

# Aquiring culture

## How do we define inequality?

### Defining inequality

#### Bullets

- Inequality is difficult to define because it is abstract and relative
- Inequality is a controversial topic in sociology
- People who experience inequality may have reduced quality of life as a result of that inequality.

#### Text

We are aware that British society is unequal. Some people have a great deal of money, influence and power whereas others do not. Taken as a whole, in British society there are entire social groups who seem to have access to better standards of living and material goods than others.

However, inequality is a difficult concept to measure in sociological terms because there are various dimensions of inequality. The famous German sociologist, Max Weber identified status, power and wealth as being elements of inequality. He recognised that inequality was not just a matter of having or not having money, but that other socially desirable characteristics were also not equally spread throughout society e.g. status.

Marxists and feminists claim that inequality matters very much. They say that society does not work well if people do not have equal access to wealth and power. On the other hand, functionalists suggest that not only is inequality inevitable for all society, it is actually a good and useful because it means that the most powerful people have an incentive to work hard to reach the top.

Inequality is a relative concept. To be unequal, some people must have more of whatever it is that is desirable or necessary and others must have less. Inequality is also an abstract concept in the sense that it is almost impossible to make a direct measurement of inequality. Nevertheless it does have a very real impact on the lives of those who experience inequality. In practical terms, those who experience inequality may feel oppressed and not part of the social system. This experience of being unable to participate in the social system is known as social exclusion and it is an important part of inequality debates.

#### Questions

- 1. What dimensions of inequality did Max Weber identify?
- 2. What differences do you notice between the functionalist and Marxist perspectives on inequality?
- 3. Is inequality always a bad thing for society?

#### Keywords

1. Abstract - cannot be measured
2. Relative concept - something that can only be understood in terms of something else
3. Social exclusion - not having access to the same quality of life as others

# Aquiring culture

## 4. Oppression - sense of injustice

### How is inequality related to wealth in Britain?

#### Bullets

- We do not know exactly how much the very wealthy own as they employ people to help them avoid taxation
- Some people in UK have very high earnings and significant wealth
- Many people in UK earn very low wages, and sometimes may not even have their legal entitlement to pay

#### Text

Wealth refers to the amount of property that a person owns. This can be in the form of objects that can be sold for money, or in the form of savings, investments or pensions. Income from wages or salaries is not necessarily the same as wealth because income can stop at any point for example, by being made redundant. All the economic evidence suggests that the UK is an unequal society and that wealth inequality is increasing. Research by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) suggests that 23 per cent of wealth is owned by 1 per cent of the population. The wealthiest 10 per cent own more than half the wealth in the UK; the wealthiest 50 per cent own 94 per cent of wealth. Statistics show that the wealthy have got wealthier over the last ten years. In fact, this is probably an underestimate of how wealthy some people are, as wealth can be hidden by tax lawyers in off-shore investments as a way of avoiding paying taxes.

In 2004, nearly 200 men in the UK were earning more than £1,000,000 each year in salary. This figure may well have gone up. The average Chief Executive earns more than £600,000 each year in salary. These people may well have bonuses added to their salaries and be earning significantly more than their stated pay. Since the 1990s, this represents an increase of pay to the wealthy of over three times the rate of inflation. Three-quarters of the total increase in incomes over the last decade has gone to those with above-average incomes and a third has gone to those in the richest tenth.

In contrast in 2008, people living on minimum wages were surviving on £5.73 an hour if they are aged over 22 years and £4.77 an hour if they were aged between 18 and 21. Those aged under 18, if not in school, could earn £3.53 an hour. There are groups of people who are excluded from minimum wages for a variety of reasons, for example apprentices do not receive minimum wages. Around 1,000,000 people in the UK earn the minimum wage. If employers do not pay the minimum wage, they are not punished if caught but simply required to pay back what they owe to their workers. TUC Wales has been campaigning for the law to be changed. Tactics that have been used by employers to avoid minimum wages have included making illegal deductions from pay, failing to ensure that employees' income tax and national insurance contributions are paid, denying workers leave and holiday pay. Other employers have insisted that workers put in illegally long hours, and exploiting migrant workers who are not aware of UK laws regarding minimum wages.

#### Questions

- 1. How is wealth defined?
- 2. What trends in wealth inequality are apparent in the UK?
- 3. What is the minimum wage?
- 4. How do employers avoid paying minimum wage?
- 5. Is a minimum wage good for society?

# Aquiring culture

## Keywords

1. Wealth - Property that is owned
2. Income - money that comes into a household
3. Minimum wage - the lowest legal wage an employer can pay
4. Exploiting - taking advantage of someone

## What economic measures of inequality are used?

### Bullets

- Inequality can be measured by the Gini Coefficient or Gini Index. This gives a numerical score for inequality.
- The lower the Gini Coefficient, the more equal a society.
- Britain is still increasing in inequality, but less than during the 1990s.

### Text

Inequality within a society is usually measured using a formula known as the Gini Index or the Gini Coefficient. It was suggested by the Italian statistician, Corrado Gini in 1912. This calculates the degree of inequality in the distribution of wealth within a society. A score of 100 indicates perfect inequality; zero indicates perfect equality.

Using this measure, the UK is the least 'equal' society in the European Union. In global terms, the UK (34) has greater equality of income distribution than the USA (45) but less than Switzerland. The country with the greatest level of inequality is Namibia (70), while Belarus has the lowest (21.7). Only six of the 27 EU countries have a higher poverty rate than the UK .

The reasons for increased income inequality in Britain are probably related to inequalities of pay and very limited improvements in benefits for the poorest people. Factors that have affected inequality have been the increasing number of dual earner families compared to unemployed families. The largest growth in income inequality arose during the 1990s under Thatcherite (New Right) policies which were designed to reduce tax burdens on the richest people in society.

### Questions

- 1. Why is Britain an unequal society?
- 2. What moral reasons are there for studying inequality?
- 3. What social reasons are there for studying inequality?

## Keywords

1. Gini Index - a way of placing a numerical value on inequality
2. Disposable income - money that is available after basic debts have been paid

## What is the link between poverty and inequality?

### Bullets

# Aquiring culture

- The number of people who are poor depends on the definition of poverty used.
- Absolute poverty is when you cannot afford basics
- Relative poverty is when you cannot afford what other people around you think is necessary for a decent standard of living
- The Government definition of poverty is when you have an income that is 60% or less of the average family income.

## Text

Poverty is a contested concept. There is more than one way to define poverty and the numbers of people who are said to be poor entirely depend on the definition that is used.

Seebom Rowntree, one of the earliest researchers into poverty used a definition that is now known as absolute poverty. He calculated a figure that was the absolute minimum for basic survival, which even by the standards of his time was very strict. Anyone who lived in a household that could not afford this basic minimum was said to be poor. Using such a basic definition means that very few people in modern Britain are poor. Yet, this is clearly untrue; there are many people who cannot afford an acceptable standard of living.

Peter Townsend and more recent sociologists use a notion that is known as relative poverty. They suggest that poverty is when you cannot afford what others around you deem to be necessary. By this measure of poverty, there are many poor people in Britain. Between 1983 and 1990, there were changes in what the public considered to be a necessity. As standards of living rose, so did the numbers of people considering various items such as a fridge or a telephone to be a necessity. Rises in the numbers considering items to be a necessity rose for all social classes between those two years, with the exception of cigarettes which the very deprived were more likely than all other social classes to consider a necessity.

The UK government uses a numerical measure of poverty. Oxfam quotes government statistics that suggest that around 20% of people in Britain are poor and do not have what others deem essential. This is based on 60% or less of the average income after housing costs. In 2005/6, the 60% threshold was worth: £108 per week for single adult with no dependent children; £186 per week for a couple with no dependent children; £223 per week for a single adult with two dependent children; £301 per week for a couple with two dependent children. Using this measure The 2004/5 Family Resources Survey, published by the Department for Work and Pension, reports that: 60% of people on low incomes say they are unable to make savings of £10 a month; 10% cannot afford two pairs of all-weather shoes for each adult in the family; 30% cannot afford household contents insurance; and nearly 30% are unable to have friends or family round for a meal once a month. In 2006/07, around 13 million people in the UK were living in households below this low-income threshold. This is around a fifth (22%) of the population. The 13 million figure is an increase of a million compared with two years previously.

One of the most notable features of poverty in the UK is that it occurs at the same time as extreme wealth. This has a negative effect on the poor who live in a culture that values people by what they can buy. They are bombarded with adverts urging them to spend money and yet they cannot afford to spend money on basic items. Research shows that poor countries where people are more equal score better on quality of life surveys than rich but unequal countries.

## Questions

1. Which definition of poverty is easiest to apply in research?



# Aquiring culture

- 2. Which definition of poverty seems most realistic?

## Keywords

1. Absolute poverty - when you cannot afford basics
2. Relative poverty - when you cannot afford what other people around you think is necessary for a decent standard of living
3. Government definitions of poverty - when you have an income that is 60% or less of the average family income

## What is social exclusion?

### Bullets

- Social exclusion is more than poverty, it also includes aspects of people's lives such as access to good and services
- Whole groups of people are vulnerable to exclusion: low earners, benefit dependent people, the elderly and disabled, women and ethnic minorities.
- Poor educational success is an element in social exclusion.

### Text

Rather than talk about poverty, the UK government is talking in terms of social exclusion. This term is not yet fully explained and there are various definitions that are used, but generally it refers to the extent to which some groups of people are not fully part of the whole of society. People who are poor do not just experience inequality of wealth and access to the things that money can buy, they become powerless over the important decisions in their lives. The government has dedicated itself to tackling social exclusion, but it has had mixed success. Many commentators argue that the government should be tackling issues of inequality or poverty.

Certain groups are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion and poverty. These groups are members of some ethnic minorities, the elderly and disabled, women and people who live in poorer areas of Britain. Exclusion is linked therefore to social class because those people who rely on benefits are likely to be excluded.

The scale of social exclusion in the UK is unknown, possibly because there is no single measurable definition of exclusion in use, however, charities have done research. Age Concern suggests that to be fully part of British society, people need access to good income, good health services, a pleasant neighbourhood with low crime rates, access to transport, local services and facilities for a social network, opportunities for culture and education, good housing and access to consumer goods that most people expect. Their research suggests that probably 1.2 million people over 50 face serious social exclusion, and 3.4 million older people live in relative poverty. 1.3 million people over 65 have clinical depression and 2.2 million households with a member over 60 live in unfit housing. In addition, 2.5 million people over 50 have little social or family contact.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has done enormous amounts of work in this area. They suggest that social exclusion has a number of dimensions that need to be recognised: poverty, education, access to work and health services, and an acceptable community life. What is the current position in Britain? Actual poverty seems to be falling using government measures as the minimum wage operates to save people from falling below 60% of the average income. Nevertheless a great many people live at risk of poverty as their earnings are not much above that figure either. Children are vulnerable because

# Aquiring culture

many live in single parent households. There is a great deal of low pay poverty where only one person works and that wage is at or near the legal minimum wage. People in their late 20s with no qualifications run an 18 per cent risk of unemployment, compared with a 5 per cent average. Three-quarters of 16-year-olds from low-income families failed to get five 'good' passes at grades A to C, which was double the rate for other students.

Babies born to working class mothers are generally more likely to be an unhealthy birth weight and more likely to die in infancy. Heart disease and lung cancers are more common among working class people and their life expectancy is shorter than for middle class people. Unemployed people are three times as likely as average to become victims of violent crime and lone parents are twice as likely as average to be burgled.

## Questions

- 1. Why is social exclusion difficult to define?
- 2. What is the relationship between exclusion and poverty?
- 3. Can social exclusion be tackled successfully by a government?

## Keywords

1. Social exclusion - people do not have the same access to goods and services as others

## What are the dimensions of inequality in Britain today?

### Who is poor and unequal?

#### Bullets

- Certain people are more vulnerable to poverty than others
- People who are vulnerable to long term poverty are generally working class, members of ethnic minorities and those who are dependent on benefits to survive.
- There are various explanations for why poverty exists in our society.

#### Text

The people who experience inequality in our society are those who are vulnerable through poverty, poor education, low paid work, reliance on benefits and those living in poor areas. These people tend to be members of some ethnic minorities, people living in post industrial areas, women, children and the elderly and disabled.

Generally, people in the UK are very much better off than they were even 40 years ago on a whole range of measures. Their homes are of a better standard and they have access to material goods and possessions that did not exist previously. Average household incomes have improved but the benefit of this improved wealth is not equal through the population. There are still many people who live in inadequate and unpleasant conditions and who have to do without basic necessities.

Robert Walker (1998) identified three types of poverty that people in UK could

# Aquiring culture

experience. Transient poverty is when people experience poverty for a short time in their life cycle. Students can expect to be poor, but after graduation, they will have access to high paid work. Some people drift in and out of poverty throughout their lives, perhaps because they do not have secure jobs or work on short contracts. This is known as recurrent poverty. Permanent or persistent poverty is when people are always poor. These people probably rely on benefits all through their lives because they are disabled or otherwise unable to obtain work.

We also know that poverty is generally a working class experience. People who are poor tend to be those who have few skills and who come from poor areas and poor families. Max Weber, one of the earliest and most influential sociologists points out that this is because working class people have few skills that they can offer in the job market and they cannot demand high wages for their time. In contrast, Karl Marx lays the blame for poverty on capitalism. More recent, New Right theorists blame the welfare state for poverty, claiming that because we have an over generous welfare state and benefits, people have no incentive to work.

## Questions

- 1. Who is vulnerable to poverty?
- 2. What types of poverty did Walker identify?
- 3. Why are working class people more vulnerable to poverty than those from wealthier backgrounds?

## Keywords

1. Material goods - possessions
2. Transient poverty - short term poverty
3. Recurrent poverty - people drift in and out of poverty
4. Vulnerable - at risk of harm from something
5. Welfare state - institutions in the state that support people: health, benefits, pensions education
6. Persistent poverty - this is when people are unable to escape poverty

## Why is childhood poverty a problem?

### Bullets

- The British government has pledged to end child poverty by 2020
- It has had some success in ending poverty for some people
- There are still huge numbers of children experiencing poverty in the UK
- Wales has the highest proportion of poor children of the countries that make up the UK
- The UK is one of the worst performing countries in the EU in terms of ending child poverty.

### Text

Governments set themselves targets against which they can be judged to be a success by those who elect them. One of the earliest aims of the Labour Government of 1997 was to end child poverty in the UK by the year 2020. In 1999, Tony Blair, the then Prime Minister made a widely reported speech in which he said the end of child poverty was at the heart of government policy. However, in 2008, it is understood by government that child

# Aquiring culture

poverty is still a major problem and it is estimated that 3.6 million children live in poverty. The children who are most vulnerable to poverty are those whose parents are disabled or those who are themselves disabled.

It is estimated that one quarter of all children live in poverty, but that the figure in Wales is even higher. One third of Welsh children live in poverty. Partly this is because average wages in some parts of Wales are very much lower than in other parts of the UK. The JRF report that 17% of children in Wales still live in workless households. They say that children growing up in this situation are likely to be doubly disadvantaged because of their probable low standard of living and because they may come to regard this as a normal way of life.

To summarise, poor children live in low paid households, lone parent households, and unemployed households. They have long term sick/disabled parents. There is an association between large families and poverty so, demographically, there are more children in no-earner households than in working households. In addition, a third of all children live in lone parent households where a single wage or no wage means they experience poverty.

The impact of childhood poverty on a person's life course can be devastating, including, as it does low educational attainment, poor nutrition, poor health, limited growth and obesity. However, it has been discovered by research and reported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation that parents from all backgrounds spend a similar amount on their children. Children who come from poor families often have a larger proportion of family resources spent on them so parents will do without for their children.

According to the Child Poverty Action Group, the UK has one of the worst records for child poverty in the EU, equal in terms of performance with Lithuania, Spain and Italy. Germany and France have far lower percentages of children in poverty with just over 10% respectively in each country. It places the blame for child poverty on low benefit levels and lack of support for the very poorest people.

## Questions

- 1. Why is childhood poverty a problem for society?
- 2. Why are children in Wales vulnerable to poverty?
- 3. Which children are most vulnerable to poverty?
- 4. Is it the role of government to end child poverty?

## Keywords

1. Demography - to do with the population

## What is the link between old age and poverty?

### Bullets

- Old people are vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion.
- Many elderly people rely on state benefits. These benefits are set at very low levels.
- Elderly people experience ill health and this may affect their quality of life.
- Social exclusion includes ageism, poor housing, poor facilities and fear of crime

# Aquiring culture

## Text

The average age of the population of the UK is rising as life expectancy increases. There are more old and very old people in the UK than ever before. Over 11 million people in the UK are over state pension age, and 615,000 of those live in Wales (2008). These numbers are expected to grow over the next few years, so that by 2031, 15,000,000 people will be over pensionable age.

State retirement pensions are known to be very low compared to average incomes. In 2008 the full Basic State Pension was £90.70 a week for a single pensioner and £145.05 for a couple based on the husband's contributions. From April 2008 the Pension Credit guaranteed a minimum income of £124.05 for a single person and £189.35 for a couple. However, only around a third of women reaching State Pension Age in 2005 were entitled to a full basic pension, compared to 85% of men. In 2006, 47% of men aged 18 to 59, and 38% of women, were contributing to a private pension. One-third of adults have never contributed to a private pension.

Those with good occupational pensions may live well, but for the majority of people retirement can mean that they are at risk of poverty. The elderly old (those over 80) are particularly vulnerable as they have increasing care costs and often survive on fixed incomes. Moreover, it is believed that many of the elderly are unaware of their benefit rights or fear surviving on charity, so they do not claim all that they are entitled to from the welfare state. It is estimated that nearly half of all pensioners do not claim Council Tax Benefit, for example.

People in their early retirement are likely to have limiting illnesses or conditions, but as people get older their chances increase so that 70% of people over 75 have a health condition or disability that affects their independence and ability to support themselves independently. Older people are also vulnerable to mental health conditions: depression and dementia are more likely to occur among the old. 25% of people over 65 have some symptoms of depression and 20% of people over 80 have some symptoms of dementia. 30% of people admitted to hospital over the age of 65 have signs of malnourishment. Many older people are in need of care and support. However, the old are not just receivers of social benefit. They support society. In 2001, 946,974 people aged 65 and over in England and Wales provided unpaid care for dependents. Over 11% of people aged 65 and over are still in employment and paying tax.

Older people are not just vulnerable to poverty. They are also likely to fit a pattern that can be described as social exclusion. According to Age Concern, 1.1 million older people in England experience severe 'multiple exclusion'. Ageism is the most commonly experienced form of discrimination, with 23% of adults reporting experiences of prejudice. For example, research into age discrimination in motor and travel insurance found that one in ten people aged 75 and over had been refused motor insurance and one in five had been refused travel insurance. Fear of crime, poor housing and poor access to transport are significant features of social exclusion among the elderly.

## Questions

- 1. Suggest reasons why the number of older people in the British population is rising.
- 2. Why are older people vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion?
- 3. How do older people benefit society?

## Keywords

1. Pensionable age - over 65
2. Elderly old - people over 80



# Aquiring culture

3. Ageism - differential treatment on the basis of age (discrimination)
4. Dementia - loss of memory and mental function, often due to age-related conditions

## Why are the disabled vulnerable to poverty?

### Bullets

- Disability is a term that covers a number of physical and mental conditions
- Disability can be a matter of social conditions as well; the disabled experience discrimination and prejudice.
- Public buildings and public spaces are not adapted to the needs of the disabled.

### Text

Disability is a blanket term that covers a number of conditions that make some people less able to function in society than others. Terms that are commonly used are impairment (this refers to a loss of function), disability (this is a restriction of activity) and handicap (this is a physical or mental disadvantage). People who experience disability are limited by the response of others to disability and their own physical or mental limitations. The inability to walk unaided is a problem in itself. However for the person who uses a wheelchair for mobility, the real handicap may well be lack of access to public toilets, transport, shops and public spaces. It is this that may multiply the problems experienced by the individual.

Disabled people are more than twice as likely to live in poverty as non-disabled people. More than one third of children who live with a disabled parent are in poverty. The disabled are significantly more likely to be unemployed than others. 50% of disabled people are unemployed, compared to around 20% of non-disabled people. Disabled people are more likely to work in low skill, low paid jobs. In addition, disability itself can bring additional costs such as special aids or employing support and care workers. So not only are disabled people on low incomes, their relative cost of living is much higher than for non-disabled people. JRF research suggests that around 800,000 disabled people aged 25 to retirement age are unemployed but would take work if they could get it. This is a far higher figure than those who are claiming benefits for unemployment.

Many disabled people find themselves trapped in poverty and social exclusion. They are dependent on benefits that are complex to claim. Again, the JRF suggest that three-quarters of all working-age people who receive out-of-work benefits for two years or more are sick or disabled. The number of sick and disabled people in this position has been rising slowly over the last decade and now stands at 2.1 million. Even benefits officers do not understand the system and there are regular medical tests for the disabled, even of those who have incurable conditions such as missing limbs or mental handicap, to ensure that they are unfit to work. This leaves people with little or no chance of escaping poverty other than through charity, or support from family and friends. Much housing is not fully adapted so that a quarter of those who are registered as disabled live in homes that are not suited to their needs. Disabled children are far more likely to leave school without qualifications than their able bodied peers. The disabled are vulnerable to crime and exploitation. They experience prejudice and misunderstanding. For any given level of qualification, a disabled person is between two and three times as likely as a non-disabled person to be out of work.

# Aquiring culture

It is also worth noting that poverty itself can lead to disability; there is an increased chance of disabling illness for those who have poor living conditions. The JRF point out that poverty has been identified as having a negative impact on mental and physical health. Stress, depression, exhaustion, low self-esteem and poor nutrition are known consequences of poverty. Poverty-related stress has been identified as having a significant impact on health, so poverty itself can be a cause of ill-health. Some 13 per cent of adults aged 25 to retirement age are judged to be at risk of developing a mental illness. Among the poorest fifth of the population, however, the proportion, at around 25 per cent, is twice the rate for people on average incomes.

## Questions

- 1. What is disability?
- 2. Why are people disabled people vulnerable to poverty?

## Keywords

1. Disability - an impairment that affects a person's ability to function in society.

## What is the link between gender and poverty?

### Bullets

- There is a link between gender and poverty. Much female poverty is hidden in official statistics.
- Causes of female poverty are: low earnings, poor qualifications, caring and domestic work, limited pension contributions, longevity into old age, single parenthood, high costs of childcare.

### Text

A number of commentators point out that there is a strong link between gender and poverty. Women are the poor in British society and 59% of those in poverty are women. The Equal Opportunities Commission show women are 14% more likely than men to live in households. Much of women's poverty is hidden. In poor households, women often deny themselves basics such as food in order to protect their families from the consequences of poverty.

Glendinning and Millar point out the fact that women may be the partners of poor men and sometimes ignored as a category in their own right. Official statistics measure income by household, this hides the fact that women generally have a lower income and fewer assets than men, and may not be given an equal share of the income if the man is the main earner. For example, men can create poverty even in well paid households by controlling income and commanding disproportionate shares of the family's resources. We do not know how many women experience poverty through male control of family income.

Government statistics show that almost half of all women have total individual incomes of less than £100 a week, compared with less than a fifth of men. Taking time out of work to bring up children, the high number of women in part-time or low paid work and the gap between women's and men's average pay all contribute to women's poverty.

There are many reasons for this, among them that women in single person and single

# Aquiring culture

family households are particularly likely to be poor. Older, single women have a 24% chance of living in poverty. Women live longer than men on average. There are far more female than male centenarians (7 women for every man in mid-2007). Poverty is an issue for elderly women because often they have not paid into pension schemes or do not qualify for full state pensions. Women make up 70% of low paid and part time workers, so they earn less throughout their lives. More than one fifth of women, 22%, have a persistent low income, compared to 14% of men. Living in persistent poverty denies women a chance to save money for future need.

Over half (53%) of all lone parent households are poor. The majority of single parents are female so this may lead to poverty. Men are sometimes reluctant to pay first partners and children when supporting a second family. Single parents may not be able to work because they do not earn enough to pay for expensive childcare. Many lone parents are poorly qualified or have a skills gap caused by parenting.

Women's domestic duties may lead to poverty as women are traditionally carers. They are expected to care for elderly or disabled relatives. They may therefore not be able to focus on careers. They may be required to live on benefits, and may lose income when the person cared for dies. Women are more likely to experience persistent poverty.

## Questions

- 1. Why are women vulnerable to poverty?
- 2. How could the government tackle female poverty?

## Keywords

1. Skills gap - women have a limited chance update their employment skills due to taking time out of work for caring.
2. Centenarian - person aged 100 or over.

## What is the link between poverty and ethnicity?

### Bullets

- Some ethnic groups are more at risk of poverty and inequality than others.
- Recent immigrants experience exploitation and deprivation.
- Many immigrants are underemployed.
- Some ethnic groups experience aggregation of disadvantage so that ethnicity, combined with other factors such as large families or single parenthood increase their risk of poverty and exclusion.

### Text

Many ethnic groups experience poverty but not all ethnic groups are equally vulnerable to poverty or social exclusion. The JRF offer evidence that there are significant differences in poverty rates related to ethnicity. The risks of poverty are highest for Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and Black Africans, but are also above average for Caribbean, Indian and Chinese people. Muslims face much higher poverty risks than other religious groups. Poverty for the Bangladeshi groups appeared to be more severe and long-lasting than that in other groups. Pakistanis were nearly as poor as Bangladeshis on many counts, but there were differences in degree. Pakistanis seemed to have different patterns of material

# Aquiring culture

deprivation. For example, one study found that Bangladeshi children were highly likely to be deprived, but Pakistani children were not. Instead, Black African children were the second most deprived group.

