Chapter 4
Sociology for care practice

Introduction

This chapter is designed to help you explore and understand key theories, themes and ideas from Sociology. It will encourage you to ‘think sociologically’ about features of society which affect the experiences, behaviour and life chances of those who need and/or receive social care services.

In particular, this chapter will focus on ways in which Sociological theory, concepts and current social research can develop our understanding of:

- the influence ‘family’ has, on the behaviour, experiences and life chances of individuals,
- the causes, nature and effects on groups in society, of poverty, inequality and discrimination

How you will be assessed:

You may be studying Sociology for Social Care Practice as a single unit or as part of an HNC in Social Care.

Single unit assessment is likely to be via a case study, an essay and/or a presentation.

Where this unit forms part of an HNC programme, assessment may be as above or may follow an integrated format. Integrated assessment is where key elements of several HNC units (for example, Sociology for Care Practice, Social Care Theory for Practice, Psychology for Care Practice) are combined in one assessment exercise.

Wherever and however you study Sociology for Care Practice, your tutor will keep you informed of assessment processes and detail.

In this chapter you will learn:

- Thinking sociologically – here you will be introduced to what sociology is and what sociologists do. The relevance of sociology to the world and work of Social Care will be highlighted.
- The sociological toolkit – as with all academic disciplines, sociology has a ‘language’ and concepts (ideas) of its own. This section introduces you to and explains important examples of these, relevant to ‘Sociology for Social Care Practice’.
- Sociological theory – the work of sociologists (as is the case with all social sciences: psychology, politics, economics and so on) is based around several key theories. Each theory represents a particular way of explaining and understanding ‘society’. This section will introduce and explain the main themes from sociological theory and introduce you to some original and current theorists in sociology. Key ideas from writers such as Durkheim, Parsons, Marx, Engels, Becker, Goffman and others will soon become familiar!
- Sociology of ‘Family’: this section will focus on how sociologists define ‘family’ and debates about the influence of family on the development, behaviour and life chances of its members. The theories introduced in section 3 will be applied here, to help us evaluate the role and importance of ‘family’.
- Sociology of ‘Poverty, Inequality and Discrimination’ – Sociological explanations for and evidence of poverty, inequality and discrimination in Scotland will be considered, with particular reference to groups who use social care services. Again, those theories introduced in section 3 will be applied.
Thinking sociologically

For students new to the subject, it can be surprisingly difficult to find a clear and universal definition of ‘sociology’.

For this reason, our chapter begins by describing (rather than defining) what sociology is and what sociologists do.

Sociology studies the ways society is organised and the behaviour of society’s members, most specifically:

Sociology studies the structures, systems, processes and relationships which make up a society—and how these might influence the lives of society’s members

For example, sociology helps us to examine and understand the importance - and impact - of being born into a particular ‘social class’, being born or becoming ‘male’ or ‘female’, being black or ‘white’, experiencing impairment or disability.

Sociology studies social issues and ‘social problems’

Sociologists have and continue to make a study of any and all aspects of life important to society, e.g. power and politics, poverty and welfare, health, illness and disease, media and communication, sex, sexuality and gender, family, deviance, crime and law, religion.

Sociology is based on research and aims to be ‘factual’ and fair by using science-like methods to study society, e.g. power and politics, poverty and welfare, health, illness and disease, media and communication, sex, sexuality and gender, family, deviance, crime and law, religion.

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Sociological argument is based on a number of theories. Each theory offers us a particular way of understanding human society and the behaviours of its members

In the way that the umbrella term ‘Christianity’ divides into several differing forms of faith (Catholicism, Protestantism and so on), sociology divides into several key ‘camps’; each camp is a theory with unique views on and understanding of, society.

Sociology urges us to question ‘common sense opinion’ and ‘received wisdom’

In studying sociology you are guaranteed to question aspects of what you have been ‘raised’ to believe and will almost certainly ask questions you haven’t asked - or perhaps even considered - before!

It can be said that the first wisdom of sociology is this – things are not always what they seem.’ (Berger, P. 1963:34)

More than common sense

Sociologists reject ‘common-sense’ explanations for human behaviour.

By ‘common sense’ they mean those everyday ideas, opinions and judgements we hear, see and tend to make about how people are, what they do, or how they should be. Often these assumptions are based on information which is limited, untrue and unfair.

Common-sense assumptions are often expressed in our society in relation to disabled people, children and young people in care, people living with mental illness – in fact any and all groups whose needs and rights are of interest to us as social carers.

Activity

Without doubt, you will have encountered many common-sense assumptions applied to individuals and groups who receive services from social care, for example:

- people living with schizophrenia have a split personality and are likely to be dangerous
- young people are taken into care when they are out of control
- adults who have dementia think and behave just like children

Do some research about the realities of living with schizophrenia and dementia and investigate the many complex reasons why young people may be admitted into residential care (the website list at the end of this chapter will help you with this).

Now, use the facts you have learned to challenge ‘common sense’!

In the activity above, where you researched current social issues and reflected critically on the evidence that research produces, you made a start on ‘thinking sociologically’.

Sociological thinking, i.e. the capacity to see past the myths and limitations of ‘common sense’, is of particular value to workers in social care, for example:

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For Mills, people tend to live ‘close-up’ and private, each of us preoccupied with our own ‘we world’ (our family, our health, our work, our relationships, our bank balance).

We lack awareness of the bigger picture; generally failing to see and understand the ways in which our experiences, behaviour and life chances are influenced, sometimes created, by aspects of the society in which we live. Mills argues:

‘…consider unemployment. When in a city of 100,000 only one man is unemployed, that is his personal trouble and for its relief we properly look to the character of the man, his skills and his immediate opportunities. But when in a nation of 50 million employees, 15 million men are unemployed, that is an issue…The very structure of opportunities has collapsed.’

(Mills, 1967:9)

Sociological imagination and disability

While the experience of having an impairment or of ‘being disabled’ is, of course, specific to and different for each person, a sociological imagination urges us to look beyond the individual, to examine ways in which society around them has constructed and responds to, their disability. We might ask why, for example, in 21st century Scotland, a disabled person is likely to experience barriers and limits which go beyond any associated with their disability? Why are disabled people in Scotland among those less likely to succeed (in line with their potential) in education and employment and more likely to experience inequality, poverty and discrimination?

By applying a sociological imagination, we work to develop our awareness of how over time, social forces (for example public attitudes over time, together with systems of law, politics and economics and all resulting policy) have separated ‘disability’, creating a ‘less valued’ and ‘less equal’ reality for disabled people. As such, disability should be considered more an (important) ‘public issue’ than simply a ‘private trouble’.

But I’m not a sociologist!

That’s fine. You can develop your awareness of ways in which big, broad and deep social forces around us can and do impact on apparently ‘private’ or ‘personal troubles’ and can apply this awareness to your practice in social care without being an academic sociologist!

In her book Dead Man Walking (1983), Helen Prejean, a Catholic nun, describes her experiences of working in St Thomas, a poor black ‘ghetto’ in New Orleans, in the 1970s.
In her early years in St Thomas, Prejean felt ‘separate’ from the population there, unable to make sense of behaviours and lifestyles and personally appalled by the extent to which ‘life on welfare’, drug addiction, gang violence, high incidences of teen and lone parenting and repeated/long term prison sentences were considered ‘normal’. Individuals and families seemed to Prejean, senselessly ‘anti-social’.

Over time, however, her perspective changed. Prejean became aware of the real impact on the population of St Thomas of grinding poverty, under-resourced and substandard systems of schooling and healthcare, virtually zero adult employment and extremely limited opportunities for ‘pro-social’ leisure.

These realities she saw were not, in any meaningful way, relieved by the ill-equipped and unresponsive social services which had been put in place to ‘help’. According to Prejean, senselessly ‘anti-social’.

Prejean became much more ‘in tune’ with the realities of life in St Thomas and, by her own description, she became more insightful, empathic, challenging (in that she became ‘political’ and ‘took on’ the authorities) and effective, as a social care worker. She was able to reject limiting and prejudicial ‘common-sense’ assumptions about the population of St Thomas, and instead began to understand the behaviours and lifestyles within their larger, social and political contexts. Remember that Prejean is not a sociologist!

The sociological toolkit

In exploring social issues and social problems, we know sociology has its own imagination. It also has a language of its own – essential terms and concepts which contribute to the ‘Sociology-speak’ with which you should become familiar. A number of these are identified, explained and/or exemplified in the table below. Prompts and/or questions for thinking and discussion are also provided to help you become competent and confident in their use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Thinking/discussion points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Patterns of thinking and behaving; essentially the ‘lifestyle’ accepted and practised by a group or society. A ‘culture’ is made up of many features, including shared language, beliefs, customs and traditions. All cultures vary.</td>
<td>Why do you think awareness of the role and impact of ‘culture’ is vital for social care workers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subculture</td>
<td>Groups which are considered separate from mainstream. Economic migrants may constitute subcultures in today’s Scotland, in terms of how they see themselves and are seen by others.</td>
<td>In what ways might individuals and groups who receive social services be considered a ‘subculture’?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnocentrism</td>
<td>Interpreting the lives of others groups and societies from our own ‘world-view’; in terms of what we believe, how we live, what we have and consider to be ‘normal’.</td>
<td>In what ways might a social care worker be ‘ethnocentric’ in his/her practice and what might be the consequences of this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialisation</td>
<td>The lifelong process of becoming social, i.e. learning the language, beliefs, attitudes, customs and traditions which characterise one’s culture.</td>
<td>What might sociologists mean when they say ‘not all socialisation is conscious’?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary socialisation</td>
<td>The initial phase of socialisation, mainly ‘family’-based, when we learn our culture’s language, values, expectations for ‘socially-accepted’ behaviours, etc. Arguably, this is the phase of socialisation when we are capable of learning the most – and most quickly!</td>
<td>What for you, would be the features (and effects) of ‘ideal’ primary socialisation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary socialisation</td>
<td>“Second stage socialisation”, mainly via influences and aspects of society outside and beyond family (for example our peers, systems and institutions of education, work, media, religion, etc.).</td>
<td>Identify ways in which aspects of ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ socialisation may contrast – or ‘collide’ – and the possible effects of this on an individual’s behaviour?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social institution</td>
<td>A part of society which contributes to its overall structure. Social institutions each have their own role in society, e.g. the economy, media, political system, the family, education, church and work. Social institutions are major influences in our socialisation, they work separately and together to encourage a broadly ‘common’ socialisation.</td>
<td>How might social institutions work together to promote for society’s members, the ‘normality’ of heterosexual marriage?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sociology for care practice

Thinking/discussion points

Beliefs about what is considered ‘good’ and ‘right’. Values inform our thinking and our behaviour.

