multiplicity of different language-games that are specific to particular areas of science or social life. Diversity is the order of the day as people lose faith in the search for one great truth that unites and justifies all knowledge.

Second, denotative language-games are replaced by technical language-games. Here, statements are judged not by whether they are true, but by whether they are useful and efficient or not. Emphasis shifts from the ultimate ends of human activity, towards the technical means through which things can be achieved. In universities, for example, researchers ask what use something is rather than whether it is true. Research becomes geared to producing knowledge that is saleable.

Knowledge and computer technology

Lyotard does not devote much attention to explaining how these changes have come about. However, he seems to attribute most importance to technology. He says that postmodernism rests upon the 'miniaturization and commercialization' of machines. Computer technology has become the principal 'force of production'.

Most postmodern scientific developments are concerned with communication, language and information storage. Knowledge that cannot be translated into a form usable by computers tends to get lost or disregarded. Increasingly, economic activity centres around information technology. Social life is monitored and controlled more and more by computerized machines; and control over knowledge becomes the major source of power. Knowledge is no longer an end in itself, but something to be bought and sold, perhaps even fought over. Lyotard speculates that future wars will not be about territorial disputes, but about disputes over the control of knowledge.

To Lyotard, postmodern society is based on the production and exchange of knowledge that can be sold. Grand theories of truth, justice and progress have fallen out of fashion. Language-games concern whether things are efficient and saleable rather than whether they serve some ultimate human purpose or goal.

Lyotard's analysis sometimes sounds like a Marxist attack on capitalism. In fact, though, he praises the consequences of postmodernism. The search for truth in modern thinking led only to 'as much terror as we can take' (for example, repression under Stalin in the communist USSR). Postmodernism offers the possibility of tolerance and creative diversity, in which humans are not corrupted by some doctrinaire metanarrative.

Lyotard – a critique

Like most advocates of postmodernism, Lyotard indulges in a number of paradoxes. While attacking 'metanarratives', Lyotard himself makes the most sweeping generalizations about the direction of human development, as well as making moral judgements about its desirability. While dismissing the possibility of objective knowledge, he claims to have identified and accurately described the development of key features of human societies. The evidence he uses to support his claims is sparse, leaving the reader with little reason to prefer Lyotard's 'language-game' to that of other social theorists. While rejoicing in diversity, Lyotard ends up celebrating language-games conducted according to one set of rules – those of the technical language-game. Terry Eagleton, a Marxist critic of Lyotard, sees this as nothing more than a justification for capitalism and the pursuit of profit regardless of the human consequences (quoted in Connor, 1989).

Jean Baudrillard – *Simulations*

Baudrillard does not explicitly discuss the concept of postmodernism in his most influential book, Simulations (1983). Nevertheless he is widely seen as a postmodern theorist. Like Lyotard, he sees societies as having entered a new and distinctive phase, and he relates this change to language and knowledge. Unlike Lyotard, he is rather pessimistic about the consequences of this change, seeing it as a kind of trap from which escape is impossible.

Signs and the economy

Baudrillard argues, in contradiction of Marxists, that society has moved away from being based upon production and being shaped by the economic forces involved in exchanging material goods. The central importance of the buying and selling of material goods has now been replaced by the buying and selling of signs and images, which have little if any relationship to material reality. Baudrillard is not explicit about what he means in this context, but examples might include the ways in which cars, cigarettes, pop stars and political parties have become more associated with images than any substance that might lie behind them (engines, nicotine content, music and policies respectively). The images are everything, the reality nothing.

The development of signs

Baudrillard argues that signs in human culture have passed through four main stages:

1 In the first stage, signs (words, images, etc.) are a 'reflection of a basic reality'.

2 In the next stage, the sign 'masks and perverts some basic reality'. Images become a distortion of the truth but they have not lost all connection with things that really exist.
3 In the third stage, the sign 'masks the absence of some basic reality'. For example, icons may disguise the fact that God does not exist.
4 Finally, the sign 'bears no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum'.