There is well documented exploitation of some recent immigrant groups who are unaware of their employment rights and recent legislation. They find jobs that are poorly paid and insecure. Research evidence shows that low income from employment was a central issue in causing poverty, impacting on whole families. Often immigrant populations are significantly over-qualified for the jobs that they undertake. Black Africans often have very high rates of higher education qualifications, but also suffer from high rates of unemployment and low income work. In addition benefits are not available to all immigrants equally.

Some groups of the poor are affected by more than one factor that contributes to poverty. This is known as an aggregate of disadvantage. Rates of sickness and disability are much higher among Bangladeshi households. Sick and disabled people have low employment rates and they can also reduce their carers' employment options. Another example is that lone parent families are much more prevalent among Black Africans and Black Caribbeans. Lone parent households are known to have higher risks of poverty due to the pressures of combining work and paying for child care for a single parent. While mothers in lone parent Black Caribbean households are more likely to be in employment than those in other households, this does not necessarily prevent poverty and could impact on other aspects of welfare such as social contact. Equally, Bangladeshi families tend to be large, so that even if the male partner is earning a relatively good income, high household expenditure and a non-working wife could cause poverty.

## Questions

- 1. Which ethnic groups are most at risk of deprivation and poverty?
- 2. Suggest reasons why some ethnic groups are at risk of poverty.

## Keywords

1. Aggregate of disadvantage - more than one predisposition to poverty may affect people
2. Material deprivation - lack of possessions
3. Legislation - laws and legal rights

## Is there a link between poverty and locality?

### Bullets

- The South East of England and the London area are generally much wealthier than other parts of Britain.
- There are areas of extreme poverty in the South East.
- Generally, poverty is found in former industrial areas and rural areas.
- Poverty has a huge impact on the life chances of people living in some areas of the UK

### Text

Some areas of Britain are considerably wealthier than others. There is more wealth in the South East and the London area than in the areas of Britain that are relatively far away

# Aquiring culture

from London. This phenomenon is known as the North South divide. It is related to employment opportunities, so there is more work available in the South East of England than in the North and West of England, in Scotland and in Wales. The financial sector in London-based has created more than 1.7m jobs in the 10-year period, between 1991 and 2001. At the same time, 500,000 skilled trade jobs were lost in other parts of the country, mainly from formerly industrialised areas and the former coalfields of the UK. Many Northern cities lost population to London in the same period of time.

Not all areas of the South East are equally wealthy, inner city areas of London experience multiple deprivation and poverty. The UK's poorest boroughs - Hackney and Tower Hamlets are in London and they have become almost 10% poorer since 1991. Generally however, Southerners in England have a far better standard of living, are better educated and earn more than people elsewhere in the UK. There is a far better ratio of doctors to the general population, and health standards are generally higher. Life expectancy is higher the closer one lives to London. People living in northern England are more likely than their southern neighbours to smoke and drink to excess. Their mental health is poorer.

Within Wales, there is another North South divide, that between the richer industrial towns of Cardiff, Newport and Swansea and the rural and former industrial areas to the north. The Valleys have not benefitted from the wealth generated by Cardiff and still experience some of the highest rates of poverty in the UK. In addition, a study by Tim Doran in the British Medical Journal, based on Census 2001 data found that Wales had very high rates of poor health compared with other parts of the UK for every social class. Even for people in the same social class, their risks of poor health varied greatly depending on where they lived. Women in class 1 in Wales had worse health than women in class 4 in the South West.

## Questions

- 1. Which areas of the UK are most likely to experience poverty?
- 2. Suggest reasons why the South East and London areas have wealth.
- 3. Why are some areas of London extremely poor?
- 4. Does poverty matter?

## Keywords

1. North South Divide - differences in wealth between the South East of England and the rest of the UK

## Is it possible to escape poverty in the UK?

### Bullets

- It is more difficult for people to move up and down the social structure now than it was in the 1960s in the UK
- Wealthy people take advantage of the education system to ensure their children have privilege and access to the best jobs
- People who are poor find it difficult to escape poverty and pass on poverty to their children.



# Aquiring culture

## Text

Moving up or down the social system is known as social mobility. In theory, the UK is a socially mobile or an open system, because there are few formal barriers to people changing their class, unlike in some countries where a change in social class is nearly impossible. In reality, social mobility has fallen in the UK over the past 40 years and it is more difficult for a child from a poor background to get a high paid job than it was in the 1950s according to a 2002 study from the London School of Economics.

There is a belief that educational opportunities have benefitted all children, but in reality this is not so. Children from better off homes are more likely to go to University and more likely to go to Russell group (famous) Universities than children from poorer families. The government is attempting to improve opportunities and solve problems of inequality by encouraging 50% of all young people from all backgrounds to attend university. The LSE's Centre for Economic Performance looked at the outcomes for children born in 1958 and 1970 - the generations that gained from the big expansion in higher education in the 1970s and the 1980s. The study found that the incomes achieved by those born in 1970 were determined to a significantly higher extent by the income of their parents than was the case for those born in 1958. Over the same period, income inequality widened dramatically so that the proportion of children living below the poverty line at age 16 rose from 6% to 10% - a proportion that rose further in the 1980s.

It is very difficult to escape from poverty and deprivation and two concepts are used to explain why this is so. The cycle of deprivation is a term used to describe a situation whereby poverty is passed on through the generations, with children born to poor parents having poor school records, poor quality of work and having their own children at a young age who also grow up to be poor. The poverty trap is used to describe situations whereby people who become poor find it very difficult to escape their poverty for reasons that are not necessarily of their own making. Employers may be unwilling to take them on because of ill-health and poor work records. Their children go to the worst schools and find it difficult to attend university. People treat them with disrespect because of the area in which they live. Even something as basic as lack of car ownership can have an impact on health. Government statistics show that 11% of households without a car have difficulty seeing their GP whereas only 4% who have access to a car complain they cannot get to see their doctor easily.

## Questions

- 1. Why is education a route out of poverty?
- 2. Why is it difficult to escape from poverty if your family is poor?

## Keywords

1. Social mobility - movement through the class system
2. Open society - society where it is possible to move up or down the social system
3. Cycle of deprivation - poverty is passed on through the generations
4. Poverty Trap - Poor people cannot escape from their situation easily and remain poor

## Functionalist theories of inequality

### What is the functionalist view of society?

#### Bullets

# Aquiring culture

- Functionalists have a consensus view of society
- They believe that people in society work together for the common good of all, this is known as the organic analogy.
- Everything that happens in society must have a basic reasoning underlying it that favours society.

## Text

Many early writers and philosophers viewed society as being like an animal or human body. They shared the view that all the separate parts of the body worked together to create something whole. They claimed that everybody works together for the common good of us all, as do body parts for the organism. They suggest that we cannot survive alone, but need the other parts of society to support us.

This shared view is known as consensus theory because it is based on social agreement.

The first Professor of Sociology was Emile Durkheim. Durkheim lived in France and died in 1917. He argued strongly for the organic analogy because he said we share values and norms. Durkheim claimed that "for a whole is not identical with the sum of its parts, and its properties differ from those of its component parts[....] society is not the mere sum of individuals. Rather, the system formed by their association represents a specific reality which has its own characteristics" Translated into simple language, different people in different jobs equate in social terms to the differing organisms of the body. Society itself is more than the sum of the people who go to make up that society. The supporting evidence is that things which happen to society will affect you regardless of your actions or opinions (e.g. war). Society lives on when individuals within it die.

Certain characteristics are said to be typical of living beings. Organic analogists said that they also correspond to states in society: reproduction (through socialisation), adaptation (through challenges to rules) and equilibrium (resistance to change). There are social facts: things that exist beyond the people who make them - e.g. fashion. Society is therefore more important than individuals who create it.

Functionalism is a popular theory of society in the USA where many sociologists are functionalists. They say that society is based on shared norms and values. They say that the job of the sociologist is to look at how parts of society work together for the good of the whole society. Social cohesion (sticking together like glue) is maintained through shared rituals and activities, for example state events such as Coronations and funerals, shared consciousness such as reading the same newspapers and watching the same TV programmes and major events such as sporting occasions which make people feel united with each other.

## Questions

- 1. Do all people in a society share norms and values?
- 2. According to functionalists, do we have free will?
- 3. How do functionalists account for those who reject society such as terrorists?
- 4. Do people in society really share values, morals and norms?

## Keywords

1. Organic analogy - society is like a biological organism.
2. Consensus - agreement

# Aquiring culture

## How do functionalists explain inequality?

### Bullets

- All societies are unequal. Inequality of whole groups in the social structure is known as stratification.
- Functionalists believe stratification is good for society.
- The best people get the best jobs because they are more talented and work harder.
- Poor people are poor because they do not work hard enough for the best positions.

### Text

The term social inequality describes a condition in which members of a society have different amounts of wealth, prestige, or power. Some degree of social inequality is found in every society. When a system of social inequality is based on a hierarchy of groups, sociologists refer to it as stratification: a structured ranking of entire groups of people that perpetuates unequal economic rewards and power in a society. Ascribed status is a social position assigned to a person without regard for that person's characteristics, for example, being a Queen is an ascribed status, as is being a female. By contrast, achieved status is a social position attained by a person largely through his or her own effort. This can be positive or negative so a person can be an ex-prisoner or a judge. These are achieved status.

Functionalists claim that inequality and stratification is functional for society and a source of social order. Davis and Moore proposed this theory in 1945. It was heavily criticised, particularly in the 1970s for being an extremely conservative theory by Tumin, who remains their foremost critic.

For Davis and Moore Stratification is a system of status positions and jobs. The key point of the theory is that Stratification is universal and necessary. This is argued because all society is Stratified. They argue that society is therefore a functional necessity. The theory focuses on the following:

How do people get to their proper positions?

How do we motivate people to fill these positions?

Once in position, how do you get people to do what is required?

Davis and Moore went on to claim that society needs to fill the most important and difficult jobs with the most talented and hardworking people. If people were all paid the same regardless of their work, they would take the easiest jobs and do as little training as possible. There would be no incentive to work hard and do difficult educational courses. Society ensures that the most pay and the best working conditions go to those who are prepared to put the time and effort into working hard for them. The high rewards act as motivation for the years of work and preparation required for the difficult and responsible careers that some people choose.

There have been many critics of the viewpoint, for example Kendall et al. point out that the functionalist approach generally ignores questions of structural inequality because it does not consider the social factors such as racial discrimination, lack of job opportunities, and the inadequate funding of many schools that may contribute to the persistence of inequality in society. Nevertheless, this theoretical perspective is very powerful. It emphasises the view that the jobs of power and importance are given to those with the

# Aquiring culture

most talent. It is clear that this type of theory is very attractive to those who have positions of power and wealth in society. It suggests those who are poor and powerless lack effort, talent and determination.

## Questions

- 1. Do the best people in society always get the best jobs?
- 2. Are those people with the best jobs the most important people in society?
- 3. Does everyone in society share norms and values?
- 4. Are the highest paid people the most useful to society?

## Keywords

1. Status - standing in society
2. Prestige - the respect and status that others give to you
3. Stratification - layering in society
4. Hierarchy - system whereby some people are at the top of society and others are below them

## How has functionalism influenced politics?

### Bullets

- The poor are often blamed for their poverty.
- The New Right believe that the poor are lazy and should be made to go out to work.
- There is little evidence to support the New Right, but their ideas are very influential.
- New Right theories are very popular with people in power.

### Text

Many belief systems suggest that poor people brought their difficult situations upon themselves. This type of theory has a long history in Britain, for example the famous philosopher Herbert Spencer argued that poverty was good for society as it encouraged people to work in order to avoid being poor. He said that the poor themselves deserved to suffer poverty because of their lack of morality. Those living on benefits today are often seen as being lazy, and the term 'dole scrounger' was frequently employed by the press to describe people dependent on benefits in the 1970s and 1980s. Even today, young single mothers are often demonised as becoming pregnant to gain housing, despite there being very little research evidence to support this claim. This type of popular thinking resulted in the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979, and led to the subsequent dominance of the thinkers of the New Right.

The political and philosophical perspective known as the New Right is associated with the politicians Margaret Thatcher in the UK, and Ronald Reagan in the USA. The principles of the New Right are based on the theoretical viewpoints that are very close to functionalism. The New Right believe that inequality is inevitable in society. They go further and argue that we should have economic freedom. We should buy and sell as we wish - this is known as market liberalism. It assumes that all people are customers who are rational and make good choices. As a result, there is a philosophy of 'choice' so that parents are encouraged to choose schools for their children or hospitals if they become ill.

# Aquiring culture

The subtext is that people also 'choose' to be poor.

In Britain, the New Right became associated with underclass theory, which is supported by writers such as Charles Murray and David Saunders. These writers both claim that in the UK, benefit systems mean that people make a rational choice to stay poor, because it is easier to stay at home on the dole than go to work. They claim that some people go on to develop a culture that is state dependent, against traditional values, criminal, irresponsible and destructive. They suggest that people are often lazy and selfish so they must be encouraged to work by making welfare payments low enough to make life uncomfortable. People who live in areas where few people have work will develop a culture that encourages laziness. People get used to relying on others if life is made easy for them and all their self will and self-reliance is lost. They must be encouraged to take control of their own lives and by punitive methods such as having their benefits cut, if necessary.

Criticisms include the way that it ignores the way that some people have more access to wealth, status and power than others, so effectively it ignores social structure. It does not take inequalities of class, gender, ethnicity, age and ability into account. There are dual standards, rich people are expected to be rewarded for their work by the incentive of high pay, but poor people should be expected to work to avoid poverty. Businesses should have the freedom to sell what they like, but families should follow strict rules of behaviour. It ignores bad behaviour among the rich, poor people are controlled, but not the wealthy. In addition, it makes odd assumptions about people, for instance, that they are naturally selfish, and that they do things for rational rather than cultural reasons. From a sociological point of view one of the most damning criticisms is that there is very little research evidence to back up what is claimed by the New Right.

## Questions

- 1. Summarise the principles of the New Right
- 2. What criticisms can be made of the New Right?

## Keywords

1. Demonised - made to seem very bad and then criticised
2. Market liberalism - we should be able to buy and choose to live as we wish
3. Underclass - those at the very bottom of society
4. Underclass theory - those at the bottom of society are lazy and choose to live on benefits
5. State dependent - living on benefits and the welfare state rather than going and getting a job
6. New Right - a political viewpoint associated with conservatism

## What is trickle-down theory?

### Bullets

- Many New Right theorists believe that cutting taxes for the rich will make everyone better off.
- This theory is known as trickle-down theory.
- It is not supported by evidence.
- Many rich people do not pay very much tax in comparison with their incomes anyway, because they employ tax avoidance lawyers or live abroad in tax havens.



# Aquiring culture

## Text

Trickle-down theory is sometimes used in an insulting way to describe a theory that has been popular among politicians of the New Right and who have functionalist views of society. The basic belief is that by cutting taxes to the rich and to businesses, then the whole population will benefit as the rich people spend their money and boost the economy.

This type of thinking formed the basis of economic policy in the USA under President Reagan and in the UK under Margaret Thatcher. There is support for this kind of thinking in the writing of the influential economist, Keynes who said that tax cuts for the rich promote investment. There are still regular and frequent calls by political parties to cut taxes in order that people can spend more of their money. The most recent and widely reported call for tax cuts came from David Cameron, the leader of the Conservative Party in May 2008. In the 1980s, taxes were cut in Britain in a way that benefitted the rich in the hopes that it would boost the economy. Many taxes were abolished, such as capital gains tax which applies only to the wealthier people in society. At the same time, some taxes that affected everyone and possibly the poor more than others increased. In 1981, Value Added Tax (VAT) rose from 8% to 15% to pay for the tax cuts to the rich. In 1991 it was raised again to 17.5% by the Conservative government of John Major government to pay for cuts in the poll tax.

In practical terms, the very rich are often low tax payers in view of what they earn. The TUC suggests that tax avoidance by the super-rich costs the British taxpayer £13bn a year. They point out that this is enough money to increase old-age pensions by 20 per cent. Tax planning loopholes mean that the super-rich put money into the names of their families or live abroad for large portions of the year to avoid tax. The government has policies which support the super-rich so capital gains tax at is set at 18% when the top rate of income tax is 40%.

There is still debate as to the effectiveness of the tax cuts in supporting the economy. It is certain that the rate of inequality in British society has been growing so that a reduction in the growth of inequality is now seen as a government achievement! Trickle down theories are not supported by economic evidence but still hold considerable influence over public policy making.

## Questions

- 1. Explain trickle-down theory.
- 2. What has been the impact of tax cuts on income equality in British society?
- 3. Should taxes be cut?

## Keywords

1. Trickle-down theory - this suggests that if the rich become richer, everyone will benefit from increased spending.
2. Value added tax - many goods have VAT included in the price so that tax is paid on what is bought.

## What is the Functionalist Perspective on class?

## Bullets

# Aquiring culture

- Functionalists see the class structure as a competitive arena that promotes hard work
- Such a class structure encourages and permits the most able to rise to the top
- The class structure offers opportunities and rewards to those willing to take them
- Functionalist ideas have been embraced and developed by New Right theorists like Murray and Saunders.

## Text

Functionalists have a positive view about inequality, since it is seen to motivate the less well off to aspire to the income and status enjoyed by the rich and wealthy. Therefore, they applaud the existence of the class structure seeing it as promoting effort, motivation and success. Functionalists believe strongly in the existence of a meritocracy whereby there is equality of opportunity enabling the talented to rise up from any social class to occupy society's most important and demanding roles. Functionalists believe it is appropriate and right to highly reward those in the higher social classes since they believe they are there through merit. Rewarding those at the top only serves to motivate those at the bottom more, they argue. Inequality is therefore beneficial to society and the existence of a class structure becomes functional in providing that inequality.

Functionalists like the competitive values that the class structure provides and genuinely believe society is open to social mobility thereby allowing the most talented to rise to the top of society. A fluid and flexible class structure rewards individual achievement by granting the 'glittering prize' of income and status to those who work hard. Despite class inequalities of the class structure a meritocracy offers the opportunity for anyone to get to the top. The ideas of functionalism are probably best expressed through the culture of the USA where the 'American Dream' is the widespread goal of almost every citizen. The argument that those at the bottom are held back by structural constraints such as poor housing, poor education and general poverty is dismissed by functionalists with the argument that they are simply not trying hard enough.

The view that the lower classes are held back by their cultural values of laziness and fecklessness, rather than genuine structural disadvantages, is a functionalist theme adopted subsequently by the New Right. For example, the work of US New Right theorist Charles Murray portrays those at the bottom of society, whom he refers to as an underclass, as outside the cultural values of the rest of society. He sees them embracing an alternative subculture of deviant values centred around being workshy, living off welfare and having fatalistic attitudes, for example, taking life as it comes. Whilst influential, Murray's work has come in for sustained criticism for its refusal to recognise the significance of structural factors and his dogmatic obsession of scapegoating lone mother families for society's problems.

In Britain, Murray's New Right contemporary, Peter Saunders shares a similar contemptuous view of those at the bottom of the class structure. However, adopting a view similar to postmodernism he sees society as divided less along lines of class and more in terms of consumption. He calls this consumption cleavage. He argues a process of 'social restratification' has taken place, dividing those seeking to satisfy their consumption needs through private ownership of cars, housing, private education and health care, in contrast to those reliant upon social housing, public transport, state education and health care. Saunders argues that divisions of consumption and lifestyle cut across 'old' class lines, with consumption now influencing and shaping identity and social attitudes to a far greater extent. However, Rosemary Crompton criticizes Saunders for claiming class is dead on the one hand; yet continuing to point to occupational class as a powerful influence on income, consumption and political attitudes on the other.

# Aquiring culture

## Questions

- 1. Why are functionalists positive about the class structure?
- 2. What is the functionalist explanation for those found at the bottom of society?
- 3. In what ways are the ideas of Murray similar to functionalism?
- 4. What is consumption cleavage?
- 5. Why does Saunders argue a process of 'social restratification' has taken place?

## Keywords

## How do Marxists view inequality?

### What is the Marxist view of society?

#### Bullets

- Marxism is concerned for the poor and powerless.
- It claims that society is in conflict between the rich who control everything and the poor who must work for the rich and gain little in reward for their work.
- The rich are able to maintain their position of power through control of the law, the police and other forms of authority.
- The rich also control the manufacture of ideas about society through controlling the media and education so poor people are taught to believe that capitalism is a good thing.

#### Text

Karl Marx (1818 - 1883) was an economist, philosopher and journalist who was born in Munich but who lived much of his life, died and was buried in London. His views have been enormously influential in sociology, though it is doubtful he would have recognised the term. Marx was motivated by concern for the workers who were experiencing terrible poverty while all around was great wealth and power. He was a revolutionary who believed in working for a classless society.

Marxism was an enormously powerful political force throughout the early part of the C20th, but was not a powerful force in sociology until the 1960s and 1970s when it formed the basis of a challenge to functionalism. It offered a better account of the divisions of society at that time than functional sociology did. Marxism also triggered many of the ideas that were adopted by feminists later in the 1970s.

Marxism is often referred to as a conflict theory and this is the point at which it differs most from functionalism. Functionalists see society as consisting of shared values. Marxists see society as being divided by conflict between the social groups, or classes who make up society. Marx believed that social change is the natural order of societies. In each form of society there are those who control property and those who work for them. In our society, which he called capitalist, and which is based on industrial production of goods, there are two basic classes of people. These are the bourgeoisie who own property, factories, wealth, technology and knowledge. Those who work for them are the proletariat and they own nothing but their own ability to work.

# Aquiring culture

The bourgeoisie are able to control the proletariat through two mechanisms. These are the direct control through the exercise of power and the indirect control of people's minds through the use of ideology or ideas. It is the second means of control, ideology that is the most dangerous, because people come to accept certain ideas as being true or self-evident without really questioning them. We accept that some people are rich and others poor as being part of daily life and so there are very few challenges to the idea that the greed and selfishness of the rich are acceptable and should be copied by the rest of us.

## Questions

- 1. Explain the term 'conflict view of society'.
- 2. How is capitalist society organised?
- 3. How do rich people (the bourgeoisie) maintain their control over the workers (the proletariat)?

## Keywords

1. Conflict view of society - social change is caused by tension between different social groups or classes in society.
2. Bourgeoisie - rich people who own and control everything
3. Proletariat - the workers who own nothing but their ability to work
4. Ideology - a set of ideas about how society works
5. Revolutionary - someone who works for a change in society

## How do Marxists explain inequality?

### Bullets

- There are a variety of Marxist explanations of inequality, but the main focus is on the power of the wealthy to exploit the workers.
- Gramsci suggests that workers accept the power of the bourgeoisie.
- Althusser suggest that workers are trained into an acceptance of the power of the bourgeoisie.
- Feminists use Marxist ideas and apply them to gender inequalities.

### Text

Karl Marx was a very prolific writer who changed his views as his life progressed. His most famous work of analysis, *Das Kapital* (or *Capitalism*) was never completed. He died before it was even half finished. In addition, Marx was writing about a society which no longer exists. He was writing about a late Victorian culture and our culture is technologically and socially rather different. Although many people work within the basic framework of his ideas, there are significant debates and discussion taking place between these people who can all be described as Marxists, but who do not agree on the details.

Antonio Gramsci was an Italian journalist and politician who suffered enormous physical hardship before he died in prison under the rule of the Fascist dictator of Italy, Benito Mussolini in 1937. Gramsci used the term hegemony to describe a culture in which the values of the ruling class become the common sense ideas of a whole culture. People who are part of the working class accept these ideas and instead of challenging the rich, accept their right to rule and to make important decisions for the rest of us. He saw religion as being one of the most important forms of mental control because it teaches

# Aquiring culture

people that they should seek reward in heaven and not equality on earth. He also said that if people challenged the dominant ideas, then the state would impose physical social control on people. Inequality exists because the people are led to believe it is inevitable, but once people see through this illusion, then it exists because the state will impose its power on people.

Louis Althusser was a French philosopher and Marxist. He believed that individuals were trained to become part of the capitalist state. Much training is part of the simple process of learning roles, so lawyers are trained as part of the political structure of the state. Althusser claimed that in our society a series of institutions exist whose purpose is to train us to accept the ideas of capitalism. He identified these institutions such as the family, the media, the education system and religion as being part of the Ideological State Apparatus. Their purpose is to work together to create obedient citizens. Althusser also noted the role of Repressive State Apparatus. These are the institutions that impose order, such as the justice system, the police, the law and the army. Inequality exists because the state trains people to accept the ideas that make them slaves to the system.

Marx was a liberal father who allowed his daughters access to a good education at a time when this was not usual. He recognised gender inequality, but thought that the solution was to end all inequality and then gender equality would follow from having a better society. Feminists have taken Marxist ideas and have developed them into an analysis that places gender inequalities as being as significant, if not more so, as class inequality. Marxist feminists have argued that they should support the struggle against capitalism but the focus of their work has been to look at women's role in the Trade Union movement and to work on class issues. Feminists believe that inequality exists because men oppress women as much as because the rich oppress the poor.

## Questions

- 1. Why are there disagreements within Marxist thought as to the cause of inequality?
- 2. What do all Marxists share in common when thinking about inequality?
- 3. To what extent do we accept the ideas of the powerful without challenging them

## Keywords

1. Hegemony - the dominance of one social group over another. It also implies that the subordinate social group consents to the domination.
2. Ideological state apparatus - people are trained into acceptance of capitalism through education and family processes
3. Repressive state apparatus - people are oppressed by the power of force to accept capitalism

## How has Marxism influenced politics in Britain?

### Bullets

- The Labour Party is traditionally associated with socialism. Some government have been more radical than others
- Strong Labour governments of the 1940s and 1960s were able to enact some radical socialist legislation.
- Much of this legislation was undone by the New Right conservative government of the 1980s.



