Part 1 Introduction to the sociological imagination
The importance of the social environment in helping us to understand how people live the way that they do – and how this varies from time to time and from place to place – is now widely acknowledged. It is accepted that the social world in which we are brought up will influence the way we live. Sociology has played a central role in developing this way of understanding the world around us. Through research and theory, sociologists explore the significance of wider social factors in shaping our lives as individuals, groups, societies and globally. While much of this work is carried out in universities, sociological research often informs policy and practice in many areas of life, including health care, education, family life, crime and justice.

In Chapter 1, we explore the idea of a ‘sociological imagination’ and consider how the subject of sociology developed and attained academic rigour and acceptance. In this chapter we spend longer than authors of other introductory books in examining the origins of the subject, but we feel it is important to establish the background and position of the subject you are now studying. After this history, we introduce and discuss a number of key concepts that you will come back to throughout the book and your studies – in particular, we look at culture, socialization and identity. We consider the effects on individuals of cultural deprivation by describing examples of cases where children have been brought up without normal human contact – extreme cases such as children brought up in the wild as well as the recent horrific cases from Austria of girls being imprisoned in their houses for many years.

Chapter 2 provides a detailed introduction to, and examination of, the different theoretical perspectives in sociology. This review follows a basically chronological pattern, starting by looking at the classic theories that helped establish sociology as a serious academic subject. In this section we look at the theoretical works and arguments of Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx and Max Weber and consider their continuing influence in contemporary sociology. The second half of the chapter turns to more recent theoretical work, from, roughly, the second half of the twentieth century. Here we introduce interpretivist sociology and interactionism, feminist theorizing, structuralism and postmodernism. Our emphasis is in looking at how these theories can be applied to everyday contemporary life.

Chapter 3 focuses on sociological research. After raising and considering the debate as to how ‘scientific’ the study of society can be, we look at the major different methodological approaches to researching the social world and then at the specific methods by which sociologists go about collecting and analysing data and information, including questionnaires, interviews and observation.
Sociological thinking

. . . tourists are often good intuitive sociologists as they often seem to find everyday things interesting, even those we may have become so accustomed to we barely notice them. So, suddenly the design on a banknote, the manner in which people greet each other, the way people order food in cafés, how people queue for a bus, can all appear strange and worthy of attention. It is well worth trying to adopt the inquiring gaze of the tourist in our own societies. This can have the effect of giving us insight into how the world came to be the way it is, how it is maintained and perhaps alert us to the fact that it can be organised in a variety of different ways. Therefore, an appreciation of movement and change as well as understanding continuities is crucial, we would argue, to developing our sociological imaginations. (McIntosh and Punch 2005: 29)

Key issues

➤ What is sociology?
➤ What are its origins as a discipline?
➤ What kinds of explanation does sociology offer for social and personal behaviour?
➤ What is culture and how does it affect social and personal behaviour?

Introduction

We live in a digitally connected world where we are increasingly dependent on emails, texting and new technologies. How would you cope if you lost your mobile phone, had your laptop stolen and your TV broke down? There are many recent shifts in society which interest sociologists: the cult of celebrity, materialist culture where we desire a never-ending range of commodities, the rise in cosmetic surgery and botox, mobile lifestyles and the gradual disappearance of local,
small-scale, specialist traders to large supermarkets and restaurant chains. If you have children (now or in the future) they are going to be unlikely to know how to use a telephone box, how to put a roll of film into a camera or how to write a cheque. Instead, they will be familiar with online shopping, electronic banking, ticket-less airlines, digital channels and multiple forms of recycling. They will be more likely to order the evening's film entertainment from 'Netfl ick' via a television connected to the Internet rather than renting a DVD from the local 'video' store. Patterns of consumption have changed over recent decades and impact upon ourselves, our bodies (see Chapter 13) and the environment (see Chapter 10). Hastings raises interesting questions about the power and manipulation of modern marketing and the corporate sector:

When a supermarket chain attains such dominance that it covers every corner of a country the size of the UK, threatens farmers’ livelihoods with its procurement practices, undercuts local shops and bullies planners into submission, it becomes reasonable to ask: does every little really help? Once the 100 billionth burger has been fl ipped and yet another trouser button popped it is sensible to wonder: are we still lovin’ it? As the planet heats up in response to our ever increasing and utterly unsustainable levels of consumption, it is fair to question: are we really worth it?

(Hastings 2012: 2)

Changing modes of communication and new technologies are a key feature of contemporary minority world societies. By stepping back for a moment and trying to see our surroundings at a distance, like a tourist in an unfamiliar environment, we can question our taken-for-granted assumptions about patterns of change and continuity. Our ‘sociological imagination’ is a way of thinking critically about the social world to enable us to understand how society works.

Society changes over time and sociology is keen to explore these processes of social change. For example:

... technological innovations generate unintended consequences and unanticipated (and often contradictory) effects. As socio-material configurations, they usher in a whole range of changes in social practices, communications structures, and corresponding forms of life. The same technologies can mean very different things to different groups of people, collectively producing new patterns of social interaction, new relationships, new identities. Rather than simply reading them as adding to time pressure and accelerating the pace of life, mobile modalities may be creating novel time practices and transforming the quality of communication. (Wajcman 2008: 70)

A closer look

**Defining the majority and minority worlds**

In this book we tend to use the recent terms ‘majority world’ and ‘minority world’ to refer to the developing world and the developed world respectively. These terms invite us to reflect on the unequal relations between the two world areas. The minority world consists of a smaller proportion of the world’s population and land mass despite using the majority of the world’s resources. Furthermore, by using the terms we are reminded that what happens in our society, in a minority world context, is not necessarily the way most of the world’s population live their lives and that, with greater access to resources, we tend to experience more privileged lifestyles (see Chapter 9). However traditional terms such as developed/developing, Western/non-Western, global north/ global south are also used in some of the chapters.

**Majority world** (in terms of population and land mass): Africa, Asia, Latin America

**Minority world**: UK, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, USA and Canada
factories open or close; and the influence on education, health and other services of economic and political philosophies and policies. In view of the insights into social life that sociology provides, it might seem strange that it is not a subject that is taught to all children as a matter of course. Before looking at what sociology is and how it has developed, we shall consider how a sociological approach can enable us to understand social phenomena like the widespread riots in England 2011.

Case study

The English riots of August 2011

Figure 1.1 Photo of English riots, August 2011 – picture research required
On 4 August 2011 Mark Duggan was shot dead by police in Tottenham, England. On 6 August 2011 a protest march to Tottenham Police Station led to the first night of rioting which soon spread to other parts of London. Between 6 and 10 August riots, looting and arson attacks took place in London and other cities and towns including Bristol, Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool. The rioters were mainly young men, with estimates that between 10 and 20 per cent were female. Five people were killed and at least 16 others were injured as a direct result of the violence. An estimated £200 million worth of property damage was incurred, and the cost in insurance claims in London alone is estimated at £300 million. The immediate police reaction has been criticized as being inappropriate and ineffective. Subsequently nearly 4000 arrests and 2000 prosecutions have taken place, including the imposition of substantial prison sentences.

Stop and think

- What do you think were the main reasons for the riots?
- In what ways do you think the government and the rioters might explain the causes? Why might their explanations differ?

How can sociology help us to make sense of the riots of August 2011 and what can this tell us about sociology as a discipline? Sociologists strive to analyse and explain social phenomena. By reaching an understanding of such events, it is then hoped that social policy can be developed which may help prevent a recurrence. Sociologists endeavour to consider social issues from a variety of perspectives in order to gain a nuanced awareness of the multiple factors that may combine for a particular event to occur. The riots provide an effective example of the complexity of society, and the usefulness of using a sociological approach to understand complex social processes. The following range of causes have been identified by politicians, the media and a variety of expert commentators.

Criminality and gang culture

Public and political debate has tended to emphasize the role of individual criminality and looting in order to distract from the links to urban deprivation, racial inequality and youth unemployment (Solomos 2011). Initially it was claimed that 28 per cent of those arrested in London were part of gangs, but more recently that estimate has dropped to 13 per cent for England as a whole (Guardian-LSE 2011).