A simulacrum is an image of something that does not exist and has never existed. To Baudrillard, modern society is based upon the production and exchange of free-floating images. Signifiers (words and images) have no connection with anything real that is signified (the things that words and images refer to).

Examples of simulacra

Baudrillard provides a number of examples to illustrate this rather sweeping claim. Disneyland is described as 'a perfect model' of a simulacrum. It is a copy of imaginary worlds such as 'Pirates, the Frontier, Future World'. Simulacra are not confined to theme parks. According to Baudrillard the whole of Los Angeles is a kind of make-believe world founded upon stories and images that have no grounding in reality: it is 'nothing more than an immense script and a perpetual motion picture'.

In contemporary society the predominance of signifiers tends to destroy any basic reality to which they might refer. He gives the examples of a Filipino tribe called the Tasaday, the mummy of Rameses II, and a family called the Louds who were the subject of a fly-on-the-wall television documentary in the USA.

The Tasaday Indians were discovered in a remote area of the Philippines and began to be studied by anthropologists. However, the government believed that the traditional culture of the Tasaday was being destroyed by this process, and decided to return them to the jungle and isolate them from contemporary civilization. Thus they were turned into a simulation of a primitive society. They were no longer in their original and natural state, but they had come to represent all primitive peoples to Western scientists.

Science and technology also destroyed the originality of the mummy of the Egyptian Pharaoh Rameses II. Once the mummy was removed from its original site and placed in a museum, it began to deteriorate and scientific techniques were used to try to preserve it. At the same time, though, they altered it and destroyed its authenticity.

The Louds family was similarly destroyed. Chosen as a 'typical' Californian family, 300 hours of film of their life were broadcast. During the process the cohesion of the family fell apart and they went their separate ways. Whether this was due to television or not, the reality of the family was inevitably changed by the fact that they had become the object of a public spectacle.

Attempts to capture reality unavoidably lead to its destruction, so that science and television culture capture nothing but images of things that never existed or have already been destroyed.

Power and politics

Baudrillard is consistently gloomy about the consequences of all this. If it has become impossible to grasp reality, it is also impossible to change it. Society has 'imploded' and become like a black hole in which nothing can escape the exchange of signs with no real meaning. For example, the meaning of a terrorist outrage becomes arbitrary. It can equally easily be interpreted as the work of left-wingers or right-wingers or political moderates who want to discredit extremists of both sides.

In Baudrillard's view, power is no longer unequally distributed, it has just disappeared. Nobody can exercise power to change things. He compares the situation to nuclear deterrence where the two sides cancel each other out and make action impossible. While President Kennedy was assassinated because he might have real power, Johnson, Nixon, Ford and Reagan were merely puppets without any genuine chance of changing America or the outside world. With the end of the real and its substitution by simulacra, and the end of effective power, we are all trapped in a kind of prison, deprived of our freedom to change things, and condemned to the interminable exchange of meaningless signs.

Television

Baudrillard, then, differs from Lyotard in that he sees humans as trapped into a type of powerless uniformity, and not liberated by plurality and diversity. If anything, Baudrillard is even more vague than Lyotard in explaining how the postmodern era came about. However, he does seem to attach special importance to the mass media and to television in particular. He talks about 'the dissolution of life into TV' and says, 'TV watches us, TV alienates us, TV manipulates us, TV informs us.' It seems that it is television that is primarily responsible for ushering in a situation where image and reality can no longer be distinguished.

Baudrillard – a critique

Baudrillard's writing is highly abstract. It relies upon the use of examples to illustrate arguments and consequently offers no systematic evidence to justify its case. For example, Baudrillard makes no attempt to show that individuals are immersed in the world of

television, that Disneyland is seen as anything more than fantasy by its customers, or that the residents of Los Angeles have lost their grip on reality. His analysis of politics degenerates into totally unsubstantiated assertions. For example, he describes Reagan as a 'puppet' who, in common with other 'postmodern' politicians, has no power.