Rules which govern behaviour, norms may be formal (i.e. laws) or ‘unwritten’ and informal. Norms reflect the values of a culture – and ‘sanctions’ are applied when these are breeched!

Patterns of behaviour associated with and expected from particular social ‘placing’, or occupation (e.g. ‘minister’, ‘mum’, ‘MSF’)

Why is ‘unconditional positive regard’ a core value for social care? By what means do ‘we’ define and evidence beauty? By what means do ‘we’ define and evidence beauty? Which culture has it right and why do you think this is so?

Patterns of behaviour associated with and expected from particular social ‘placing’, or occupation (e.g. ‘minister’, ‘mum’, ‘MSF’)

What kinds of ‘role behaviours’ are typically associated with being a ‘person who uses services’ and a ‘care worker’ in our society?

What can and does happen when individuals are considered to act outside their ‘assigned’ (given) role?

Essential sociological terms and concepts.

Further research

Refer to the ‘what is sociology?’ or ‘introducing sociology’ section in any recommended/HNC-appropriate textbook. This will help you consolidate your understanding of what sociology is and the kind of ‘topics’ sociologists study, together with those key terms which make up your sociological toolkit.

Sociological theory – an introduction

By getting to grips in the previous pages with key ideas and terms, you have begun to think sociologically. Now it is time to develop an awareness of the main perspectives and theories on which sociology is based.

Sociological perspectives

Broadly speaking, sociology is split into two main perspectives (‘perspective’ being a generalised view and explanation for human behaviour); these are ‘Structural’ and ‘Action’ (or ‘Interpretive’).

The ‘structural-action split’

A structural perspective has a ‘macro’ (large) focus and emphasises the ways in which society’s systems and institutions influence and determine the lives of its members.

An action (or Interpretive) perspective has a ‘micro’ (small) focus, emphasising the ways in which small-scale interactions between individuals and groups in turn influence and ‘create’ their society.

Each perspective contains several theories (‘theory’ is a specific set of views about human behaviour). Often, an image or picture helps us understand ideas. Theories relevant to sociology for care practice are shown in the illustration below:

Functionalism

For Functionalist theorists, society’s structure and shape is comprised of interrelated systems.

Social stability

For Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), as with all early Functionalist writers, society can be understood as a system made up of separate but interconnected parts. This can be illustrated by a biological analogy, where society is compared to a living body.

While each ‘part’ (organs, systems) of the body performs a unique and specialised function (the lungs oxygenate the blood), all the organs work together too, to ensure the body as a whole, ‘functions’ and survives.

Society as a system is similar. The ‘organs’ or ‘parts’ of a society are its social institutions (key institutions include family, education, the economic and political systems). Each institution has a special and particular function to fulfil (or job to do), in terms of society’s ‘needs’ and all institutions co-operate and work interdependently to ensure society stays ‘healthy’, by remaining stable. The family, for example, socialises children in preparation for school, school socialises and ‘prepares’ children and young people for the world of work and so on.

Other features of society which contribute to social stability are socialisation, social control and managed social change.

Socialisation

A society is stable when sufficient of its members have been socialised into accepting
and conforming to that society’s value consensus: a broadly shared agreement about how society should operate and its members live (heterosexuality, marriage and monogamy can be considered features of ‘our’ value consensus).

Social institutions in the course of fulfilling their ‘specialised’ functions (e.g., the education system preparing the young population to enter the world of work) are, at the same time, society’s main instruments for socialisation – where those social norms, values and roles expected of us are transmitted and are for Talcott Parsons (1952) ‘internalised’ by society’s members.

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Consider this
What do we learn in school which is not part of the formal curriculum and is not timetable? What, for Functionalist theorists, might be the ‘functions’ of this kind of learning: for society’s members and for society itself?

Social control
Where social rules are breached, there are powerful individuals, groups and social institutions which have the responsibility and right to apply social sanctions (punishment). Sanctions can be minor and informal (for example, a warning look from a parent to child at the sweetie counter) or significant and formal – ranging from ‘re-education’ to separation from society via imprisonment.

When ‘rule-breakers’ are made an example of, and receive social punishment, it confirms for the majority just how different (from the rule-breakers) they are and how ‘right’ they (the ‘moral majority’) are – and so the value consensus is further reinforced!

Consider this
In what ways have you heard asylum seekers held responsible for social and economic problems in Scotland? What ‘functions’ might this (blaming process) perform?

Social inequality
Society for Functionalists is recognised as hierarchical: economic, political and social inequalities and ‘layers’ of power, control, prestige and reward do exist and are seen as inevitable, ‘natural’ and desirable.

Inequality fulfils a functional requisite for society – ensuring, for example, that all the jobs get done - from the cleaner in your work setting, to the unit or area manager. Inequality is ‘aspirational’ too: those who lack social and economic means and status can see others achieving – and so are encouraged to ‘work harder’ and ‘aim higher’ as a result.

Social change
By Functionalist analysis, changes in society are inevitable and acceptable, providing that these occur gradually, in limited ways, and can be accommodated without threat to social order and stability – adaptation rather than revolution!

Functionalist theory is accused of being: <BL>
• over-deterministic; Functionalism implies humans are largely controlled and constrained by social structures – and exercise little free will
• over-emic on social stability and cohesion: is society really more stable than unstable? Do the majority really conform?

Activity
The residents of Troontown have become increasingly alarmed by the crowds of teenagers who gather every night outside the community centre. They play loud music, drop litter, a majority smoke, a few have been seen drinking alcohol and suspicions of drug-taking have been voiced. Residents of the town say they are ‘frightened to walk the streets’.

In terms of each of the key themes of Functionalism outlined above, what is happening here and how should the townpeople respond? <ACT>

Not: For all Functionalist theories, ‘family’ is the most fundamental and influential social institution of all. Why might this be?

Conflict theory
For Conflict theorists, society has a pyramidal structure and shape, with concentration of ownership, wealth and power in the hands of a privileged few at the ‘top’ of the pyramid.

Society is unstable and unequal
Karl Marx (1818-1883) is renowned for his critique of capitalism, the economic system which has spawned industrialisation throughout Europe. Capitalism created and maintained powerful divisions between groups or ‘social classes’, with a relatively small ruling class (bourgeoisie) occupying the top of society’s ‘pyramid’, owning most of society’s wealth and resources. Via this ownership, the bourgeoisie become sufficiently powerful to assume power and control over the majority working class (proletarian).

A capitalist economy was seen by Marx as unstable and unsettled, with the social classes in constant competition and conflict. For, while the ruling elite seek continually to expand their ratio of ownership, wealth, power and control, the subject population struggles to improve on their economic and social experiences of inequality and powerlessness. For one group to have more, the other must necessarily, have less!

For today’s conflict theorists, economic and social inequalities between social groups remain critical – and can be seen in divides of social class, sex, ethnic group, disability, i.e., in all spheres of life where inequalities in wealth, power and participation are evident.

Capitalism in the 19th century of course evolved, with ‘ownership’ and ‘wealth’ occurring in new and more varied forms. As described by Kirby et al (2000, page 630):

‘the property owned by the modern upper class is no longer the land, factories and industrial plants of yesteryear but the assets, pension funds and insurance funds flickering on computer screens in global money markets’.

Sociological change
For Conflict theory, the dominant ideology (a set of beliefs representing the interests of elite groups) is transmitted via the social institutions of capitalism throughout our experiences of socialisation. This ideology creates for society’s members the illusion that society is ‘fair’ and social divisions are ‘natural’.

In today’s Scotland for example, law, policy and politicians (!) inform us that all citizens have equal right to free and ‘needs-appropriate’ education. We might assume from this level playing-field, that those who ‘succeed’ in the education system are Scotland’s most academically capable students.

Conflict theorists would argue, however, that many forms of education exist in Scotland, with some more ‘needs-appropriate’, good quality, fair (and expensive) than others. In effect, equality in Scottish education is a myth sold to us via the dominant ideology.

Social control
While society’s members may assume their
behaviour, experiences and life chances result largely from their own actions and choices and via free will, i.e., Conflict theorists, live primarily shaped and determined by economic, political and social forces.

Control begins as economic (how much people can earn, what they can buy, where they can live), but extends to become political, personal – even spiritual.

In short, all areas of life experienced by subject class members have been shaped (or ‘created’) by the system(s) into which they have been born, are educated, work and/or raise their families.

### Conflict theory: key themes
- Society is based on an economic system which is unequal and exploitative (all forms of exploitation, financial and social, arise from that system).
- Society’s social institutions work (alone and together) to falsify justify and reinforce economic and social inequality.
- A majority (of the population) experience control and constraint via these systems, therefore are denied free will.
- Redistribution of society’s resources is vital, if society is to become more economically, politically and socially equal – and ethical.

### Activity

**The Kennedy Road Centre** is a community base where adults who have enduring mental health issues attend to develop and extend ‘employability’ skills.

A local businessman has been in touch to offer a work experience programme, open to all who attend the Kennedy Road Centre. He will provide training, real shop-floor experience and qualified supervision. Those who sign up from Kennedy Road will receive no payment for the work they do.