# Aquiring culture

- The New Labour Government of 1997 has not been able to halt the growth of inequality in Britain though it has targeted some of the very poorest people for action.

## Text

There has been a long tradition of socialism in Britain. It originates from before the work of Karl Marx. However, there are very strong similarities between the two sets of ideas. The main difference is that socialism is an agenda for political action whereas Marxism is generally seen a theory to explain society and social relationships. Socialists believe that capitalism creates inequality; it concentrates all the power and wealth into the hands of a very small number of people. These are the oligarchy. Socialists argue that we all need to work for a fair society in which there is equal access to wealth and power. Just as there are debates within the Marxist tradition, there are debates in the socialist tradition as to how equality can be achieved for ordinary people.

Traditionally the Labour party has been associated with socialist policies. In 1945, the Labour Party was elected to power under the leadership of Clement Atlee. It had a strong socialist agenda and policies that would change the nature of the British state. This was a popular victory, despite the fact that Clement Atlee was standing against the powerful war leader, Winston Churchill who was a Conservative Prime Minister. The government, under Attlee set up legislation to set up the Welfare State: education, benefit systems, the Health Service, pensions and unemployment payment. It also nationalised many struggling industries to preserve jobs and improve conditions for workers: coal mines, gas companies, steel works, telephones, transport and electricity. Less popularly, it oversaw the return of the British Empire to the populations who actually lived in those countries. In the election of 1950, there was a reduced majority and the Labour party were defeated in 1951.

The next influential Labour government was that of Harold Wilson in the early 1960s. It was responsible for a number of social policies such as the legalisation of homosexuality, abortion and the abolition of capital punishment. It pushed for comprehensive schools and also set up the Open University.

In 1979, there was a radical conservative government elected. This was led by Margaret Thatcher and much of the liberal policy of the Attlee government was dismantled. The state run industries were sold off and many people employed in those industries lost their jobs. The miner's strike of the early 1980s was bitterly fought and resulted in the loss of coal mining as an industry in Wales. The wealth that was created by the government was spent on tax refunds to wealthy people in the belief that this would reinvigorate the economy. In 1997, the Labour Party was re-elected in a landslide victory for Tony Blair. Many people hoped that this would see an end to New Right policies, but in reality, very little changed and many of the policies of the previous conservative government were carried on through into the new government. Whilst the extreme growth in inequality of the early years of Mrs Thatcher's government has been slowed, inequality is still rising slowly.

## Questions

- 1. Summarise the principles of the socialism.
- 2. What criticisms can be made of the socialist thinking?
- 3. Suggest reasons why socialist policy is sometimes unpopular with people

# Aquiring culture

## Keywords

1. Oligarchy - the very few people who own and control our society
2. Socialism - a political belief system that argues for a fair and just society
3. Marxism - an analysis of society that argues that society works for the benefit of the rich
4. Radical - extreme in viewpoints
5. Welfare state - the system of health, education and the benefits that support people who have social or health problems
6. Nationalisation - the ownership of key industries by the state

## What have been the equality policies of New Labour?

### Bullets

- Traditionally the Labour Party believed it is the role of the state to look after the weak.
- New Labour policy is not concerned with looking after people, but encouraging them to look after themselves and giving them legal rights.
- It is targeting money to certain groups of people who are poor.
- Some sociologists argue that this is creating a two tier state system for poorer people

### Text

The Labour Party has developed what is known as the Respect Agenda. They say, 'Our vision is of an equal, inclusive society where there is opportunity for every citizen regardless of gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, race, religion or belief.' The important word in their sentence is opportunity. There is no claim that the wealth inequality that exists in our society will be corrected, because the Labour Party does not see wealth inequality as being an issue. Tony Blair said, on the Newsnight programme in 2001, "The key thing is not... the gap between... the person who earns the most in the country and the person that earns the least... The issue isn't... whether the very richest person ends up becoming richer. The issue is whether the poorest person is given the chance that they don't otherwise have...". New Labour do, however see poverty as a problem that requires attention from government and have targeted some groups for special consideration; the elimination of child poverty is one such target area.

Examples of New Labour legislation include the introduction of the National Minimum Wage. As they point out, two thirds of the beneficiaries are women. The Labour Party believes that this law has played a part in narrowing the pay gap. A new Equality and Human Rights Commission has been created out of a number of different government departments that addressed rights issues: the Commission for Racial Equality for example. This new agency has tackled disability discrimination and now there are strict laws to promote access to public buildings and look after the rights of the disabled. The Labour Party gave homosexuals the right to civil partnerships which offers legal recognition to same sex couples so that they have the same inheritance, pension and next-of-kin rights as married couples. It is difficult to say how effective all of this has been. It has certainly created a social climate in which the rights of certain groups of people must now be at the forefront of planning and provision.

The Labour Party has also actively pursued a series of policies known as Welfare to Work. The intention of these policies is to encourage people to take up available work. Benefits are often the target of cuts and they do not rise as quickly as average incomes. In addition

# Aquiring culture

many benefits have conditions attached so that if young people do not undertake training and short term work they will lose income. In addition, taxes on very low incomes have been cut, so employers are still able to pay low wages.

The traditional view of the Labour Party was that the state has a role in looking after the weakest individuals. This has given way to a policy direction in which the state supports those people who are able or willing to provide for themselves. The most vulnerable people must prove their need through being tested for eligibility. Benefits and welfare projects are targeted to problem areas. For example, the provision of childcare is promoted to bring women back into the workforce. However deprived families will have access to classes offering childrearing skills to parents. It is claimed that such classes will give children the skills and experience they need to succeed in compulsory education.

It is argued that these policies may be effective in some parts of the country, but there are large areas of the UK where work is not easily available for people. The intention of many of New Labour policies appear to be in order to keep the numbers claiming benefits small so that the bill for the tax payer is kept at a minimum. Stuart Hall, the famous sociologist and Marxist thinker claims that this is leading to a two tier society where some people have access to goods and services, but others are trapped in inescapable poverty. He claims that as richer people opt out of the welfare state, so it will become a second class service that only the very poor will use.

## Questions

- 1. What is New Labour policy with regard to inequality?
- 2. How has New Labour attempted to solve issues of poverty in the UK?
- 3. Is it the role of the state to look after the weakest and poorest people?
- 4. Are the equality policies of New Labour Marxist in intention?

## Keywords

1. Respect Agenda - a New Labour policy that allows people to have equal rights
2. Targeted benefits - money is directed at certain problems and people.
3. Sexual orientation - the sex to which you are attracted or the gender you feel yourself to be.

## What is the Marxist Perspective on class?

### Bullets

- Marxists see the basis of class as relational to the means of production
- The dominant class own the means of production, the subordinate class own nothing and work for the dominant class
- Marxists adopt a dichotomous view of two classes whose interests will never coincide
- This conflict of interest will ultimately drive social change, but change may be delayed through false consciousness of their true exploited position (class consciousness).

### Text

# Aquiring culture

Marxists, more than any other perspective, embrace the concept of social class. The bottom line for Karl Marx was that all societies (with the exception of primitive hunter/gatherers) are divided along class lines. Rather than defining class by occupation, Marx adopted an economic definition based on people's relationship to the means of production. According to Marx there are always just two classes. The dominant class own the means of production (factories, mines, mills etc.) whereas the subordinate class owns nothing except its labour power. This is known as a dichotomous or two-part view of society.

These two classes are interdependent but their interests never coincide and are in conflict with each other: the dominant class benefits from society remaining as it is, the subordinate class benefits from change so that it is no longer oppressed. In capitalism these two classes are the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Because the dominant bourgeoisie class exploits the proletariat, class conflict inevitably exists, although this is not always recognised; resulting in a state of false consciousness.

False (class) consciousness occurs because economic power leads to political and social power. The economically dominant class is also the ruling class and shapes society through developing ideas (bourgeois ideology) through education, politics and especially the media that reflect their interests. Through socialisation, ideology and social control the ideas of the ruling class are internalised and accepted by ordinary people denying them awareness of their true class consciousness as an exploited group.

Marx correctly predicted that the peasantry, a legacy of preceding feudal system, would become smaller and less relevant to the central conflict of the capitalist order. He said that the rich would get richer as the poor got poorer, and this is known as polarisation as the two classes moved away from each other in terms of power and wealth. However, the greatest flaw in his analysis is a failure to foresee the growth of a middle class.

Traditional Marxists would argue that economically the middle classes are wage slaves, who sell their labour to the bourgeois capitalist class; these are no different from any other member of the proletariat. However, Weberian sociologists would argue there is a crucial status difference between middle-class managerial and professional workers and the manual workers of the working class. Sociologists have written in-depth of cultural differences between the social classes in terms of values, attitudes and behaviours. Such differences are largely academic to Marxists who emphasise the relational basis of class: that is to the means of production as paramount and the bottom line to making sense of how society operates.

The Marxist view of class has been criticized for its overemphasis upon its relational 'class consciousness' to the means of production. However, even Marx himself recognized this with the concept of 'false consciousness'. Others have portrayed Marx's two-part (dichotomous) view of society as simplistic and for ignoring the fact that reality is much more complex. The development of capitalism has not confirmed this picture of polarization and dichotomisation, but rather within the twenty-first century the sub-division and splitting up of classes (fragmentation and diversification) that Max Weber predicted. Postmodernists go even further, talking about the death of class altogether as a meaningful concept. Finally, feminists have criticised Marxist analysis as 'malestream' seeing class exploitation as the key issue that ignores other forms of exploitation, such as gender and race, as invisible.

## Questions

- 1. What is meant by Marxists having a relational view of class?
- 2. Why can the interests of the two social classes never coincide?
- 3. How is false consciousness promoted in society?



# Aquiring culture

- 4. Are the middle class simply well-paid members of the proletariat or are there significant differences between them and the working class?

## Keywords

## What are Neo-Marxist Models of Class?

### Bullets

- Neo-Marxists have addressed some of the criticisms labeled at traditional Marxist view of class
- They see the middle class as occupying an 'intermediate' position between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat
- Wright identifies four specific 'contradictory class locations'
- Wright's work has elements that are Weberian as well as neo-Marxist.

### Text

Marx predicted that capitalism would be overthrown as the workers revolted against their masters and created a class free society. He thought this would happen in his own lifetime, or shortly after his death. This has clearly not happened, and certainly not in Britain or Germany where Marx thought the revolution against capitalism would begin. This leaves many who accept Marxist analyses of society as being basically correct with a problem. They are required to explain why the predicted worker's revolution has never taken place. This means that they have adapted and developed Marxist ideas to explain why his predictions were incorrect. These adapted forms of Marxism are known as neo-Marxist.

Whilst many agree that Marx's dichotomous model of a two-class society was a fairly accurate description of the nineteenth century capitalism he lived in, it is over-simple for the complex capitalism we live in today. Even some neo-Marxists, such as Harry Braverman and Erik Wright, have recognized that high-status white-collar employees constitute an 'intermediary class' having features in common with both the bourgeoisie and proletariat.

Braverman developed a classification of social class in the 1970s which he felt reflected modern American society. He firstly differentiated between large-scale bourgeoisie and small-scale bourgeoisie, but most significantly recognised upper-middle class occupations as an 'intermediate' class between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. His class model resembles a triangle with the bourgeoisie at the very top, and with managers and technicians forming a middle group between the capitalist classes and the true working class at the base of the triangle.

Erik Olin Wright, begins from the classical Marxist position of seeing society as comprised of two polar classes: the bourgeoisie (upper class) and proletariat (working class). However, Wright recognizes certain 'contradictory class locations' that do not fit neatly into either of Marx's dichotomous view of class. He identified four contradictory class locations: managers and supervisors, small business owners, the self-employed (petit bourgeoisie) and semi-autonomous workers.

Managers and supervisors have factors in common with the bourgeoisie since they are responsible for controlling the workforce in a way that maximises the return for capital, yet at the same time, they are employees and as wage slaves are subject to exploitation by capital. The self-employed do not have wage slave status but are vulnerable to the exploitation by the capitalist class (bourgeoisie). Small employers may be viewed as small



# Aquiring culture

capitalists and exploit the workers they employ, but Wright argued they too occupy a contradictory class location because they are vulnerable to power of larger capitalists. Finally, semi-autonomous workers, such as university lecturers who can exercise considerable control over their work activities such as when and how they do their research, are included because their class position is also within both modes of production simultaneously.

Although Wright is a neo-Marxist, some have described his analysis of contradictory class locations as a theory of domination (which is more of a Weberian concern) than a Marxist theory of exploitation. Wright responded with a revised model of class which made exploitation central again. However, with this model he still wants to move beyond the dichotomous view of class held by Marx. More than ever he argued there is a need to 'tackle the problem of the middle classes' through identifying contradictory class locations.

Wright argues that people's class position through the class structure can be fluid over time. Equally, he argued, that because people occupy the same class position that they may not experience the world in the same way. For example, a female clerical worker aged 55, and with no prospects of promotion, is in a very different class position from a male clerical worker aged 22 on the first rung of a managerial career. Again with this trajectory analysis Wright's model has elements in common with a Weberian analysis whose concept of market situation takes into account not only current position but promotion prospects too.

The work of neo-Marxists Braverman and Wright have gone some way to address the criticisms of the traditional Marxist approach to class by recognising the intermediate and contradictory position of the middle classes. In addition, their neo-Marxist analysis of class and exploitation manages to touch upon many aspects of contemporary capitalism. Despite the Postmodernist view that class is dead, political divisions still often reflect class divisions. The impact of globalisation on domestic employment may lead to deskilling and pauperisation anticipated by Marx.

## Questions

- 1. How can the middle class be viewed as an intermediate class?
- 2. What did Wright mean by 'contradictory class location'?
- 3. In what ways does Wright's work have Weberian similarities?

## Keywords

## What are the critical theories of inequality

### What is a critical theory of society?

#### Bullets

- Critical Theory refers to writing in a Marxist tradition
- Critical theories refer to any types of writing that challenge traditional ways of thinking
- Critical theorists tend to use methods that challenge traditional thinking on research processes and so may ask respondents to design the research process themselves

# Aquiring culture

## Text

"Critical theory" is a technical term for a type of thinking associated with German writers in a Marxist tradition. The aim of Critical Theory (with capitals) is to emancipate or free humans from the ideology of capitalism. It is based on an idea that was put forward by Karl Marx himself, who once wrote, "Philosophers have only interpreted the world in certain ways; the point is to change it"

However, "critical theories" (without capitals) refers to a variety of social movements that identify how humans are dominated and which then attempt to describe that domination and address it. A critical theory provides a basis for research and attempts to challenge people's typical and traditional ways of thinking. Any philosophical or research approach that has the aim of raising people's awareness of social process and then challenging it is known as a critical theory. It is concerned with understanding the rules by which people live, and how they come to form a sense of identity and experience. This term is used to address recent thinking related to gender, race and sexuality in particular.

There is no single critical theory. The term is used to describe an approach to study and uses ideas from a range of areas such as history, literary criticism, film study, and politics in addition to the social sciences. Critical theories challenge traditional approaches to research as well, and reflect on its purpose and value. Research methods based on critical theories may encourage participants to involve themselves in the design of the research process.

## Questions

- 1. What is the difference between Critical Theory and critical theories?
- 2. What is the similarity between Critical Theory and critical theories?

## Keywords

1. Critical Theory - Marxist philosophical movement that attempts to free people from capitalist ideology
2. Critical theories (without capital letters) - ways of thinking that address a specific social inequality and attempts to understand how it developed and how it can be challenged.
3. Ideology - a set of ideas about how society works

## Why is Max Weber important to sociology?

### Bullets

- Max Weber is a founding father of sociology. His work has been extremely influential to sociologists from all perspectives.
- Weber felt that there is no such thing as an objective science of society
- Weber claimed that sociologists should attempt to understand how people create reality.
- This idea has given rise to ethnomethodology and supports critical theorists in their work.

## Text

Although critical theories draw on Marxism, another early sociologist is also associated with critical theories. He is Max Weber (1864 -1920) and he is known as one of the

# Aquiring culture

founders of sociology. Weber differed from both Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim because he did not view the study of society as a scientific discipline. Durkheim was concerned to apply the methods of science to sociology and Marx considered his views to be scientific and rational. Weber however was concerned with the notion of verstehen. Verstehen translates as 'understanding' in German. However it has a slightly wider meaning in German than in English. It also covers the ideas of comprehension and empathy through familiarity with something. Weber used the term verstehen to refer to the understanding of why people act as they do bearing in mind the context that they are acting in. Weber stressed that humans have a variety of motives that include emotions, traditions and rational choice.

In terms of critical theories it is necessary to understand what Weber said about the study of society. Weber said that all science is based on interpretations and belief, so it cannot be objective or value free. Thus there is no such thing as objective truth based on science because science itself is based on human assumptions. In order to understand reality, one has to select what is important about the ideas that people have about the world. It is the values held by individual people that determines their actions and beliefs. It is this set of beliefs about the nature of sociological enquiry that have given rise to a form of sociology known as ethnomethodology.

Ethnomethodology is slightly different from traditional sociology because traditional sociology assumes that there is such a thing as society which can be studied. Ethnomethodology attempts to discover how that social order is created in people's minds. The impact of this on methodology is that there is no agreed set of methods for people to use; they must create methods that are appropriate to what it is they are seeking to discover.

## Questions

- 1. What did Max Weber believe about scientific sociology?
- 2. How does Weber differ from Durkheim and Marx?
- 3. Can sociology be scientific? What is your view?

## Keywords

1. Verstehen - understanding, comprehension and empathy through familiarity with something.
2. Rational choice - a logical decision that is based on evidence
3. Functionalism - a conservative view of society that suggests sociologists should study institutions in society
4. Ethnomethodology - a sociological discipline that tries to understand the ways in which people create a sense of the world.

## What did Weber say about inequality?

### Bullets

- Weber said that power is the ability to influence others
- Society is arranged into social groups on the basis of access to power; these being party, class and status.
- Weber said that class grows up out of the market position of a group, which is what they can charge for their work.
- He claimed that there would be an increasing number of social classes developing in capitalism

# Aquiring culture

## Text

Karl Marx saw inequality in terms of the ownership of wealth and the control of material possessions. This is a very simple view and does not take into account all of the other forms of inequality we experience in society. Weber was aware of Marx's writing and disagreed with him. Weber said that inequality is more complex than that. He described power as being the ability to influence others to do your will and claimed that power had a number of sources such as ownership of land and capital, social status, physical strength and education.

Weber saw stratification in terms of the relationship between class, status and party. Status is related to inequalities that are to do with the way in which people judge and relate to each other. Class is to do with inequalities that have their source in the workings of capitalism and the market place. Party is related to concepts of politics in its broadest sense. Weber says people form groups and organisations to look after their own interests.

Status is formed out of the tendency of people to judge each other. We all value some characteristics and despise others. When we do this as members of a social group towards members of other social categories, then we are according them a social status. Some groups will benefit from having a high status, but others may well be treated negatively. In our society, for instance, membership of certain racial groups implies worth, so that non-membership of high status groups then disadvantages those who come from ethnic minorities. The disadvantages of belonging to a low status group, such as membership of an ethnic minority, can leave people in poorly paid, low status occupations and with little hope of advancement.

Wealth and economic advantage are a significant element of class. Weber suggested that the increasing bureaucracy that accompanies capitalism leads to status differences between those members of the working class who are manual workers and those who offer services to capitalism through the exercise of professional skills such as the middle classes. Weber suggested that there would be a growth and increase of classes linked to differences in educational skills and qualifications and the power that these confer on workers in the labour market.

Karl Marx believed that the social classes would polarise, with some people becoming ever more rich and powerful while others would become poorer. Weber said that there would be ever more social classes developing in capitalist society. Class would depend on our life chances and our life styles. Class would be characterised by such things as accents, education, locality, leisure habits and spending.

## Questions

- 1. What are the three components of class according to Weber?
- 2. Compare and contrast the Marxist and the Weberian views of social class.

## Keywords

1. Status - this is related to inequalities that are to do with the way in which people judge and relate to each other.
2. Class - this is to do with inequalities that have their source in the workings of capitalism and the market place.

# Aquiring culture

3. Party - this is related to concepts of politics in its broadest sense. Weber says people form groups and organisations to look after their own interests.

## What is Weber's theory of stratification?

### Bullets

- Weberian approach, like Marxist, sees class divisions as rooted in economic structures, however class is less central to the Weberian tradition.
- Weberians identify status and party that are independent of social class.
- Status groups are shaped by market position and may be more central to a person's identity than their class position.
- Weber's approach is seen as more relevant to the complexities and differentiation of contemporary society.

### Text

Max Weber, like Marx, begins his analysis of class from an economic point of view: 'property and lack of property are ... the basic categories of all class situations'. Weber's use of the word property is similar to Marx's view of capital or means of production. But where this was the starting point for Marx, for Weber his starting point is to recognise that people are individuals. He says that within each class there are major social divisions based around status and what he calls 'party'. By 'party' he means any organisation (such as trade unions, professional associations, etc) that helps their members pursue their common interests. Such common interests can be summarised as market position. Weber's analysis can therefore be described as 'gradational' in contrast to the 'relational' approach of Marx. Weber identified four different 'constellations' of class:

- The dominant property-owning and commercial class;
- The white collar intelligentsia;
- The petty bourgeoisie (owners of small businesses);
- The manual working class.

These different class groupings have distinct market situations which either privilege them or make them more vulnerable. Weber introduced the important sociological concept of life chances which refer to the opportunities (or lack of them) individuals have for success in education, employment, housing, health, etc. Within the market economy propertyless individuals depend upon the skills they can offer, and the relative scarcity of these skills improves their market position. For this reason, the highly qualified have a different class situation from those with no qualifications. Weber's theory of social class is based on the view that class divisions and inequalities reflect different life chances in the market and that a person's class position is determined by the job market. Because such markets serve to divide and sub-divide classes, the result is differentiation between groups of employees becomes increasingly complex. With this view we could not be further from Marx's dichotomous view of a society of just two classes.

Weber presents a view of society as becoming split into smaller groups or increasingly fragmented, in contrast to Marx's prediction of an increasingly polarized society. Weber's key point is that within class there is further differentiation in terms of status that reflects the different amounts of social standing individuals and groups have. Weber's analysis of status and market position can usefully explain social differences in society. For example,



# Aquiring culture

in the workplace women, the disabled, the elderly and many minority ethnic minority groups have found themselves discriminated against, irrespective of their class position. Therefore people occupying the same class position may well be distinguished by differences in status. For the individual, their status may be more significant than class as a source of identity. Weber thus sees class, status and party as cross-cutting.

Weber's approach is useful precisely because it allows us to describe the complex reality of contemporary society. However, Marxists argue that his concepts of class and status groups lack the close relationship with a theoretical position that Marx's concept of class exhibits. They question Weber's concept of status group, arguing that life chances are primarily shaped by class location more than anything else.

## Questions

- 1. In what ways is Weber's view of class similar to Marx's?
- 2. How does Weber's use of status and party help explain social fragmentation and increasing social diversity?
- 3. How does Weber's approach help explain wider social divisions in society?

## Keywords

### How did feminism built on Weberian thought?

## Bullets

- Feminism builds on Weberian approaches to research.
- Feminisms claim that research should be politically motivated
- Feminisms challenge the notion that research should be value free
- Feminism is therefore a critical theory of society

## Text

One of the earliest movements influenced by Weberian ideas of research was feminism. It is easy to think of feminism as being one single approach to the study of society, history or literature, but in fact, there are a number of different approaches to feminism. The most commonly identified forms of feminism are liberal feminism which argues for gradual change in the roles of women, Marxist feminism which sees capitalism and gender as enemies of women and radical feminism which criticises patriarchy and views masculinity as an enemy. Black feminism sees both racism and masculinity as issues for Black women. There are very strong differences between each of these approaches and different feminists are as likely to disagree with each other as to write against masculine society. What all feminisms share in common is a sense of anger and a sense that research should enlighten women and challenge patriarchy.

Feminisms tend to argue that empirical, scientific approaches to research are masculine in approach. They reject the notion of value free and objective sociology, claiming that it is 'malestream' and ideological thought. According to Millen, what makes feminist research feminist in intent is that it is politically motivated and that it intends to have a role in changing social inequality. It considers the experiences of women and provides a context for the understanding of female issues. The researcher may actually become part of the research process. Feminist research acknowledges that the politics of the researcher influences the findings and actually views this bias as a strength of the research process. It

# Aquiring culture

is this type of thought that makes feminism a critical theory of society.

The feminist researcher will be guided by feminist principles and will attempt to study issues of gender inequality. Mies says this means that the researcher must have a commitment to transform gender relationships in our society. In addition, the study group should have its consciousness raised. Fine and Macpherson, for example, interviewed respondents over dinner so that rather than simply interviewing, the study process became an opportunity for open debate and discussion. Both Oakley and Finch claimed that increased equality in the relationship between the researcher and the researched gave rise to better quality and more valid data.

## Questions

- 1. What is feminism?
- 2. Why is there more than one form of feminism?
- 3. How is feminist research carried out?
- 4. Should research be value free and objective?

## Keywords

1. Male stream - a traditional and male view of how society works
2. Liberal feminism - argues for gradual change in the roles of women
3. Marxist feminism - sees capitalism and gender as enemies of women
4. Radical feminism - criticises patriarchy and views masculinity as an enemy
5. Black feminism - sees both racism and masculinity as issues for Black women.

## How do feminists account for inequality?

### Bullets

- Functionalism suggests that inequality is a result of the differing biologies of males and females
- Marxist feminists claim that capitalism is the cause of inequality
- Liberal feminism suggests that women are trapped by social structures and habits
- Radical feminists claim that inequality is a result of male violence and hatred of women
- Post modern feminists suggest that the inequality of women is overstated.