David Harvey accepts that Reagan's election might have owed a good deal to his television image, but argues that the reality of his policies and their very real effects on the lives of many Americans cannot be denied. He says:

> *A rising tide of social inequality engulfed the United States in the Reagan years, reaching a post-war high in 1986. ... Between 1979 and 1986, the number of poor families with children increased by 35 per cent. ... In spite of surging unemployment (cresting at over 10 per cent by official figures in 1982) the percentage of unemployed receiving any federal benefit fell to only 32 per cent, the lowest level in the history of social insurance.*
>
> Harvey, 1990

In addition, nearly 40 million were left with no medical insurance. Perhaps, then, it is Baudrillard who has lost his grasp on reality rather than the 'postmodern' world.

In his later work, Baudrillard (1995) goes as far as claiming that the Gulf War (in which the USA, Britain and other countries attacked Iraq as a response to its invasion of Kuwait) did not take place. From Baudrillard's point of view, the Gulf War was just a series of images produced by the media with no evidence that what they depicted was real. Such views display Baudrillard's lack of grip on reality, since there are innumerable eye-witnesses to the events, not to mention graves containing the corpses of those who died during the war.

(For further descriptions and evaluations of postmodernism in relation to particular topics see pp. 119–23, 157–63, 276–82, 423–7, 495–500, 577–84, 639–47, 765–71, 818–21, 916–21, 949–50 and 990–1.)

David Harvey – Marxism and post-modernity

David Harvey (1990) himself offers a very different view from that of either Lyotard or Baudrillard. Harvey is a theorist of postmodernity, not a postmodern theorist. He accepts that important changes have taken place in society but he does not regard them as absolutely fundamental, nor does he believe that modern approaches to sociological theory are outdated. Harvey rejects the claim that metanarratives have outlived their usefulness, since he uses Marxism as the basis of his analysis. He makes a greater effort to explain the changes in contemporary societies than most postmodernists, and he puts particular emphasis on economic factors in influencing change. Harvey can be described as a neo-Marxist who has developed a theory of postmodernity. His work is much more explicitly sociological than that of Lyotard and Baudrillard.

Continuities and changes in capitalism

Harvey argues that a capitalist economic system remains at the heart of contemporary Western societies. This economic system retains three basic characteristics that have not disappeared with postmodernity:

1. Capitalism is based upon economic growth and is defined as being in crisis when there is no growth.
2. Capitalism is based upon workers being paid less than the value of the commodities they produce, so that profits can be made. The 'dynamics of class struggle' are therefore inevitably involved in capitalist economies and societies.
3. Capitalism is dynamic. It is always producing new ways of organizing work and technological innovation, as businesses seek to get ahead of their competitors.

These basic characteristics mean that capitalism is always likely to change. As it develops, new ways of controlling labour and trying to ensure profitability become necessary. According to Harvey, and Marxist theory in general, periods of crisis are unavoidable. These crises lead to changes in the economy which may have important consequences for society and culture.

Harvey sees postmodernity as a response to one such crisis and dates its arrival at 1973. From the end of the Second World War until 1973, capitalism was fairly stable. There was steady growth in most countries, rising living standards and relative harmony between social classes. From 1973, a series of economic problems struck the world capitalist economy. Oil producers increased the price of oil, unemployment began to rise, profits fell and many countries experienced stagflation, that is, high inflation without economic growth. These problems led to, in Harvey's words, a different 'regime of accumulation', different ways of trying to ensure growth and profitability. This in turn helped to produce some of the cultural changes that have been termed postmodernity, and produced a new 'mode of social and political regulation'.

Harvey stresses that many aspects of postmodernity are not entirely new. Throughout its history, capitalism has always contained contradictory tendencies. He says, 'there is never one fixed configuration,

but a swaying back and forth between centralization and decentralization, between authority and deconstruction, between hierarchy and anarchy, between permanence and flexibility'. Nevertheless, he believes that capitalism has now swayed more towards the latter, postmodern, set of characteristics, and away from the former, modern, ones.