Evaluate this scenario in terms of each of the key themes of Conflict theory outlined above. (Remember, ‘evaluation’ requires you to consider both sides of an argument, in this case ‘for’ and ‘against’.)

**Note:** ‘Family’ for conflict theorists is simply a social institution which, like all others, contributes to our ‘signing up to accept’ social inequalities. How might ‘family’ do this?

### Comparing consensus and conflict theories

The big difference:
- **Consensus** theory identifies society as a system of relative harmony and stability.
- **Conflict** theory views (and criticises) society as a system of conflict and instability.

Social institutions:
- **Consensus** theorists see the function of social institutions as essentially positive and beneficial for the greater good in that they operate to ensure maximum social cohesion, conformity and stability.
- **Conflict** theorists are critical of the role social institutions play in manipulating society’s members to accept and live within a system which is organised solely to meet the needs of a relatively small number of social elites.

The essential similarity is that both theories assert that social structures are more influential (than free will) in determining the behaviour, experiences and life chances of society’s members.

### Feminist theory

**Feminism** is the umbrella term for a large body of theory, writing and political action which has at its core, attempts to identify, challenge and redress inequality and discrimination which is sex-based.

For feminist sociologists, if we are to study, interpret and respond to issues about ‘social structures’ and human experience, we must begin by considering the most fundamentally divisive social structures of all, those based on sex and gender.

### Social construction of gender roles

Or: did Miss Muffet learn to scream when she saw a spider?

Gender roles are the patterns of thinking, attitude and behaviour that each culture associates with ‘being masculine’ and ‘being feminine’. For feminist writers gender roles are socially constructed and assigned (given).

We acquire these via our experiences of socialisation.

Gender-based differences are reinforced by society’s social institutions, sometimes subtly, sometimes openly and with emphasis. According to Robert Connell (yes there are male ‘Feminists’!) women in modern ‘Western’ societies are socialised towards the ideal of ‘emphasised femininity’:

‘The display of sociability rather than technical competence, fragility in mating scenes, compliance with men’s desire for titillation and ego-stroking in office relationships, acceptance of marriage and childcare…’

(Connell RW 1987:187, in Fulcher and Scott 2007)

### Consider this

Research confirms that the same baby is spoken to, played with and spoken about, in very different ways by adults – depending on whether that baby is dressed in pink or blue!

What might these ‘differences’ be, where might they come from – and why, for sociologists, are these differences important?

### Power and patriarchy

For many feminist sociologists sexual inequality, disadvantage and exploitation are deeply rooted in society’s power structures – most specifically within an economic system which expects women (as part of their ‘natural’ being and role) to carry out a disproportionate amount of unpaid domestic and ‘caring’ work.

By this model, women become effectively, a subject class within ‘the’ subject class: at greater economic, political and social disadvantage than men.
Patriarchy (‘father-led’/male dominance of all economic, political and social systems) is a means by which male dominance and control is ensured.

**Different schools of feminism**

Feminism is not a single theory, in fact many ‘schools’ of Feminism exist.

Key ideas from liberal, radical and socialist/Marxist feminism are summarised in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School of feminism</th>
<th>Key ideas (to explain sex-based inequality)</th>
<th>What is to be done?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Disadvantage, inequality and discrimination are pervasive experiences for women, arising from social and cultural attitudes and are evidenced even when law exists to ‘ensure’ sexual equality!</td>
<td>Change the system from within -introduce or extend policy and law to frame and ensure equality (e.g. childcare provision, equal pay, prevention of sexual harassment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialist/Marxist</td>
<td>Women are uniquely oppressed (via economic and ideological inequality); unpaid, lower paid and under-recognised labour market positions; with economic exploitation goes patriarchal domination.</td>
<td>Change the system to a new system, where economic and social equality between the sexes can exist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radical</td>
<td>Disadvantage, inequality and exploitation are the consequences of ‘patriarchal hegemony’ (where the ideology of patriarchy is embedded in all social institutions, beginning with ‘family’) Natural differences between the sexes are socially manipulated and presented as justification for social, economic and political difference (i.e. women give birth and have ‘maternal instinct’ and are therefore, society’s ‘natural’ carers)</td>
<td>Sexual separatism: change the system to a new system, where women disengage from patriarchal institutions and recreate alternative social systems.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. With reference to each of the **key themes** from Feminist theories outlined above, comment on this scenario.

**Action theory**

For most of her adult life, Libby was a renowned academic and political figure. Prior to retirement she held a senior Scottish Executive post. Having always lived independently, over the past three years Libby became increasingly frail and vulnerable via osteoarthritis, peripheral vascular disease and early-onset dementia.

No longer able to manage alone at home, Libby moved into a local residential home. This time has been unhappy for her – and she is fast developing a reputation as a ‘difficult’ resident. The setting receives a newspaper every day, the *Daily Record*. On several occasions Libby has torn up this newspaper, describing it as ‘unreadable’. When the activities co-ordinator arrived today and, producing a soft ball, arranged the residents in a circle to play ‘catch’, Libby caught then threw the ball deliberately, and with force, at the Co-ordinator’s head, shouting “I’m not a baby, babies play ball”. Libby’s response to suggestions that she may like to ‘knit a scarf’ instead, are unprintable. Staff are at a loss about what to do.

For action theorists, society’s structures and shapes are mostly determined by the actions and interventions of its members. Social reality (how society is organised and how we live) is for the action theorist primarily built by people in the course of what they do – and by how they do it.

Immediately you will have recognised that this contrasts directly with core ideas from Functionalism and Conflict theory!

**Symbolic interactionism**

George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) is considered the ‘founding father’ of Symbolic Interactionism. His work combined themes and ideas from philosophy, psychology and sociology to explain the processes...
by which our self concept is influenced and develops, via social interaction.

Importantly, Mead differentiated between what he described as our senses of ‘me’ and ‘I’. ‘Me’ relates to the social versions of ‘self’ which we choose to present to the world around us, i.e. those versions based on what we know is most likely to be expected and accepted. ‘I’ for Mead, is the uniquely private, individual sense of self we have – and don’t often share with others (this often contrasts hugely with the more socially-acceptable ‘me’!).

Our senses of self derive from the ‘feedback’ we receive from interaction with others.

During social interaction, society’s members exchange symbols. For Mead, all human interaction is based on and around this exchange of symbols. These will include the language and gestures we use, the dress codes we adopt, and so on. To make sense of other people, we must be able to make sense of the symbols they present and share and the meaning of those symbols to them (adapted from Miller, D.L., 1973).

Verbal and non-verbal language is a key symbol in any society, a tool by which we act, react and interact with others and develop a picture of ‘self’, to ‘see ourselves as others see us’.

Consider this
What might be the potential impact on a child’s sense of self, of interactions at (a Scottish) school when the child’s capacity to understand and express in English, is limited?

Mead’s founding work on human interaction was taken forward by Erving Goffman (born 1928) in his Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1969).

In this work, Goffman presents us with a form of dramaturgical analogy, meaning he used metaphors of ‘theatre’, ‘stage’, ‘performance’ and ‘roles’ to explain the processes, meanings and significance for society, of how humans interact.

For Goffman, we are effectively ‘actors’ playing a variety of roles, to a variety of audiences. We are always performing and present a particular version of ‘self’ to each audience – usually a version which we consider will bring positive feedback from that audience.

For Goffman, this process is termed impression management and, importantly it is not always done consciously. As with any performance and any audience, the feedback or response we (as actors) receive, is important for how we see ourselves; for our self concept.

Social reaction theory: Labelling

Howard Becker in Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance (1963) formalised work on labelling. For Becker, while labels are universally used and can be abbreviated and ‘handy’ symbols and ways of summing up ‘who’ or ‘what’ a person is, we must consider the meaning and impact for an individual or group, of having a label applied. Labels can be affirming (‘fabulous student!’) and motivating.

However, labels can be negative too, creating and reinforcing prejudice and separation between individuals or groups. Labels also reflect wider inequalities in power. It is ‘easy’ for example, for teacher to label Wee Mikey in class (‘naughty’), but not quite so straightforward for Wee Mikey to (publicly) label his teacher!

Where an individual or group has been labelled and, as a result, experiences an altered self-concept they can begin to identify with and retreat into the label and may ultimately evidence an increase in the ‘difference’ on which the label was based in the first place: a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Consider this
How differently do you ‘perform’ when you play your roles of ‘student’, ‘partner’, ‘parent’, ‘friend’ and ‘colleague’ – and why is this?

Why are Goffman’s ideas of unconscious impression management important for social care workers?

Consider this
From your own memories (and/or experiences!) of infant school, try to develop the next instalment of Wee Mikey's story…

How, for example, might his relationships, behaviour and progress in school change over time, if the label which his teacher has applied, ‘sticks’ to him?

Much work has been done in sociology to examine the impact of ‘mentally ill’ as a label. Link and Phelan (1995) see labelling as a result of prejudicial attitudes and behaviour but also resulting from broader cultural expectations of what ‘mental illness’ is and means. Where, via socialisation, we learn to associate mental illness with social rejection, loss of credibility and suspicion from others, then the person who is diagnosed ‘mentally ill’ (who has been subject to this same socialisation) is likely to expect these reactions from others and likely as a result, to ‘hide’ or attempt to disguise their labelled status.

In turn, a self-fulfilling prophecy can occur, when the ‘diagnosed person’ keeps social distance from others and the (‘not-diagnosed’) others reinforce this distance.

In this way, those who are ‘diagnosed’ experience the suspicion, loss of credibility and social rejection their culture has led them to expect. (Adapted and abridged from Link and Phelan 1995 in Rogers, A., Pilgrim, D. 2005)

Activity
Christie has just recently started work in a respite unit for adults with complex needs. Following initial training and induction, she has been shadowing Mrs Brennan (a senior worker), in order to benefit from her experience and ‘really’ learn the job.