### Text

Women have long challenged the privileged position of men in our society. Women were challenging the position of men as early as 1792 when Mary Wollstonecraft published her essay, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Early feminists were able to point out that men prevented women from having legal or political rights and much early feminism challenged very obvious and clear discrimination. In the 1960s, while women still did not have a right to full equality with men, the focus of the challenge changed. Women began to address issues of how men treated women in the workplace and wider society. They looked at the patriarchal structures of society.

Many writers, particularly in the functionalist tradition, have argued that inequality is functional to society and comes about as a result of the differing biology of men and of

# Aquiring culture

women. This type of thinking was apparent in Parsons' work as recently as the 1960s.

Strong challenges have been issued by feminists who have looked at reasons why women are manifestly unequal in our society. Walby, claims in *Patriarchy, Structure and Gender Inequality* that patriarchy operates in a different fashion in the public sphere and in domestic life. Individual men are able to dominate individual women in the home whereas in public life women are excluded from a whole range of spheres of activity. In public life and in work the discrimination is institutional, so women are not able to participate equally with men. Haug found that German women work for more hours in the home than men do. This finding echoes that of Oakley who also discovered that British women were far more likely to work long hours in the home than their male partners.

Radical feminists such as Shulamith Firestone argued women do not know what it is to be female because femininity is defined for them by men. Many radical feminists such as Greer looked for ways to identify and develop a female culture and way of being which was free from the influence of males. Greer viewed the traditional family as an institution of oppression whose purpose is to foster gender inequality through the socialisation of children into gender roles. It subordinates women by forcing them to conform to feminine stereotypes. Radical feminists such as Brownmiller often point to the violence that is directed against women in society. They see it as endemic (built into every social structure and interaction). Violence can range from explicit attack, such as domestic violence, through to simple threat, so that many women fear going out at night and thus do not have the same freedom as males.

Liberal feminists such as Gavron suggested that women are trapped by traditional roles within the family and that they should have more choice with regard to marriage and family life. More recent feminist theories have suggested that men oppress women through control of the body and what is considered sexually attractive. Modern writers in this tradition include Jane Pilcher and Naomi Wolf, though many writers have also pointed out how women have adapted and moulded their bodies to appeal to men.

Marxist feminism suggests that gender inequalities arise out of capitalism itself and that women will never be equal with men until a classless society can be established. Barrett argues that the domination of men over women in the family is simply an echo in the family of capitalist domination over workers. The cause of inequality is capitalism and the solution is the dismantling of capitalist economic structures and ideology. In contrast to all of the above forms of feminism, post modern feminist writing challenges the view of women as the victims of gender relationships. Catherine Hakim, for example, claims that women often choose part time work to fit in with their home lives.

## Questions

- 1. How does Marxist feminism account for inequality?
- 2. How does radical feminism account for inequality?
- 3. How do post modern feminists challenge traditional feminism?
- 4. Are women the victims of gender inequality in our society?

## Keywords

1. Male stream - a traditional and male view of how society works
2. Liberal feminism - argues for gradual change in the roles of women,
3. Marxist feminism - sees capitalism and gender as enemies of women and
4. Radical feminism - criticises patriarchy and views masculinity as an enemy.
5. Black feminism - sees both racism and masculinity as issues for Black women.

# Aquiring culture

## How do postmodernists account for inequality?

### Bullets

- Modernism is the belief that society is progressing and improving
- Postmodernism is a way of looking at the world and saying that there is no reality, everything is relative
- Post-modern society is characterised by loss of community, identity and culture.

### Text

Postmodernism is a relatively recent development in sociological thought. Thinkers in this tradition reject both functionalism and Marxism as being unable to explain the changes that are taking place in modern cultures. Post modernist ideas are very controversial in sociology and have given rise to complex debates and arguments. Modernism is a term used to describe a belief that humans can improve their culture and society. Marxism is therefore a modernist mode of thought, because it believes that societies progress to something better.

Postmodernism (after modernism) describes theories that see all culture and theory as relative. There is no such thing as a 'better' world, just a different world. Post-modernists talk of discourses. A discourse is a particular way of thinking about a topic such as gender. A modernist might look at how gender affects behaviour and consider how equality may be achieved between genders. A postmodernist would not try and find any definite answers as to how the genders differ, but would try to look at how gender itself is defined by other people and to consider why we have such a concept. For a post modernist, all reality is relative to what other people think. Postmodernism can also be applied to the research process and it is when research uses postmodernist thinking that it can be described as critical theory, because it breaks all of the traditional rules of research and uses unconventional techniques to understand how people think and feel about their world.

Baudrillard, a well known postmodernist, says that there is no knowledge that can be assumed by other people. We live in a society with a two-minute attention span. Rojek gives examples of how people live in an unreal world of theme parks and consumerism. People create their own identity by what they buy rather than by reference to people around them. Hebdige suggests that consumer identities are developing in modern Britain. Postmodernists are likely to look at the media and other cultural artefacts to see how people buy into identities. They suggest that society is becoming fragmented and diverse (as Weber did in his analysis of class) so that communities are breaking down and there is no such thing as a value consensus.

The implication of this for the study of inequality is that there is no such thing as inequality as such. Inequality is a modernist idea because those who try to describe it and then study it consider it to be a problem that has some resolution. Post modernists would suggest that people only develop a sense of inequality when the issue is of importance to them for some reason. Thus, the study of inequality becomes an issue for individuals and not for groups within society.

Lyotard is not a postmodernist as such; he describes society as being post-modern. He claimed that a postmodern society is typified by social disorder and a cultural vacuum. By this he means that modern societies have no central core of values or belief. Post-modern societies have few community links, people have no sense of identity within society and

# Aquiring culture

there is no sense that one should keep and treasure things like old buildings or furniture forever. Everything is short term and disunited. People do not know their neighbours, travel a long way to work and no longer feel the need to unite with others for better working conditions for everyone. People watch television or play computer games as an alternative to talking to one another. Thus, post-modern societies see a collapse of traditional bonds and people are unaware of their true position in the social structure.

## Questions

- 1. What is modernism?
- 2. What is postmodernism?
- 3. What are the characteristics of post-modern society according to Lyotard?

## Keywords

1. Modernism - the belief that society is progressing and improving
2. Postmodernism - a way of looking at the world and saying that there is no reality, everything is relative
3. Post-modern society - a culture characterised by loss of community, identity and culture.
4. Discourse - a traditional way of looking at a social phenomenon
5. Discourse analysis - a way of analysing traditional thinking and questioning why it has arisen and what it means
6. Relative - nothing exists in its own right, but it is measured against other phenomena (for example, good cannot exist unless there is bad)
7. Fragmented - broken into small pieces

## What is social exclusion?

### Bullets

- The notion of social exclusion has grown out critical theories of society and post-modernism
- It argues that some people do not participate fully in the opportunities of society.
- It is an ill-defined term that encompasses far wider ideas than poverty or deprivation.
- Government strategies and resources have been targeted at solving the problem of social exclusion.

### Text

The government of the UK has been moving away from traditional concerns with poverty and inequality and moving towards a concept derived from critical theories of society. Rather than tackling the traditional enemies of poor people (the five evils): squalor, want, idleness, ignorance and disease, since the 1980s, government initiatives have been set up to tackle social exclusion. Social exclusion is not a well-defined term, despite the way that it is commonly used in literature relating to inequality, poverty and deprivation. It is related to the ideas of postmodernism and critical theory however because it describes what may happen in a fragmented society. The UK government definition of social exclusion is a little vague despite the desire of New Labour to tackle the consequences of social exclusion. The British government defines it in the following way: 'Social exclusion is



# Aquiring culture

about more than income poverty. It is a short-hand term for what can happen when people or areas have a combination of linked problems, such as unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime rates and family breakdown. These problems are linked and reinforce each other. Social exclusion is an extreme consequence of what happens when people don't get a fair deal throughout their lives, often because of disadvantage they face at birth, and this disadvantage can be transmitted from one generation to the next.'

Social exclusion is a far wider concept than poverty or inequality. According to government thinking, it consists of a set of personal characteristics that allow people to progress through life, and it is seen as being a cultural phenomenon as much as anything. In 2008, the Social Exclusion Task Force said, 'Many people suffer one or more forms of disadvantage. For example, they may live below the poverty line, have a long-term illness or struggle with basic literacy. This does not however necessarily mean that they are socially excluded. Research shows that if certain protective factors are in place (such as supportive parents for children) then outcomes in later life are much more positive'. There have been a number of government strategies and programmes set up to deal with issues of social exclusion such as Sure Start and the Communities programme. Lack of opportunity is tackled by policies that prevent social exclusion and promote social inclusion. The Government has said it will promote social inclusion, through the following strategies: helping provide individuals with opportunities to participate in work and learning; removing barriers to participation in society; helping children and young people develop the skills and attributes which will secure their inclusion as adults and building stronger communities

The notion of social exclusion and the policies put in place to tackle it are related to a notion known as 'The Third Way' which is an attempt to combine socialism and also to support traditional capitalism. The Third Way was a political philosophy which drew on the ideas of Anthony Giddens, one of the UK's most prominent sociologists. The notion of the Third Way has been criticised for providing middle class voters with a sense that their interests will be cared for by low taxation and strong financial policies, whilst poorer people will be given a sense that something is being done to look after their needs and interests. Ruth Lister (2000) claims that that the 'third way' offers a very conditional form of social inclusion. It does not set out to offer solutions to problems of poverty and deprivation. She points out that it is, 'conditional on the willingness of citizens to exercise responsibility to include themselves through paid work and educational training for it and to grasp the opportunities being opened to them.' Thus only the very weakest are offered targeted support, other people must choose to accept it and be seen to be working at the problem of their own poverty and deprivation.

## Questions

- 1. What is social exclusion?
- 2. How does the government intend to tackle social exclusion?
- 3. Which sociologist is associated with the notion of the third way?
- 4. What criticisms have been made of the notion of the third way and social exclusion?

## Keywords

1. Social exclusion - the idea that some people do not participate fully in society
2. Third Way - an attempt to combine socialism and capitalism associated with New Labour
3. Squalor - poor living conditions
4. Fragmented society - people do not feel a sense of community values

# Aquiring culture

## What is the relationship between gender and inequality?

### What is sexism?

#### Bullets

- In the past, male superiority was assumed to be natural. Few people challenged it.
- Biological differences between males and females have been overstated by many people and used to justify unequal treatment of people on the grounds of gender.
- Increasingly, unequal treatment on gender grounds is becoming less acceptable, though it remains part of the legal and religious codes of some countries.

#### Text

The notion of sexism is a very recent idea in our society. The idea that men were superior to and different from women was so deeply ingrained into much thinking that most people never thought to question it. It has been claimed for example that Charles Darwin believed women to be less highly evolved than men. Sigmund Freud constructed a whole theory of gender based on the notion of 'penis envy', which he saw as the natural desire of a female to be male. Throughout the history of ideas, female inferiority has been seen as the natural order of things. There were very few people who challenged this notion until the second half of the last century, in the 1960s and 1970s.

Even today, there are many psychologists and biologists who still believe that there are significant biological differences between the genders. Many of those suggest that the male role is to be dominant over females. Steven Goldberg (1993) an American sociologist claims that male hormones push men towards world dominance and female hormones create a nurturing instinct in women. This is not a commonly held sociological view, but there are those who do support it. For example, in educational debates, there are still many people who believe that the genders should be educated separately because males and females learn in different ways. Feminists have challenged this type of thinking arguing that it is used as a justification for social injustice. The famous Australian sociologist, Bob Connell has claimed that the differences between male and female psychology and biology are very over-stated. Individual differences are far more significant than whole gender differences.

Misogyny is a term used to describe the fear and hatred that some males have for women. Germaine Greer, a radical feminist, argues that society is misogynistic. Sexism refers to an argument that suggests the biological differences between males and females can be used to justify the unequal and unfair treatment of one gender over another. Another less frequently used term which means something similar is male chauvinism. This term was used in the 1970s to describe the male assumption of superiority that was common at that time. Sexual discrimination is a more serious matter. This is when a person of one gender is favoured in terms of opportunity over another on gender grounds. It is now illegal in many countries, though not in all countries. For example, in Saudi Arabia, women are still not allowed to drive motor cars.

#### Questions

# Aquiring culture

- 1. What are the physical and biological differences between the genders? This question requires some careful thought and is not as easy as it seems!
- 2. Do biological differences between the genders justify differences in laws and educational opportunities?

## Keywords

1. Sexism - belief in the inequality of the genders
2. Sexual discrimination - differences in the treatment of individuals on gender grounds
3. Misogyny - hatred and fear of women
4. Male chauvinism - the assumed superiority of men over women
5. Gender - the expected social roles related to biological sex

## How are gender roles changing in our society?

### Bullets

- Women have always worked. It was more unusual for middle class women to have employment than working class women in the past.
- The political fight for equal rights for women has a long history, but it is only recently that people have begun to accept that women should have the same opportunities as men.
- Despite the massive changes that have taken place in the roles and expectations of women in recent years, women still do not have equality with men in many areas of public life.
- Some women have moved from traditional low pay and casual work into areas of work previously reserved for men. Many have not.

### Text

The expected behaviour of the genders has changed throughout the ages and varies from culture to culture. At various times in history, women have had relatively high status whereas in other periods of history or culture, women had far less control over their own lives and destinies. In addition, unmarried women have often been seen as the property of their male relatives to be disposed of as the parent sees fit. This view of the role of women is underlined in a traditional church service where a father 'gives away' his daughter to another man whom she promises to 'obey'.

Although working class women have always worked and often in large numbers, their work has generally been low paid and undervalued. Many women worked in factories in heavy industrial jobs until the Factory Acts of the early 1830s and 1840s made it illegal to employ women and children in this way. Women's work then became an extension of their domestic roles as cooks, cleaners and in childcare. Thomas Hood wrote his famous poem, 'The Song of the Shirt' in 1843 as a protest against the low pay and long hours expected of women who worked from their own homes as needle workers, so we are aware that women were expected to work hard for a living. Much work was as domestic labourers; women were used as servants and thus did not form part of employment statistics. Thus, although women have always been an important part of the labour force, it is not known in what numbers they worked or what conditions they worked in.

Middle class and wealthy women tended to have more freedom, as long as they did not marry and they had some disposable income of their own. They would not usually have

# Aquiring culture

been allowed or expected to have an education beyond that which was necessary to maintain a good conversation or to complete household tasks. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, some women were still able to make a significant impact on their culture and times: Florence Nightingale, Elizabeth Fry, George Eliot (Mary-Anne Evans), the Bronte sisters and Elizabeth Beaton among others.

Until the 1870s, women had very few legal or political rights. It was not until the Married Women's Property Act of 1870 that married women were allowed to keep their own earnings or own their own property. The pressure groups for voting rights had a powerful voice even in the 1860s, but it was not until 1928 that women had the same rights to vote as men. Even as recently as the 1970s, there was limited legal equality between the genders. In Britain it was still perfectly legal to pay men more for doing the same work as women until the Equal Pay Act of 1970. The history of the last 40 years has seen an increase in legislation protecting women's rights. Any study of gender will show that although sexism is socially less acceptable than it once was, and despite the fact that women have equal rights with men, there are still significant differences between the status of males and females in our society.

Traditional female roles in our culture have been associated with the home and family. Although during both World Wars (1914 - 1918 and 1939 - 45) women were expected to work alongside men in factories and many were killed on active service, it was not until the 1960s that married or middle class women began to move into the workforce in large numbers. There have been a variety of reasons to explain changes in the role of women in our society: changes in education, norms and values and contraception have all played their part. In addition, in the past, women were often expected to give up their jobs on marriage. However, despite the fact that women are now found in public life in ways that would have been unthinkable 100 years ago, many argue that there is still a long way to go before women can consider themselves the equals of men in our society. There are gaps in political representation; gender pay gaps are still high and women are more likely to live in poverty than men. In addition, nearly all of the directors of the top 100 companies in Britain are male.

## Questions

- 1. Why is it difficult to know much about the history of women in work in Victorian times?
- 2. What have been the most significant changes in the lives of women over the last 100 years?

## Keywords

1. Contraception - the prevention of unwanted pregnancy
2. Factory Acts - a series of legislative changes in the 1800s that made factory work illegal for children and women
3. Gender pay gap - the difference in average earnings between men and women
4. Disposable income - spending money above what is needed for taxation and bills

## How equal are the genders in employment?

### Bullets



# Aquiring culture

- Although women are working in increasing numbers, there is still inequality in work. Women earn less on average and are not promoted as often as men.
- Feminised work is low paid and low status. It is often associated with roles that women play in the home.
- Laws designed to protect women tend to increase levels of gender inequality by making the association between parenting and women.
- Feminists would like non-gender specific laws so that men and women both have more freedom to choose whether to live work orientated or family centred lives.

## Text

Despite the fact that women are now part of the formal workforce in increasing numbers, they tend to be found in low pay sectors of employment (the four C's - cooking, cleaning, caring and check-outs). There are obvious differences in terms of pay and conditions for similar status work for the sexes. Nurses are expected to have university degrees. Yet their conditions of service and pay are significantly worse than for police officers who are traditionally male and for whom lower educational standards are required. The pay gap between doctors and nurses is very extreme. Women are gradually making their way into the higher paid sectors of employment, but rarely rise to the top of those professions in any significant numbers. In addition, when professions do become feminised, such as teaching, there is often a loss of status and pay for the whole profession. Grimshaw and Rubery (EOC 2007) identified two elements of undervaluation: women tend to be paid less than men for the same performance in the same job and the jobs that they do tend to attract lower wages than men's jobs.

Overall, the pattern is one of gross inequality; according to research published in 1999, one woman in five earned less than £200 a week, compared with one man in 12. At the top of the earnings distribution, just 12 per cent of females made more than £500 a week compared with 27 per cent of males. And those in high-paid occupations were far less likely than their male counterparts to be paid the most. Among top doctors, for instance, 95 per cent of men earned more than £540 a week, a figure reached by only 64 per cent of the women. Although there are slight variations annually, this pattern has remained remarkably consistent over the past ten years.

The World Economic Forum on Women's Equality ranked Britain very low in terms of gender equality; it was the 13th out of 130 countries in 2008. The biggest contributing factor to Britain's declining performance was in the area of pay, with a 4% drop in wage equality. This is despite women generally scoring better than men in terms of educational attainment and educational records. In 2006, the Equal Opportunities Commission showed that over the 30 years from 1976, there were a quarter of a million employment tribunal cases of sex discrimination with 67 000 related to equal pay. Record numbers of cases were filed after 2000. The EOC claims that many of the problems of gender equality remain. Examples in 2006 include the fact that women working part-time earn nearly 40 per cent less per hour than men working full-time and this has barely changed over the last thirty years. Four out of five part-time workers, mostly women, find themselves stuck in jobs below their potential partly due to the lack of flexible working at more senior levels. Nearly half of pregnant women experience some form of discrimination at work, and 30 000 are forced out of their jobs.

In Wales, The Office of National Statistics released figures showing that the full-time gender pay gap has risen to 12.7% in 2008, up from 10.3% in 2007. The part-time gender pay gap in Wales has risen to 33.7%, from 29.2% in 2007.



# Aquiring culture

Women and men are protected by gender equality laws in work. The first UK laws relating to pay equality were enacted in the 1970s. Initially the laws tended to look at gender as being an issue for women, but now they protect people of any gender or sexual orientation so they have been broadened in scope. The Equal Opportunities Commission claimed that inequality laws are generally not effective because they are based on people bringing cases against their employers. This is both difficult and expensive. The average cost of legal advice and representation for individuals is £4400, while employers spend an average of £5800 on legal costs for their defence, not including staff time.

In addition, laws designed to give women legal rights during pregnancy and childbirth have been criticised as being counter-productive and restricting women's opportunities by women's organisations on the grounds that the focus on giving mothers rights, rather than giving parents of either gender legal rights. As a result, parenting is still seen as a feminine occupation, despite the fact that a person of either gender may choose to be the prime carer for small children. This keeps mothers out of promotion races and off the career ladder.

In addition, Catherine Hakim, a controversial sociologist, famed for rational choice theory has asked for gender neutral policies to be put in place. Individuals make personal life choices and only 25% of women choose to live career-driven lives. She points out that in Sweden, men and women can choose to take parental leave but only women tend to do so. Men still continue to dominate the workplace in Sweden as a result of this. However, in Belgium, all employees are entitled to paid leave that can be used for parenting, further education or anything else. This means that men and women do have more equal choices. In contrast, in Britain, men are the victims of gender equality legislation as they are forced to take on work-driven lives, whereas women can choose to be career or family centred in their daily lives.

## Questions

- 1. Which employment sectors tend to be associated with women?
- 2. Why have equality laws been criticised by the Equal Opportunities Commission and by women?
- 3. How effective have Equality Laws been in changing attitudes towards women in work?
- 4. What is rational choice theory?

## Keywords

1. Feminised - associated with women rather than men.
2. Gender neutral policies - policies that are designed for women, men, boys and girls as if they are all the same and they do not have different needs and roles
3. Gender aware - recognition that women and men perform different roles in society and therefore have different needs which must be recognised
4. Gender equality - equal rights and opportunities for women, men, girls and boys in all sectors, political, social, legal and economic
5. Gender sensitive - being aware that women and men perform different roles and have different needs which must be planned for accordingly
6. Gender bias - a positive or negative attitude/practice towards either female or male

## What gender patterns are emerging in educational attainment?

# Aquiring culture

## Bullets

- Women achieve better and higher examination results than men at GCSE, and slightly so at A level.
- Women are improving more quickly than men in terms of educational attainment.
- Women have challenged traditional gender patterns in education.
- Women tend to choose feminised subjects and those who do, often take on lower paid feminised work.
- Female success in education is not matched by success in the workplace where women still earn less and are less likely to be promoted.

## Text

Since 1988, girls have begun to outstrip boys in terms of educational attainment at GCSE. The performance gap has stabilised so that on average, girls outperform boys by a factor of around 10%. There are variations for individual subjects, so that results are nearly the same for both genders in Mathematics. Girls tend to do better in language based subjects and Humanities. In addition, girls are more likely to get higher grades than boys. Girls are more likely to take subjects that are traditionally seen as feminine than boys. They also opt for traditionally masculine subjects but boys rarely take feminised subjects. Girls are more likely to remain in school, post 16 than boys. Subject choices are even more strongly gendered, with males taking science based subjects and girls taking on language based subjects. At A level, the gender gap in attainment is not so significant but it is still present. Girls are more likely to outperform boys by a factor of 4%.

Younger et al (2005) point out that some boys indulge in disruptive behaviour as a result of attempts to project a 'macho' image. They often influence their entire peer group and affect the tone and content of lessons. However, overall, gender gaps arise because of differences in male and female literacy skills. Gender gaps are negligible in Mathematics and Science. This is true over time and cross culturally. Gender is not as significant a predictor of educational attainment as social class, and it is possible that gender is not as significant as ethnicity either. There has been something of a moral panic about male underachievement in recent years, but large numbers of working class females also under-attain. In the view of the Department for Education and Skills, (2007) the 'different subject choices made by boys and girls may be more marked and have greater longer-term outcomes in terms of subsequent career choices than attainment differences'.

Research into education suggests that there are slight differences in the way that girls are socialised towards education and perhaps in the way that they learn. These differences do not fully account for changes in gender attainment patterns within education. A rather more complex process is taking place. Girls' attitudes towards education have been influenced by wider economic and social change in society. There has been considerable pressure on girls to challenge male dominance in the workplace and in education. The rise of single parenthood means that girls can no longer assume that a man will provide them with financial support for life. Furthermore, Arnot et al. (1999) pointed out that girls express desire for independence and do not want to take on traditional female roles. Mirza found that mothers encourage their daughter's education, particularly among the African Caribbean community as it is a route to social mobility. However female attitudinal change has not been matched by equal attitude change on the part of boys, many of whom accept an outmoded notion of gender and gender relationships.

Despite female progress in terms of gaining academic qualifications, girls still tend to choose feminised work. In 2002, women formed 69 % or more of administrative and secretarial, personal service, and sales and customer service occupations. Men made up 69

# Aquiring culture

% or more of managers and senior officials, skilled trades, and process, plant and machine operatives. Women's work is less well paid leading to inequalities in pay and income. Even with relative equality in levels of qualification, the gender pay gap is still in existence; female employees working full time earn on average nineteen per cent less than the average hourly earnings of male full-time employees.

## Questions

- 1. What is the gender gap in terms of attainment at GCSE?
- 2. What are the causes of female improvement in educational attainment?
- 3. To what extent is female attainment in education matched by success in the workplace?

## Keywords

1. Moral panic - public and media over-reaction to a perceived social problem
2. Social mobility - movement between classes and status groups in society

## What gender inequality patterns emerge in the study of criminality?

### Bullets

- Male and female criminal behaviour is different.
- Courts are increasingly punitive against women.
- Female criminals are likely to be women who are victims of other social problems and who have experienced deprivation or abuse in some way.
- Women are more likely to be victims of crime from people they know and might be expected to trust.
- Women are under-represented in senior positions in the criminal justice system.

### Text

Superficially, males are more likely to be the victims of the criminal justice system than women. They are more likely to be criminal and they are more likely to be the victims of crime. In addition, there are significant gender differences in offending behaviour and in the nature of those who are likely to be convicted. According to self report studies, women are far less likely than men to offend (11% to 26%). The peak age for female offending is 15 years as opposed to 19 for men, and women are far more likely to stop offending as they mature than men.

Female offences tend to include fraud and handling stolen goods. Women offenders are often also problem drug users. Women make up approximately 6% of the prison population, and in 2002 there were on average, around 4,300 women in British prisons. However, between 1992 and 2002, the average population of women in prison rose by 50%. More than 29% of the female prison population are from ethnic minority populations and 20% of female prisoners were foreign nationals in 2002. Many of these women were caught trafficking drugs into the UK from developing countries. 71% of female prisoners are in prison for short sentences of under 12 months. Government statistics suggest that courts have been increasingly prepared to impose custodial sentences on women for offences. The Fawcett Society says the single most common offence for which women are

# Aquiring culture

sentenced to prison is shoplifting and they are twice as likely to be sent to prison for this crime as in the 1990s.