Broken Britain

After the riots, the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, talked about the ‘moral collapse’ of ‘Broken Britain’ including: ‘irresponsibility, selfishness, behaving as if your choices have no consequences, children without fathers, schools without discipline, reward without effort, crime without punishment, rights without responsibilities’. Many public responses to the riots blamed poor parenting within poor communities, ‘with single mothers blamed for failing to bring up their children properly, fuelling public discourses of welfare dependency and the (un)deserving poor’ (Allen and Taylor 2012). The public discourse of ‘chaotic families’, the breakdown of morality and loss of community values did not coincide with many of the rioters’ own reasons for getting involved in the events (see Table 1.1). As Solomos argues, the government ‘sought to portray the riots not as a form of protest that could be linked to social and economic inequalities but as the product of the absence of morality and community in sections of the urban underclass’ (2011: 2).

Race and policing

Whilst the initial trigger was directly linked to racial tension between the police and the local community after the shooting of Mark Duggan, it has been acknowledged that racial conflicts were not relevant for all the places where the riots occurred. Solomos (2011) argues that further research is required to explore the possible links between race and outbreaks of collective violence. Poor relations with police and widespread grievances about police treatment of ethnic minorities is often considered to have been a catalyst for the disturbances. However, mistrust of the police and antipathy towards their stop-and-search tactics was not only raised as an issue by black and Asian young people, and many have argued that these were not race riots. Nevertheless, it is important not only to consider the role of policing in why and how the riots occurred but also in the ways that they will be responded to both in the short and the longer-term (Murji and Neal 2011).

Social inequality and social exclusion

Many of the rioters themselves refer to the lack of opportunities and disillusionment regarding employment and recent social changes. Even with a university education, it is increasingly difficult to secure employment. The spending cuts of the UK coalition government have included cuts to youth services, the ending of the Education Maintenance Allowance and the trebling of university tuition fees. It is no coincidence that the majority of those arrested were under 25 years. Growing inequalities between the have and have
The above illustrates the diversity of possible causes for the riots. Sociologists argue that many of the reasons are interrelated and that multiple factors combined to lead to the violence and disorder of August 2011. It is certainly not as simple as politicians like to suggest. The government has a vested interest in trying to blame particular ‘troubled families’ rather than address the fundamental underlying causes relating to the ever-increasing social and economic inequalities:

Public discourses of feral youth and failing families elide and mask questions of structural disadvantage, individualising inequality as the outcome of personal ‘ills’ rather than systematic material inequalities.

(Allen and Taylor 2012)

As we have seen there are multiple and complex explanations for the England 2011 riots which move ‘from and between themes of criminality, moral nihilism, social breakdown, gangs and lawlessness to themes of social exclusion, hopelessness and the anomic consequences of a consumerist and materialist society’ (Murji and Neal 2011). Interestingly there were some key differences of causes cited for the riots between the public opinions generated via a Guardian/ICM poll and the views of the rioters themselves as Table 1.1 indicates. The issues which both groups agreed on were unemployment (79 per cent), media coverage (72 per cent), greed (70–77 per cent), boredom (67 per cent) and racial tensions (55 per cent). Poverty, policing, government policy, the shooting of Mark Duggan, social media and inequality were perceived as more relevant causes by the rioters, whereas criminality, moral decline, poor parenting and gangs were cited more often by the general public. This illustrates the importance of directly asking the people who were involved for their views of the causes rather than only relying on media or political accounts.
Table 1.1 Key differences between the general public’s versus rioters’ perceptions of the causes of the riots

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes of the riots</th>
<th>Rioters (%)</th>
<th>Guardian/ICM poll (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policing</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government policy</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The shooting of Mark Duggan</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inequality</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminality</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral decline</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor parenting</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangs</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Reading the Riots, Guardian-LSE 2011)

Thus, as sociologists, we can appreciate the range and complexity of the longstanding tensions, the underlying reasons and the more immediate causes which combine to result in social disorder. In order to comprehend such social phenomena we have to place them within the particular social and historical context, considering both macro and micro issues. This is where the strength of a sociological perspective lies, in the bringing together of the personal and the historical in what C.Wright Mills termed ‘The Sociological Imagination’ (1970: 3): ‘Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both’.

The important thing to recognize is that:

- there were multiple riots with varying causes. . . . In some areas we saw deliberate targeting of ‘designer’ shops; in others the police were the explicit target. We thus find a very varied mixture of ‘historic’ community tensions; a general rebelliousness amongst “disaffected” young people; and criminal opportunism. If we must identify a singular cause, it is the conjunction of three things: disaffection with economic prospects; serious levels of mistrust between young people and police; and a realisation that when faced with large and mobile numbers of rioters, the police are often powerless to stop looting and arson.

(Gorringe and Rosie 2011: 3)

Although sociology deals with everyday life and common sense, that does not mean that it limits itself to explanations that simply depend on feelings of what makes sense. Such opinions would rely on what Bauman (1990) has called ‘a personalised world-view’ and should be distinguished from a sociological perspective. Sociology and sociologists have a very strong relationship with common sense in that the object of study is often the common-sense view of social reality held by members of society. It is the way that they study the experience of ordinary people’s daily lives, the questions they ask and the concepts they use that distinguish sociologists from other people and disciplines.

The theories and methods used by sociologists are the concern of Chapters 2 and 3, but we should note that in studying people going about their everyday lives, sociologists employ a scientific and theoretical perspective that seeks to establish some kind of factual picture of what is going on. This sociological perspective relies on rigorous procedures and is informed by...
rational argument, criticism and existing knowledge. In this sense sociology is a combination of common sense, statistical enquiry and social theory and provides a distinct, but partial, view of what is going on:

Sociology as an approach to understanding the world, can be differentiated from other approaches in that it attempts to be scientific, that is to produce empirically warranted and verifiable statements about the social world and is basically distinguished by its distinctive assumptions, concepts, questions, methods and answers.

(Cuff et al. 1990: 9)

The idea of 'the sociological perspective' as a way of interpreting and analysing social life should not be taken to indicate that there is a universal agreement as to exactly how sociological investigation should proceed. As we highlight below, the discipline of sociology encourages creative debate, controversy and diversity.

Stop and think

➤ What common-sense assumptions do you have about (a) yourself; (b) your country and community; and (c) your family?
➤ What evidence is there for these assumptions?
➤ Can you test them?
➤ How widely shared are they?

In the writings of Berger (1967) and C.Wright Mills (1970), and more recent contributions from Kingdom (1991) and Bauman and May (2001), we get a very strong notion of what sociology is, often as a result of stressing what it is not. They make clear that sociology is an antidote to personal and subjective observations and a complete rejection of explanations that are grounded in naturalistic or individualistic assumptions about 'human nature.' The emphasis is quite clearly on the individual as a social animal within the context of a social environment. As this emphasis challenges popular and sometimes deeply held notions of human nature and individual responsibility, it is not surprising that sociology meets a certain amount of resistance.

Anticipating what has become known as the 'structure versus agency debate,' C.Wright Mills pointed out in his introduction to The Sociological Imagination that the primary role of the sociologist is to reveal the complex relationship between the individual and society:

The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and its promise. To recognise this task and this promise is the mark of the classic social analyst . . . No social study that does not come back to the problem of biography, of history, and of their intersections within a society, has completed its intellectual journey.

(Wright Mills 1970: 12)

Wright Mills demonstrates that by unifying biography and history we are forced to place our own individual experiences and attitudes in the context of social structure and that societies themselves are not unique but have to be placed within an historical context. Thus, we have to go beyond personal experience and common sense for answers to our questions. The most vivid example can be seen in Wright Mills’s distinction between ‘personal troubles’ and ‘public issues’. Whether we are looking at poverty, unemployment, war, divorce or the problems of urban living, there are aspects of our lives over which we have some control – ‘personal troubles’ for which we bear some responsibility and to which we can offer some private solution. However, there are other conditions that offer no such remedy, because the troubles that we experience (no matter how personally) are beyond our control; they have historical and structural causes and as such represent ‘public issues’ that can be changed only by large-scale economic developments or social reform.