Mrs Brennan tells Christie she must always be ‘strict’, otherwise residents will ‘manipulate’ situations and ‘take advantage’ of her good nature. She warns her to look out in particular for Derek, described by Mrs Brennan as ‘immature’, ‘aggressive’, ‘attention-seeking’ and ‘difficult to manage’.

Christie finds herself relating differently to the residents when Mrs Brennan is around – adopting an uncharacteristically ‘stern’ tone (especially with Derek!) and being less relaxed, open and friendly.

For Christie this role does not feel natural or comfortable and she regularly checks the rota for Mrs Brennan’s off-duty. On those days she feels she can ‘be herself’; with her confidence unaffected by Mrs Brennan’s ‘old school’ authoritarian ways.

What key themes from symbolic interactionism can you see evidenced in this scenario – and in what ways?

Note: How might labelling and modified labelling relate to other groups who use services – and where might we look to find evidence of this?

Symbolic interactionism: key themes

- ‘Social reality’ derives from the actions and interactions of society’s members.
- Our self concept is influenced by our interactions with others.
- We have, and present, various senses of ‘self’.
- When labelling and modified labelling occur, these are important social actions – and can have ‘self-fulfilling’ impact on those who are labelled.
Sociology of ‘family’

Different family types or structures.

- **nuclear** a unit of man and woman, married or cohabiting, plus their biological children
- **extended** a ‘network’ of family members living together or close by and sharing the experience of family (for example a ‘nuclear’ family plus grandparents)
- **lone parent** one parent (usually mother) with children
- **same sex** two adults of the same sex, with children
- **reconstituted** (a ‘stepfamily’), where adults establish a new relationship which includes their children from previous relationship(s)

What other types of ‘family’ can you identify from your own culture – and beyond?

‘Family’ is a complicated creature, with enormous variation in understanding and experience. Consider the following social facts about ‘family’:

Families based on marriage are statistically subject to break-up and change. Children can be ‘created’ via artificial insemination & surrogacy. Some marriages and families are formed by choice, others are ‘arranged’. Members in reconstituted families find themselves in new roles and relationships, with new ‘family’ members. Some children who live with two parents in a traditional nuclear family spend most ‘awake time’ with paid carers. For some people ‘family’ means being ‘looked after’ in a residential setting, by a team of carers. One in nine children in Scotland run away or are forced to leave home before the age of 16 due (mainly) to family conflict and instability, violence, emotional abuse and neglect.* Family types are ‘culturally-specific’, for example the established Scottish practice of grandparent ‘childminders’. Some families are networked into society, with the adult(s) motivated to and capable of, effective and safe parenting. For others, parenting and being parented is an isolated, unsafe and developmentally harmful experience.

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*http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/swrdu/Publications/missingouttext.pdf

Key terms

- **Behaviour** put simply, what people do!
- **Experiences** what people see, learn, are taught and so on. What happens!
- **Life chances** literally, chances in life – opportunities and resources people can – or cannot – access. A complex array of factors combine to determine for example, how long we will live, how ‘educated’, ‘qualified’ and ‘employable’ (etc.) we will become.

However, ‘family’ – as a concept and reality – can be surprisingly difficult to define. Family occurs in many forms.

Family structures (or ‘types’) include those outlined in the table below.

Family has a huge influence on all of our lives.

Much ‘family’ sociology explores the influences of our experience of family, on our **behaviour, experiences and life chances**.

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Consider this

**What for you makes family life happy, or sad, ‘healthy’ or ‘unhealthy’?**

**Family roles**

In Scottish society, a long tradition exists of **roles** within family segregated on the basis of gender and supported by the institution of marriage. For women, roles of ‘wife’ and ‘mother’ were based in and around the home, with primary responsibility for domestic labour and child care. Men, with their roles as ‘husband’ and ‘father’, were expected to maintain roles of financial provider; their main locus (base) being outside the home, where they worked and socialised. The male provider role traditionally, was associated with authority over the family (‘Wait until your father gets home!’).

In 21st century Scotland however, the picture is more complex. We assume greater equality and interdependence exists between parents (and the sexes) and many of us have ‘alternative’ views on and experiences of, relationships, ‘marriage’ and parenting.

Traditional segregation of sex roles within families does not fit with the realities of lone parenthood, gay or lesbian parenting, or with men and women who value the nuclear model of family but who reject sex-based segregation within it.

For most of us too, our experiences and understanding of ‘family’ varies throughout our lives, with new family structures and new roles accompanying each form of family”.

For many Sociologists however, we have not moved as far as we think we have, for we still tend to assume ‘nuclear’ and ‘marriage’ when think ‘family’!

**Equipped for life**

Whatever and however we experience ‘family’, it is our primary link from our first wee world as children, to understanding and engaging with wider society, as adults.

For Donaldson, ‘healthy’ family experiences and socialisation provide a framework (or a springboard) from which positive self esteem and genuine feelings of ‘belonging’ can and should develop. From this start in life, young people can become ‘equipped’ and ‘resourced’ adults, able to form and maintain relationships with others, cope with decision-making, accept new challenges with enthusiasm (and) cope with complex interpersonal situations by using appropriately-developed skills and qualities. (Adapted and abridged: Donaldson 1986 in Moone, N. 2005.)

…and less equipped

‘Conditions of worth’ (our internal sense of how much and in what ways we matter; ‘belong’ and ‘can do’) are established via the internal relationships and dynamic of family. Conditions of worth may be negatively and conditionally reinforced, where a child’s primary socialisation is dominated by feelings of being loved ‘but only if…’ (for example, if you work hard at school, if you keep good company, if you always do as I/we say, then . . . ).
Case study

Calum

Calum is 20 years old and lives at home with his dad and sister Jo. He has a moderate learning disability with associated mobility issues. Calum requires support to structure his day and some prompted assistance with almost all aspects of daily living.

Jo has always been ‘Mum’ to Calum; highly protective of her brother, she forgoes a social life of her own to spend evenings and weekends with him.

Together, Dad and Jo have provided a secure, stable and loving home life for Calum. He has a strong sense of being a vital family member and healthy levels of esteem and social confidence.

For his ‘age and stage’ however, and according to his teachers and support workers, Calum tends to lack practical and coping skills, living as he does with a family who do almost everything for him.

Since leaving school, Calum has completed several Foundation units at his local college and is keen to progress. He has gained work experience too, via a college placement. Working in the community library, Calum has developed real skills for work and has fast become a valued team member.

Recently, Dad and Jo have been very worried to hear Calum say he intends to get a flat and a job, of his own. When he signed up for a student exchange scheme to involve a supported visit to Prague, Dad and Jo immediately phoned the college to cancel it, arguing that Calum was ‘too vulnerable’ and ‘wouldn’t cope’ away from home.

Calum finds it hard to accept his family’s views. Relationships at home have become unsettled, with frequent arguments. Calum is angry, arguing his family are ‘treating him like a baby’. 1. In what ways do you think ‘family’ has impacted on Calum’s experiences, behaviour and life-chances? 2. How can they move forward?

In My Vision for the 21st Century, Camilla Batmanghelidjh (founder of the innovative London-based service ‘Kids Company’ which supports the capital’s ‘hardest-to-reach’ children and young people) argues that the ‘trouble’ in these young peoples’ lives, and with which they are associated, originates primarily from their experiences of ‘family’. It is then exacerbated by inadequate and ill-informed responses from the state, for example via the systems of education and/or social services.

‘Childhood in major parts of Britain is in crisis, because grownups on individual and institutional levels are failing to honour it. Grownups, who themselves have unfulfilled childhoods, refuse the task of parenting as they compete with their children to be cared for.’

‘Often roles are reversed and children abandon their childhood to act as responsible carers for dysfunctional parents. This is a landscape of emotional depletion and distortion… (where) … fathers abandon…and lone mothers reject, too psychologically and emotionally depleted to withstand the agitation of adolescence.’

‘Origins of street violence often have their beginnings in experiences of early childhood…. a very young child is living in conditions of extreme stress and fear; adults around the child are often terrifyingly violent. These young children initially protest, they cry, plead, cling, scream and when they see they have effected no change they feel desperate then emotionally exhausted they cease to react…unconsciously they kill off their capacities to feel. These children cannot feel for themselves and therefore they cannot feel for others. They are moving but emotionally vacant; their whole moral and emotional thermostat is damaged.’

‘Many of these households do not have books, children are never read to. There is no genuine interest in any topic other than immediate survival and the acquisition of material goods. Music and video games are often criticised as negative influences on these children’s lives.

These outlets do not create crisis, they simply reflect a state of mind and a way of living.’

‘There are also environmental factors which draw these young people into crime …dissatisfied individuals see the State as having abandoned them. They in turn cease to be passive in their poverty and take on the meeting of their needs through the gains of crime. Drug dealing, theft, street robberies become an accepted norm amongst a group whose moral baselines are pushed below decency. Local authorities, often due to a lack of resources, fail to meet these children’s educational and social needs. Many cannot read and write, their hyper-agitated mental state makes them difficult to manage in classrooms. The primary preoccupation of these youngsters is survival.’

‘When these young people are advised about the benefits of gaining qualifications or the possibility of accessing jobs, they react with self-nicidule and disbelief. Tutors and bosses often despair at the young people’s inability to obey rules, complete tasks and work systematically towards a goal. The young people in turn cannot calm down sufficiently to believe in long-term gains as they live in a state of immediate survival or extinction.’

(Adapted, abridged & reproduced with kind permission of ‘Kids Company’, London, 2008)

Activity

From the adapted extract from Batmanghelidjh’s ‘My Vision’, identify features of a child/young person’s primary and secondary socialisation which are likely to have destructive impact on his/her behaviour, lifestyle and life chances.