Economic change and postmodernity

The shift from modernity to postmodernity is characterized by a change to 'flexible accumulation'. Harvey is among those who claim that flexibility in business (often termed post-Fordism) has begun to replace Fordism (see pp. 713–17 for the debate on post-Fordism). He sees flexible accumulation as involving rapid changes in labour markets, products and patterns of consumption; more rapid technological change; increasing employment in the service sector; the reduction of trade union power; high unemployment; and reduced security for workers who are expected to be flexible enough to accommodate the ever-changing demands of their employers. Businesses can no longer rely upon regular and long-term profits and so have to constantly adapt to succeed. In terms of consumption, new products such as computer games and new services in the leisure industry have led to cultural changes. Capitalists have succeeded in encouraging rapid shifts in fashion (for example, in clothes and music) which allow profits to be continually renewed.

Cultural and social changes

These economic changes underlie the cultural, political and social changes that have been the focus of attention for some other writers. In particular, the penetration of capitalism into so many areas of leisure to encourage consumption has resulted in 'the ferment, instability, and fleeting qualities of a postmodern aesthetic that celebrates difference, ephemerality, spectacle, fashion and the commodification of cultural forms'. As mass production has become less profitable, flexible accumulation has led to capitalism exploiting smaller markets with more specialized tastes, thus encouraging cultural diversity.

Increasing geographical mobility and the development of large-scale tourism have led to an increased intermingling of the world's cultures. Faster and cheaper travel and the pervasiveness of mass communications, have, according to Harvey, affected the way people perceive space and time. Both have been compressed and he associates this with the speeding up of production and the use of techniques such as 'just in time' (see p. 714).

A sense of time and place has been weakened in postmodernity. For example, in major cities you can eat food from around the world – French croissants, Japanese sushi, American doughnuts, Chinese crispy fried duck – listen to world music from every continent, and buy 'Kenyan haricot beans, Californian celery and avocados, North African potatoes, Canadian apples and Chilean grapes' in supermarkets. Furthermore, 'the world's geographical complexity is nightly reduced to a series of images on a static television screen'.

Time gets confused as people can visit the 'Old World' at Disneyland, or dress up to attend a medieval banquet in a castle. Times, places and cultures get mixed together in close proximity. This becomes reflected in art, philosophy and social thought and is typified by 'ephemerality, collage, fragmentation'. Firm foundations for knowledge or beliefs seem undermined by this diversity and confusion, but, to Harvey, such foundations need not and should not be lost.

Time and space have also been compressed in the world financial system. Trading in stocks, shares, currencies and commodities continues 24 hours a day and, with computer technology, takes place almost instantaneously. What happens in Tokyo affects the markets in London, New York and elsewhere. All countries of the world are affected by the enormous debts owed by the Third World to the First. According to Harvey the world financial system has become so complex that it is almost impossible for national governments to understand, never mind control. (The relative powerlessness of national governments can be illustrated by the stock market crash in October 1987, and the turmoil in the money markets in 1992 which forced the British government to take the pound out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism.)

These developments, combined with a shift to flexible accumulation, encouraged political changes. They can be related to the increasing importance of image in politics. Despite the problems experienced by America under President Reagan, he was able to get re-elected as a 'tough but warm, avuncular and well-meaning person who had an abiding faith in the greatness and goodness of America'. Both Reagan and Thatcher caught the economic mood of the times by encouraging entrepreneurship, necessary in a period of flexible accumulation. Both stressed the limitations of government power and the need to trust the markets, though both were forced to intervene in the economy to deal with problems such as Third World debt. Both weakened trade union power, making it easier for capitalists to make a profit under the new conditions.

According to David Harvey, postmodernity has not just affected governments, it has also influenced the development of political and social movements. Class issues and workers' movements have become less important as sources of opposition to capitalism. Political opposition has become more fragmented into diverse movements representing particular groups or issues. There are 'religious, mystical,

social, communitarian, humanitarian' movements, which 'define themselves directly in terms of an antagonism to the power of money and of rationalized conceptions of space and time over daily life'. Issues relating to Women's Liberation, ethnic inequalities and poverty in the Third World have become increasingly important.