Women in prison are likely to come from deprived or problem backgrounds. They are less likely to be in long term relationships and more likely to have parental responsibilities than other women of a similar age range. In addition, 20% of female prisoners are likely to have experienced the care system as children. Many female prisoners interviewed report that they had experienced abuse as children. Abuse included sexual and physical maltreatment. Some female prisoners experienced abuse as adults. Nearly 50% of female prisoners had used crack cocaine or heroin in the year preceding sentence to prison. Most were in relatively poor health, and 15% had previously spent time in mental hospital. In 1998, 31% of female prisoners had been diagnosed with anti-social personality disorders. 37% of female prisoners have previously attempted suicide and female prisoners are at high risk of self-harming behaviour and suicide. Their levels of educational attainment are generally very low compared to the general population though slightly higher than for men in prison.

Men are twice more likely to be the victims of crime than women, but women are far more likely to know their attackers than men. 30% of murder victims were female in 2002. Nearly half of those were women who were killed by a partner or former partner. The 2000 British Crime Survey suggested that probably 5% of women have experienced rape, generally by someone the victim knew well or who was in fact, her partner or former partner.

Women form a significant part of the criminal justice system of the UK, but not in positions of senior management. They are likely to be probation officers, lawyers, magistrates and clerical staff. They are under-represented in senior positions, as judges, or as police officers.

## Questions

- 1. What are the social characteristics of women who are imprisoned?
- 2. What differences are there between male and female victimisation?
- 3. Should male and female criminals receive different treatment?

## Keywords

1. Anti-social personality disorder - a psychological condition where people have a long term pattern of disregarding the rights and feelings of others. This often begins in childhood and is a sign of poor socialisation and abuse.
2. Custodial sentence - prison sentence

## Are there gender inequalities in the experience of health?

### Bullets

- Poverty has a significant impact on health.
- Wealthy people live longer and experience better health than poor people in general.
- Females live longer than men, but are more likely to experience poor health and disability.
- Males indulge in risk behaviours that have an impact on their health.
- Males are less likely to consult a doctor about health concerns.

# Aquiring culture

## Text

The main factor affecting health inequality in the UK is social class. Study after study shows that people born in poor families are low birth weight, are more likely to die as babies, grow up with poor health, are vulnerable to disabling disease and impaired development and they die early. Their children will experience poor life chances so health inequality runs in families. Some of these health inequalities are due to patterns of poor life style so that obesity and smoking related illnesses are also diseases of poverty and deprivation. Children born in poverty and deprivation are also vulnerable to high risk behaviour such as drug abuse, binge drinking and sexual transmission of disease.

There are particular issues associated with gender. Women tend to live longer than males, but they are also likely to experience more years of poor health and disability before mortality. Women sometimes have significant problems accessing health care: transport, caring and childcare can all mean that women tend to experience problems obtaining treatment. Women who have diseases normally associated with males such as heart disease tend to be slow obtaining diagnosis and treatment. Women are more likely to experience disability than men and are vulnerable to mental illness and depression.

Men tend to live shorter lives than women but these gender differences are more explicit in areas of deprivation. Men in deprived areas are more than twice as likely to indulge in risk behaviours such as smoking and alcohol consumption. Among Asian populations 23.2% of males smoke compared to 5.3% of women. Women are vulnerable to self-harming, but young men are more likely than women to commit suicide. Males are far less likely to visit a doctor than women and to leave obtaining a diagnosis for serious illness until it is too late to treat. Men are nearly twice as likely as women to develop one of the ten most common cancers that men and women 'share' and about twice as likely to die from it. In addition, it is argued that men are more likely to be engaged in risky employment and to have diets that are high in fats and low in fruit and vegetables. Being overweight and obese is more marked among manual, semi-skilled, unskilled and unemployed groups of men, linked to poorer diets and less exercise. There is a significant North/South divide, with men in the North being significantly more overweight. It is also possible that men are vulnerable to social stress linked to their working lives and their status in society. A study, by Newcastle University, found that more 50 year old men than women were clinically depressed.

## Questions

- 1. What single social factor is most significant in terms of health equality in the UK?
- 2. What differences are there in the experience of health by gender?
- 3. Why are smoking and obesity linked to poverty?

## Keywords

1. Health inequality - systematic differences in the health of social groups occupying unequal positions in society

## What about women and political representation?

### Bullets

- The UK has a poor record on the representation of women in Parliament.



# Aquiring culture

- Wales has a good record for the election of women to legislative bodies including the Welsh Assembly.
- It is important for women to be represented in government as they make up half of the population.
- The reasons for women not being part of Parliament are related to lack of opportunity and a masculinist culture that is not woman friendly.

## Text

There are few women MPs in the Westminster Parliament, though the introduction of all women short lists of candidates for some constituencies has been effective in increasing female representation. Women remain less than 20% of all MPs. The Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party have a better record of electing women than the Conservative Party in the UK. The UK Parliament has one of the worst records in the EU, being behind new member countries such as Lithuania and Latvia in this respect.

The Welsh Assembly has a better record for female presence with approximately half of all AMs being female. In 2003, Welsh Labour had all women short-lists in six constituency seats and Plaid Cymru took positive action to include women. The Welsh Liberal Democrats and the Welsh Conservatives were encouraging of women, and this suggests that positive political action to encourage women is effective because in 2003, there was equal gender representation in the Welsh Assembly.

The Fawcett Society and other women's groups have long pressed for there to be more women in Parliament. There is a clear failure of representation if the needs of more than half the population are represented by fewer than 20% of Parliamentary members. It is argued that women MPs would act as role models for future generations. Women have significantly different life experiences and concerns from men. Our society is still gendered in many ways, and women can bring this understanding to the law-making process. Issues such as childcare and domestic violence have moved up the political agenda since 1997 when there was a huge increase in the number of women in Parliament. Women also have a different style of politics and social behaviour. As society is becoming more feminised, then it is appropriate for Parliament to follow. Women are more likely to vote when there are female candidates and it is wise for parties to support women's issues as they are a significant part of the voter population.

The reasons for the under-representation of women in Parliament appear to be a combination of both cultural and social reasons. Parliament uses a very confrontational style of debate that many women MPs claim they find uncomfortable to work in. The Fawcett Society surveyed female MPs after the 1997 election and found many women MPs complaining of 'yob culture' and 'public school attitudes' among the men. Women are less likely to have experience of high paid, high status work of the kind that MPs are often drawn from. It is also argued that the long and antisocial hours expected of MPs work against the needs of women who may be caring for children and family members. It is also argued that many constituency selection groups are made up of men who are prejudiced against women. They are rarely given safe seats to win.

## Questions

- 1. Why is it important that women be fully represented in law making bodies??
- 2. What barriers are there to the election of women to law making institutions in society?
- 3. How could women be encouraged to participate in politics?

# Aquiring culture

## Keywords

1. Constituency - the geographical area represented by an MP or AM
2. Yob culture - bad masculine behaviour

## What is the relationship between gender and poverty?

### Bullets

- Women are more vulnerable to poverty than men.
- Women are vulnerable to poverty as a result of low pay and poor conditions of work outside the home.
- Within the family, women tend to bear the brunt of poverty because they take primary responsibility for caring for their families.
- Women are vulnerable to poverty in old age as they live longer and are more reliant on state benefits than men.

### Text

Research from the Fawcett Society and others shows that there are clear links between gender and poverty. Women are slightly more likely to experience poverty and more women live in households that are poorer than men. Fawcett offer figures to show that 40% of women have incomes of less than £100 each week and that 22% of women live in conditions of persistent low income.

The reasons for this poverty tend to be related to low income when in work. Women are likely to work part time and even when they work full-time, they are likely to earn 20% less than men on average. 70% of low paid workers are women. Women with children are more likely to be poor than women without children, they earn less and take on part-time casual work. The distribution of money within households can leave some women short of cash. In low income households, money is often directed at the children and the man, so women will do without to support their families. Scullion and Hillyard (2005) in a study in Northern Ireland found that women in poverty are more likely to economise on food than men in poverty. Some 71 per cent of women buy cheaper cuts or less meat in contrast to 60 per cent of men. Also more women (42%) than men (27%) skimp on food so others can have more. Women in poverty are more likely to put off buying clothing or rely on gifts of clothing to save money than men. Payne and Pantazis found similar patterns in the Breadline Britain Survey. They claimed that men and women seem to have a different understanding of poverty and of the things which are necessary to avoid poverty, so men will see money that women spend on children as being part of the woman's own personal spending money. Craig and Glendinning, (1990) found that women report not heating a home while they are on their own, especially during the day in order to save money for their families.

Social factors that make people vulnerable to poverty are related to low skills. Women, in the past, were vulnerable to leaving school without qualifications. However, people of both genders are vulnerable to poverty through low educational attainment. The factors that propel women into poverty are often related to their family situation: teenage pregnancy, divorce, separation, lone parenthood and old age. Government policy aimed at solving this problem is intended to encourage lone mothers back into the workplace. In 2008, Work and Pensions secretary, Peter Hain MP confirmed plans that would require all lone parents on benefit to look for a job once their children reach age seven, from 2010. This plan was controversial and unpopular when announced, nevertheless under the new

# Aquiring culture

measures lone parents will go on to Job Seekers' Allowance and be expected to look for employment once their youngest child is 12 from next October, 10 from 2009 and seven from 2010. It is arguable how effective this policy will be as single income households are often in poverty. The JRF Foundation point out that unemployed people are about twice as likely as the all-population average to experience persistent poverty. However, low-paid and insecure employment also increases the risk of poverty. Between 1994 and 1997 a third of working-age adults living in poverty for two years or more were in low paid employment.

According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, ageing is a female experience. The majority of older people are women and as age increases, women outnumber men proportionately so that there are more than double the number of females aged 85+ than males. Women are more likely to rely on state pensions and are less likely to have occupational pensions. Receiving an occupational pension is clearly linked to a higher level of income for older people. Arber and Cooper (1999) found that women are far more likely to have been in low status employment with few rights or benefits. In addition, married, widowed or divorced women are more likely than men to have been responsible for caring, and thus have disrupted employment records. In contrast, never married women are the group most likely to have paid into an occupational pension, as they are most likely to have been engaged in pensionable employment throughout their working lives (Arber, 2004).

## Questions

- 1. Why are women more vulnerable to poverty than men?
- 2. What social factors make a person vulnerable to poverty?
- 3. What has government policy done to attempt to solve problems of poverty for women and children?
- 4. Why are women vulnerable to poverty in old age?

## Keywords

1. Occupational pension - private pensions paid for while in work

## What is the relationship between ethnicity and inequality?

### What is racism?

#### Bullets

- Racism is difficult to define because it takes many forms, not all of them associated with race.
- In the past, racism was a normal part of people's thinking so that daily language contains racist beliefs and opinions.
- Many cultures are ethnocentric. They view their own way of life as superior to others.
- People still hold racist beliefs but often they are more discrete and attempt to provide what may seem to be a logical reason for their prejudice

# Aquiring culture

## Text

Racism is a difficult term to define because it can be used in so many different ways. At its most simple, it is the belief that some ethnic groups are superior and others inferior. This belief is often associated with notions of skin pigmentation or the minor physical differences that are sometimes apparent between different groups of people. However, racism is not always associated with skin colour, but also with culture, ethnicity, with religious belief or language differences. The notion of racism itself is also a very recent idea in our society. In the past, the idea that people from certain ethnic groups were superior to and different from others was so deeply ingrained into much thinking that it was not seriously questioned. There is a long and deep history of racism in European culture. Anti-Semitism against Jewish people is an historic tradition and Hitler's Final Solution was built on a long pattern of European hatred for Jews. Even the English language is racist. The term 'black' is used to describe anything that is bad: black magic, blackmail. In Medieval times, the Devil was portrayed as a black man in wall paintings. We often ascribe negative characteristics to people of different ethnicities and nationalities so that they are used as terms of abuse. Many jokes rely on negative assumptions about people's national characteristics.

Many cultures are ethnocentric. Ethnocentrism is the tendency to see the world from the perspective of your own culture and to assume that one's own culture is the only correct way to think. Franz Boas, an anthropologist, developed the concept of cultural relativity to suggest that whatever one culture believes to be correct and moral, another would find disgusting and immoral. Racism is a step beyond ethnocentricity because it implies that people of different cultures are not equal with each other. People may be racist, but it is the impact of racial beliefs on behaviour that is significant to sociology. Many people are prejudiced. They have stereotypical beliefs about people of different ethnicities and this may affect their attitudes. More importantly, people may discriminate on the basis of ethnicity. Discrimination is acting on a prejudice.

There are various forms of racism. Racism can be individual distrust of people from a particular ethnic, religious or racial group. It can also be institutional whereby social institutions operate in such a way as to exclude people from certain backgrounds from fully taking part in the institution. Overt racism is increasingly rejected by society, but few people would deny its existence. Barker (1981) for instance, has suggested that the direct racism associated by rejecting people on the basis of skin colour has been replaced in recent years by a marginally more sophisticated form which he terms as New Racism where commentators reject those of different ethnicity on cultural grounds. Muslims, for instance, are rejected for their 'failure' to adapt to British cultural traditions.

## Questions

- 1. Think of examples of racist jokes and racist beliefs that people sometimes express.
- 2. Suggest reasons why some people hold racist beliefs and fears
- 3. What is New Racism?

## Keywords

1. Racism - discrimination on the basis of culture, religion, ethnicity or race
2. Racialism - belief in racial categories and the idea that these influence behaviour or ability
3. Prejudice - making a judgement about someone on the basis of beliefs about their background or ethnicity
4. Discrimination - this is the power to act on a prejudice
5. Racial Discrimination - this is the power to act on a prejudice based on beliefs about ethnicity or religion



# Aquiring culture

## 6. Xenophobia - Fear and distrust of foreigners

### Why is Britain a multi-cultural culture?

#### Bullets

- There has been a long tradition of migration into Britain.
- Migrants have added to the rich diversity of British culture.
- Post-war migrations saw a large influx of non-Whites into Britain. They experienced prejudice and poor treatment.
- More recent migrants have come legally from Eastern Europe.
- All have come to work and to make better lives for themselves.

#### Text

Britain has always been a multicultural society. There have been many waves of immigrant groups into the British Isles. It is probable that the first Africans seen in Britain came with the Roman legions before the birth of Christ. There have been other major groups of invaders, refugees and immigrants over the centuries, Vikings, Jews, Saxons, French, Dutch, and Normans. All of these groups have left their mark on British culture and the English language in particular. Most of these groups were white and thus the racial diversity of Britain would not have been obvious. However, even in the 18th century, there were sizeable groups of Black people in London and other sea ports. Intermarriage was not uncommon so that many 'White' people have genetic evidence of African or Mediterranean ancestors.

Reasons for migration into Britain include invasion. It was the Dark Age invasions of England during the period after the Romans left and before the Normans arrived in 1066 which pushed the Celtic inhabitants of Britain into Wales, Cornwall, Cumbria and the Isle of Man where the original language survived. Many migrants have come to Britain in the hope of a safer life for themselves and their children, so Jewish people, Poles and Czechs escaped Nazi terror and came to Britain. Many people arrived for reasons of trade or commerce, some of those people as slaves so that Bristol and Liverpool built great wealth on the trafficking of Africans. In Bristol there are many historical reminders of slavery; one of the main streets is still called 'Black Boys'. The Irish arrived to escape starvation and death at home as a result of the potato famines. Many people arrived for work; during the great boom time of coal mining in the valleys, Italians opened cafes and there are still many Italian families in Wales. Migrants into Britain still come for many of the same reasons, in the hope of building a better life for themselves and their families.

After World War 2, there was a labour shortage in Britain. People, who lived in areas of the world governed by the UK, many of whom had fought as soldiers, came to live in Britain. It is estimated that half a million migrants came from the West Indies, attracted by advertising by British companies. Many of them arrived expecting wonderful new lives, only to be met by racism and discrimination. West Indians were not the only migrants. People of Asian heritage came directly from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh to work in the factories in the North of England. They also came from Africa where many had lost their jobs and businesses as African countries gained independence from British rule. The new rulers of Uganda and Kenya both expelled British Asians from their countries in the 1960s. These people came to Britain.

More recently, there have been migrants from Eastern Europe. When Eastern European countries joined the EU, their citizens were entitled to live and work anywhere in the EU and many have come to Britain to learn English and improve their job prospects at home.



# Aquiring culture

At least 7.3% of the British population was born abroad. Not all of these people are migrants. The figure includes the children of British citizens who were working abroad when the babies were born, for example Army children. Migrants are not equally distributed throughout the country. Most settle in London and the South-East. In and out migrants tend to be both young and male. Most recent immigrants have come to Britain to study or work.

## Questions

- 1. Suggest reasons why people migrate.
- 2. What benefits have migrants brought to British culture?
- 3. What was the experience of the post war non-White migrants to Britain?
- 4. List the various reasons for migrating.

## Keywords

1. Emigration - movement out of a nation state to take up permanent life in another country
2. Immigration - movement into a country
3. Internal migration - movements of people within a country
4. Migration - movements of population between different countries
5. Migrants - people who move within a country or between countries

## What has been the experience of ethnic minorities in the job market?

### Bullets

- Members of some ethnic minorities are more likely to be unemployed, underemployed and underpaid when in employment than the White majority population.
- There are cultural, educational and social differences between ethnic groups and the groups most vulnerable to poverty and inequality are the Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups.
- Sometimes these inequalities are related to educational and cultural differences.
- There is evidence of institutional discrimination against some ethnic minority groups.

### Text

The experience of many ethnic minority people arriving in Britain has not always been pleasant or positive. Many have experienced prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping. Some of this has been direct. In the 1960s and 1970s, until the law changed, it was possible to see shops and hotels with notices saying 'No Blacks, no Irish'. It is in the job market that the effects of disadvantage and discrimination remain most obvious, so that on average, members of ethnic minorities can experience pay disadvantage. This is not equally true for all ethnic minorities. There are variations, so that Hindus are well represented in the highly paid medical profession. In general, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black African men, are very low paid or underemployed when compared to White British men. In London, data suggests the most disadvantaged ethnic minority groups are those of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin. UK figures showed that in 2004, taken as a whole ethnic minority

# Aquiring culture

workers earned only £18,044 on average compared with £19,552 for white employees, however, the average Bangladeshi salary was only £12,220 a year.

Government data in 2004 showed that Blacks and Asians were twice as likely to be unemployed as White workers. The first annual report from the government's Ethnic Minority Employment Taskforce showed that the employment rate among ethnic minorities was 59.4% compared to 74.9% for the general population. The figures also showed that minority employees earned less than their white counterparts. Average weekly earnings for white workers were £376, compared to £347 for ethnic minorities. Bangladeshi workers were the worst off, receiving an average £235 a week, while Indians took home £373. Although minority employment has risen, mainly due to more ethnic minority women securing jobs, there is still government concern that the pay gap is not closing fast enough. Jane Kennedy (2004), then Minister for Work, said: "These statistics are shocking".

Ethnicity alone is not a guide to earnings. Different social groups may have differing educational backgrounds. In general, Indians and African-Asians were very highly qualified people when they arrived in Britain. Although many found themselves in bad jobs, their children have generally been successful in making the transition to highly paid occupations. Nevertheless, research by JRF suggests that when qualification levels are taken into account, there is still some difference between the earnings of White people and Indian or Black African people. Block (2004) suggested that recent immigrants generally experience significant disadvantage, with refugees earning 79% of the pay of ethnic minority groups in general, despite being well qualified and highly educated. Sometimes the issue is one of language difficulties, but many overseas qualifications are not recognised in the UK.

There is evidence of workplace discrimination, probably institutional rather than personal, so ignorance of other people's backgrounds and capabilities may be widespread. People who are trained in different environments may not understand the British workplace culture and be passed over for promotion. Just as feminised jobs are often underpaid, so ethnic minority work is often seen as low status and low paid. Lucinda Platt (2007) found that ethnic minority workers do not have access to informal social networks. Clark and Drinkwater (2007) suggested that many Asians in particular prefer self-employment in relatively low paid sectors of work such as taxi-driving and catering, rather than face discrimination in the wider employment sector

## Questions

- 1. What evidence is there to suggest some ethnic minority groups may have experienced discrimination?
- 2. How effective have Equality Laws been in changing attitudes towards members of ethnic minorities?
- 3. What impact will low pay and unemployment have on the life chances of members of ethnic minorities?

## Keywords

1. Ethnicity equality - equal rights and opportunities for people regardless of ethnicity or culture in all sectors, political, social, legal and economic
2. Ethnicity sensitive - being aware that people of differing ethnicities have different needs which must be planned for accordingly
3. Ethnicity bias - a positive or negative attitude/practice towards a member of an ethnic minority
4. Prejudice - judging someone without knowing them
5. Discrimination - acting on a prejudice

# Aquiring culture

6. Stereotyping -classifying people on the basis of ascribed qualities
7. Institutional racism - the rules of the organisation make equality impossible
8. Immigrants - people who move to a new country
9. Refugees - people escaping war, government torture or illegality, or terror in their home countries

## How does ethnicity affect educational attainment?

### Bullets

- There are differences between the ethnic minorities in terms of educational attainment.
- At GCSE some ethnic minorities achieve better than the White population.
- At degree level, ethnic minorities are likely to under attain.
- There are no simple explanations of why these patterns have emerged in British society, but it is important because educational attainment affects people's life chances.
- Some ethnic minorities are more likely to be excluded or to reject education than others.

### Text

Government data reveals significant differences between the educational attainments of various ethnic groups. At GCSE, Chinese and Indian pupils are most likely to achieve five or more GCSEs. The groups who under attain are Black Caribbean boys, Black Africans. Mixed ethnic groups tend to under attain the most. In all ethnic groups, girls tend to achieve better results than boys. Similar patterns are found in Universities, ONS statistics show that in 2004 people from the Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean and Pakistani groups were less likely than White British people to have a degree (or equivalent). Among men, Bangladeshis and Black Caribbeans were the least likely to have a degree (11 per cent for each group). Among women, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis were the least likely to have a degree, 5 and 10 per cent respectively. The groups most likely to have degrees were Chinese (31 per cent), Indian (25 per cent) and White Irish (24 per cent). These compared with 17 per cent of White British people. However, a relatively high proportion of Chinese people had no qualifications - 20 per cent, compared with 15 per cent of White British people.

However, a Department for Education and Skills team found in 2007 that Black and Asian undergraduates are less likely to get a first class degree than white students. The research group used a statistical model based on a number of characteristics to predict what class of degree 65,000 undergraduate entrants would get. They predicted only 3% of black Caribbean and other black students, 4% of black African and 5% of Bangladeshi and Pakistani students obtained firsts. This compared to some 13% of those termed white UK Irish and 16% of other white students. This has serious implications for ethnic minority students given the very strong relationship between educational qualifications and future life chances

Lee Harvey (2008) in a study for the Higher Education Academy and the Equality Challenge Unit, suggested the issues are not just issues of racism but that more complex social factors affect the attainment of ethnic minorities. The researchers surveyed students and staff in 54 English higher education institutions and followed these up with phone interviews and a questionnaire. The top three reasons that those surveyed gave for differential attainment were the need to undertake paid employment while studying, social

# Aquiring culture

class and prior family background of university students. The research team did not rule out racism and ethnic discrimination as a problem, but said that it was hard to quantify.

The issue is not just one of the failures of some groups to attain qualifications but of behaviour and attitudes to educational attainment. In 2003/04 pupils from Black Caribbean, Other Black and Mixed White and Black Caribbean groups were among the most likely to be permanently excluded from schools in England. The permanent exclusion rates for pupils from the Other Black, Black Caribbean and Mixed White and Black Caribbean groups were 42 pupils per 10,000, 41 per 10,000 and 37 per 10,000 respectively. These were up to three times the rate for White pupils (14 pupils per 10,000). Chinese and Indian pupils had the lowest exclusion rates, at 2 or less pupils excluded per 10,000. For all ethnic groups, the rate of permanent exclusions was higher for boys than girls, with boys representing around 80 per cent of the total number of permanent exclusions.

## Questions

- 1. What is the ethnicity gap in terms of attainment at GCSE?
- 2. What is the pattern of attainment at degree level?
- 3. Suggest reasons why educational attainment is important for children of ethnic minorities.

## Keywords

1. Exclusion from school - pupils are barred from attending as a punishment.
2. Social mobility - movement between classes and status groups in society
3. First class degree - also known as a first, a top quality degree from a University, this is needed to get the best jobs or to stay on and do research.
4. Degree - qualification obtained from a University or other Institute of Higher Education

## What is the relationship between ethnicity and criminality in the UK?

### Bullets

- Ethnic minorities are not equally distributed through the whole population, they are generally younger and poorer than the general population and this is reflected in the crime statistics that we have for victimisation and conviction.
- Members of all ethnicities are likely to experience race attacks; however the risks are proportionally higher for some ethnic minorities.
- Members of all ethnicities commit crime; however some ethnicities are over-represented in crime statistics.
- There is some evidence that the police and criminal justice system operate in an institutionally racist way.

### Text

There are a number of issues to explore in this section. People from ethnic minorities are likely to appear in victim and conviction statistics in different proportions from White people according to their cultural backgrounds.