Writing 20 years later, Zygmunt Bauman reiterates the importance of Wright Mills’s early insights into the crucial relationship between history, society and biography:

Deeply immersed in our daily routines, though, we hardly ever pause to think about the meaning of what we have gone through: even less often have we the opportunity to compare our private experience with the fate of others, to see the social in the individual, the general in the particular, this is precisely what sociologists can do for us. We would expect them to show us how our individual biographies intertwine with the history we share with fellow human beings.

(Bauman 1990: 10)

In minority world societies, where the cult of the individual and the notion of voluntary action are crucial aspects of our cultural history, and the coverage of politics is often reduced to the antics of personalities rather than their policies, it is not surprising to hear
Introduction to the sociological imagination

Prime ministers proclaiming that ‘There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families’ (Margaret Thatcher, 1979–1990) or referring to ‘the classless society’ (John Major, 1990–1997) as if it were a matter of agreed fact. In such a climate, sociology must struggle to assert the concepts on which its perspective is based; if it does not, it will disappear among the clamour of those whom John Kingdom (1991) has called ‘the new individualists’. As Burns reminds us, ‘Sociology began as virtually a resistant movement against the trend towards individualism’ (1992: 20).

Stop and think

What do you think the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, meant when she proclaimed ‘There is no such thing as society’? What are the broader (a) moral, (b) political and (c) sociological implications of such a statement?

The sociological perspective in practice

Sociology as an empirical enterprise

Sociology has had to fight to establish itself as a social science. Using the principles of the scientific method established by the natural sciences, sociologists have developed methods of data collection that enable them to claim that sociological knowledge is as reliable as that found in any other sphere of the social sciences. This does not mean that sociology can produce infallible laws of the human universe (many natural sciences have failed to do this), but it can endeavour to follow the rules of the scientific method to establish verifiable data and valid correlations that may be used to confirm or deny a hypothesis (or to create a new one). In essence, sociologists demand that theoretical positions be tested against evidence and that this evidence be gathered by the most logical method in an objective manner and interpreted in an impartial way. The application of the scientific method to sociology is examined in Chapter 3.

In general terms, the use of the scientific approach enables social researchers to establish two things:

First, through observation and measurement a statistical record of how things are can be compiled. Such statistics are based on and confirm the assumption that social life is largely routine, predictable and unconscious. We normally take for granted the ‘patterned regularity’ of social life because we are steeped in the familiarity bred by habit. On a superficial level, these patterns may simply be descriptions of how people normally behave within their culture, perhaps dressing in an ‘appropriate’ manner for different occasions, such as interviews or funerals. On another level, it may be noticed that some forms of behaviour are exclusive, for example the majority of people do not enter higher education, while patterns may also emerge that change over time, such as the rise in the recorded levels of crime.

Second, the compilation of data allows us to identify possible correlations between the patterns of behaviour so that we begin to notice that certain patterns of behaviour are more commonly discovered among particular groups of people. Some social groups are less likely to pass exams than others, people who live in urban areas may be more prone to burglary than those who inhabit the suburbs or the countryside, and the children most likely to be found anywhere but school in term time come from backgrounds where education is not highly valued. This does not mean that sociology can predict exactly who will fail their exams, get burgled or bunk off from school, but it can make ‘tendency statements’ about the likelihood of the correlations reproducing themselves.

Sociology as explanation

Social correlations need to be explained, and the emphasis in sociology is on social conditions rather than biological, psychological or genetic factors. This is not to deny that we are, as a species, the product of millions of years of biological evolution or that individual differences call for psychological explanation. However, sociologists resist any generalization that suggests that behaviour can be reduced to biological explanations alone. Not only do such claims have very powerful ideological connotations, but they also fly in the face of the clear evidence linking behaviour to social circumstances and cultural experience. The power of culture and the importance of the learning experience are examined later in this chapter, but the areas we have used so far as examples are clear cases where social circumstances are an essential part of any explanation: educational failure, crime, truancy and mental breakdown are all issues that call for sociological illumination.
In the popular imagination, pure evil may still be the most appropriate explanation for senseless crime, madness may be conveniently dismissed as a disease of the mind, and some individuals are simply ineducatable. Sociology teaches us that educational success is related to gender and class, that recorded crime is committed largely by young people, that black people are more likely than whites to be diagnosed as schizophrenic by British and North American psychiatrists, and that the number of British children truanting from school is currently running at about 30,000 per year – in some parts of inner-city London the rate is as high as 40 per cent. It is not surprising that when things happen to us that we were not expecting, we take it personally or blame it on chance. However, if we are aware of the way in which the odds are stacked, then the element of chance is drastically reduced: your failure to pass your exams is something you share with a lot of other people, your house was the third to be burgled in your street that week, and your children have discovered that their classmates who still attend the local community comprehensive school are now regarded as deviant.

In this section we have talked of the sociological perspective as if it were a uniform and standardized body of concepts, theories and findings. This would give the impression of a discipline free from criticism and internal division, but it would be wholly incorrect. One of the main difficulties that students of this subject experience is the failure of sociologists to agree with one another and the diversity of opinion that exists within it. Without exaggerating these differences, there are obvious disagreements over methodological procedures and theoretical perspectives, which provide the conceptual backdrop to what sociology is all about and which we explore in Chapters 2 and 3.

Thus sociology is a diverse and rewarding area of study; it offers the opportunity to ask questions, to consider different perspectives, to evaluate evidence and to reflect on those attitudes previously thought of as ‘common sense’. As a result, we begin to see ourselves and the social world we inhabit in a different way. As an echo of Berger’s claim that the first wisdom of sociology is that ‘things are not what they seem’, Bauman has summarized the position brilliantly:

When repeated often enough, things tend to become familiar, and familiar things are self-explanatory; they present no problems and arouse no curiosity . . . Familiarity is the staunchest enemy of curiosity and criticism – and thus also of innovation and the courage to change. In an encounter with that familiar world ruled by habits and reciprocally reasserting beliefs, sociology acts as a meddlesome and often irritating stranger. It disturbs the comfortably quiet way of life by asking questions no one among the ‘locals’ remembers being asked, let alone answered. Such questions make evident things into puzzles: they defamiliarize the familiar. Suddenly, the daily way of life must come under scrutiny. It now appears to be just one of the possible ways, not the one and only, not the ‘natural’ way of life.

(Bauman 1990: 15)
A closer look

Who is in society?

What do we think of when we hear the word ‘society’? If you close your eyes and try to envisage what society must look like, what kind of images do you see? Perhaps a parliament filled with people debating the latest events and making new laws for us to live by. Or a city street with commuters pouring out of trains and buses on their way to work in towering office blocks. Maybe you see a school filled with pupils and teachers learning about art and science, or perhaps you even see a group of friends, gathered together for a celebration. But here is the big question, when you think of the word ‘society’ are all the beings you see human? Is it only human beings who make up society, or could society be something larger and more expansive than we tend to imagine? What if society is not just about people, what if it is made up of many different forms of life and sentience?

Animal–human interaction is a new area within sociology, which understands humans as not standing alone in society, but as being part of a complex web of living creatures. In animal–human interaction we study the contribution that non-humans make to our world, and the relationships that we have with them. These relationships are varied and complex, rich with meaning and deeply influenced by our history and culture.

For example, you might want to consider if you went to a café for lunch and they were serving cat kebabs and dog burgers, would you eat them? If not, why not? Why is it acceptable in contemporary Britain to eat lambs and calves, but not to eat cats and dogs? Would you go out and buy a lamb to keep at home as a pet, take it to training classes, and walk it down the street on a lead? In other times and places people have eaten dogs and kept lambs as companion animals. So after all we eat and keep in farms some animals, while others live with us in our homes as companions. What makes the difference and how do we relate to non-humans in these very different contexts?