For Batmanghejilh, family structure and the symmetry (eveness) or otherwise, of parental roles, is less important than the relationships and experiences of childhood and the presence of parents (whoever they are and whether or not they live together) who are themselves emotionally and socially developed and equipped to take responsibility for their children; to parent. For her, ‘The essence of childhood is the presence of loving parents who protect and nurture the child’.

Further research

1. What do you think sociologists mean when they argue that modern society ‘demonises’ young people? Do some research in the current Scottish press for features on ‘feral’ or ‘criminal youths’. What explanations do media and/or politicians give for instances of anti-social behaviour amongst young people? In other words, where do they say the ‘blame’ lies?

2. Carry out some research to uncover the philosophy, services and practice of ‘Kids Company’ London.
Activity

‘In Place of Family’

In the last decade, numbers of children and young people who are looked after and accommodated by the state have risen by 20%. In publicising the 2008 ‘Couldn’t Care Less’ report from the Centre for Social Justice, former UK Conservative Leader, Iain Duncan Smith is cited as saying:

‘Ironically, the plight of children in care is so dreadful that if they were living with their natural parents, the state would insist on taking them into care’

(Duncan Smith, I. in Cassidy, S. Independent, 6 September 2008)

What research evidence can you find to support and refute this assertion?

A range of relevant reports and websites will help. Your sources might include:

- NCH Factfile
- The Centre for Social Justice
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation

What conclusions do you reach about the experiences and life chances of children and young people leaving care? What does this suggest to you about ‘family’?

Consider this

What are these core beliefs about family? Why do you think Thatcher identifies ‘religious organisations’ in particular, as a solution to the ‘problem’ of lone parent families?

For every argument (in this case to support particular views on ‘family values’ and parenting), a counter-argument exists.

In his work ‘Moral Politics’ for example, George Lakoff argues that families who have fundamentalist Christian beliefs are those most likely to be unrealistic and excessive in their demands (of children), with expectations of parents being ‘obeyed without question’ and who are those most likely to resort to ‘physical violence to teach children ‘correct’ behaviour’.

As you read through extracts from Sociological theory on family, you should attempt to ‘unpack’ these too, looking to identify and compare main ideas from theory, of how family structure and roles are considered to influence behaviour, experiences and life-chances.

Functionalism

George Peter Murdock (1897–1985) considered the nuclear family a foundation of all 250 societies he studied. This family type, for Murdock, operates as a contained economic, emotional and social unit where members provide for each other and create and nurture the next generation - preparing them for societal ‘fit’. More recently, for Talcott Parsons (1923–1979) the nuclear family fulfils two crucial functions for its members and for society:

- The primary socialisation of children by which children are encouraged to internalise the norms, values and behaviours of their culture - where ‘personality’ is nurtured and established
- Stabilisation of adult personalities where for two adults in a committed, socially sanctioned and heterosexual relationship, emotional security and safety are provided, together with a ‘natural’ division of labour for men and women (From: Parsons and Bales 1956 in Giddens 2001:175).

This is a picture of family characterised by love, care, sharing, emotional balance and safety and ‘socially accepted’ sex. Via its close fit with ‘society’, the institution of family is where culture is ‘learned’ and reinforced; where transmission of social values is assured and, for Parsons, it is also the uniquely private place where we may truly be who we really are.

Conflict theory

For conflict theorists, the nuclear model of family dominates analysis and is characterised by economic control and sexual division. Rather than a ‘natural’ social arrangement, nuclear family is, according to Friedrich Engels in The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (1894), a small-scale, privatised institution where men have legal and economic supremacy. The institution of family arose in response to a need for the capitalist class to maintain their ownership, wealth and social control by keeping it in the family – passing on wealth and ownership via male heredity. Adopted originally as a bourgeois model of family, the nuclear model became aspirational for the proletariat and was absorbed by them.

For conflict theorists, women within modern marriage can be considered subject to men in the same ways that subject class(es) are to ruling elites; that is economically, socially and personally controlled.

What appears to be a contract of ‘free will’ ultimately signs each partner up to expect and accept different and unequal roles. Via the nuclear family, a continuing supply of labour is guaranteed, with the ‘main’ labourer (male) cared for by the ‘secondary’ labourer (female/ wife/mother). Roles within the family for conflict theorists are traditionally segregated, with male decision-making and authority linked to superior earning power, and relative female powerlessness linked to economic weakness. Eli Zaretsky in Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life (1976), described the nuclear family as a social system which props up and promotes capitalism.

For men experiencing alienation (a sense of meaninglessness about the work they do and the role they play, working for the profit of others) within a capitalist economy, home is where this dissatisfaction is played out, via male power and control over women.

Feminism

Feminist writers have been major contributors to our sociological understanding of family, providing new explanations for what ‘family’ means and how it affects its members. Feminist analysis informs us that family dynamics, relationships and experiences are dictated and controlled by economic and patriarchal structures.

In this way, family reflects inequalities found in wider society - and has particularly limiting effects on the behaviour, experiences and life chances of girls and women.

Radical feminist Kate Millet in Sexual Politics (1970) argues that ‘consent’ for a patriarchal control of women comes via socialisation, with gender roles and ‘personality types’ of men and women culturally made up, or ‘determined’. In this way, ‘family’ is the lynchpin ensuring economic, social and sexual disadvantage for women, their relegation to a ‘sub’ working class. Evidence of women’s status as an inferior social group includes what Millet describes as ‘burgeoning’ cultures of porn and ‘anti-women satire’ (comedy). The private nature of modern-day families further disempowers women, with high (and higher-than-reported) incidences of male-female domestic violence and by the misuse of ‘biological difference’ to ‘explain’ and justify relative powerlessness and the ‘domestication’ of women.

Marxist feminist Michele Barrett in Women’s Oppression Today (1980), describes a capitalist ideology of segregated heterosexual ‘husband’ and ‘wife’ roles which exist to divide and separate the working class. The power of this dominant ideology which roots women in the domestic world has implications for them, and limits in real terms, their participation in economic, social and political aspects of society.

Action theory

Edmund Leach and R.D. Laing offer us...
broadly ‘interactionist’ analyses of ‘family’ both asserting that (mainly nuclear) family can be the deepest and darkest of environments.

For Leach, nuclear family is likely to be overloaded with unrealistic expectations, pressures and stress. Modern family life tends to be private and separate from society, a place of secrets – a form of ‘emotional prison’.

Almost all forms of anti-social behaviour and social problems can be traced back to experiences and relationships within the family. Leach for example, refers to family roles which are unhealthy and relationships of ‘ever-decreasing emotional intensity’.

For RD Laing, in his highly controversial work with fellow psychiatrist Esterson, Sanity, Madness and the Family (1968), the nuclear family is unhealthily private and controlling. Ideas for each of us about being ‘socially separate’ begin within ‘family’ and, for these writers, provide a rich breeding ground for all forms of prejudice and discrimination, including overt race-based hatred.

For Laing and Esterson, family life operates on a complex basis of emotional ‘games’ where individuals compete with, exploit and scapegoat others in their family.

Family life is characterised too, by roles and interactions which are contradictory (e.g. ‘you’re too young to do that’ but, ‘you’re old enough to know better’). According to this argument, forms of mental illness, including schizophrenia, arise from ‘disturbed’ family relationships. In an emotional environment where children face unrealistic expectations, the development of schizophrenia (where the individual is ‘separate from reality’) is for Laing and Esterson, ultimately a valid and understandable response.

Criticising theory

**Functionalism** is accused of recognising the nuclear model and assuming women’s role is largely determined; that women are more ‘passive’ than ‘active’ as individuals and family members.

**Conflict** theory is accused of the assumption that family and its members are effectively powerless in shaping their own lives; all elements of family life – including relationships – are tied down to elite models of socialisation and gender division.

**Action** theory is accused of ‘extremism’, with Laing for instance cited as generalising his research about schizophrenia and Leach criticised for ignoring the genuinely positive and reinforcing experiences of family many of us have.

Activity

Apply key ideas from Functionalism, Conflict theory, Feminism and Symbolic Interactionism to this chapter’s adapted extract from Batmanghelidjh’s ‘My Vision for the 21st Century’. The following should help you do this:

According to **Functionalist** analysis, a great deal of the moral and emotional harm these young people have experienced, originates from their non-nuclear family and unhealthy, anti-social experiences of socialisation.

For **Conflict** theorists, the Batmanghelidjh extract evidences the social and emotional consequences, for young people, of living in unsupported families and experiencing economic oppression.

For **Feminism**, patriarchal domination results in fathers who feel free to abandon and mothers who are unsupported and insufficiently resourced to respond to their children’s needs.

For **Action** theorists, the ‘insular’ nature of family exacerbates the likelihood of private suffering and emotional torment and results in individuals experiencing and ultimately re-creating, family patterns of abuse and hatred.

Also with reference to Batmanghelidjh’s ‘Vision’ (above):

1. Which Sociological theory, for you, best explains the influence of ‘family’ on the behaviour, experiences and life chances of its members? Why is this?
2. Which theory do you consider is most limited in explaining the influence of family structure and roles? Why is this?

Further research

**Same-Sex Parenting:**

Consult Sociological Research Online, Volume 8, no.4 (http://www.socresonline.org.uk/8/4/hicks.html) or search ‘Stephen Hicks’ to read his paper ‘the Christian Right and Homophobic Discourse: a Response to ‘Evidence that Lesbian and Gay Parenting Damages Children’). Hicks’ work is not as complicated as the title would suggest; rather it is a clear and well-evidenced analysis - and challenge - to writers he considers homophobic in their analysis of same-sex parenting.
Poverty, inequality and discrimination

Key terms
- **absolute poverty** defined by a fixed idea of ‘basic needs’
- **relative poverty** defined in terms of a society’s ‘normal’ lifestyle and standards
- **social inequality** experiences of being more or less equal (to others)
- **deprivation** having ‘less than’, a lack of (usually refers to society’s resources)
- **social exclusion** where access to ‘normal’ society’s resources, opportunities and participation is restricted

A walk in Glasgow East

‘It takes about fifteen minutes to walk from Glasgow’s Merchant City where you can buy £90 thongs from Agent Provocateur and £1000 suits from Emporio Armani, to the outskirts of Glasgow East; from the avenues built on the bounty of Victorian entrepreneurialism to what looks like a shanty town.