# Aquiring culture

According to the British Crime Survey, people from ethnic minorities are over-represented in crime statistics as the victims of crime. This is often more a question of their age, their social class and their locale than their ethnicity, but ethnicity alone can make people vulnerable to hate crime. Pakistani people are more likely to be the victims of crime and to report this crime as being racially motivated than African Caribbeans or Indians. African Caribbeans are often unwilling to report racist crime to the police in the belief that this may not be taken seriously or acted upon. There is evidence to support their case, because more racial crimes are reported to the police than are recorded in crime statistics. The ONS report that in 2002/03, adults from a Mixed race or Asian background were more likely than those from other ethnic groups to be victims of crime in England and Wales. Almost half (46 per cent) of adults of Mixed race had been the victim of a crime in the previous 12 months. This compared with 30 per cent of Asians. Black adults and those from the 'Chinese or other' group experienced similar levels of crime to White people. There has been an increase in recorded instances of race crime, but this is probably because more people are more likely to report incidents and the police are more likely to take accusations seriously.

People from some ethnic minorities are more likely to be represented in prison statistics than others. In June 2005, there were 18,750 people in prison establishments in England and Wales from Black minority ethnic groups, representing 25 per cent of the total prison population. This is an over representation of non-White prisoners. 15% of prisoners were Black or Black British, whereas 6% were from Asian heritage backgrounds. This poses a problem for sociologists because there are two plausible conclusions that can be drawn. If the figures are an accurate reflection of criminality, then it is possible that people from some ethnic minorities are more criminal than others. Note, however, that some of this over-representation of ethnic minorities may be related to the age and social class of the populations. On the other hand, it may be that the criminal justice system itself is unequally applied and that ethnic minority criminals are treated more harshly.

There is a strong argument to suggest that the police themselves can be racist in their approach. In 2002, ICM research conducted a poll for the BBC and found that 33% of Black respondents and 30% of Asian respondents said they have been made to feel like a criminal because of the colour of their skin. However, more than 70% of ethnic minorities questioned - and 82% of all respondents - also said they felt the police do either a very good or a quite good job. The same research discovered that 18% of black and 15% of Asian respondents said they had experienced racism by the police or in the criminal justice system. Home Office statistics for 2005 showed that members of black and minority ethnic (BME) groups were more likely to be arrested, or stopped and searched, than white people. The total number of 'stop and searches' conducted by police increased by 14% in 2005, with terrorism-related searches increasing by 9%. Black people were six times more likely to be stopped and searched by police than white people and there were nearly twice as many searches of Asian people than white people. This supports claims by sociologists such as Muncie and Heidensohn that the police operate a 'canteen culture' that is both racist and sexist.

## Questions

- 1. Why are people more likely to report hate and racist crime now than in the past?
- 2. Why is the over-representation of some ethnic minorities in criminal justice statistics a problem for sociologists?

## Keywords

1. Custodial sentence - prison sentence



# Aquiring culture

2. Stop and search - this is a police power in England and Wales, allowing officers to search members of the public for weapons, drugs, stolen property, terrorism-related evidence or evidence of other crimes.
3. Reported crime - crime that is reported to the police
4. Recorded crime - crime that the police note down as requiring action
5. Hate crime - crime that is prompted by aggression towards a member of a particular social group rather than the individual.

## Are there ethnic inequalities in the experience of health?

### Bullets

- Poverty has a significant impact on health.
- Wealthy people live longer and experience better health than poor people in general.
- Black Ethnic Minorities are more likely to experience poverty and their health is affected by problems of deprivation.
- People of Black ethnicities are more likely to be detained in mental hospitals and to experience mental health problems.

### Text

The main factor affecting health inequality in the UK is social class. Study after study shows that people born in poor families are low birth weight, are more likely to die as babies, grow up with poor health, are vulnerable to disabling disease and impaired development and they die early. Their children will experience poor life chances so health inequality runs in families. Some of these health inequalities are due to patterns of poor life style so that obesity and smoking related illnesses are also diseases of poverty and deprivation. Among Asian populations 23.2% of males smoke compared to 5.3% of women. As certain ethnic minorities are often located within the lowest social classes, then they will be especially vulnerable to diseases of poverty and deprivation.

There are particular issues associated with ethnicity. In 1998, the Independent Inquiry into Inequalities in Health highlighted some of the variations between ethnic populations. People in Black (Caribbean, African and other) groups and Indians have higher rates of limiting long standing illness than white people. Those of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin have the highest rates. There is excess mortality among men and women born in Africa and men born on the Indian sub-continent. Among mothers who were born in countries outside the UK, those from the Caribbean and Pakistan have infant mortality rates about double the national average. Premature, newborn and stillbirth rates have also been consistently higher for babies of mothers born outside the UK. The differences between groups have not decreased over the last twenty years.

In 1999, the White Paper Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation focused on "the main killers": cancer, coronary heart disease and stroke, accidents, mental illness. Again, inequalities in health between ethnic groups were highlighted, e.g. Death rates for coronary heart disease for those born in the Indian sub-continent are 38 per cent higher for men and 43 per cent higher for women than rates for the country as a whole. Stroke death rates in people born in the Caribbean and the Indian sub-continent are one and a half to two and a half times higher than for people born in this country - a differential that has persisted from the late 1970s. Women living in England born in India and East Africa have 40 per cent higher suicide rates than those born here. The 2001 Census showed that Pakistani and Bangladeshi men and women had the highest rates of long-term illness or disability - around 1.5 times higher than their White British counterparts. Chinese men and women

# Aquiring culture

had the lowest rates. In Asian and Black groups, women had higher rates than men. In the White and Mixed groups men had higher rates than women.

The Count Me in Census of all patients in mental hospitals in 2007 has shown that there are statistical differences in the experience of mental health. The research showed that 22% of people hospitalised for mental health problems were from minority ethnic groups, compared with 21% in 2006 and 20% in 2005. Bhui (2004) found that African-Caribbeans with mental health problems are more likely than other ethnic groups to be compulsory detained, with national data showing higher rates in psychiatric institutions and prison populations. They are also more likely to receive antipsychotic medication and less likely to be offered psychotherapy. Rates of suicide are also higher among some South Asian women and young people of Caribbean origin.

In 2008, Paul Farmer, Director of Mind, a mental health charity said, " research is now showing fixed patterns of racial inequality with no signs of improvement, suggesting that racial discrimination is an entrenched problem ... While there have been some advancements in mental health services more broadly, the problems of racial discrimination are persisting and show no signs of improvement."

## Questions

- 1. What single social factor is most significant in terms of health equality in the UK?
- 2. What differences are there in the experience of health by ethnicity?
- 3. Why might some ethnic minorities be vulnerable to mental health problems?

## Keywords

1. Health inequality - systematic differences in the health of social groups occupying unequal positions in society
2. BME - Black Minority Ethnicity
3. Anti-psychotic medication - Strong drugs used to control behaviour, many have serious side effects
4. Compulsory detention - being put in hospital against your will
5. Indian sub-continent - This is the area comprising the countries of India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh and other smaller countries. This is an area of varied culture and ethnicity.

## What is the relationship between ethnicity and poverty?

### Bullets

- Members of ethnic minorities are more likely to experience poverty than White working class families.
- Poverty is related to the concentration of ethnic minority workers in low pay occupations such as catering and hotel work.
- Poverty is also related to cultural and family factors which may affect some ethnic minority families

### Text

# Aquiring culture

Research from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and others shows that there are clear links between ethnicity and poverty. Lucinda Platt did a review of studies and found that all identified minority groups had higher than average rates of poverty. Rates of poverty were highest for Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and Black Africans, reaching nearly two-thirds for Bangladeshis. Rates of poverty were also higher than average for Indian, Chinese and other minority group households. Around two-fifths of people from ethnic minorities live in low-income households, twice the rate for White people. For all ages, people from ethnic minorities are, on average, much more likely to live in low-income households than White people. For example, almost half of all children from ethnic minorities live in low-income households compared to a quarter of White British children. The differences are, however, less for pensioners than for either children or working-age adults.

There has been a slight decline in the proportion of people who live in low income households throughout the country in recent years, and BME people have benefitted from this. However, the data was produced before the economic crises of 2008 which will inevitably have an impact on the figures.

The Poverty Site website says that overall, the rate of low income for mixed ethnic groups of for BME is much higher in London than in the rest of the country. The rate of low income for White British people in London is similar to that in the rest of the UK. However, more than half of people living in low-income households in London are from ethnic minorities. This is as a result of the high proportion of people from ethnic minorities in London who are in low income combined with the high proportion of the total population in London who are from ethnic minorities.

Kenway and Palmer (2007) in a report for the JRF point out that one of the main reasons for poverty is worklessness, or low incomes when in work. Low pay is widespread among Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black families. Up to half of Bangladeshi workers, a third of Pakistanis and a quarter of Black Africans were paid less than £6.50 per hour in 2006 compared with a fifth of the other ethnic groups. Some ethnic groups are disproportionately represented in sectors where a high proportion of employees are low paid. In particular, from the 2001 Census, 35 per cent of Bangladeshis work in the hotel and catering sector compared with around 5 per cent of those from other ethnic groups.

However there are also cultural differences that contribute to poverty, so that Bangladeshi women are not expected to work outside the home and they may also have relatively large families. Large families who rely on a single, possibly low income will experience poverty. In contrast, African Caribbean families are often single parent families and whilst African Caribbean women are usually active in the job market, the reliance on a single income is a problem for their families. Thus, people from ethnic minorities are, on average, more likely to live in low-income households than White people. Whilst these differences are relatively small for workless families who receive benefits, they are proportionally much bigger for working families. Thus, part-working families from ethnic minorities are twice as likely to be in low income groups as part-working White British families: two-fifths compared to one-fifth.

## Questions

- 1. What cultural factors may make ethnic minority families vulnerable to poverty?
- 2. What social factors make a person vulnerable to poverty?

## Keywords

1. BME - Black Minority Ethnicity

# Aquiring culture

## What is the relationship between social class and inequality?

### What is social class?

#### Bullets

- Class is subjective and emotional. People take pride in their class and it is part of their identity.
- Various attempts have been made to define class objectively and none have been totally successful.
- Despite the fact that class is difficult to define and operationalise, class is an important dynamic of our society and has an effect on our life chances and life styles.
- Although there are a variety of ways of describing the class structure of Britain, most are based on income and occupation.

#### Text

Social class is one of the oldest and most persistent inequalities in British society. In the past, people were very aware of their social class and their expected roles and responsibilities. People would have worn different clothes, behaved in different ways and had a very different culture from each other and they would have accepted this as a perfectly normal element of behaviour. We are still aware today of some of the cultural differences between the social classes so that rich people and poorer people have different accents, are educated differently and wear different styles of clothes from each other. These cultural differences that separate the classes are known as indicators of class. In the past, many people also believed that people of the highest social classes were better than other people and should be respected because of their social position. This idea is known as deference.

People nowadays are less willing to admit that social class is important. Poorer people may imitate the styles and behaviour of wealthy people by buying copies of their expensive clothes in cheaper shops or buying replicas and fakes. However, rich people often copy the 'street style' of the working class people and their fashions. The differences between the classes seem to be blurred to such an extent that many people would not define their social class in the same way that sociologists might. Sociologists mostly believe that despite the way that people reject the idea of social classes, it is still important in our society. We are just less aware of it than people were in the past. It affects our life chances and our life styles, with high earning people enjoying a superior standard of living and better life chances than those from more deprived backgrounds.

Most people think in a common sense way about their subjective class, which refers to their personal beliefs about class position and to norms, morals and values. Subjective class can be measured by attitudes, beliefs and political opinions. This generally consists of the vague notions upper, middle and working class and most people would identify themselves as belonging to one of these groups. This type of description does not explain the full range of differences between these groups. People may be middle class and have access to huge wealth, whereas others have the education, lifestyle and manners of the middle class but are relatively poor. Equally, people from a working class background who achieve very good professional jobs may well still feel themselves to be working class. In contrast, sociologists are concerned with objective class. This refers to our possessions and our wealth. It can be measured in the data put out by the Office of Population,

# Aquiring culture

Censuses and Surveys such as mortality lists.

There are two generally used scales of social class, though a very wide number have been devised by sociologists in the past. The Registrar General's Index of Social Class was used by government statisticians till 2001, and is still widely used as a rough indicator of people's background. It uses occupation as the basis of differentiation. People are placed in a five point scale. This is still used by advertisers and manufacturers who target products to certain markets. There are weaknesses with this class indicator because it does not take into account people's income or their job security. In addition, women take their class from their male relatives. More recently, the class structure diagram has been amended to take into account employment conditions including: job security, promotion opportunity and the ability and opportunity to work on their own and make own decisions about tasks. This new scale is known as the NS-SEC. You can see these scales in more detail in the interactivities.

Goldblatt suggested alternative measures of class including home ownership, access to a car and educational status and he has shown that all of these can be correlated to inequalities in health. One of the most recent attempts to define the class system in a new and radical way was by Will Hutton (18995). Hutton is a critic of the New Right. He argues that social inequality, in the form of low wages, low skill and high unemployment, has resulted in a clearly divided and economically unstable society. Hutton has put forward the 30-30-40 thesis to show the three-way split in contemporary British class relations. He says our society can now be seen to consist of: 30% - unemployed, low paid, insecure work; 30% with some job security and quality of life; 40% - privileged workers in secure and regular employment.

## Questions

- 1. What is the difference between subjective and objective class?
- 2. Suggest reasons why people are less aware of their social class now than they were in the past.
- 3. Why is it so difficult to define social class?
- 4. Why does Will Hutton argue that conditions of work are part of class?
- 5. Is class still important in British society?

## Keywords

1. Deference - believing that people of a higher social class are superior people.
2. Subjective - personal feelings about something
3. Objective - impersonal, measurable and scientific
4. Class -membership of a social group that is of a similar economic position
5. Class indicator - way of identifying or allocating someone to a social class
6. Professional people - people who earn a salary and work selling educational skills and knowledge
7. NS-SEC - an eight point scale of social class based on occupation and terms of work, used since 2001
8. Registrar General's Index of Social Class - a five point scale of social class based upon occupation

## What is the link between class and occupation?

### Bullets



# Aquiring culture

- There is a link between a person's occupation and that person's social class.
- Middle class people tend to earn more money and have better terms and conditions of work.
- Working class people tend to have less job security although they may sometimes have high earnings.
- There is an underclass of people who have never worked. The New Right see these people as lazy, whereas the New Left see them as victims of social pressures that they cannot avoid.
- As the structure of work has changed so too the class system has undergone change.

## Text

Traditionally class has been linked to the type of work a person does. The debate as to the nature of class has therefore become more complex as the nature of work has changed. The upper classes are able to live off unearned income such as rents from land or property. There are so few of the upper classes that they are more or less invisible to sociologists. Very little research has been done on these people. Upper class people usually keep themselves to themselves and are not willing to participate in studies. Recent work by Adonis and Pollard (1998) stresses the significance of the upper class in modern British society and they consider that there is an emerging 'superclass' that consist of an elite of extremely high paid managers and professionals. According to Adonis and Pollard, this new superclass is linked financially to the City of London, a male and upper class world that has many links with the traditions and heritage of public school and Oxbridge elites of the past. This superclass emerged from the financial changes of the 1980s and is composed of people who benefited from low taxation and privatisation of industry to become significant in international trading with global companies. They earn multi-million salaries and have large financial bonus packages.

The middle classes live off professional work such as law, medicine or the ownership of a business. Generally they earn more and have better working conditions than the working class. Working class people worked with their hands as tradesmen or labourers. Work with the hands is known as manual work. We still call professional people who sell knowledge rather than skills, non-manual workers. This is the basic social class division in society - between manual and non-manual work.

Middle class work requires educational qualifications and skills. Most people who are members of the middle classes will have been to university and gained higher level professional qualifications as well. Generally, middle class professional work is well paid or has good conditions and terms of service. In the past, there would have been quite serious differences in pay between professional workers and manual workers though these differences have been eroded.

C Wright Mills (1956) and others have seen the middle classes as divided into two groups. The higher professions have the potential for high earnings and who are self-employed or employed by large corporations. These are people such as judges, accountants, lawyers, dentists, doctors. These people tend to control entry into their occupations. The lower professions are often, though not exclusively, feminised and work in the public sector. They have limited access to high earnings and include teachers, nurses, and social workers.

The lower middle classes have become more like the working class according to the Marxist, Braverman (1974) who points out that many of the professions, such as architects, have become vulnerable to redundancies. He also claims that skills are being lost (de-

# Aquiring culture

skilling) because mechanisation means that individuals are now being taken over by technology. People are no longer required to undertake tasks that traditionally required talent. Tradesmen have lost their skills to machines, and architects plans can be created by computer programmes. Others, such as teachers or opticians who are unable to control entry into their professions are no longer able to claim high rates of pay as there is always demand for work and people who are willing to accept low rates in return for employment. Oppenheimer (1973) has also suggested that the middle classes have lost power and authority in work.

Working class work may require high levels of skill and effort: however, because it is manual work, it is not generally well paid and often is of relatively low status. In addition, although years of on-the-job training may be involved in such work, people will not have been to university or college. Hairdressing, for example, is one of the worst paid occupations on average. Unskilled work is very low value, low status work and there are few openings for people who have no educational qualifications. Work which once was done by people is now done by one person with a qualification who operates a machine. In the 1930s, digging was done by teams of men with shovels. We would be surprised to see people do work of this kind today. Even much check-out work is now done by machine alone.

In the 1970s, it was commonly believed by many commentators that the working class were becoming more middle class as their incomes were higher than previously earned by the working class. This theory was known as the affluent worker thesis or embourgeoisement and was supported by Galbraith. This theory was disproved by Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechofer and Platt (1968) who conducted detailed research on car workers in Dagenham. They found that the workers worked longer hours and had different attitudes to work from middle class management. Fiona Devine (1992) repeated the work and found that redundancy and unemployment were a real concern for working class families. The gap between professional work and working class work was widening.

Another debate has opened up in terms of occupation and class in the last thirty years. Unemployment and benefit dependency has become more common in British society. This has led to the development of a significant underclass of people who have never earned their own money. In the early 1970s, the term was used sympathetically by Giddens and other members of the developing New Left (1973) to describe those who faced massive deprivation and social inequality with working conditions and income levels below even those of the working class. At the same time, other social commentators from the New Right were using the term underclass negatively to describe a class of people who have little self-sufficiency but rely on social security benefits to survive. The term 'dole scrounger' was widely used in the press to describe those who lived on benefit.

## Questions

- 1. Suggest reasons why the upper class would not be willing to be the subjects of research.
- 2. Who are the super class?
- 3. How does middle class work differ from working class work?
- 4. Who are the underclasses in British society?
- 5. Suggest reasons why middle class workers often earn more than working class workers.

## Keywords

1. Super class - people who earn huge salaries in the financial sector such as banking

# Aquiring culture

2. Professional people - people who earn a salary and work selling educational skills and knowledge
3. Manual workers - people who sell skills in making and doing things.
4. Underclass - people who take minimum wage and low skilled work
5. Redundant - when a job no longer exists and people are forced out of employment
6. Embourgeoisement thesis - idea that working class people are more middle class
7. Affluent worker - working class people have the incomes of the middle class
8. Deskilling - people find that traditional skills are no longer required as technology is taking over things that were traditionally done by a skilled workforce

## What is the relationship between work, class and income?

### Bullets

- Working class work is often long hours, low paid, casual and insecure.
- There has been a fall in the number of jobs available to the unqualified and unskilled.
- Much new work has been in the service sector; jobs such as burger flipping and bar work.
- People in these jobs usually earn minimum wage; many take a second job to make ends meet.

### Text

There is a common belief that those who earn more money have worked harder for it. In reality, the low paid are often extremely hard working but unable to gain an acceptable income from the work that they do. One of the reasons is to do with the changing nature of the work that is available.

The structure of the British economy has undergone radical change since the end of World War 2. There has been a massive move away from employment in primary industries such as agriculture and coal mining. Manufacturing or secondary industry has also experienced a drop in employment. There has been a reduction in traditionally male heavy industry and a growth in light industry and assembly work that can be automated and which employs more females. The real growth sector in the economy has been in service sector jobs. Many of these are middle class jobs in management and training; however, more are jobs which offer long hours, low pay and casual part time work in restaurants and pubs.

Ivan Turak (2000) points out that the actual number of manual jobs fell by 11% between 1981 and 1991 while non-manual jobs have expanded. Certain sectors of the workforce have been more vulnerable to unemployment, and he points to the older male manual worker as being particularly vulnerable. Paul Gregg (1994) has claimed that one of the main causes of poverty in Britain is unemployment and that the UK had a third more families out of work than other developed countries. Statistics suggest that in a fifth of households, there is no adult in employment and although in the rest of Europe, 80% of single parents work, in Britain the figure is closer to 40% of single parents in work.

Figures based on social class alone are difficult to access, as emphasis is placed on other forms of inequality in official data. However, there is a clear link between a person's social

# Aquiring culture

class and the opportunities or life chances that they may experience. Partly, this is because of differences of income. People who were born into the middle classes and who have educational qualifications are more likely to be employed and earn more when they are employed on average than people without qualifications. People in the lower classes of the Registrar General's Index of Social Class earn less, live shorter and less healthy lives, experience higher disability, divorce and criminal conviction rates. They are more likely to die in poverty than those people who were born into non-manual families. As Wilkinson (1996) identified, people at the bottom of the stratification system in the UK have severely reduced life chances:

"In Britain people in the poorest areas have death rates that are - age for age - four times as high as people in the richest areas. Among Whitehall civil servants, junior staff were found to have death rates three times as high as the most senior administrators working in the same offices."

In 1994, it was established that 2.2 million workers in the UK earned less than 68% of the average gross weekly wage that stood at less than £6.00 per hour in that year. These low paid workers tended to be female, the young, the disabled, single parents and members of ethnic minorities. Their work was part-time, homework or casual labour and they tended to be found in certain areas, and in smaller firms.

After much pressure on government, National Minimum Wage legislation was introduced by the Labour government with effect from April 1999. It is currently set at £5.73 (2009). Employers' organisations had predicted a massive increase in unemployment following the introduction of a minimum wage, but this did not occur. Even so, people still resort to desperate measures to obtain satisfactory income. Evidence presented to the Low Pay Commission by the Greater Manchester Low Pay Unit (2000) described one woman who had taken on three low paid jobs at one time in order to 'make ends meet'. Wadsworth (2007) suggests that around 10% of British households rely on minimum wage income. He also points out that many minimum wage earners take a second job to supplement income. Bryan and Taylor (2006) suggest that those who earn National Minimum Wage (NMW) tend to stay in NMW work jobs when they change employment. In addition, low pay workers spend time out of work. More than 80% of NMW workers are female, and many are over the age of 50. Most of these workers had no qualifications. There is also some evidence that employers can evade minimum wage legislation through a variety of semi-legal tactics and pay their workers less than they are entitled to. Migrants are very vulnerable to this kind of abuse.

## Questions

- 1. How has the nature of work changed in Britain since WW2?
- 2. Why has the nature of work changed in Britain since WW2?
- 3. What impact have these changes had on the job opportunities for the unskilled and unqualified?
- 4. Suggest ideas that the government could implement to find work for the low paid.

## Keywords

1. National Minimum Wage - legislation enforcing a given rate of pay
2. Low pay workers - people earning minimum wages
3. Stratification system - layers in society
4. Life chances - opportunities in life
5. Registrar General's Index of Social Class - a five point scale of social class based upon occupation



# Aquiring culture

6. NS-SEC - an eight point scale of social class based on occupation and terms of work, used since 2001

## How does social class affect educational attainment?

### Bullets

- There are differences between the social classes in terms of educational attainment.
- The gap between attainment is present in infant school and widens as people grow older
- At degree level, ethnic minorities are likely to under attain.
- There are no simple explanations of why these patterns have emerged in British society, but it is important because educational attainment affects people's life chances.

### Text

As the ESRC point out, British sociologists all tend to agree that qualifications are the best predictor of whether a child will gain a high earning middle-class job. However they also point out that there are unequal success rates between social classes at school and unequal entry and success rates in post-compulsory education.

Government data reveals significant differences between the educational attainments of the differing social classes. In 2008, 35% of the working class pupils obtained five or more good-grade GCSEs, compared with 63 per cent of children from middle class families. While the proportion of poorer children getting degrees has risen by just 3 per cent, the increase among those from wealthier backgrounds is 26 per cent. The reasons for the development of this pattern are complex. It could be to do with home or schools, or it could be related to cultural or material deprivation. Sociologists, Bynner and Joshi (2002) used longitudinal birth cohort data and discovered that the link between class and educational underattainment is clear and years of government policy have had little impact on this inequality. In 2003, David Miliband, then schools minister, said that Britain's educational problem was "that birth rather than worth still counts for too much". Nick Clegg, leader of the Liberal Democrats has recently (2009) said "It is an outrage and a tragedy that two children born at the same time in the same hospital should have wildly different life chances, based simply on the income of their parents".

In 1999, West et al found that there was a 66% correlation between free school meals and low school attainment. Levacic and Hardman in 1999 also pointed out the relationship between free school meals and poor GCSE grades. O'Keefe found that there was a measurable relationship between free school meals and higher levels of truancy. The Guardian reported that Jefferis (2002) found an unarguable link between class and attainment. She studied nearly 11,000 children born from March 3 to 9, 1958. Maths, reading and other ability tests measured the educational attainment of the children at ages seven, 11 and 16. At the age of 33 their highest educational achievement was recorded. Her research team found the gap in educational attainment between children of higher and lower social classes widened as time went on - it was greatest by the age of 33. Maths scores tended to improve for classes I and II from the age of seven to 16, while classes IV and V showed a relative decline as time went on.

At university level, social class inequalities still have an effect. Wakeling suggested in 2002 that a lower class degree and rich parents are more likely to lead to a student taking up post-graduate studies than the highest level university degrees and a modest background.