To take the context of the home, research by the animal–human Interactionist, Maria Desougi, has found that companion animals not only effect the wellbeing of their human family members, both in positive and negative ways. But can themselves be affected by changes in the family. If one of the human family members becomes ill and has to go to hospital, the non-human companions may grieve their absence, become anxious or even refuse to eat. The companion animals may change their patterns of relating to a sick family member, lying beside, or even on top of them, offering the sick human toys or food. In the home, it is not simply a case of humans caring for their companion animals. Animals are also agents of social action, with their own needs, desires, and ways of expressing them. Because as we humans relate to the non-humans within society, they are actively relating back to us.

(Source: Maria Desougi, PhD Student, University of Stirling)

Using sociology

Stop and think

➤ What did you think sociology was about before you started to study the subject?
➤ What do other people think sociology is? (Carry out a brief survey of your friends and family.)
➤ Why do you think some people — including politicians and journalists — might feel threatened by a subject that encourages the questioning of human institutions and human realities?

Sociology is an increasingly popular subject in schools and colleges throughout the minority world. Its public profile is largely due to its inclusion in the school curriculum, its status as a degree-bearing discipline and the regular appearance of its experts on television and radio documentaries. As we have seen, sociology enables us to have a deeper understanding of the social world in which we live. It encourages us to develop key skills including: ‘the opening up of critical insight, participation in the power of ideas, the capacity to analyse and manipulate data, and acquisition of sound knowledge of the social world’ (McLennan 2011: 3). This not only enhances our self-development and self-knowledge but connects us to others:

What it consistently demonstrates is that our individual situations and fate are closely and inextricably bound up with those of others. Some of
these others are seemingly ‘people like us’, but many are also (apparently) very different, and sociologists seek to understand these different social relations in order to grasp what makes everyone tick. . . . Sociology was born in the heat of a changing modern world around 200 years ago, and it constantly forces us to think about whether society is progressing or not; about who are the winners and losers of social change; about whose side we are on; and about how things can be changed for the better. Sociology is thus intimately bound up with questions of social justice. (McLennan 2011: 3)

Hence it is no surprise that a sociological understanding of the world is important to a range of other disciplines including social policy, criminology, social work, education and nursing. Sociology is regarded as an essential part of professional training courses for teachers, social workers and people who work within the National Health Service (NHS) and the criminal justice system. In the United States and in continental Europe trained sociologists are employed as consultants in areas such as industrial relations; it is clear that having a degree in the subject is no barrier to future career prospects. Given that sociologists are well equipped to understand and explain social problems, they are well placed to point to possible solutions. Ministers in both Labour and Conservative Cabinets of recent times have held university degrees in the subject, while Ralph Dahrendorf and Anthony Giddens, formerly Professors of Sociology and Directors of the London School of Economics, have both been elevated to the House of Lords for their contribution to public life.

A closer look

**Studying sociology**

First-year undergraduates from Stirling University in Scotland highlight their initial impressions of studying sociology after one semester:

Sociology allows a rich analysis of seemingly ‘everyday’ topics, meaning you view your surroundings in a different light. It has sparked many debates with classmates and friends.

(Andy Rodwell)

It is a really diverse and complex subject which surprised me. It does help you gain a better understanding of the world.

(John Williams)

It made me aware of various arguments that come with each problem in society and that ‘solutions’ for these problems are not clear cut.

(Mary Robins)

I have started to look around more and see things that I didn’t see before.

(Lesley Turner)

It has surprised me how much inequality there is in society and how it affects people’s lives.

(Ross Verhaere)

It gives a whole new outlook on life and situations which arise. I always find myself asking why now rather than just accepting it is how it is as I used to.

(Kirsty Ross)

It has made me think about society around the world a lot more: how something in our society that seems perfectly normal and that we take for granted is completely irrelevant or means something different in other societies.

(Shona Keith)

It makes you think differently about yourself and others around you. Makes me perceive people differently and evaluate how others may perceive me.

(Lorna Graham)

Sociology has made me take a step back and think about what I am saying before I say it.

(Mark Coles)

It’s given me a better understanding of why people are the way they are.

(David Blackwell)

As a body of knowledge sociology has the potential to reform and improve society. I genuinely believe sociology is as important to health and wellbeing as medical, or any other science. For as anyone who has read Wilkinson and Pickett’s *The Spirit Level* (2010) will appreciate, there are many pressing public policy issues and competing visions of how these arise and how they should be addressed. Sociology’s gift is that it develops a student’s ability to think critically about how and why society and the world more generally has developed and is organized. The theories and concepts I have encountered throughout my time at university
Part 1 Introduction to the sociological imagination

A closer look continued

are a series of explanatory frameworks which provide a language we as social scientists can use to question the prevailing social order and challenge inequality and injustice wherever they exist. Whether from micro, meso or macro sociological traditions, such concepts and theories can be seen as an armoury or toolbox from which we can draw the most appropriate weapon or tool for the job.

Now nearing the end of my studies, being equipped with a broad sociological knowledge has resulted in one previously unforeseen circumstance; it is often difficult to watch mainstream television news and current affairs programmes without a sense of frustration. I came to realize there is a dearth of critical analysis in the media on really important issues ranging from world economic crises and social unrest to Britain’s chronic housing shortage. What is surprising is that news reports typically fail to locate events in historical context and omit to demonstrate awareness that social problems such as housing shortages are often structurally prescribed. Moreover, students of sociology are taught that the social world is ostensibly socially constructed and as such can in theory be reconstructed by them as social actors. In my view, developing these techniques is essential if students are to think sociologically. So a sociological imagination enables us to see the world differently and a short course on Marx Weber and Durkheim for everyone would do little harm and may even help enlighten the work of our journalists, broadcasters and social commentators to better inform wider society.

In light of this, I saw my recently completed final year dissertation as an opportunity to investigate an issue I felt strongly about. As a part-time taxi driver I was able to assimilate personal experience and insight to direct my recently acquired sociological knowledge. I developed a topic centring on the effects of the recent profusion of technologically enabled surveillance equipment in taxis (or soon to be). After a lengthy period of deep thought and informal exploratory interviews, I was able to focus the research on issues important to other drivers and, through a series of semi-structured qualitative interviews, teassed out a number of key findings which were not without revelation or surprise. For example, I found that self-employed people are not necessarily immune from alienation at work; Taylorism is not yet dead, and that feeling safe at work and making more money can temper concerns of diminished privacy. My hope now is to gain permission from the participants to distribute an abridged version of the report to local taxi ranks to raise awareness of and stimulate debate around some of the issues which have arisen from it.

With the world of work looming once again, a fellow student and I have been considering the many options available. Aside from continuing on to Masters or Doctorate level, we realize that we will soon be able to answer calls for research in our own right, and contribute to national debates in various publications. Additionally, we are investigating the possibility of starting a social enterprise which should enable us to apply our learning in the real world, with real effects. Given the current political climate of state retrenchment in welfare, there is a pressing need and opportunity for ingenuity in the provision of sustainable and well-informed public services at arms length from the state. Whilst we may not change the world, we hope to change lives by targeting marginalized groups and spreading the word that sociology really can be good for your health.

(Michael McGrath, Fourth Year Sociology Undergraduate, May 2012, University of Stirling)

There are some careers where a sociology degree is a requirement, for example working as a sociological researcher or a lecturer or teacher of sociology. However there are many more opportunities where the knowledge and understanding you acquire in studying sociology is highly valued, for example work in local government, for the police or prison service, social work, work in the voluntary sector, or in human resources. Furthermore, the wide range of skills that studying sociology helps you to develop, can be a definite bonus in the process of job hunting. Employers are often as interested in a candidate’s ability to think critically, work as part of a team, or communicate well, as they are in a specific body of knowledge. The diversity of skills of a sociology graduate are outlined on the UK’s official graduate careers website, Prospects:
appreciating the complexity and diversity of social situations;
applying sociological theory to society’s organisations including schools, shops, hospitals and offices;
researching, judging and evaluating complex information;
making reasoned arguments orally (in tutorials and presentations) and in written work;
strong IT skills gained through the presentation of projects and dissertations;
knowledge and understanding of research methods, analysis and statistical techniques;
developing opinions and new ideas on societal issues;
working collaboratively with others;
using effective methods to communicate your ideas and conclusions;
statistical and other quantitative techniques;
the ability to understand, scrutinise and re-assess common perceptions of the social world;
relating sociological knowledge to social, public and civic policy;
understanding ethical implications within sociology and assessing the merits of competing theories;
organising your work and meeting deadlines.