But Harvey also detects some evidence that these diverse social movements may be starting to come together. Some political leaders, such as Jesse Jackson in the USA, have urged the development of a 'Rainbow Coalition' of oppressed minorities. Harvey claims to have found signs of 'a new internationalism in the ecological sphere ... and in the fight against racism, apartheid, world hunger, uneven geographical development'. He cites Live Aid as one example, though admitting that it confined itself largely to image-making rather than political organization. Nevertheless he sees a possibility of launching a 'counter-attack' against some of the worst consequences of postmodernity.

Harvey is willing to acknowledge that very significant changes have taken place in contemporary societies. However, he rejects the belief of many postmodern theorists that the Enlightenment project should be abandoned. Modern societies can be systematically studied and understood, and ways of improving them and the lives of those who live in them can be found. Society is real and consists of more than language-games or simulacra.

Modern theories of society and the sociology of modernity

As well as David Harvey, there are numerous sociologists who believe that the basic principles of modern sociological theories remain valid. They believe that it is possible to analyse the social world rationally, to develop coherent theories of that social world, and to intervene to improve it. Such sociologists reject the claims of postmodernists that metanarratives are dangerous, that all knowledge is relative and that the Enlightenment project of improving society has reached the end of the road.

A good example of such a view is provided by the work of Kenan Malik (see pp. 281–2). Malik claims that racism is not a product of modernity, but a consequence of the social relations of capitalism. He believes that Enlightenment thinking provides a foundation for the belief that humans should be treated equally. He points out that the postmodernist's emphasis on plurality and diversity can be used as an excuse to support and justify inequality.

Throughout this book there are numerous examples of sociologists who continue to use a modern approach in analysing society, and who also continue to insist that it is possible to improve society. A few examples are: Gordon Marshall and his colleagues' work on class inequality (see pp. 88–9), Peter Townsend's work on poverty (see pp. 296–300), Sylvia Walby's theory of patriarchy (see pp. 150–6), and Jock Young's new left realist theories of crime (see pp. 391–9). Whatever the merits of the work of such sociologists, the types of approach used by them suggest that modern sociological theory and research are far from exhausted.

Anthony Giddens – high modernity and beyond

Anthony Giddens is undoubtedly one of the most influential sociologists who reject both the claims of postmodernism and the theory of postmodernity. Like the sociologists mentioned above, Giddens (1990) does not accept that all Enlightenment thinking must be abandoned, that metanarratives no longer have a place or that all knowledge is relative. Furthermore, unlike sociologists such as David Harvey, he also rejects the idea that Western societies have entered an era of postmodernity. Nevertheless, Giddens does believe that significant changes have taken place within modernity and he believes that postmodernity *might* develop in the future.

The central features of modernity

Giddens starts his analysis by contrasting modern and traditional societies. He argues that, compared to traditional societies, modern societies are characterized by a more rapid pace of change. Furthermore, the scope of the changes is much greater than in traditional society. Changes rapidly encompass virtually the whole of the globe and are not confined to geographically limited areas.

Giddens argues that a number of key features of modernity lead to the rapid pace and widespread scope of change:

1 There is a process of 'time–space distanciation'. This process involves the separation of time from space. In modernity, what time it is does not depend upon where you are. In pre-industrial societies time was not standardized across the

globe, and what time it was therefore depended on where you were. By the twentieth century all parts of the world used a standardized system of recording time. This allowed the development of railway, and later airline, timetables, which made it possible to coordinate the movement of goods and people across space, over time.

2 Time–space distanciation was important as a crucial disembedding mechanism. Giddens describes disembedding as 'the "lifting out" of social relations from local contexts of interaction' (Giddens, 1990). Disembedding allows people to relate to and interact with others who do not live in the local area. It reduces the importance of local contacts and starts to break down geographical constraints. Thus time–space distanciation was a disembedding mechanism partly because it made travel easier.

3 Another important disembedding mechanism was the development of symbolic tokens. By far the most important type of symbolic token is money. Money allows the interchange of goods and services between people who have never met each other. It allows these exchanges to take place over long distances without face-to-face bartering. The existence of credit allows the deferment of payments, reducing the obstacles that time limits previously imposed on conducting exchanges.