‘Once upon a time the Gallowgate was throbbing with life. But on a drizzly July morning it looks like it’s been kicked in the teeth and left for dead.

‘… (poverty) here is endemic. This is at the root of most, if not all, of Glasgow East’s problems, which range from the early deaths of males to high rates of unemployment and sickness, alcohol abuse, drug addiction and the garnet of anti-social behaviour.

‘Here, even if children leave school literate and numerate, they have much less chance of going on to higher education than their peers virtually anywhere else in the country. They are victims by virtue of where they’ve been born and brought up.’

(Alan Taylor in Sunday Herald 20/07/08)

What do you conclude from Alan Taylor’s statement?

Problems of definition

‘Common sense’ tells us real poverty has been consigned to the past, together with Grandpa’s tales of sixpence and a wee wooden toy for Christmas; or that real poverty lies elsewhere in the world, where population groups are dispossessed, their survival under threat. Maybe Scotland isn’t poor, simply unequal?

For sociologists, concepts of poverty and inequality can be complex in that each tends to be understood subjectively; that is, we all have our own ideas, beliefs and experiences of what poverty and inequality are—and aren’t.

How poverty is measured

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Britain’s first attempts to measure poverty were carried out by Charles Booth (1840-1916) in London and Seebohm Rowntree (1871-1954) in York.

Both calculated a minimum income (in terms of shelter, food and fuel) necessary for survival. This sum came to be described as the subsistence line (or the poverty line), income below which signified absolute poverty.

A ‘poverty line’ gives us a clear-cut and definite statistic of who is and is not poor. Or does it?

Critics of this absolute view of poverty argue that it is packed with assumptions and value-judgements about the poor, by those who are not: what are ‘minimum essentials’ and who decides these? What does ‘survival’ mean and is survival any way to live?

With the launch of Britain’s welfare state in 1948, an eradication of want, idleness, ignorance, squalor and disease’ was predicted and poverty, for a time, was edged off the political agenda.

In the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, economic crises swept the developed world. For the majority of people in the 1970s, life in the UK was characterised by high inflation and rising prices, a decline in heavy industries and long-term industrial disputes (with the infamous ‘three-day-week’) affecting all major public sector workers. The Conservative government responded from 1979 with a raft of policies designed to cut public spending on one hand, whilst simultaneously promoting and rewarding new ventures in business.

This approach increased wealth and income in Britain - for some. But a ‘rich-poor divide’ became increasingly and dramatically apparent, to the extent that a European Commission report in the mid-1980s asserted that a quarter of Europe’s ‘poor’ were families in Scotland. In response, left-wing commentators demanded new information on who was becoming poor in Britain and on the differences (in lifestyle and life chances) between social groups.

Peter Townsend, studying poverty in the UK (1979), set the bar for defining and understanding poverty in more qualitative ways; as a relative concept.

By Townsend’s definition, poverty of income does not stand alone but is attached to a network of lost resources, activities and opportunities; the experience of being less equal.

Poverty and deprivation in Scotland

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Why do these figures differ in the ways they do? For many sociologists, the key lies with multiple deprivation, where experiences of having and doing less ‘weaves’ across and throughout people’s lives. For Neil Moonie (2003:183-178), a multiply-deprived lifestyle may include combinations of:

- smaller homes in less developed and more polluted areas; homes that are more likely to be damp and cold
- ‘food poverty’, higher-fat and over-processed diets, resulting in diet-specific issues and conditions
- relatively low levels of educational achievement in less resourced, less ‘successful’ schools
- greater incidences of part-time and insecure work, with greater risk of unemployment
- relatively poorly networked and supported communities with higher crime figures
- proportionately more expensive services and consumer goods
- reduced options for leisure.

In June 2004, the Scottish Executive presented its first Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). Updated in 2006 and due to be reworked in 2009, this is a vast analytical tool used to scrutinise small-scale ‘data zones’ (areas) where a high concentration of multiple deprivation exists.

The 2006 SIMD uncover 48% of the Glasgow City area (as being in the 15% most deprived), with Inverclyde at 38%, Dundee City at 30%, West Dunbartonshire at 28%, Clackmannanshire at 23% and North Lanarkshire 20%.

(For more information on the SIMD, go to this website: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/SIMD)

Scotland’s children

Scotland’s Child Poverty Action Group tells us that in 2008:

‘One in four children in Scotland are officially recognised as poor. Thousands of our children continue to miss out on the basics; adequate housing, clothes and shoes, on healthy food, on educational opportunities and on the social..."
activities that bind children to their families, friends and communities. Poverty continues to grind down the quality of children’s lives and stunt their life chances.’

In July 2007, Barnardo’s Scotland published the first ‘Index of Wellbeing for Children in Scotland’ (IWCS). This report compared the economic, social, physical and emotional wellbeing of Scottish children and young people with their peers from 24 OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries:

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<th>Country</th>
<th>Overall Index rating</th>
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<td>Sweden</td>
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<td>Scotland</td>
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<td>USA</td>
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The position of Scotland’s children in relation to other OECD countries.

This graph illustrates the nexus between poverty and inequality, where material poverty (poverty of income and resources) equates with impoverished and ‘unequal’ experiences and life-chances. The groups most likely to experience this nexus include lone-parent families, disabled people, the unemployed, ‘the sick’, unskilled couples and, in relative terms, women.

In full-time work, women in Scotland earn on average 15% less than men, whilst in part-time work, the differential is 34% (http://www.closethegap.org.uk/project.asp?h=Aims). Women’s income on retirement in Scotland averages 53% of that of men (www.engender.org.uk).

Current research informs us that economic inequalities experienced by Scottish women extend to affect and limit their experiences and life-chances in terms of social and political participation and power.

Close the Gap, a Scottish lobby group, explains the ‘pay gap’ in terms of women’s disproportionate employment in lower paid ‘female’ occupations (e.g., catering, caring and administration). Women constitute the majority of part-time workers too, with relatively lower levels of pay, conditions and security. A high proportion of women who work part-time do so in relation to additional caring responsibilities (a child or family member who is sick, disabled or ‘vulnerable’ (http://www.engender.org.uk/projects/36/Poverty.html). In 2004, 66% of Scotland’s unpaid carers were women (http://www.engender.org.uk/UserFiles?File/Gender%20Audit/Care%20&%20Caring(1).pdf).

Unpaid caring consistently means the carer’s mental and physical health is compromised with high incidences of depression and stress. Financial and employment worries are commonly experienced, particularly in situations where the carer struggles to combine caring with working. Increased social isolation and loss of ‘external focus’ are widely reported (Scottish Exec. 06).

As formal carers, women currently make up 84% of Scotland’s Social Services workforce (http://www.engender.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Gender%20Audit/Care%20&%20Caring(1).pdf).

Pay, conditions and ‘status’ in these posts are low when compared with senior public service positions, for here, gender trends are reversed:

- 76 female Secondary Head Teachers
- 286 male
- 6 female Council Leaders
- 26 male
- 5 female Senior Police Officers
- 38 male

(adapted from http://www.closethegap.org.uk/project.asp?h=Aims)
### Changing Face of Inequality

'The power of the poor' have been organised and prioritised as Scotland’s demographic, labour market (or government) change. In ‘Older People in Scotland’ (2005), Age Concern tell us that 63% of households experiencing fuel poverty are older adults with income limited to the state pension. This group is most vulnerable to ‘excess winter mortality’, i.e. unnecessary death from hypothermia.

According to the league table from consumer watchdog Energy Watch, ‘The power of the poor’ in September 2008, those least able to pay in Scotland are charged ‘discriminatory tariffs’ at higher costs. By this measure, therefore, the poorer you are, it costs significantly more, in real terms, to be warm – and this difference is increasing!

### Scotland’s response

Poverty is when a person’s household income is equalised (adjusted for the size and composition of the household) and is less than 60% of UK average income (the Scottish Executive).

Attached to the Scottish Parliament’s broadly ‘relative’ view of poverty are ideological and policy agendas identifying social exclusion as the ‘scourge’ of modern Scotland. Social exclusion can be described as the combined effects for an individual, household or community, of ‘not having’ coupled with ‘not doing’ (what others have and do).

For current policy makers (EU, Westminster and Scottish Parliaments), the solution to social exclusion lies with creating and developing resources and opportunities in education, employment and social life where none or few exist: social inclusion.

For further reading on the Scottish Executive’s Social Inclusion Strategy, go to www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2012/01/17495, or simply key in ‘Scottish Executive – Social Inclusion’

### Causes of poverty and inequality

The causes of poverty are much disputed by sociologists. The following is an introduction to some key theoretical positions. Our focus will be on two broad schools of thought on poverty and inequality: ‘Cultural’ and ‘Structural’. Anthony Giddens (Giddens, 2001, page 316) refers to the main schism between these approaches as ‘blame the victim’ (cultural) versus ‘blame the system’ (structural).

#### Cultural

Some cultural theorists adopt a ‘social pathology’ model. If we consider in lay terms, ‘pathology’ refers to disease-causing agents; this is a powerful and controversial metaphor to apply to people.

First formalised as ‘theory’ in the 19th century, all who subscribe to a ‘cultural’ view, consider the causes of poverty and inequality to lie primarily with the poor themselves. Sections of society have established and remain locked into ‘poor’ ways of living, anti-social and unproductive, socialising each new generation to expect and accept the same.