Given that in the current economic climate it is difficult to secure well-paid employment even with a university degree, postgraduate qualifications are becoming increasingly necessary to obtain specialized careers. As McLennan points out: ‘Most employers of first-degree graduates just want people who are adaptable and who can think’ (2011: 2). The variety of transferable skills that sociology enables students to develop, means that sociology can be practically applied to many employment opportunities.

Finally, it is worth asking whether the study of any subject should have to be justified in purely vocational terms. Sociology retains its popularity with young and old alike because it asks questions about the very things that directly affect our lives. It has an immediate relevance because it provides insights into the workings of the world we inhabit. Although he was writing in the 1960s, Peter Berger explained that sociology could be viewed as ‘an individual pastime’ because it transformed the meaning of those familiar things we all take for granted:
The fascination of sociology lies in the fact that its perspective makes us see in a new light the very world in which we have lived all our lives.

(Berger 1967: 32–3)

A closer look

A view from sociology graduates

In this box, recent sociology graduates evaluate the usefulness of studying sociology.

**Joanne**

At university, the individual courses were of varying interest to me. Some in particular stand out as having helped to form my opinions and provide me with a much more tolerant and open view of society. At first, the issues tackled such as race, feminism and poverty gave me an unexpected cynicism about the world, but also made me more aware of different issues and the difficulties facing individuals within society. I feel that I learnt an awful lot about people and the structures within which we live. A focus on the workings of contemporary society has provided me with an insight which I feel has improved my understanding of the world.

**Jackie**

When I did my teacher training, I realized how much sociology contributed to my understanding of education. It made me realize that people in societies do not behave the way they do by nature only, but they also learn behaviour. In my training, it was apparent that education was not just concerned with academic, but also with social learning. When

**Meeta**

Learning about culture, race, class and sex has been invaluable during every step of my working life. Although I have worked mostly in administration and computer support, what I have learned from sociology has taught me that there are so many inequalities. Recognizing and understanding how they arise does actually help to confront these challenges in a positive and constructive manner.
teaching children about acceptable ways to behave, I could see that I was part of the socialization process. As a social worker, I continue to be part of this process as I act in loco parentis to the children with whom I work. Some of these children are estranged from their families. Again, I have found that a sociological outlook has helped me to appreciate the various forces and pressures at work in society and this has helped me to be less judgemental in my work and more understanding of my clients’ situations. This view has also been useful in my general life. I would say that studying sociology has made me more open-minded, more accepting of difference, and more able to question societal norms. (adapted from ‘Viewpoints from three sociology graduates’ in Ballard et al. 1997: 372–4)

It was our first term at University. I was concerned that I would regret the decision to go joint and study some Sociology, I thought it might be dull and irrelevant. I was wrong. Sociology just isn’t like any other subject. They present their view, their truth, only Sociology says ‘this is view, this is what they say is truth’.

Meeting sociological ideas for the first time is a journey, but not an easy one. There are moments, on the street, on the bus, when the familiar world around you seems to shift. Everything you ever thought and believed begins to melt away and that is not without its agony. I bemoaned to my tutor that Sociology was reducing the assumptions of my safe and solid reality to liquid, and that paradoxically I was enjoying it. Yet Sociology itself is unafraid of paradox. It is not so rigid that it insists we only view the world through the perspective in which its interests are invested. With enormous intellectual courage it perceives a multiplicity of worldviews, without fear that that which is uniquely its own will be undone in the process. And a process it is. Even at the personal level, as you encounter for the first time the hideous limitations of your thinking. Face to face you must stand with the massive assumptions of reality and normalcy with which you have walked every day of your life.

Assumptions die hard and I feared that without mine I would be lost in a dark meaningless world forever. Then the very ideas which had damned me to a deconstructed darkness, came to save me. I was lucky enough to attend a primary school for a project. It was there, watching the teachers and pupils interact, that for the first time I saw it. I glimpsed the dance. As if an invisible ball was passing effortlessly from person to person as they wove the construction of their worlds around them. It didn’t matter how dimly shone the light of sociological ideas upon my world. It was enough to see the world anew. (adapted from Desougi 2005: 28)

The origins of sociology

European sociology has its recent origins in the intellectual aspirations and social upheavals of the nineteenth century, its foundation as a discipline is usually attributed to Auguste Comte (1798–1857). Comte invented the word ‘sociology’ and also the term ‘positivism’. He established the Positivist Society in 1848 and saw positivism as the search for order and progress in the social world. He felt that a science based on experimentation and open to testing was the only valid form of human knowledge and, in the face of a great deal of academic prejudice, devoted himself to the establishing of sociology as the study of social facts. A year after Comte’s death, Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) was born; he continued the fight for sociology to be recognized by the academic community as ‘the science of institutions, their genesis and their functioning’.

The work of the early sociologists has to be seen as a product of their direct experience, as middle-class intellectuals, of an age characterized by social change. Societies that had remained relatively static for centuries now found themselves embroiled in the dramatic transformation involved in the development of capitalism. As Nisbet (1970) has pointed out, many of the terms that we now use in everyday discourse (e.g. industry, ideology, bureaucracy, capitalism, crisis) take their modern meaning from the attempts by nineteenth-century social commentators to make some sense of ‘the collapse of the old regime under the blows of industrialism and revolutionary democracy’.
Early sociological theorists differed widely over the nature, development and impact of capitalism (Chapter 2 looks at differing analyses of capitalism offered by the founding writers of sociology, in particular Max Weber’s famous study *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*). They were, however, clearly aware that anyone trying to make sense of industrial society had to take account of the emergence of capitalism as the dominant economic system in the minority world.

All these changes came together to create a dynamic and sometimes chaotic environment into which the early sociologists were born. Many of their ideas were products of the changes to which they were witness, and the major areas of sociological enquiry were more or less established during this period. The themes of religion, urbanism, capitalist development and political stability became essential areas of sociological speculation, while the issues of poverty, crime, industrial relations and family life have retained their place as objects of social enquiry ever since. This connection between the discipline and its historical origins was reflected clearly in both sociological theory and social research.

Confronted with a rapidly changing, fragmented and rootless mass society, the early theorists developed their systematic critiques of the modern world. Whether it is Comte anguishing over the collapse of authority or Durkheim looking for a new moral order, there is a strong conservative element in much sociological theory. This may be contrasted with Marx’s celebration of social conflict as an inevitable consequence of class society and Weber’s more pessimistic view of the eventual rationalization of society and the replacement of ‘magic’ with the ‘iron cage’ of bureaucratic order. Many of these perspectives are dealt with more fully later, but the crucial point is that without the momentous social and political events of the post-Enlightenment there would have been no social crisis to observe, there would have been no middle-class intellectuals to recount it, and there would have been no social theory.

In Turner’s review of the contribution of sociology’s classic writers, he argues that despite their great differences in outlook they were unified by an essential belief in the power of ‘abstract and analytical thought to understand the social world.’ This sense of purpose is as crucial to sociology’s future as it was to its emergence in the nineteenth century:

Disciplines that have a theoretical canon make a difference in the world. The founders of sociology provided a vision of what was possible; and indeed, gave us many of the critical insights to forge a contemporary canon that can be used to make a real difference in the quality of human life at the close of the twentieth century. What those who begin to practice sociology in the twenty-first century must do is consolidate the canon, make it ever more coherent even in the face of specialization in the academic world, and, if one is still guided by the goals of the Enlightenment, to use sociology to inform public debate, political policy, and social action to reconstruct society.

(Turner 1997: 77)

Stop and think

➤ In what ways may the following be understood in terms of ‘globalization’?

(a) fast food  
(b) sport  
(c) Pop music  
(d) Nike sportswear  
(e) the deaths of Chinese cockle pickers in Morecambe Bay in 2004  
(f) the bombing of the Madrid express in 2004  
(g) Hollywood movies  
(h) the Bhopal disaster in 1984.