4 Another important disembedding mechanism is the development of expert systems. Giddens defines these as 'systems of technical accomplishment or professional expertise that organise large areas of the material and social environment in which we live today'. Examples of expert systems include engineering and medicine. Expert systems allow people living in modernity to carry out their day-to-day activities and to accomplish things without any knowledge of the technicalities of what they are doing. For example, motorists can drive around without any knowledge of how to build roads; patients can undergo heart surgery without knowing how it is carried out; and airline passengers can cross continents without having any knowledge of aeronautical engineering. Like other disembedding mechanisms, expert systems allow many aspects of social life to proceed without the need for personal relationships between those involved.

5 As a result of the changes discussed above, modernity results in the basis of trust changing. In pre-industrial societies you trusted somebody because you knew them, and/or because their local reputation suggested that they were trustworthy. With modernity you place your trust in the expert systems that train people and monitor and regulate their behaviour. For example, you do not have to know an airline pilot and the airline's mechanics personally before you will board a plane. You trust that the training of the pilot and the mechanics, the technology used in the plane and the procedures for servicing and flying the aircraft are sufficiently reliable for you to undertake the journey.

6 Along with disembedding mechanisms, a crucial feature of modernity is the development of greater reflexivity. Reflexivity refers to the 'reflexive monitoring of action': that is, the way in which humans think about and reflect upon what they are doing in order to consider acting differently in the future.

Humans have always been reflexive up to a point, but in pre-industrial societies the importance of tradition limited reflexivity. Humans would do some things simply because they were the traditional things to do. With modernity, tradition loses much of its importance and reflexivity becomes the norm. Giddens says, 'The reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character.' This produces constant change and a permanent state of uncertainty.

Giddens does not agree with postmodernists such as Lyotard that modernity produces metanarratives that are accepted as the absolute truth. Instead, according to Giddens, modernity undermines all certainty. All knowledge is constantly reviewed and is always likely to be revised. This is most obvious in the social sciences where there is constant theoretical dispute and frequent development of new theories. Indeed, Giddens believes that sociology has a central place in the reflexivity of modernity. He describes sociology as 'the most generalised type of reflection upon modern social life' (Giddens, 1991).

The existence of sociological knowledge reflects back upon society and helps to shape the very social life it describes. According to Giddens, sociological thinking becomes embedded in society, it shapes the way people see the world, and influences their decisions. For example, people considering whether to marry are almost certain to be aware of sociological knowledge about the existence of high divorce rates and arguments about the instability of the family as an institution. Whether they decide to marry or not, awareness of such issues is bound to have some effect on their thinking. If they do get married, this awareness is likely to have some influence on the way they conduct their marriage. This in turn may affect future divorce rates. Giddens therefore believes that '*Modernity is itself deeply and intrinsically sociological*' (Giddens, 1990).

7 To Giddens, modernity is globalizing. Disembedding and reflexivity allow social interaction to stretch across the globe, with the result that social life in particular localities is increasingly shaped by events taking place far away (see Chapter 9, pp. 630–1, for more details of Giddens's views on globalization).

The institutions of modernity

According to Giddens, modernity is based upon four key institutions. These are:

1 Capitalism. Giddens defines capitalism as 'capital accumulation in the context of competitive labour

and productive markets' (Giddens, 1990). He sees capitalism as 'intrinsically unstable and restless'. Capitalists are always seeking new markets and trying to develop new products in the pursuit of profit. This makes modernity rather unsettling for the individual and contributes to the process of globalization.

2 Industrialism. This involves 'the use of inanimate sources of material power in the production of goods, coupled to the central role of machinery in the production process' (Giddens, 1990). Industrialism produces a massive increase in the productivity of human labour.

3 Surveillance. This refers to 'the supervision of subject populations in the political sphere' (Giddens, 1991). In modernity the state devises a range of administrative systems to monitor the behaviour of populations so that people can be controlled (see the work of Foucault, discussed on pp. 635–9).

4 Military power. This concerns 'the control of the means of violence in the context of the industrialisation of war' (Giddens, 1990). From the First World War onwards, military technology allowed ever-greater destructive power to be used in warfare.

(For an illustration representing these views, see Figure 9.2, p. 646.)