Oscar Lewis, a social anthropologist studying poor South American townships in the 1960s, evidenced a ‘culture of poverty’, characterised by 62 defining traits including fatalism, helplessness and domestic violence (Kirby et al, 2000, page 772). In such a culture, life was lived for-the-moment, with neither investment in nor expectations about, the future. In contemporary Britain, David Marsland, a New Right theorist writing in 1996 cited a ‘dependency culture’ as directly created by an overly-generous welfare state. Those resource in this way lack incentive – and responsibility:

’It (the welfare state) has made of its primary clients – perfectly normal, capable men and women before the state got to work on them – a festering underclass of welfare dependants.’ (Marsland 1996, page 20)

American right-wing social commentator, Charles Murray, extended this conception of a new and rising British ‘underclass’. Writing in the 1980s and 1990s, Murray gave fury vent to his perception of ‘ghetto lifestyles’ characterised by immorality and crime and maintained by overly-high state benefits. Society’s most ‘undeserving’ include young female lone parents (and absentee fathers), raising their children to be undisciplined, work-shy and disengaged from mainstream society.

In ‘the Advantages of Social Apartheid’ (Sunday Times, April 2005), Murray argued that neither poverty nor social exclusion is the problem and providing additional resources no solution. Ultimately for Murray, we must be prepared to ‘write off a portion of the population as unfit for civil society’

A clear distinction is made here between the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor. While disabled people would be considered ‘deserving’, disability exists on a spectrum and, within ‘the disabled’, some are considered ‘more’ or ‘less deserving’ than others.

#### Structural

In sharp relief from ‘blame the victim’ theories, cultural theorists consider society’s economic and social structures and institutions as the main cause of poverty, social division and inequality.

For Peter Townsend (1979) the main ‘constraint’ determining the lifestyles of society’s poor are the ways they are excluded from or disadvantaged in, the labour market. When individuals and groups are not sufficiently skilled or educated, when they are considered ‘too old’, or ‘too disabled’, when they are female or black (or combinations of these defining criteria), then disadvantage in the labour market and beyond is guaranteed.

Lydia Morris (1993) challenges the idea of a distinct underclass culture. Rather than individuals and groups who are apathetic, fatalistic and irresponsible, her research concluded they remain motivated to work and to ‘make good’, but are systematically denied adequate opportunity to learn skills and secure opportunity to do so.

For Ralph Miliband, the British system of welfare creates poverty. While ‘welfare capitalism’ may appear to respond to society’s most needy, it in fact exists to support and protect the interests of a ruling elite (Miliband, page 69, in Fulcher and Scott 97-585).
Elite groups continually pursue maximum economic, social and political power and control over the majority (subject) population. Subject class wealth, well-being and opportunities are therefore, consciously limited, with income and benefits kept low.

The subject class is in itself structurally unequal in that its most vulnerable members (older adults, lone parents, homeless people) experience additional economic, political and social inequality. Divided in this way, a subject class is not resourced to make collective and effective change to the dominant system.

Activity
You are advised to read up, and take notes on, cultural and structural interpretations of poverty and inequality before attempting the following:
1. For structural theorists what should a child born in a deprived area of Scotland expect in terms of behaviour, experiences and life-chances and why is this?
2. For cultural theorists, how might people’s behaviour, experiences and life chances be affected by poverty and inequality?
Revisit ‘Sociological Theory-an Introduction’ earlier in this chapter, before attempting the following:
3. In what ways do ‘cultural’ and ‘structural’ views on poverty and inequality relate to Functionalism and Conflict theory?

Discrimination
This final section will exemplify ways in which social inequality relates to discrimination. We start with a table defining key terms and exemplifying each in relation to ‘racism’.

Note: While the term discrimination is not in itself ‘negative’ (meaning simply to differentiate between), we will focus in this section on the nature, extent and effects of negative discrimination.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key term</th>
<th>Key term explained</th>
<th>Key term exemplified</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>Where prejudicial views and assumptions based on ‘race’, nationality or ethnic group are evidenced in the attitudes and actions of individuals, groups and institutions. Racist actions are hostile, degrading and violate the dignity of a person or group</td>
<td>Activity/Further Research: To which ‘race’ do you belong – and why is the concept of ‘race’ so problematic for sociologists?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prejudice</td>
<td>Negative attitudes toward ‘others’ usually based on lack of knowledge, generalised assumptions and/or fear</td>
<td>‘I don’t like people who look different, or who come from a different place’</td>
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<td>Stereotyping</td>
<td>Crude and generalised assumptions that ‘all’ members of a particular social group share similar characteristics, a form of labelling</td>
<td>‘Asians live in extended families, look after their own therefore tend not to need social care services’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotyping</td>
<td>‘Young black men are into gang violence’</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Stereotyping</td>
<td>‘Scotland is “swamped” by asylum seekers manipulating the system’</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Stereotyping</td>
<td>Find evidence to support or refute the idea that post 9/11 ‘Islamophobic’ stereotyping exists in Scotland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual discrimination</td>
<td>Treating people seen to be ‘other’ in different, unequal ways</td>
<td>Where a person or group treats another / others differently because of their ‘race’, nationality or ethnic group. Discrimination takes many forms, including insults and ridicule, exploitation, neglect, exclusion and physical violence – ultimately genocide and ‘ethnic cleansing’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional discrimination</td>
<td>Where discrimination is embedded within the culture and ‘normal practice’ of an institution.</td>
<td>Where discrimination based on race, nationality and/or ethnic group exists within the rules and working of society’s institutions, i.e. under-representation of minority groups in arenas of power and politics, the police and armed forces and over-representation in society’s lower paid, lower status and most insecure jobs</td>
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<td>Direct discrimination</td>
<td>Openly treating an individual or group less favourably. Can be evidenced ‘individually’ or ‘institutionally’</td>
<td>Where an applicant is refused consideration for a job based on their perceived ‘race’, nationality or ethnic group. Current race relations legislation cites victimisation and harassment too, as unlawful</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indirect discrimination</td>
<td>Usually covert (hidden) – when a rule or condition is applied to all – but not all of society’s groups are able to meet it equally</td>
<td>For example, where in a job advertisement, a condition of ‘excellent written and spoken English’ is stated – yet is not a requirement of the job itself</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marginalisation</td>
<td>When the effects of prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination result in individuals or groups being excluded from accessing ‘mainstream’ society</td>
<td>Literally means ‘to be set aside’, ‘to be and feel separate and ‘unheard’. This concept applies to individuals, groups and agencies within society</td>
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Activity / Further research:
1. Describe the role, remit and aims of the Scottish organisation ‘BEMIS’. |
2. Find current evidence of marginalisation affecting ethnic groups in Scotland.

Discrimination: key terms explained and exemplified.
From the table above it becomes clear that prejudice and stereotyping are interrelated, and form the ‘thinking’ and ‘believing’ which in turn feed into discrimination (the ‘doing’). Discrimination can be experienced in several ways and in combinations of ‘individual’, ‘institutional’, ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’.

Prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination are tied into society’s structures, patterns of power and existing inequalities. In order to negatively discriminate, one individual or group has to exploit its economic, political or social ‘power’ over another – for example, the ‘able’ over ‘the disabled’.

The effects of discrimination on any individual or group may include labelling, marginalisation and exclusion; all of which impact upon people’s capacity to live their own lives.

**Activity**

**Go to** http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A1132480 (or simply look up ‘Jane Elliot’/‘a class divided’) to study American schoolteacher Jane Elliot’s 1960’s ground-breaking classroom experiment ‘Brown Eyes-Blue Eyes’, then answer the following:

1. By what means did Elliot create prejudice and stereotyping within the group?
2. What were the effects, for the children involved, of ‘labelling’, ‘discrimination’ and ‘marginalisation’?
3. What for you, is the most important message of this experiment?

**Institutional discrimination**

Institutional discrimination is evident where patterns of ‘inappropriateness’ occur in the health care of disabled people, when professionals assume ‘symptoms’ to be part of a disability, when life is held to be of less value (than ‘normal’) or when staff simply ‘don’t know’

and leave aspects of the individual’s care to parents or friends. It can be seen when school teachers reference heterosexuality only, in the ‘relationships’ element of a PSE curriculum, when care workers routinely make choices for people who uses services (assuming ‘they’ can’t, or shouldn’t), when college students with particular learning difficulties consistently receive support which is needs-inappropriate, inconsistent or too late, when the criminal justice system responds in different ways to different ethnic groups who commit the same crime, when Scotland has amongst the lowest rates in the world for rape conviction and when workers in social care (which is built on anti-discriminatory practice) make a complaint about homophobia to find their managers ‘do not recognise it as an equality issue’.

**Further research**


2. Envis Goffman in his seminal 1968 work Asylums describes the impact that living within a ‘closed institution’ can have on the individual. Where residents are ‘closed-off’ from the world and are subject to consistent power, control and routine they stand to lose their sense of ‘self’, their capacity as individuals, to make choices and take responsibility.

3. In ‘Less Equal than Others’, commissioned by Help the Aged (Scotland 2007) one respondent who received social care services described her experiences as ‘being managed, not cared for’.

4. In ‘Prescription for Change, Lesbian and Bisexual Women’s Health Check 2008’, commissioned by Stonewall, recurring patterns of ‘exclusive’ practice in women’s health care are apparent: ‘50% of respondents recorded negative experiences (in relation to their sexuality) in the health sector in the last year, despite the fact that it is now unlawful to discriminate against lesbian and bisexual women’.

5. ‘Healthcare workers continually assume I am heterosexual and ask inappropriate questions about my relationships. I am lectured about safe sex and preventing pregnancy. ‘ (Go the Stonewall website and look up this report now.)

How might ‘normalised’ expectations about sexual health affect lesbian and/or bisexual women?