# Aquiring culture

Boliver (2006) found that only 35% of candidates from semi/unskilled manual class origins applied to a Russell Group university (one of the top 100 universities in the UK), in contrast to 65% of those from professional backgrounds. Machin and Vignoles (2005) conducted research on links between higher education and family background, focusing particularly on the experiences of two cohorts of individuals born in 1958 and 1970. Their findings point to a rise in educational inequality. Specifically, they claim that links between educational achievement and parental income / social class strengthened during this period. Furthermore, a person's actual (measured) ability became a poorer predictor of whether they would get a degree than was previously the case. The expansion of higher education in the UK during this period appears to have benefited children from richer families rather than the most able. Furthermore, the labour market success or failure of individuals became more closely connected to their parents' income, revealing a fall in the extent of social mobility through the class structure over time.

The Social Mobility Commission, reporting in 2009, found that social class accounts for much of the gap in attainment between higher and lower achievers. They reported that the gap widens as children get older. In addition, it was claimed that increased spending on education has favoured the middle classes. In other words division between the social classes is widening.

## Questions

- 1. What is the social class gap in terms of attainment at GCSE?
- 2. What is the pattern of attainment at degree level?
- 3. Suggest reasons why the children of the working class tend to achieve lower grades in school than the children of the middle class. Refer to studies if possible.

## Keywords

1. Social mobility - movement between classes and status groups in society
2. Truancy - absence from schooling which is not condoned by the school
3. Cohort - people born at the same time

## What is the relationship between social class, criminality and inequality in the UK?

### Bullets

- Working class people are over-represented in crime statistics.
- It is possible that working class people commit more crime.
- It is possible that social resources are not directed at middle class criminality.
- Working class people are also likely to be the victims of criminality.

### Text

Maguire points out that the prison population tends to consist of young, male, poorly educated people who are likely to have experienced difficult or deprived childhoods and many of whom come from ethnic minority or mixed ethnic backgrounds. In 1992, 40 % of male prisoners had left school before the age of sixteen. People from lower social class backgrounds are significantly more likely to appear in victim and conviction statistics than people from wealthier backgrounds and it is a matter of argument as to whether they

# Aquiring culture

commit more crime, or they are more likely to be convicted if they do commit crimes.

In the past, much analysis of criminal behaviour worked on the false assumptions that crime statistics were an accurate representation of crime and that conviction rates gave a fair representation of criminal behaviour. Self report studies show that the majority of the population have broken the law and that middle class crimes can often be very serious indeed. For example, Murphy et al (1990) showed that football hooliganism is not limited to the working classes and Pearson (1987) found that drug offences occur in all social classes. White collar crime and corporate offences receive very little attention from the news media in comparison with youth crime such as knife crime. Levi (1993) pointed out that official statistics do not include tax fraud cases as these are rarely prosecuted by the police or followed up by the criminal justice system. Snider points out that capitalist states are unwilling to pass laws that regulate business or challenge the rights of the rich to make money. Karstedt (2004) estimates that middle class crimes such as car tax avoidance, tax fraud and damaging items once worn in order to return them to shops may cost the UK something in the region of £14 billion each year. Braithwaite, as early as 1979, concluded that working class children and adults commit the types of crime that are targeted by the police and do so at higher rates than middle class people.

There is also research evidence to show that some forms of crime are linked to poverty and deprivation. Gang crime is especially prevalent in areas of deprivation where there are fewer opportunities for work. Brodie et al (2000) and Hope and Shaw (1988) found disadvantaged communities to be vulnerable to youth crime. It is estimated that 40% of crime takes place in about 10% of local authority areas. Stratesky (2004) links this phenomenon to the concentration of power and social exclusion in post industrial communities. Willott and Griffin (1999) found that working class men in prison justified their criminal behaviour by claiming that they were supporting their families. Furthermore, because they were effectively excluded from society, they could not then be expected to follow its rules. It could be argued that these accounts are self-serving because the victims of crime are often the very weakest in the community. Living in a poor and deprived community is also to live at risk of being a victim of crimes such as car theft, vandalism, anti-social behaviour, burglary and violence. Hughes et al (2002) suggest that more than half of victims of crime have already previously been victimised. This acts as evidence that some types of crime are more likely to be associated with working class status than others, particularly crimes against property and the person.

## Questions

- 1. Why are working class people over-represented in crime and victimisation statistics?
- 2. To what extent are the middle classes protected from appearance in criminal statistics?
- 3. Is crime a phenomenon of the underclass?

## Keywords

1. Self report study - people are asked what crimes they may have committed.
2. Social exclusion - not being fully part of society

## Are there class inequalities in the experience of health?

### Bullets

# Aquiring culture

- Poverty has a significant impact on health. Wealthy people live longer and experience better health than poor people in general.
- Working class people may choose to live unhealthy and stressful lifestyles.
- Working class areas have fewer doctors and health care professionals
- Manual work is more likely to lead to occupational health risks.

## Text

The over-arching factor affecting health inequality in the UK is social class. Study after study shows that people born in poor families are low birth weight, are more likely to die as babies, grow up with poor health, are vulnerable to disabling disease and impaired development and they die early. Their children will experience poor life chances so health inequality runs in families. Some of these health inequalities are due to patterns of poor life style so that obesity and smoking related illnesses are also diseases of poverty and deprivation. Children born in poverty and deprivation are also vulnerable to high risk behaviour such as drug abuse, binge drinking and sexual transmission of disease. Furthermore, in 2002, the Office for National Statistics said that inequalities of health and life expectancy between social classes were widening.

Spicker points out that figures from the UK show that people in lower social classes, including children, are more likely to suffer from infective and parasitic diseases, pneumonia, poisonings or violence. Adults in lower social classes are more likely to suffer from cancer, heart disease and respiratory disease. He also underlines the point that there are inequalities in access to health care according to social class, so that the poorest people live in areas with fewer doctors, more difficult access to major hospitals and poorer services. Wheeler et al, working on 2001 Census data also found that areas with the highest levels of poor health tend to have the lowest numbers of doctors and other health professionals (other than nurses). They also discovered that areas with high levels of poor health tend also to have high numbers of their population providing informal care for family and friends, in almost direct proportion to the apparent need for that care. There is lower take-up of preventative medicine such as vaccination and routine screening for disabling conditions among working class people. This called the inverse care law.

Discounting theories that suggest the working class are genetically weaker, then the unavoidable conclusion is that poverty leads to ill health through poor nutrition, housing and environment. This is exacerbated through cultural differences in the diet and fitness of different social classes, and in certain habits like smoking. Tim Spector (2006), an epidemiologist found that social class has an impact on how the body ages, irrespective of diet and bad habits. In a study of 1,500 women, he discovered that there is a link between class and poor health. He claims that the cause is that people from lower social backgrounds are more likely to feel insecure, especially at work, and suffer low self-esteem and a sense of lacking control over their lives. He claims that the stress this causes creates damage at a cellular level that accelerates ageing. Support for this theory can be found in the fact that studies consistently show that people from lower social classes experience higher levels of mental ill-health, with particularly high rates of depression and anxiety. There is additional health risk from many working class jobs. Males in manual jobs are more than twice as likely to get occupational lung cancer. Bladder cancer is also work-related, associated with work in industrial settings. For nearly all conditions the risk of heart disease, cancer, stain injury and stress is higher for those in working class occupations rather than managerial jobs in the same industry.

## Questions

- 1. What single social factor is most significant in terms of health equality in the UK?

# Aquiring culture

- 2. What differences are there in the experience of health by social class?
- 3. Why might working class people be vulnerable to health problems?

## Keywords

1. Inverse care law - areas of high sickness get lower levels of health provision
2. Health inequality - systematic differences in the health of social groups occupying unequal positions in society
3. Risk behaviour - activities and life styles that can cause ill-health and damage

## What was the embourgeoisement thesis?

### Bullets

- The assumption that embourgeoisement was occurring began in the 1950s.
- Goldthorpe et al found no evidence in their 1960s affluent worker study of embourgeoisement, but argued instead that the working class was fragmenting into 'new' and 'traditional' layers.
- The new working class reflected a convergence with middle class values (instrumentalism, consumerism, privatised family) but displayed no evidence of wanting to be middle class.

### Text

Towards the end of the 1950s, which saw a rise in consumer spending plus three general election victories for the Conservatives, there was a view that the higher-paid members of the working class were apparently adopting middle-class values and lifestyles. Many commentators saw the rise of a new working class with consumer based lifestyles as proof that everyone was going to become middle class and this idea was widely promoted as the embourgeoisement thesis.

Embourgeoisement is the view that over time society takes on classless characteristics as the working class aspire to the values, attitudes and behaviours of the middle-class. In response to this, in the 1960s Goldthorpe et al applied a neo-Weberian analysis and studied new workers in car factories in Luton. These 'affluent workers' in Luton were able to earn high wages through working long hours on assembly lines. Although Goldthorpe and Lockwood specifically chose Luton as an area favourable to finding evidence of embourgeoisement they failed to find convincing evidence to support the concept. However, they did discover that working-class identity was fragmenting and a growing differentiation among a 'new' working class was developing.

Whilst the manual workers in their study were relatively well-paid and had bought their own houses (relatively uncommon amongst the working class in the 1960s) they had to work exceptionally long amounts of overtime, often in unpleasant circumstances. They also showed little interest in socializing with their middle class neighbours and had lifestyles that were very different. However, Goldthorpe et al conceded that a 'convergence' was taking place. They described the new working class as motivated by 'instrumentalism', that is, working for money. In this sense, they were becoming increasingly materialistic with work playing a smaller role in their sense of identity than it did for the 'traditional' working class; it was simply a means to an end.



# Aquiring culture

In addition, they observed how the 'privatization' of the family had promoted values such as home-centredness and family fortunes as a 'central life interest'. At the same time there was a decline in attachment to trade unionism and a 'them and us' attitude. Privatization and instrumentalism were viewed by Goldthorpe et al as the most important factors in encouraging 'a more individualistic outlook' but this was not viewed in any way as a desire to attain and identify with middle class lifestyle and values.

In an interesting follow-up study to Goldthorpe et al's affluent worker study, Fiona Devine returned to Luton in the 1990s. If anything she had found even less evidence of embourgeoisement and a strengthening of traditional working class characteristics. In the 30 years or so between the two studies there had been a strengthening of the extended family as kin had moved to Luton. Devine found the three generational family remained an important source of informal support and sociability. In response to the instrumentalism defined as a key feature of the affluent workers in the first study Devine concluded that the workers in her study were characterized by 'instrumental collectivism'. Luton workers saw themselves as part of a large working class standing in a class hierarchy defined by money and standard of living. Interestingly, they viewed their own working class as divided suggesting recognition of an 'underclass'.

Changes in manufacture have meant that the traditional working class jobs in heavy industry have declined, but also that there is less well-paid work on assembly lines for working class people. Much of this kind of work has been outsourced to the far East where wages are lower, trade unions are weaker and there are fewer regulations related to Health and Safety. Working class work has been replaced by casual, short term contract work in the service sector - call centres and fast food outlets being typical new forms of working class work.

We are clearly a long way from Tony Blair's claim in 1999 'we are all middle class'. Where class convergence has been greatest it has been at the margins of the classes with a blurred area between the upper working class and lower middle class. The term embourgeoisement is less discussed than it used to be, but Goldthorpe et al's conclusion that the working class has fragmented into a new and traditional working class commands general support to this day. Another factor worth remembering when considering the embourgeoisement debate is what is happening at the other end of the working class. At the bottom of society many see an impoverished underclass of those living on the minimum wage or in receipt of long-term welfare. This impoverished group has seen their living standards deteriorate relative to the rest of society.

## Questions

- 1. What is embourgeoisement?
- 2. What were the key characteristics of the new working class observed in the affluent worker study by Goldthorpe et al?
- 3. What evidence is there for and against proletarianisation?

## Keywords

## What is proletarianisation?

## Bullets

- Proletarianisation is a Marxist concept that sees the middle-class identifying increasingly with working-class identity.
- Autonomy is the ability to control one's work and make active choices about task setting and time management



# Aquiring culture

- Neo-Marxists see proletarianisation linked to deskilling and loss of autonomy of non-manual workers.
- Others, especially the neo-Weberians, found little evidence to support the concept of proletarianisation amongst routine non-manual workers.
- There is some evidence that the proletarianisation thesis applies more to women than men.

## Text

Proletarianisation is a Marxist concept that sees the middle-class as identifying increasingly with working-class identity. Applied research has focused upon using case studies to examine whether non-manual work is becoming increasingly similar to manual work. Neo-Marxists like Erik Wright or Harry Braverman claim that proletarianisation is progressing at a reasonable pace. In contrast, neo-Weberians like David Lockwood and John Goldthorpe have always vigorously argued against it. One reason for this conflict of views is that different meanings of proletarianisation are adopted in order to measure it.

Neo-Marxists such as Wright and Braverman argue that routine white-collar workers are no longer middle class. They consequently see such jobs and even some 'professions', such as nursing and teaching, as particularly prone to proletarianisation. Braverman argues that deskilling in the workplace affects both manual and non-manual work, causing him to argue that routine white-collar workers have joined the mass of unskilled employees. As such they are part of the working class, they are 'proletarianised'. Braverman argues that deskilling and the loss of the social and economic advantages non-manual jobs enjoyed over manual work, are the key factors behind the growth of proletarianisation. In addition, many workers have lost the control and autonomy they enjoyed 20 years or so in the workplace. A good example is the university lecturers Wright cited as example of 'semi-autonomous workers' in a contradictory class location. Many university lecturers are very poorly paid and on short term contracts. Many earn less than primary school teachers. In addition they are subject to performance scrutiny and time monitoring. Many professionals in education are now subject to clocking in and out like factory workers.

In the 1950s David Lockwood using a framework based on Weber's distinction between class and status sought to investigate whether clerks were subject to proletarianisation. He looked at three aspects of their employment: 'work situation' (physical conditions of the workplace, hours worked, holiday entitlement, responsibility and authority); 'market situation' (income, sick pay, security, pension, perks, and career structure) and 'status situation' (prestige and position clerical work occupies in society's hierarchy of symbolic reward). Lockwood found no evidence of proletarianisation, arguing that even though tasks may have been subject to deskilling, clerks who occupy reception desks, control appointment diaries (such as doctor's receptionists) or have access to confidential information have a sense of self-importance which is visibly conveyed to the public. This research is very dated, but Lockwood revisited it again in 1989 and came to very similar conclusions.

Lockwood's observations about the class situation of clerks was supported by Goldthorpe et al., he investigated this area in the 1980s. They noted how post-industrial society had led to a large increase in routine non-manual work; this is often very poorly paid with wages well below those paid to people in manual work. However, like Lockwood, they found factors like greater job security, higher status, and their proximity to the service classes acted to prevent the development of proletarianisation. Another factor acting against the development of class consciousness was the opportunity for upward occupational mobility.

It has been argued by some feminists, such as Rosemary Crompton, that women are more

# Aquiring culture

prone to proletarianisation than men, in the sense that they experience poorer promotional opportunities. In examining the work of clerks (Crompton and Jones) they found that only a low level of skill was required and that computerisation seemed to accentuate proletarianisation. However, Marshall et al have challenged the idea of proletarianisation. They found both male and female routine white collar workers reported greater levels of autonomy than those in the working class. They found that it was mainly manual workers who felt their work had been deskilled. In contrast, the perceptions of over 90 per cent of male and female non-manual workers were that neither skill levels nor autonomy had significantly diminished. However, they did find that personal service workers such as receptionists, check-out operators and shop assistants lacked a sense of autonomy in a manner similar to the working class. Since this group is composed primarily of female workers, this supports the idea that women are more prone to proletarianisation. Recent research by Clark and Hoffman-Martinot (1998) has highlighted a growing number of casual or routine workers who spend their working day in front of a VDU and/or on the telephone. Marxists would see such workers, especially those in call centres as working class despite the 'white-collar' working environment. They would see the low morale and general worker discontent as evidence of class consciousness and a sense of collective work-place identity. A Weberian analysis would identify class in terms of a group sharing a weak market position in the labour force. Weberians might identify any internal competition between workers and factors such as performance-related pay as designed to fragment the workforce. Any attempts at unionisation, they might argue, could reflect the pursuit of sectional interests (party) rather than evidence of class consciousness.

## Questions

- 1. What is the basis of neo-Marxists like Braverman and Wright in support of proletarianisation?
- 2. What is the basis of neo-Weberians like Lockwood and Goldthorpe against the proletarianisation thesis?
- 3. Why are women seen as more prone to proletarianisation than men?

## Keywords

### How have contemporary models of class developed?

## Bullets

- Shifts in the make up of the class structure have resulted in new theories of class.
- Postmodernists argue that class has lost its meaning as a primary definer of identity and is effectively a dead concept.
- As a result of an increasingly fragmented and individualistic society consumption patterns vary not only between classes but within them.
- Consumption has replaced production as the main source of identity.

## Text

As we have seen a range of neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian models of class have developed in the past 50 years or so adapting and interpreting the ideas of Marx and Weber. There is a consensus that the size and make-up of the working-class is shrinking as we move to a post-industrial society, however, there are markedly different interpretations about the meanings and consequences of this change. Neo-Weberians such as John Goldthorpe and David Lockwood have focused upon occupational categories within a

# Aquiring culture

market power context. Neo-Marxists argue that the critical issue is whether the working-class are 'falsely conscious'. A third group, the postmodernists have developed their response to the changing class structure and social class experiences, arguing simply that class is dead; having lost its significance as a source of identity. Consumption, they argue, has become the main definer of people in society.

Although an early writer on embourgeoisement, F. Zweig was the probably the first and foremost proponent of a 'postmodern' vision of a society where class was seen as no longer relevant. Postmodernists would question whether class and class identities are meaningful concepts anymore, arguing it makes more sense to speak of a fragmented society with identity increasingly derived from consumption rather than issues associated with production, such as occupation. According to a Postmodern vision, people are seen to acquire their identities as consumers rather than as producers. Status differences (now based on consumption) were seen no longer as sharp and divisive, but loose and cross-cutting. People's consumption became home-centred in the post-war period, rather than communal, and their identities as consumers became constructed from images that came into their homes through the rapidly expanding media. The mass popular culture that resulted seemed more 'real' than experiences outside the home and at the workplace.

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu researched the relationship between consumption and class. He found that consumption patterns varied not only between classes but within them too. He argued that people thus use consumption to both establish and express their social difference. Bourdieu draws from both the work of Marx and Weber in his analysis that consumption and class are interrelated influences on identity. He argues social divisions are not shaped by economic capital alone but introduces his important concept of cultural capital that he sees as shaping lifestyle including promoting education success, sports and leisure activities. However, he argues that cultural capital has to have symbolic status and be recognized within the society as having high status.

## Questions

- 1. How do neo-Weberians and neo-Marxists view changes to the size of the working class?
- 2. Why do Postmodernists think class is dead?

## Keywords

## What is the relationship between age and inequality?

### What age inequalities exist in our culture?

#### Bullets

- People of different age groups are treated with different degrees of respect.
- Younger people are denied rights and privileges that older people have.
- Younger people are sometimes linked with deviancy
- Older people may have some legal rights, but as they get older they are likely to be treated with less respect and many are forced to retire against their will.
- Older people are likely to experience poverty as they live on restricted incomes.

# Aquiring culture

## Text

Age inequalities are taken for granted in our society. For example we accept that children are not the equal of adults and they do not have the same legal rights and protections as those who are over eighteen. Children are not allowed to vote, they may not watch certain films and programmes. It is legal for an adult parent to hit a child so long as the child is not marked, whereas if an adult hit another adult, it would be seen as an assault. Many of these age inequalities are intended to protect the child from harm: the rules governing sexual age of consent were first imposed to protect young girls from child prostitution. Often the age boundaries set are arbitrary and make little sense. Sexual activity is legal at 16 and yet young people may not view the sexual act in a cinema until they are 18. Young people are legally entitled to move from the family home and to go to war before they are legally allowed to buy tobacco. In addition to formal differences in rights and status, young people are often demonised by the press as a problem for society.

Equally, the law makes it legal for employers to force people to leave their jobs at the age of 65 irrespective of their ability or willingness to work. From 2006, discrimination on the basis of age was made illegal and this is the latest form of discrimination to be tackled by the government. The argument is that as people are living longer and are usually very much healthier at an older age than would have been normal in the past, people may wish to work for longer. This also means that there would also be less of a burden on the economy as older people in work would pay tax rather than draw benefits. There is an acknowledged problem of age discrimination in our society and in certain sectors of work such as the media or advertising. Older employees are often encouraged to leave their jobs or are the first to be made redundant when cuts are made to the workforce. There are certain occupations where employees are expected to retire before the usual retirement age of 65; the armed services, the police and the fire service expect young retirement. In other occupations, the average age is significantly older so the average age of judges in the UK is around 60 years.

Older people can routinely expect different treatment from the young in our culture. Older people are often not given insurance, and people over 80 pay increased premiums for travel insurance. Doctors have been known to refuse treatments or referrals to older people on the grounds of their age. Only 5% of those over the age of 65 who require it will receive the benefit of transplant surgery in UK, whereas 55% of Norwegians over 65 will have such surgery. Some benefits such as disability living allowance are not available for older people. However, they do qualify for bus passes and other discretionary price reductions because it is accepted that many older people live on a very restricted income. People who are as young as 45, may be considered too old to expect promotion in work. Age discrimination of this sort is actually difficult to prove though it is illegal.

## Questions

- 1. In what ways do young people experience legal control over what they do?
- 2. Suggest reasons why it may be necessary to raise the age of retirement?
- 3. Why might people over the age of 65 wish to continue in employment?
- 4. Why is age discrimination difficult to prove?

## Keywords

1. Demonise - made out to be worse and more criminal than you really are
2. Ageism - discrimination on the basis of age



# Aquiring culture

3. Premium - the cost of an insurance policy
4. Discretionary - it is left to the person who is making the decision
5. Illegal - against the law

## What is the link between age and work?

### Bullets

- Both younger and older people are disadvantaged at work.
- Younger people find it difficult to get jobs, especially if they are unskilled.
- Older people find it difficult to get promotion and if they lose their jobs are unlikely to be rehired.
- Making laws to prevent discrimination on the basis of age does not always change behaviour and sometimes make it slightly worse.
- Nevertheless some employers are beginning to see advantages in employing older people.

### Text

There are strict rules governing the age at which young people may start work. You are allowed to do some part-time work when you are 13 and doing light jobs. You may not work full time until you are 16 and have passed the last Friday of June of the school year in which your 16th birthday occurs. You may not work behind a bar until you are eighteen. In addition, people do not qualify for National Minimum Wage of £5.73 per hour until they are aged 22 years and older. There is a rate of £4.77 per hour for workers aged 18-21 inclusive and the pay is £3.53 per hour for all workers under the age of 18, who are no longer of compulsory school age. At the end of your working life, you cannot face compulsory retirement until the age of 65. Employees can write to ask for their working life to be extended, but the employer has the right to refuse.

The situation in reality is more complex than that. Young people often find it difficult to get a start in the employment market, especially if they are unqualified or inexperienced. In 2009, ONS statistics showed that the country's overall jobless rate is currently 6%, but among 18-24-year-olds it is 14% and among 16-17-year-olds it is 26%. In 2008 almost 30% of all unemployed people were young. For older people, the picture is equally poor. Campbell, (1999) found that people trying to find work following redundancy or other gap from work often have to start work on lower pay. This pattern is increasing rather than decreasing. The TAEN website says that in the case of under-50s the discount on the level of pay in a new job is 12% compared to pay in the last job. For those over age 45 it is now 26%, up from 12% in 1980 and reflecting prejudices about older workers. The National Opinion Poll research suggested that 85% of over-50s believed that there is discrimination against older workers; over 95% of employers believed that they had 'age friendly' employment policies and saw no need to change to meet the principles of the Code of Practice; 20% of over-50s said that they had had direct experience of age discrimination.

A 2005 study by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development of 2682 managers and personnel professionals, show that age discrimination persists in many organisations. Six in ten respondents (59%) reported that they were disadvantaged at work because of their age. 22% of managers said that age has an impact on recruitment decisions. 48% of those surveyed had suffered age discrimination through job applications while 39% believe their chances of promotion have been hindered by age discrimination. Over half (63%) of respondents believed that workers between the ages of 30-39 years old had the best promotion prospects, with only 2% citing 50 year-olds or above. Most managers



# Aquiring culture

reported that they expected to retire at 65 despite believing that the average age of retirement would have to rise in the very near future.

In 2001, research by Zmira Hornste that was published by the JRF suggested that legislation protecting people from age discrimination changed employer behaviour in the sense that discrimination against older workers was no longer explicit. However, whether this reflected changes in their behaviour was arguable and attitudes did not seem to shift and change. There was a further problem with legislating against age discrimination. Forbidding employers to set compulsory retirement ages may even have made them a bit less likely to hire older workers. On the other hand, companies such as B and Q encourage older workers to apply for work with them believing them to have a range of experiences and knowledge to draw on.

## Questions

- 1. Why do you think that employers are reluctant to hire the young and the old?
- 2. Why do you think that legislation may not prevent age discrimination?

## Keywords

1. Pension age - when an employee can draw a pension; for many, but not all, it is also the time when they can retire if they wish.
2. Retirement age - age of 65 when a person qualifies for a state pension
3. Normal retirement age means the age at which the employer requires employees in the same kind of position to retire.

## What is the relationship between poverty and old age?

### Bullets

- Basic state pensions are very low. People who live on basic state pension will experience poverty and deprivation.
- People who are poor throughout their lives are vulnerable to extreme poverty in old age.
- Women are particularly vulnerable to poverty for a number of reasons including work history, dependence on male pensions and caring duties.