Living in modernity

Modernity does not just consist of a number of institutions; it is also a lived experience for individuals. Giddens considers two sociological theories of the experience of modernity:

1 For Weber, modernity was largely experienced in terms of the '"steel-hard" cage of bureaucratic rationality' (Giddens, 1990). People were trapped in the logic of bureaucratic rationality, and had little freedom to express themselves.

Giddens rejects this view. He argues that 'Rather than tending inevitably towards rigidity, organisations produce arenas of autonomy and spontaneity – which are often less easy to achieve in smaller groups.'

2 For Marx, modernity was experienced as 'a monster'. It was characterized by the exploitation of the mass of the population who were alienated from their true humanity by the nature of capitalist work (see pp. 687–9). However, Marx did believe that the monster could be tamed with the advent of a communist society.

Giddens also rejects this view. He does not see modernity in such a negative light. As well as having some negative effects, it does open up new possibilities in people's lives which were not available in premodern societies.

Giddens develops an alternative image of modernity. He sees it as similar to a 'juggernaut – a runaway engine of enormous power which, collectively as human beings, we can drive to some extent but which also threatens to rush out of our control and which could rend itself asunder'.

It threatens to rush out of control because there are certain high consequence risks that characterize the most recent phase of modernity and that threaten to destroy human society. These risks are:

1 The 'growth of totalitarian power': this comes from the existence of systems of surveillance which make the close control of populations feasible.

2 The 'collapse of economic growth mechanisms': this stems from the unpredictability of capitalism with its booms and slumps, and the finite nature of certain resources (such as oil) on which capitalism currently depends.

3 'Nuclear conflict of large-scale warfare' remains a real possibility while a number of nations possess the means of mass destruction. Nobody can be sure that the principle of deterrence amongst major military powers will continue to work indefinitely.

4 'Ecological decay or disaster' is also a real possibility, with nuclear accidents (like that at Chernobyl), global warming, the depletion of the ozone layer, and other, as yet unforeseen, possibilities threatening human life on earth.

To Giddens, high modernity could end with disaster of one sort or another. The juggernaut might career out of control and come to an abrupt end in a crash. However, he sees this as only one possibility. Attempts to steer the juggernaut of high modernity *may* be successful and are still worthwhile.

Steering the juggernaut

Giddens rejects the view of postmodernists that planned intervention in society is neither desirable nor effective. He admits that there are problems with the Enlightenment view that modernity can be rationally planned, and that society can be perfected through such planning. Giddens argues that there is always an element of uncertainty and unpredictability in planning society. This stems from the reflexivity of social life, as discussed earlier. Sociological knowledge and theories can result in changes in the societies that they are trying to describe and analyse.

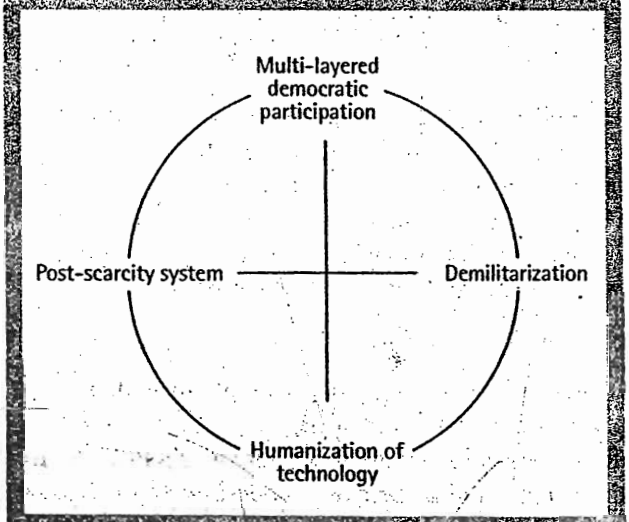
The nature of society can never be entirely pinned down, since the attempt to understand it can at the same time change it. Furthermore, societies are highly complex. Attempts to intervene to change society can have unintended consequences and end up doing more harm than good. However, none of this means that it is impossible to try to steer the juggernaut of modernity at least roughly in the direction in which you want to go. Knowledge about

society may be imperfect, but it is not useless. The effects of intervention in society may be somewhat unpredictable, but lack of intervention is even more likely to end in calamity. With care, there is a good chance that the high consequence risks that threaten modernity will be avoided, and that human society will progress further.