Contemporary sociology

Although the origins of the discipline of sociology are clearly linked with minority world industrial societies, and the changes that took place within them, the increasing globalization of the modern world has taken contemporary sociology beyond the traditional ‘nation-state’ conception of society. No modern societies are self-contained in the way that we might associate with traditional societies. Essentially, globalization refers to the interdependence of societies across the world – there is a constant flow of goods and information around the globe. Perhaps the most obvious changes have been in terms of economic globalization – illustrated by the activities of transnational corporations (TNCs) – and cultural globalization – apparent in the increasingly international flavour of the media and the worldwide interests and activities of particular media companies.
Part 1 Introduction to the sociological imagination

The massive changes associated with globalization (which are introduced and discussed more fully in Chapter 9) have meant that sociological analysis has had to move beyond the study of single societies. Whether we are concerned about poverty, terrorism, crime or the formation of contemporary identities, it is no longer possible to talk sensibly about social issues without considering the impact of global influences. For example, George Ritzer’s concept of the ‘McDonaldization of society’ began its life as an exploration of the ways in which the principles of the fast-food industry were coming to dominate American everyday life but quickly moved on to examine the ‘global existence and implications of McDonaldization’. In his more recent work, Ritzer has introduced the notions of globalization to refer to the opportunities for cultural diversity, which stem from an interaction between local cultures and global systems of communication, and glocalization, which reveals the opposite tendency towards cultural imperialism and homogeneity (Ritzer 2004).

A closer look

Impact

A new requirement of many funders (such as the ESRC: Economic and Social Research Council) who pay for social research to be conducted, is that the findings have a practical use. This is often referred to as ‘impact’: the usefulness of research outcomes. When sociologists come up with ideas for a new research project, they must identify who will benefit from the study. Possible beneficiaries include: individual service users, organizations (state, voluntary, charity), policy-makers and local government, and academia (lecturers and students). When writing an application for research funding, sociologists have to consider the different ways that the potential findings can be applied. In other words, what are the policy, practice and academic implications of their proposed study? Some groups may benefit directly, others indirectly. It is important that not only academic books and papers are produced, but that the results of the work are presented in an accessible format for non-academics, such as a short briefing paper for busy policy-makers who want clear, concise summaries of the most important results, or booklets with training implications for practitioners. For research with children and young people, a visual DVD or CD-rom of the relevant findings could be developed or made accessible via a website. A creative example of trying to engage young people with their research is the work of Rosalind Edwards and Susie Weller at London South Bank University. They have been working on a longitudinal study exploring change and continuity in young people’s sibling relationships and friendships. In order to disseminate some of their research findings they developed a short YouTube video, using participants’ photographs and extracts from some of their interviews (see the project website http://www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk/research-projects/siblings-friends/ and YouTube clip at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=El0ph9yVl3I).

Sociology of everyday life

As we have seen, traditionally sociologists were interested in exploring class conflict, social problems and large-scale processes of social change. More recently there has been a shift towards a focus on everyday life: ‘Questions such as “How do we compose a shopping list?” or “Why do we queue?” might seem ridiculously trivial but, once unpacked, reveal intriguing sets of rules’ (Scott 2009: 2). For example food has become a popular focus for sociological research over the past ten years. Food is a mundane and regular part of people’s lives. Food practices serve the fulfilment of a basic need and this association with daily existence can also carry a ‘connotation of ordinariness’ (Bennett and Watson 2002: x). As a consequence our familiarity with everyday food practices can mean that we often pay little attention to the meanings attached to them, such as the social significance of making somebody a cup of tea. The cycles of routines that surround food on a daily basis – from shopping to preparing, to consuming and cleaning up – are part of a ‘seen-but-unnoticed life’ commented on long ago by sociologist Alvin Gouldner (quoted in Jacobsen 2009: 2). Recently, sociologists have started to explore the meanings of food within schools, foster and residential care, and family settings (James...
et al. 2009; Punch et al. 2011). In their study of food practices in residential care for children, Punch et al. (2012) found that the ways in which people ‘do’ food, and the routines and rituals that this involves, can be deeply embedded and reflect how they care for themselves and others and how different generations define their social positions in relation to one another. They noted that food practices in residential care can thus be experienced in deeply ambivalent ways – as rooted in the mundane and the unseen yet closely linked to more conspicuous displays of caring and responsibility and relations of power and resistance.

Like food practices, new technologies also form part of the fabric of our everyday lives. We do not usually stop to consider the meaning of such simple acts as sending an email or a text. The following section contemplates some of the ways in which new patterns of communication are changing our daily interactions.

Stop and think

➤ In what ways do new technologies shape your everyday life? Consider the impact of emails, social networking sites and mobile phones on the ways you manage your study, work, home and social life.
➤ To what extent do computers, the Internet and wireless technologies provide opportunities for you or make your life easier?
➤ What are the downsides of new technologies? For example, how much time do they absorb? How often do you check your messages (emails, texts, Facebook)?
➤ In what ways would your life be different if you did not have access to new technologies?

Social change and new technologies

The increased automation of production and the intensified use of the computer are said to be revolutionizing the economy and the character of employment. In the ‘information society’ or ‘knowledge economy’, the dominant form of work becomes information and knowledge-based. At the same time leisure, education, family relationships and personal identities are seen as moulded by the pressures exerted and opportunities arising from the new technical forces.

(Wajcman 2002: 347)

Perhaps one of the most significant recent impacts on the way we live is technological change. We inhabit a more interconnected world where digital networks have become more intensified and extensive. We can communicate with people locally and globally in a variety of forms and at a fast pace. As Wajcman points out: ‘In the resulting “Network Society”, the compression of space and time made possible by the new communication technology alters the speed and scope of decisions’ (2002: 347).

In what ways has the computer age and mobile/wireless technologies shaped our daily interactions? To what extent have the boundaries between public and private or between work and home been transformed in recent decades? To what extent have new technologies transformed the nature of friendships and peer interactions for young people? Furthermore, how do we influence the way technology is used? What opportunities and constraints are created via the use of social networking sites and micro-blogging such as Twitter? These are all interesting questions that sociologists can help to answer.

Sociology is concerned with relational processes which are not linear or fixed. Just as technology shapes our lives, we shape the ways technology is implemented and used. We may use the Internet in different ways with different people or in different contexts. How we present ourselves online is likely to vary, and we may develop multiple identities which we play out in a range of ways. For example, the style and tone of our emails is likely to differ considerably according to the nature of our relationship with the recipient. Technological change has not only led to new ways of communicating, but also to new forms of language being developed: text speak and tweeting. New conventions are emerging and the rules of engagement are changing, as Zhao argues:

The advent of the Internet and the ensuing social transformation has thus reconfigured the lifeworld we live in, specifically, the ways in which we connect with others. In this new environment, face-to-face interaction is only one of the many contact options individuals can choose from for ‘social relating.’ Face-to-face relationships used to be the context within which all other forms of contact (e.g., postal and telephone contacts) were embedded. Typically, people came to know each other in face-to-face situations first and used mail and the telephone afterward to help maintain the relationships. Now, this trajectory of acquaintanceship development can be entirely reversed. For example, it is possible for people to get to know each other first in online chat room, then move to e-mail exchange, to telephone contact, and, finally, to in-person meetings. In such
cases, face-to-face interaction is the outcome rather than the basis of mediated communication. There are also instances in which social relationships are developed and maintained in total absence of corporeal copresence.

(Zhao 2006: 471)

Nevertheless, we have to remember that not everyone shares our ability to ‘log on’ and connect at ease with others around the world. Access to computers and the Internet is far from equal. In a middle-class family in Europe or North America there may be good quality, high-speed Internet access on the household computer or perhaps each child has their own personal laptop for use in their increasingly digitized and media-rich bedroom. In many parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America access to such technology may be severely lacking (see Chapter 9 for a discussion of the digital divide). Some rural communities in economically poor parts of the world still lack electricity, let alone the education and training to develop the required skills for using computers and the Internet.