### Text

Burholt and Windle, in research for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2006) produced the most definitive recent research into material poverty among older people. Using a range of data, they attempted to compare the financial resources of different groups of older people and to discover which groups of people were most vulnerable to poverty. Unsurprisingly, those groups who were vulnerable to poverty in youth were more likely than others to be poor in old age. However, there is a more unwelcome side to poverty in old age. Many younger people move in and out of poverty. Older people who become poor remain poor and can do little about the position that they find themselves in. They suffer multiple deprivations as they are vulnerable to loneliness and disability. Generally these people are uneducated, living in poor areas, female and in poor health. Often they are widowed or separated. It is those people who have to survive on state pensions rather than occupational pensions who have the poorest experience of old age. Basic state pension is in the region of £90.70 per week though a number of factors may influence

# Aquiring culture

how much people get in pension such as the amount that they have contributed in National Insurance. There is a small increase for people over 80 years.

The Scottish Widows Pension Index in 2007 surveyed more than 5,000 people and found just 49 per cent are setting aside adequate sums for their old age. Their results suggested that of the 51% who will rely on basic state pension, almost a quarter have no savings at all. They suggest that women who stay at home to look after children will be most vulnerable to poverty in old age. A study by Bardasi for the JRF (2002) pointed out that another vulnerable group was people who became unemployed in their early 50s. In the same study, it was also shown that women who were divorced or single were substantially likely to experience poverty in old age.

One group who are particularly vulnerable to leaving work in their 50s are people who care for others. This is often women, who care for elderly relatives or dependents. They tend to face early redundancy and discrimination. Age Concern in 2005 claim that carers save the UK £15 billion, and yet they are likely to experience poverty themselves in old age. Women in their 50s are most likely to be caring with nearly one in four providing care. But employers' inflexibility together with old fashioned and rigid state pension rules mean that carers are penalised financially for taking time out of work to care for sick older and disabled partners relatives and friends.

Help the Aged in 2006 showed that many people were ignorant about the risks of poverty in old age. They believed that the basic state pension would be enough to pay for living in a care home. However, in that year, the basic state pension was £84 a week and the average cost of a care home was over £400. Many people believed that the state would take care of their needs, but in fact, this is far from the truth. Help the Aged point out that many people are forced to sell their homes and use up all of their savings before they are entitled to any financial help with the additional costs of care.

An ESRC publication in 2003, Growing Older in the 21st Century, found that many older people still live in conditions of deprivation and poverty and social exclusion, and the older the person, the greater the deprivation. This was revealed in a three year study of the old living in poor wards in Liverpool, Manchester and London (Newham) which identified 70 per cent living with some form of social exclusion. Some four million pensioners live in the 88 most deprived wards in England. Nearly half the people in this study were poor, which is twice the poverty rate nationally among pensioners. Almost half of them had not bought clothes in the previous year and 15 per cent had gone occasionally without buying food. One fifth lacked contact with children, relatives, friends or neighbours.

## Questions

- 1. How much is basic state pension?
- 2. What factors make a person vulnerable to poverty?
- 3. Why do some people fail to make provision for old age?
- 4. Why are women more vulnerable to poverty than old men

## Keywords

1. Life chances - opportunities in life
2. Redundancy - when your job no longer exists
3. Carer - person who looks after someone who is vulnerable or sick
4. Widowed - experienced the death of a partner
5. Ward - a council election area. Each parliamentary constituency is divided into a number of wards. This is also used as a unit of analysis for research purposes.

# Aquiring culture

## How does the experience of old age vary for individuals?

### Bullets

- People are living longer. Many have good health for much of that time.
- People are vulnerable to disability in old age
- Older people may also be vulnerable to mental deterioration and some develop dementias
- People experience social difficulties in old age.

### Text

There are increasing numbers of people who live longer than ever before. The population of people over 80 is rising and life expectancy is increasing so that children born in 2006 might well expect to live until they are 90 years of age. Many experience healthy and fit lives well into their 70s and 80s, but as they grow older, there is an increasing risk that they will become dependent on others to maintain a reasonable standard of living. Wales has a specific problem in that the population is projected to increase by about 5% to 3.14m over the next ten years. Whilst the number of children is expected to drop by 6% over the period, the number of people aged 65 to 84 is set to rise by 24% and those over 85 by around 29%.

The health of old people is often poor. This may be a function of old age; senses become less sharp and people are vulnerable to wear and tear in their joints so that the disabling condition of arthritis affects very large numbers of the elderly. Many people experience serious health problems in old age that are related to the way that they have lived their lives: poor diet, obesity, smoking, alcohol use, occupational disease and disability may all play a part in people's physical well-being. It is estimated that over a third of people over the age of 75 have some degree of disability. Note that very few disabled people rely on wheelchairs and many disabilities such as poor eyesight, breathlessness from heart disease or deafness are invisible to others though they have an impact on the person who experiences these difficulties.

There may be some decline in memory and mental sharpness as people grow older, though people who use their minds or work tend to retain their mental powers for longer. Dementia (mental impairment such as Alzheimer's disease) affects large numbers of people and can often attack people when they are still relatively young. Early onset dementia has been known to attack very young people and those with existing learning disabilities such as Down's Syndrome are particularly vulnerable. In 2008, it was widely reported that a study had found that people with depression are particularly vulnerable to cancers, so problems of poverty, stress and disability tend to be linked in ways that researchers do not yet fully understand. The experience of old age can be affected by the health and wealth of the individual person. All of us are likely to experience some difficulties; however, those who already have difficult and poor lives are more vulnerable to problems and at an early age than others.

The problems of old age are not just associated with the body. There are social aspects too. Some people who have been poor all of their lives continue to experience difficulty. For others, the experience of poverty is linked to old age alone and the result of long periods on a very restricted income. Other difficulties include isolation and loneliness as friends die or move into care homes. Most old people will experience the shock of bereavement as partners die. Many may have been caring for partners through ill health and disease before the final loss. Housing stock for the elderly is often poor. People live in

# Aquiring culture

older homes that they cannot afford to maintain properly and which are not economical to run.

## Questions

- 1. What physical problems can old age mean for people?
- 2. What mental difficulties may older people be vulnerable to?
- 3. What social difficulties can older people experience?
- 4. Why do people who have been poor all through their lives run the risk of a difficult old age?

## Keywords

1. Dementia - mental deterioration such as Alzheimers
2. Early onset dementia - affects people when they are still very young
3. Bereavement - experiencing the death of a family member
4. Obesity - seriously overweight

## How do the problems of ageing impact on ethnic minority communities?

### Bullets

- The minority ethnic community is growing older
- Age and gender distributions are different from those of the majority population
- There are health differences for older minority ethnic populations which may be related to their earlier poor experiences of deprivation and discrimination
- Minority older people may have needs specific to their cultural background.

### Text

Katbamna and Matthews, (2006) from the University of Leicester conducted research on ethnic minority communities and ageing in Britain. They point out that there are increasing numbers of elderly Britons from ethnic minority communities in the UK as the populations who migrated in the 1950s and 1960s reach retirement age. There are differences between minority ethnicities and resident population distributions, for example there are more males in the Asian British and African Caribbean British over 65s whereas women outnumber men in the majority population.

Minority ethnic communities are vulnerable to a variety of problems, with many experiencing disabling and chronic health conditions. One of the most significant health problems is diabetes which is a chronic condition that can lead to disability. People who experience poverty and deprivation are more than twice as vulnerable as others to develop diabetes and people from Black Minority Groups (BME) are six times more likely to get the illness than others. If they develop the condition, people who are poor or deprived are often less able to manage the condition and less likely to be screened for complications.

However, BME elderly people have some problems that are specific to their membership of minority groups. Many live in decaying inner city areas with poor access to services.

# Aquiring culture

Others may live in areas where there are fewer people of shared ethnicity and they are vulnerable to isolation and a lack of recognition of their needs. For example advice literature and drug guidance may not be in minority languages.

## Questions

- 1. What particular problems may people from ethnic minorities experience as they grow older

## Keywords

1. BME - Black minority ethnicity
2. Diabetes - an inability to process sugars in the food which if not controlled leads to blindness, kidney disease and amputation

## Are the old a problem for society?

### Bullets

- There are more old people than ever before
- These older people are healthier and happier than previous generations
- Many of these older people lead useful and productive lives
- Old people who feel unfulfilled are more likely to experience deterioration of quality of life
- The UK is discriminatory towards the old in many spheres of life

### Text

The population is growing older and living longer. There are deeply ingrained negative attitudes towards the old so that people will spend money and time on trying to maintain a youthful face and figure. Part of the shock expressed at the idea of older women having children through changing medical technologies can be put down to ageism as there is little reaction to the idea of elderly fathers. There are age barriers in place so that people are no longer able to travel easily, to work or to expect the best medical treatments beyond certain birthdays.

However, many of these older people are healthier and wealthier than any previous generation and many do not want to live restricted lives. They wish to experience the freedom to do things and spend their money. They provide a substantial market for goods and services such as holidays, leisure activities, educational and sporting events. Leach (2008) found that many of the people born in the post war period who are just approaching retirement age regard age as unimportant in terms of their personal identity and they told the researchers that they felt younger than their actual age. Their interests were homes, travel and family. Many volunteer so that a number of charities are reliant on people over the age of retirement for income generation through charity shops. Others work in schools, prisons and hospitals supporting and befriending people. As it is necessary for many parents to work, grandparents take on a significant role in caring for children and many elderly people care for relatives who are sick or disabled.

There is increasing psychological evidence that the way we treat the elderly can have a marked effect on their mental faculty so that deteriorating mental faculties can be a social phenomena. People who go into institutions may lose alertness quickly, whereas those who remain in control of their own lives for as long as possible retain a more positive mental attitude and remain healthy and fit. One of the conclusions of the four year Growing Older Programme of studies (reporting 2003) funded by the Economic and



# Aquiring culture

Social Research Council - is that the Government needs to do more to ensure that the growing numbers of older people have a better life. They discovered that it was the over 80s who experienced disproportionate poverty, exclusion and discrimination. In the same series of studies, it was found that 9% of those over 65 still work. Those who did so through choice rather than because they required the money reported high levels of satisfaction with their lives.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2004) report 'From welfare to well-being - planning for an ageing society' summarises the basic position as being that Britain has not yet got to grips with the implications of living in an ageing society where, for the first time, older people will outnumber young people. In other European countries, older people are celebrated as an asset to society but in the UK the ageing of the population is often portrayed in negative terms in the media. Welfare policy is targeted at some of the poorest groups but other older people are left struggling because society has not moved towards supporting them in any positive way.

## Questions

- 1. How is the experience of old age changing for people in our society?
- 2. How are older people a benefit to our society?
- 3. Why is it important for older people to feel fully part of society?

## Keywords

1. Ageing society - one where the average age of the population is increasing
2. Elderly old - those over 80

## How do social structures contribute to inequality and poverty?

### Why is poverty a topical issue?

#### Bullets

- Despite people's good intentions and concern, there is very little real attempt to solve the problems of poverty.
- The popular media tend not to run stories about poverty and inequality
- The people who are most likely to be poor are the social groups that people would rather ignore and who are often the victims of discrimination.

#### Text

In 2005, there was a major social and political campaign known as 'Make Poverty History'. Huge protest groups met to demonstrate against world poverty and inequality. Poverty became part of the news in a way that it had not been for very many years. Thousands of people wore white plastic wrist bands to symbolise that they rejected poverty; in reality, probably very little was achieved beyond raising awareness and creating a fashionable opinion. Wealthy and powerful people wore the wristbands and walked in demonstrations about world poverty. A website was created and pop stars signed up to end poverty. At

# Aquiring culture

the same time, as Yeo pointed out, a major, but under-reported famine was taking place in Niger and this was barely mentioned in the media that year as the reporters were covering protests at the G8 summit in Gleneagles.

This illustrates a major point about poverty. Despite the fact that many people in Britain live lives that are characterised by poverty and deprivation, many people still believe poverty to be a problem that only exists in poorer or less economically developed nations of the world (LED). Politically, poverty is not usually big media news and is overlooked in favour of more fashionable campaigns and the activities of the rich and privileged.

Another uncomfortable fact about poverty is that it affects certain groups of people who are not well represented in government and who do not have access to the media to promote their cause. These groups are generally people whom we discriminate against in many ways. They are those with disabilities, women, older people and young people, people with caring responsibilities, gay and lesbian people and Black and minority ethnic people, including Travellers. One of the causes of poverty is therefore discrimination; certain people are rejected by society often for reasons beyond their control. They do not have access to the same life chances as many in the population and become vulnerable to poverty.

## Questions

- 1. Suggest reasons why poverty in Britain is not a good news story.

## Keywords

1. Famine - people are starving
2. Less economically developed nations of the world (LED) - countries that depend on agriculture and where many people have a low standard of living
3. Life chances - opportunities

## How does government policy contribute to inequality?

### Bullets

- Inequality is at its highest level ever (2009) despite government efforts to solve the problem of poverty.
- Governments since the late 1970s have tried to reduce taxation and target benefits at the poor.
- Large sums of money are spent on targeted benefits
- Targeted benefit has not helped solve the problem of poverty because targeted benefits are not effective.

### Text

There is an increasing gap between rich people and poor people in Britain, despite at least 10 years of government targets to bring up the standard of living of the poorest to acceptable levels. Part of the problem is that solving issues of poverty, without tackling inequality is doomed to failure. The government attempts to solve problems of poverty by spending money on policies such as providing tax credits for the poor. Tax credits are payments from the government. People who work, but earn low wages, may qualify for Working Tax Credit if they have children. This particular policy was designed to reduce

# Aquiring culture

child poverty. It is an expensive policy. In the three years since it was introduced in 2003, something in the order of £65 billion was spent on tax credits by government. Even so, there is still a shortfall and poverty persists.

The money paid out to people as tax credits, pensions and benefits is raised through taxation of richer people. However, in Britain, taxation is very unpopular and governments often pledge to reduce taxation for middle class people in order to gain the votes that will take them into power. The government therefore also spends money on reducing taxation for the richer. The impact of this is that DWP figures in 2008 showed the incomes of the poorest 20% of households fell by 1.6% between 2005-06 and 2006-07 while those of the richest households rose by 0.8%. Thus, although Britain is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, one in five of its children is living in poverty.

When the welfare state was set up in the 1940s and 1950s, many benefits paid out by the state were universal. Everyone was paid money in pensions or child benefit and then the cost was clawed back through taxation of richer people. One of the advantages of this system is that it is easy to administer and efficient. A weakness of the system is that it means that taxation levels are high and this is very unpopular in Britain, although many European countries accept high taxation in exchange for a high standard of living for everyone.

One of the main beliefs of the Conservative New Right government of the 1980's was trickledown theory. This is the idea that if you make the very rich even richer through offering them bonuses and incentives, they will spend more money and keep poorer people in work. Clearly this did not work. The effect was to make rich people very much richer. Greed was seen as being a virtue in the 1990s when it was acceptable to be selfish and accumulate vast wealth through the new technological industries that were springing up. The New Right froze benefits and welfare spending in order to pay for tax cuts for the very wealthy.

Since the late 1970s when the New Right took control of government, there has been a movement away from universal provision of welfare towards the targeting of welfare. Now money is directed at certain needy groups. Feinstein (2006) identifies problems with targeting benefits and these include the fact that many people may slip through the net because they move in and out of targeted groups. For example, children from poor families may have unstable lives and be moved between different sets of relatives. It is possible that the benefits will not always follow the children. There is always the risk of feeling embarrassed and many people do not claim benefits for which they are entitled because the claim system is so complex or they do not want to feel ashamed. For example, many parents refused to claim free school meals for their children if there was any way that others could identify the children who were entitled to free meals.

Although New Labour has targeted the poor and spent vast sums on targeted benefits and poverty relief schemes, it can be argued that they were not likely to solve problems of inequality. Peter Mandelson, one of the main figures in the Labour Party pointed out that they were 'intensely relaxed about the wealthy'. Thus many people have become very rich leaving the middle and the poor behind.

## Questions

- 1. Why do targeted benefit systems fail to solve problems of poverty?
- 2. Why do targeted benefit systems fail to catch everyone who is poor?
- 3. Why has New Labour failed to solve the problem of poverty despite spending more money on anti-poverty schemes?
- 4. What is trickledown theory?

# Aquiring culture

## Keywords

1. Universal benefit - everyone is given benefit
2. Targeted benefit - people are expected to claim benefit and prove that they require it.
3. Trickle-down theory - the belief that making the rich very wealthy will benefit everyone

## How has globalisation contributed to inequality in the UK?

### Bullets

- Manufacturing has moved to low pay countries of the world.
- It is claimed that workers in these countries are exploited.
- Meanwhile, British workers do not have access to good jobs but work in casual low pay work.
- Huge multinational brand name companies put smaller, local companies out of business so there are fewer jobs for British workers.

### Text

Curiously, one of the main reasons for poverty and inequality in Britain is the availability of cheap goods and of poverty in those countries that are normally described as LED (less economically developed). The process has been described in books such as Naomi Klein's No Logo and George Ritzer's The MacDonaldisation of Society.

Globalisation is the process whereby people are becoming more and more part of one single society and are losing their own cultures. For example, three hundred years ago, most people would have eaten, dressed and used items that they made for themselves or which were very local to the area in which they live. They would have developed their own regional cooking, eaten food that was in season and worn individual clothes to a style that was local to their area. Now, we wear clothing made in a variety of countries, eat foods from all around the world and tend to follow fashions that are given to us by the media and magazines. This luxury and choice comes at a terrible cost to the poor people of all of the countries of the world.

Companies are owned in countries such as the United States and the UK. They design styles for items such as trainers or sports goods but they do not make them. Instead, these goods are made in factories in poor countries, often in sweatshop conditions where people are paid very poor wages and work for very long hours. The manufactured cost of a pair of trainers that sells for £90 may well be less than £3. People in wealthy countries pay more for advertising, marketing and transporting the goods than they pay for the goods themselves. Very little of the price of a packet of tea or a jar of coffee goes to the growers, unless you buy Fairtrade goods. There has been a growth in the marketing, media and advertising industry, but only a few people benefit from this and they are generally very well paid.

Traditional manufacturing is dying out in Britain as goods are made cheaply in developing countries. So, there are few jobs for British workers except in low pay casual work such as retail or food services. This work is generally unpleasant and lacking in creativity, so that workers cannot have a normal conversation with clients, but have to follow a set script where they all say the same things, 'Would you like fries with that?' or 'Do you need any help with the packing?'. Thus, unskilled British workers do not have access to good jobs or work that is satisfying and interesting. Meanwhile, poor workers in LED countries may be

# Aquiring culture

working long hours in terrible conditions to provide very cheap goods for people in the West. It is sometimes claimed that many Chinese products are made in prison labour camps where prisoners are forced to work; often they are guilty of little but criticism of the government.

The big multinational companies who sell brand name goods such as Gap, Adidas, Nike and others have control over the market and they are able to produce large numbers of goods very cheaply in developing countries. They undercut the prices charged by local brands so that small manufacturers go out of business. In very few years, Starbucks, Cafe Nero, Subway and other coffee shop chains have increased their control over the market so that there are fewer independent cafes and restaurants in British cities and towns.

## Questions

- 1. What is globalisation?
- 2. Why has manufacturing declined in the UK?
- 3. What is a sweatshop?

## Keywords

1. Sweatshop - factory where poor people work very long hours for low pay
2. Multinational - company with outlets in a number of different countries
3. LED - less economically developed
4. Globalisation - people are becoming part of a larger global society and losing cultural differences
5. Fairtrade - companies that pay people in LED countries a living wage for their work

## How are attitudes to social inequality changing?

### Bullets

- Many people have criticised the wealthy for the way that they have increased their own salaries at the same time as they have been benefitting from relatively low taxation.
- Recent panics in the credit market have emphasised how much rich people have taken out of the system whilst at the same time, bankers have been mismanaging the economy.
- Critics of inequality point out that more equal societies are also happier societies with fewer social problems.

### Text

There is some evidence that there are changing attitudes to inequality. The credit crunch of the 2008-9 has underlined just how well the extremely rich have been rewarding themselves for work and people have been scandalised by the pensions and rewards offered to the executives of banks and financial service companies, often for spectacular levels of mismanagement. There has always been disquiet at what is known as the 'Fat cat' salaries paid to executives. In 2006, Jonathan Prynn, of the Evening Standard described how executive pay had risen by 30%, more than seven times the rate for ordinary workers. He described how the average pay for a chief executive at one of Britain's biggest companies had risen to £2.4m, almost 100 times average earnings. The standard rate for a finance director was £1.1m a year. He says that the acceleration in bosses' pay has opened



# Aquiring culture

up an ever widening gap between those running companies and people on the shop floor. In 2005, the average worker's pay packet went up by 3.7%, while inflation inched ahead by 2.5%.

The JRF in their work on social evils looked at inequality and commented that participants in their research had suggested that poverty was closely linked with other social evils. For example, they described how, in a deprived community, making money from drug dealing can seem an appealing option to young people who have no access to other work. They claim that there was widespread concern about inequality - the polarisation of society into 'haves' and 'have nots'. Website respondents to their blogs felt that growing inequality in Britain is socially divisive and morally wrong, partly because income differences do not always reflect people's efforts. Participants added a different perspective. They recognised that people doing well would welcome growing affluence, but noted that there were huge numbers of people not benefiting.

Recent fascinating and very well reported cross-cultural research by Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) entitled *The Spirit Level* underlines the terrible impact of inequality on a society. They say that large inequalities of income in a society have often been regarded as bad for a society, and it is common knowledge that in rich societies the poor have shorter lives and suffer more from almost every social problem. However they go on to claim that unequal societies are bad for almost everyone within them - the well-off as well as the poor. Almost every modern social and environmental problem - ill-health, lack of community life, violence, drugs, obesity, mental illness, long working hours, and big prison populations - is more likely to occur in a less equal society. Indonesians, Vietnamese, Finnish and Japanese people from more equal societies will claim to be happier than the British and Americans. This is despite the fact that average levels of wealth are higher in the UK than in Indonesia and Vietnam.

Nevertheless, as with the Make Poverty History campaign which raised consciousness but, it is argued, had little real impact on poverty, it remains questionable as to whether the increasing concern with inequality in society will have a lasting impact or really affect those who actually do have the power to make the necessary changes.

## Questions

- 1. Why have people expressed concern at growing inequality in society?
- 2. Why is social inequality linked to other social problems?

## Keywords

1. Fat cat - refers to a greedy rich person
2. Polarisation - widening gaps
3. Unheard groups - those with little power or influence to be heard by those in power, those who have no access to the media

## How do people consolidate their wealth and power?

### Bullets

- There are structures in society to help the rich and powerful to maintain their position
- These include financial and legal loopholes which mean that they are able to avoid tax.
- The most powerful and wealthy form an elite that is difficult to penetrate. People from that elite find it easier to gain powerful positions in society.

# Aquiring culture

- As qualifications are increasingly important in society, so too is middle class pressure on the education system to provide their children with a higher class education.

## Text

There are structures in society that enable the wealthy to maintain and develop their positions of power and wealth. Some of these are personal and require them to use strategies, one of which is to invest their money carefully in items such as works of art, property or land. However, wealthy people can also use the way that society is organised in order to look after their own interests. It is known for example that although the wealthy pay large sums of money in taxation, they actually probably spend a smaller proportion of their income in this way than less wealthy people. There are many tax loopholes that the super-rich can access and many employ tax avoidance lawyers to help them to do so without necessarily breaking the law. They have access to offshore accounts which are bank accounts in countries where the tax rates are very low indeed. Many choose to spend time in tax havens and limit their time in their own countries so that they are not liable for high rates of income tax. In UK, such regions of low taxation are the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. Internationally, Switzerland and Leichenstein have low taxation rates for bank accounts.

In addition, many rich people invest in providing their children with an expensive and exclusive education in expensive schools and top league universities where they will not be expected to mix with their social inferiors. In fact, they will often not mix with the non-wealthy at all. They attend elite private schools and may live in gated communities or in large private houses with land. They go on holidays in remote and expensive locations. This may leave them with an unrealistic view of society. In 2008, a survey of rich Americans by the Spectrem group showed that many considered assets of over £1,000,000 not to be rich at all. Rich people felt that it required at least \$5 million to be considered wealthy and 8% picked \$100 million as being the amount it took to be considered rich.

C Wright Mills in 1956 described what he called a 'power elite' in America. He claimed that the upper classes control politics, the army and business. Individuals from powerful families are born powerful families and may join one of these groups. In effect, they have become a caste (outsider people are not usually allowed to join them). They control all the important decisions that are made in society. He goes further to suggest that democracy is a sham. Big businesses and corporations control politics. This has clearly been an influential and controversial thesis; but the existence of very powerful families is evident in American politics - more than one president has been related to another president, for example. Whether the same is true of British society remains a matter for debate. It is clear, however that people from wealthy families have access to privilege and power structures to ensure that their children are protected from moving down the economic structures of society.

Goldthorpe (1980) and Glass (1954) both found evidence of what they described as 'elite self-recruitment' whereby privileged and powerful positions go to children of wealthy and powerful people. The evidence to support this thesis is mixed; certainly there was probably more social mobility (movement through the classes) when these people were researching class than there is in modern British society. However, as educational qualifications become more important for people to gain top jobs, so too differences in educational attainment between the social classes are widening and the pressure from middle class parents to get their children into high attaining schools has become a major political issue

# Aquiring culture

## Questions

- 1. What can the rich do to ensure that they do not mix with the poorest sectors of society?
- 2. Why would the rich prefer to mix with other rich people?
- 3. How do the rich avoid paying taxes?
- 4. What is a power elite?
- 5. To what extent can rich people be said to form a power elite in British society?

## Keywords

1. Tax haven - country or area with very low taxation, so rich people own their bank accounts in such countries.
2. Gated community - People cannot get into the housing complex without passing security guards and security systems.
3. Income tax- proportion of earnings paid to government to be spent on education, defence, welfare and other mechanisms of the state.
4. Elite self-recruitment - top employers choose the children of the rich to take on the best jobs and opportunities , 'it's not what you know, but who you know'.