Modernity and 'post-modernity'

Unlike theorists of postmodernity, Giddens believes that we still live in an era of modernity or high modernity. However, he does not entirely reject the idea of 'post-modernity' (unlike most theorists, Giddens hyphenates this term). Instead of seeing postmodernity as something that has already been attained, he uses the term to describe a type of society that may come into existence in the future. According to Giddens, a 'post-modern' society will move beyond each of the four dominant institutional structures of modernity. The main institutions of a 'post-modern' social order are shown in Figure 15.1.

Figure 15.1 The contours of a 'post-modern' order



Source: A. Giddens (1990) The Consequences of Modernity, Polity Press, Cambridge, p. 164

The four transformations that would take place in the shift from modernity to 'post-modernity' are as follows:

1 Capitalism would be transformed into a post-scarcity system. Markets would continue to exist, but they would not produce the inequality typical of modernity because there would be an ample supply of goods for everybody. This would be achieved partly through economic growth, but also through people in the richer countries scaling down their aspirations. People will accept a lower standard of living because of 'development fatigue'. According to Giddens there is evidence that people in richer countries are becoming tired of the negative consequences of unlimited economic growth. They are unhappy with overcrowded roads, pollution and soaring house prices. People are coming to understand that there are ecological limits to how much economic growth the environment can stand. They are therefore becoming willing to accept that lower incomes might actually improve the *quality* of people's lives. Richer nations would have to accept the need to share some wealth with poorer nations if a post-scarcity system were to be achieved.

2 Societies based on surveillance would be replaced by societies in which there was multi-layered democratic participation. The development of techniques of surveillance helps to convince governments that the cooperation and support of populations are essential for the effective exercise of power. People increasingly demand the right to have a say in all aspects of their lives, at local, national and even global level. There are 'pressures towards democratic participation in the workplace, in local associations, in media organisations, and in transnational groupings of various sorts'.

3 In a postmodern society the dominance of military power would give way to demilitarization. Globalization and the accompanying increase in interdependence between nations are likely to mean that going to war makes little sense. Long-established borders between nations are increasingly accepted, and disputes over territory are likely to become infrequent. Furthermore, states will be keen to reduce the enormous costs of building up armed forces or fighting wars.

4 Finally, industrialism would be superseded by the humanization of technology. With the development of areas such as genetics and biotechnology, people are becoming increasingly aware of the need to exercise control over technology to prevent it having disastrous consequences. They are likely to become concerned over issues such as human cloning, transplanting animal organs into humans, and genetically modified crops. Such concerns would lead, in a 'post-modern' society, to strict limits being placed on the development and use of technology to prevent it causing environmental disaster or human tragedy.

(For more details of Giddens's theories see pp. 646–7 and 496–8.)

Conclusions

Giddens's vision of a 'post-modern' society is (as he admits) a rather idealistic one. It is hard, for example, to envisage richer countries readily sharing their wealth with poorer ones, or people in the richer countries accepting that their living standards will not grow in the future.

Giddens's general theory is rather abstract. It is backed up with occasional examples rather than the use of systematic evidence. However, it does provide

an alternative perspective to those of postmodernism and theories of postmodernity. It suggests that claims that we have entered postmodernity may, at best, be premature. More importantly, it suggests that sociological analysis remains possible and desirable. If the arguments of postmodernism were accepted, then all attempts to understand social structures and to shape the future development of society as a whole would be abandoned. Using Giddens's analogy, this would involve taking your hands off the steering wheel of the juggernaut, and trusting to fate that it will not crash.

Sociological knowledge may be imperfect, and attempts to shape society may not always succeed, but most sociologists still believe that these endeavours are worthwhile. More than that, it can be argued that the sociological imagination is more important than ever if we are to control the risks found in contemporary societies, and fulfil the potential for improving people's lives.

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$3 = 3$