As well as a digital divide between the information rich and the information poor, there is also a generation gap. The younger generation tend to have more expertise or creativity in using new technologies (Livingstone and Brake 2010). Computer literacy is now regularly taught alongside more traditional skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. Computer consoles, such as playstations, can allow children to be physically alone yet playing online with their friends in a form of ‘playing alone together’. For the vast majority of you reading this book, you are likely to have different practices of communicating and socializing with your friends compared with your parents’ generation. A Friday night out with friends may well be arranged via Facebook rather than a telephone landline. The evening may also evolve through information gathered via electronic messages so plans may change quite rapidly. During the night out you may spend significant periods of the evening sending and receiving texts or ‘tweets’ from absent friends and your interactions with your mobile phone are unlikely to be considered rude by your peers. Sociologists, interested in patterns of change and continuity, are keen to explore the ways in which our virtual interactions shape our identity and impact upon our sense of belonging and sense of self.

Digital technologies have led to the speeding up of the pace of life, yet as Wajcman explains: ‘Rather than simply saving time, technologies change the nature and meaning of tasks and work activities, as well as creating new material and cultural practices’ (2008: 66). For example, on the one hand, email enables us to deal with things rapidly compared with the longer time required for postal correspondence. Yet, on the other hand, some of us can end up feeling overwhelmed by the sheer quantities of emails that are generated. Lecturers, for instance, may receive far more email questions from students compared with the amount of students who would have attended their office hours in the days before email was available. Thus email simultaneously saves us time but also adds to our time pressure by taking up more of our time. Wireless technologies may enable us to control when and where we respond to messages, but may also feel oppressive given that we are almost always contactable. An interesting sociological question would be: what are the positive and detrimental effects of new technologies for everyday work and home practices? The role of sociology is to explore the processes and consequences of social change from a variety of perspectives, considering both the opportunities and the constraints.

It may be that, with ‘seamless connectivity’, the separation of home and work that we take for granted in modern societies is in the process of reformulation. . . . Rather than ICTs pushing us inexorably into a life in the fast lane, perhaps they can be harnessed and reconfigured as an ally in our quest for time control.

(Wajcman 2008: 74)

The individual and society

As we have seen, sociologists are interested in the relationship between the individual and society. A sociological perspective encourages us not to see things only from our own individual experiences but also to recognize that as individuals our actions are shaped by the society we live in. On the one hand, we can argue that individuals are affected by social influences, by their class, gender, race, by society as a whole. On the other hand, individuals are not puppets that are controlled by society and do not go through life without influence over what they are doing. Some sociologists are more interested in how we interact with each other, how we make sense of our lives at the micro level of society. Other sociologists are most interested in the way in which society shapes our lives at the macro level of society. Nevertheless, the majority of sociologists would argue that we need to look at both the macro and micro
aspects of society. Thus we have to explore the ways in which the social structures of society shape how we act and what our experiences are, whilst at the same time we must consider that as human beings we are conscious of what we do and we are active in creating the world around us. This tends to be known as the structure/agency debate: society consists of social structures as well as people who are active and can assert their agency. Macro-sociology tends to exaggerate the power of social structures and processes whilst micro-sociology concentrates more on the conscious and self-determining individual. Most sociologists combine macro and micro perspectives, striving to accommodate the idea of the individual as an active agent within the powerful social and cultural influences that play upon them.

Social structures are ‘enduring social arrangements that influence individuals and selves’ which are ‘recurrent and relatively stable patterns of social conduct’ (Plummer 2010: 219). Hence social structures such as education, family or the economic system are basic elements which shape or constrain social life. By analysing the structures of society we can then move towards an understanding of individual action. The following sections consider the ways in which society shapes our actions by looking at the key concepts for understanding social structures: culture and socialization. The application of these sociological concepts is then explored by assessing the power of culture through cultural diversity and deprivation.

Culture

Stop and think

➤ What does the term ‘culture’ mean to you?
➤ What activities would you describe as ‘cultural’?

Culture can have two meanings. On the one hand, it refers to certain activities and traditional arts such as ballet, literature and painting. Trips to a theatre, art gallery and opera house are seen as examples of cultural involvement (and often recalled by resentful members of school outings). This view of ‘culture’ is only one definition of the term. It is what Matthew Arnold (1963) called ‘the best that has been known and said in the world’ and concentrates on the intellectual aspects of a civilization. The subjective and elitist nature of this definition has been questioned in the second half of the twentieth century. This sort of approach has encouraged a division and distinction between what is seen as high culture and mass culture. In lay terms, a classical symphony or Shakespeare play is seen as high culture; as something of enduring aesthetic merit. In contrast, a TV soap opera or Top Ten single is likely to be seen as an example of mass, or popular, culture; as a commercial product of little aesthetic merit.

However, there is another sense in which the concept of culture can be used. Sociologists prefer a much broader, less subjective and impartial definition that refers to the values, customs and acceptable modes of behaviour that characterize a society or social groups within a society. Indeed, culture and society are closely entwined concepts in that one could not exist in any meaningful way without the other. As Giddens puts it, ‘no cultures could exist without societies. But equally, no societies could exist without culture. Without culture no one could be “human” at all’ (1997b: 18). Culture, then, refers to the non-biological aspects of human societies – to the values, customs and modes of behaviour that are learned and internalized by people rather than being genetically transmitted from one generation to the next.

This general notion of culture is related directly to social behaviour through the moral goals of a society (its values), the status positions of its members (social roles) and the specific rules of conduct related to society’s values and roles, which are known as norms. In other words, those general values that society holds in high esteem are reflected in the norms governing our everyday attitudes and behaviour.

Many sociologists regard the culture of modern societies as differentiated and fragmented. They see such societies as embracing a range of beliefs, values and customs rather than a unified cultural system. Within such diversity, however, some sociologists (among others, those writing from a feminist or Marxist standpoint) would argue that contemporary societies do possess a dominant culture or ‘ideology’. In contrast, others would suggest that such societies have a ‘core culture’ that is more or less shared by everyone.

Socialization

The emphasis on culture, rather than biological instinct, as the key to understanding human behaviour implies that learning plays an essential part in creating social beings. In sociology, the term given to the process by
which we learn the norms, values and roles approved by our society is 'socialization'. The survival of children into adulthood and the future of culture itself depend on a society's successful organization of this process.

Unless a society is to rely for its survival on the fear induced by the armed police forces or other agencies of control, socialization is the key to social cohesion and cultural endurance. The rules and customs governing normal social interaction must become internalized by the members of that society in such a way that they become part of the individual's view of the world and of themselves without the individual feeling brainwashed. As Berger makes clear, this balancing act can work only if it is achieved by stealth on the part of the society and through acceptance on behalf of the individual:

Society not only controls our movements, but shapes our identity, our thought and our emotions. The structures of society become the structures of our own consciousness. Society does not stop on the surface of our skins. Society penetrates us as much as it envelops us. Our bondage to society is not so much established by conquest as by collusion. (Berger 1967: 140)

Gradually, as part of the process of 'growing up', individuals absorb the standards and expectations of a society so unconsciously that they become transformed into social beings almost without noticing it. The requirements, rules and standards of a society have become part of their own identity, motives and desires so imperceptibly that they are experienced as natural and unique although they are clearly social and uniform.

Stop and think

➤ Norms of conduct are often learned from an early age and unconsciously absorbed so that they become part of our 'taken-for-granted' assumptions about appropriate social behaviour. List as many norms of conduct as you can.

➤ How do these norms differ for different social groups? Consider the differences between (a) young and old; (b) women and men; and (c) poor and rich.

The cases that we mention later in this chapter of children who were deprived of such social interaction in their formative years are clear evidence of the crucial role played by the socialization process in the structuring of identity and the development of the individual.

Culture and identity

The emergence of identity in modern society

According to some writers (e.g. Beck, Giddens, Foucault) the latter part of the twentieth century saw people losing faith with the certainties of religion, social progress, class, community and so on and turning instead to a contemplation of (and obsession with) the self. If the world 'out there' cannot offer security and becomes increasingly shaped by global forces, then it is easy to see why people seek expression (and control) in their lives through local, regional and ethnic identities and become immersed in 'identity politics'. According to Martin Shaw, our response to this sense of powerlessness is to turn away from the big picture (public sphere) to the subjective and personal world of our individual existence (private sphere): 'Most people, most of the time, are concerned overwhelmingly with their private existence' (Shaw 1995: 31).