5. The homepage for the website of the ‘UK Men’s and Father’s Rights’ cites ‘anti-male’ discrimination, as individually and institutionally commonplace in the UK today: ‘Family courts have a powerful default of awarding custody to the mother – in 91% of cases. This is regardless of the mother’s conduct, or of her ability to care for her children. A great deal of research has established high correlation between fatherless families and child poverty, family violence, drug abuse, teen pregnancy, school failure and juvenile crime’. (See: www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialpolicy/SP81.asp )

What are your thoughts on this? How might functionalist, conflict and feminist sociologists respond to this statement?

Multiple discrimination: the discrimination weave

It is an over-simplification to assume that discrimination happens in categories of ‘sex’, ‘age’, ‘race’ and ‘disability’ because of course, people who are disabled are ‘black’ or ‘white’, are male or female and are ‘of an age’.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s ‘Disabled Women’s Project’ (1995) involved three respondent groups – disabled black women, disabled older women and disabled lesbians – and was an attempt...
to explore experiences and perceptions of multiple discrimination. Participants identified factors beyond their disability which resulted in additional feelings and experiences of racism, ageism, or homophobia, together with disableism: ‘black disabled women voiced feelings of discrimination from within the (essentially white) disability movement, from within their own black cultures (as ‘disabled’) and from within society as a whole (as black and disabled).’

The Fawcett Society (2006:8-9) argues that current equality legislation fails to adequately address these ‘complexities of multiplicity’. Current Equality Duties too, are limited in their scope and application: ‘duties placed on public bodies to eliminate discrimination and promote equality do exist for race, sex, disability – but not age, religion or belief, sexual orientation or transsexual status.’

A single Equality Act to enclose the six ‘essential’ areas of inequality and discrimination is expected on the statute books in 2009. For further information, see www.equalityhumanrights.com

Abuse and hate crime
According to Help the Aged (Scotland) two-thirds of elder abuse takes place in the home and is perpetrated by someone the older adult ‘knows and should be able to trust’. The spectrum of potential abuse can be financial (coercion, exploitation or theft), can involve insults, intimidation, neglect, bullying, aggression and physical violence (including force-feeding and ‘rough handling’). (Adapted from www.helptheaged.org.uk.)

The consequences of abuse will vary in terms of the emotional and physical health of those affected; the contacts and relationships they have (or do not have), their capacity to and opportunities for, seeking support. Effects can include damage to self-esteem and self-confidence, debilitation via chronic fear and anxiety, depression and ‘helplessness’ via enforced passivity.

Further research
The Disability Rights Commission (now incorporated into CEHR) with Capability Scotland commissioned a report: Hate Crime Against Disabled People in Scotland: A Survey Report (2004). 47% of respondents in this social survey recorded experiences of ‘hate crime’ specific to their disability. Forms of attack included taunts and name-calling, threats, intimidation, spitting, kicking, shoving, theft from person and harassment.

Groups who had experienced the greatest number of attacks were people with mental health problems, learning difficulties and visual impairments. Around 33% of those who had been attacked changed their routines to avoid certain places. In addition to this, 25% recorded they had moved home as a direct consequence of persistent attacks.

Further research
1. The Scottish Parliament set up a Hate Crime Working Group in 2003. Your task is to find out (via http://www.scotland.gov.uk/topics/justice/criminal/17543/8978), if hate crime exists in Scots law, in relation to none, some or all of the following: age, sex, sexuality, transgender status, religion/belief/sectarianism, disability.
2. According to research in January 2008 by the Women and Equality Unit ‘trafficking of women is the third highest black market income earner after drugs and arms’. Women are advertised in regional press throughout the country as if they were commodities, with stereotyped ‘marketing’ per ethnic group (e.g. South Asian women as ‘submissive and exotic’, South American women as ‘hot blooded’). (See: http://www.equalities.gov.uk/publications/Women_Not_For_Sale.pdf)

What do you think is being sold here? Why in sociological terms, do you think ‘business’ is so profitable?

Theories of social interaction and reaction
Look again at ‘Symbolic Interactionism’ on page xxx (MS p21). In this chapter and revisit ideas Mead on ‘self’, Goffman on ‘roles’, Becker on labelling and Link and Phelan on ‘modified labelling’.

Edwin Lemert (Lemert (51) in Sweeney et al 2003:276) developed Becker’s early work via additional concepts of primary and secondary deviance. Where ‘deviance’ relates to behaviour considered outside social norms, ‘primary deviance’ for Lemert is behaviour which has not yet been labelled. Secondary deviance is behaviour which alters as a consequence of labelling.

Discrimination: the role of social care
Jocelyn Mignott is the manager of a residential home:

‘I get tired of people calling me ‘coloured’ because they feel it sounds better than black…’

‘I get tired of being mistaken for someone else. Take a look at black people – we don’t all look the same…I get tired of people who think that to be white is ‘normal’. I get tired of people who pay lip-service to the abhorrence of racism yet fail to confront it in their everyday lives’

Activity
Take some time to reread and rework Mignott’s statement, this time substituting ideas about disabilism in place of racism …and do the same again for sexism … and ageism.

What does this exercise show?

In Mignott’s experience people routinely fail to recognise, or will play down or deny situations where others appear ‘different’. ‘Different others’ tend to be homogenised and people routinely protest (about discrimination) but do nothing!

Mignott, a woman, occupies a position of relatively high social and professional status in that she manages the care others receive. She is, in addition, able to independently express her thoughts, experiences, reactions and frustrations and has accessed a public forum (Social Work Today) to do so. For a majority of people who use services, the picture is very different; inequalities and discrimination are compounded by their status as ‘people who use services’.

For workers in social care, two of the most important signposts to good practice in terms of promoting equality and anti-discrimination are the promotion of rights (more than ‘needs’) and empowerment.

For further reading in relation to equalities legislation and anti-discriminatory practice, see the chapter on Social Care Theory for Practice.

Poverty, inequality and discrimination: Preparing for assessment
Remember that your emphasis throughout assessment(s) has to be on the impact or influence of poverty and inequality and/or the nature and extent of discrimination on behaviour, experiences and life chances.

Practice essay
In relation to the people who use services you work with – apply Sociological theory and concepts and find current and credible research evidence to argue for or against the following statements:

In contemporary Scotland people determine their own lifestyles, behaviour and life chances. Everyone can succeed providing they participate in society and take up the resources, opportunities and support available.

Individual and institutional discrimination remains a fact of life for a many who are in receipt of social care services.

Conclusion
In this chapter we have considered some key themes, theories and concepts from sociology and applied these to the life situations of individuals and groups in Scotland today.

You have been encouraged to develop a sociological imagination – and a capacity to ‘think sociologically’ about ways in which family, socialisation, poverty, inequality and discrimination might individually and in combination, influence the lifestyles, behaviour, experiences and life-chances of people who use services.

Equality is the right of all society’s members and the social care worker is instrumental in supporting individuals and groups to access resources and to receive standards of care which are rightfully theirs - and in challenging situations and practices which limit or discriminate.

Check Your Progress
The following questions will help you reflect on key areas of ‘Sociology for Social Care Practice’ and will support you in unit assessment.

1. What does it mean to apply a sociological imagination to the ‘private troubles’ of client(s) you support?
2. In what ways might common-sense assumptions limit the behaviour, experiences and life-chances of clients you support?
3. In what ways might major social institutions influence our behaviour, experiences and life-chances?
4. In what ways do structural and cultural perspectives in sociology compare and contrast?
5. Why for sociologists does ‘discourse’ provide the best route forward in our attempts to understand and respond to ‘social problems’?
6. What features of ‘family life’ are the most influential for an individual’s behaviour, experiences and life-chances?
7. In what ways are poverty and deprivation understood in Scotland today?
8. What forms of social inequality do you consider have the most limiting effects on the behaviour, experiences and life-chances of individuals/groups?
9. In relation to one ‘group’ of people who use services, how would you describe the nature, extent and effects of discrimination?
10. In what ways might your practice as a social care worker be influenced by what you have learned in ‘Sociology for Social Care Practice’?

Resources (and recommended reading)

For the purposes of this chapter, you will find generic sociology textbooks helpful and relevant. These give description, explanation and commentary on the ideas and arguments, of sociology’s main theorists and all clearly show chapter and subject headings (‘family’ etc.). The following are ‘core’ recommendations only.

HNC appropriate
(Note: see also in support of this text: www.collinseducation.com/sociologyweb)

Extension reading
This title is more suitable for those who plan to further their interest in academic sociology:

Websites
The following is an introductory list of web pages to support research and assessment in Sociology for Care Practice.

Many other agencies and sites are equally relevant:
www.sociologyonline.co.uk (then search subject areas)
www.scotland.gov.uk/Home (then search subject areas)
www.equalityhumanrights.com (CEHR, then link to ‘Scotland’)
www.jrf.org.uk (Joseph Rowntree Foundation)
www.povertyalliance.org.uk
www.cpag.org/scotland/ (Child Poverty Action Group, Scotland)
www.barnardos.org.uk/scotland.html (Barnardo’s)
www.opfs.org.uk (One Parent Families, Scotland)
www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk
www.stonewallscotland.org.uk (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual issues)
www.engender.org.uk (gender-based inequality in Scotland)
www.enable.org.uk
www.capability-scotland.org.uk
www.mencap.org.uk
www.helptheaged.org.uk
www.ageconcern.org.uk
www.news.bbc.co.uk (then search subject areas)

References
Basingstoke: Macmillan

Reports
Age Concern Scotland, 2005, 'Older People in Scotland'
Energy Watch 'The Poor Pay More?'
Fawcett Society 'Gender Equality in the 21st Century: Modernising the Legislation' April 2006
Help the Aged Scotland, 2007 'Less Equal than Others'
Mencap 2004 'Treat Me Right'
Mencap 2007 'Death by Indifference'
Scottish Executive 2006 'The Future of Unpaid Carers in Scotland', Crown Copyright

Papers
Camilla Batmaghelidjh 'My Vision for the 21st Century' (undated and no longer available; reproduced in this instance, with permission from Kids Company, London)