The notion of identity emerged alongside the ideology of individualism (see above) and the modern obsession with the self. A sense of identity can be seen to function on three levels:

● **Personal** – Life is given a sense of purpose or direction especially through a clear set of values and priorities.

● **Social** – Successful interaction with others (essential in mass society) relies upon people understanding one another and fulfilling personal and social expectations. The successful accomplishment of such social interaction and the 'people-handling' skills involved not only contributes to social relationships (and social stability) but also reinforces positive feelings of self-worth/social value, which are vital aspects of identity maintenance.

● **Potentiality** – Whereas the two points above refer to those continuous and special aspects of identity that delineate who we are, individuals also need to have some idea of who they might become and whether they have the 'right stuff' to achieve it. Achievement is a self-confirming activity that provides personal fulfilment and increases positive feelings about the
Theories of identity formation

There are too many theories of identity to consider here, but it is worth distinguishing between two general perspectives on identity before moving on.

- **Essentialism** – An essentialist perspective is one that emphasizes the fixed and usually biological basis of behaviour. According to this view, an individual’s identity may be fixed by their genetic makeup, personality traits or basic instincts/drives. It would be wrong to imply that all essentialist arguments are simply a matter of genetics, as there are spiritual explanations that stress essential qualities (good/evil), psychological ones (aggression/sex) and even sociobiological and functionalist perspectives within sociology that stress the similarities between animal behaviour and that of humans. In all of these approaches, identity is determined by some universal characteristics over which people have little control. Consequently essentialists are often criticized as ‘reductionist’.

- **Constructionism** – At the other end of the spectrum are explanations that stress the social construction of identity, the cultural variety in identity formations and the opportunities for changing/choosing identities. The emphasis in this perspective is upon learning, culture and socialization; the social roles required by society and the influence upon the individual by the groups to which they belong are crucial. According to this view, the notion of individual identity cannot be separated from the idea of society – without one, the other does not exist.

Whereas psychologists tend to talk of identity as being ‘part of the personality’, sociologists stress identity as ‘the recognition of who one is and how one is recognised by others’ (Plummer 2010: 216). For sociologists identity is not fixed but a multi-dimensional process which involves learning, choice and change. As Jenkins suggests, it is about knowing who we are as individuals and as members of collectivities: ‘it is not something that one can have, or not; it is something that one does’ (2008: 5). The processes involved in identity formation are a combination of the physical, the personal and the social. In this process of ‘growing up’, the individual does not simply assimilate the influences upon them but reflects, negotiates and incorporates (or rejects) them.

Identity and socialization

One of the growing areas of interest in sociology is the notion of the active subject. The emphasis is not on the deterministic forces of the social structure but on the conscious individual capable of self-awareness and reflection. These ideas stem from Cooley’s idea of ‘the looking glass self’, Mead’s work on the ‘self-concept’ and Goffman’s ‘presentation of self’ (see Chapter 2). These writers suggest that the identity of an individual is not the outcome of some essential personality but a more fluid creation that develops over time through the interrelationship between the self and those who comprise the outside world. In other words, our identities are a social construction and open to change. This does not mean, however, that we are completely free to choose whatever persona we fancy, and the role of culture in the formation of identities is a crucial one. The process of socialization helps us to become recognizable individuals, but it does so by providing us with options for group membership that shape our identity. The self-concept then is deeply embedded in the process of becoming social, and the resources from which our identity is created are found in key aspects of social life such as family, work and community.

Most of us were brought up in areas that could be characterized as predominantly middle or working class and that have predominantly white or ethnic minority populations. Most of us still mix mainly with people from similar class and ethnic backgrounds. Most of us grew up with people of a similar age and will still have as our closest friends people of a similar age. Although there are many exceptions to these generalizations, modern, large-scale societies have almost invariably organized themselves by separating their schools and neighbourhoods by race, class, religion and age. Sociologists refer to these categories as social divisions which merge in particular ways to form our identity. Social identity is not a simple outcome of upbringing but a combination of various and sometimes contradictory commitments that the individual self may have towards a range of identities; a Catholic male homosexual from a working-class
background in Ireland who is the head of a suburban girls’ comprehensive school in Yorkshire will have to juggle with a range of separate and competing claims on his self-image that raise questions of gender, sexuality, region, nationality, class and ethnicity.

The major agencies of socialization are covered in detail in later chapters, where we look at the contribution of the family, the school, religion and the mass media to the reproduction of culture as it is handed on from one generation to the next. Here we shall look at the way in which the concept of culture has been applied by anthropologists, psychologists and sociologists in their attempts to identify its significance for individuals as well as society.

Stop and think

➤ Who are the key people involved in the socialization of children and young people at the following ages: (a) 0–4 years; (b) 5–10 years; (c) 11–15 years; and (d) 16–21 years?

➤ Consider the relative importance of primary and secondary groups at these different ages.

The power of culture

Cultural diversity

How would you feel about being offered dog meat for breakfast? What would be your reaction to a professor giving a lecture wearing nothing but a loin cloth? Would you be surprised to find people of your grandparents’ generation using cocaine? Whether we look at fashion, food or leisure activities, anthropology and history reveal a wide range of cultural diversity over all forms of behaviour and belief, which suggests that human activity cannot be reduced to simple biological or social models that have been fixed for eternity. What is regarded as normal and acceptable behaviour by one society or cultural group may be punished as a crime elsewhere. As Matza (1969) reminds us, ‘one man’s deviation is another’s custom’, and it is clear that cultural standards are relative to time, place and social position.

Women’s work and men’s work

The diversity of sex roles is often used as an example of the power of cultural conditioning and is regularly quoted as evidence against conventional explanations for the differences between the sexes. In her analysis of women’s work, Ann Oakley (1974a) argues that ‘roles in traditional non-industrialized societies are often defined to some extent by sex status’ but goes on to emphasize that there is no simple or universal rule for the division of labour by sex. Instead, we find that the rules regarding sex-appropriate tasks vary enormously from one culture to another. To demonstrate this argument she contrasts two African societies – the Mbuti pygmies of the northern Congo and the Lele from the south.

Love and marriage

The importance of culture is also obvious when we consider the relationship between men and women in their pursuit of one another. Courtship, marriage and sexual activity reveal patterns of normal behaviour that are anything but universal, despite the fact that the desires and emotions involved are powerful natural drives genetically transmitted to ensure the survival of the species. From a minority world perspective, the notions of free choice, romantic love and jealousy may lead to the conclusion that monogamy is a natural response to the questions of courtship, marriage and sexual reproduction. However, the briefest review of both minority world history and other cultures demonstrates how relative such arrangements are.

Arranged marriages are often associated with the Hindu religion, but this practice is widespread, often touching on cultures where we would least expect to find it. Until the First World War (1914–18) the use of ‘dynastic marriage’ for political purposes was a crucial aspect of European history. For centuries it was regarded as normal practice for royal marriages to act as a form of international diplomacy to maintain bonds of alliance and peace between states, nations and cultures (Baignent et al. 1986). Marriages were also arranged between wealthy families in order to increase their wealth, status or family honour.

Some marriages are still arranged in Japan, where the question of marriage partner is regarded as so important, especially for family honour, that it cannot be left to the romantic preferences of the daughter. A ‘go-between’ is employed to discover likely partners with good prospects from families of honourable status and background. This is as much an issue of parental concern for the daughter as it is a matter of family honour, because the bride changes family membership on her wedding day and belongs to her husband’s family thereafter. To signify this ‘death’ in her parents’ eyes on her wedding day, she wears white, the Japanese symbol of mourning.
World in focus

Two African societies: Mbuti and Lele

The Mbuti are a hunter-gatherer people who ‘have no rules for the division of labour by sex’. Although there are some very loose practices of ‘women’s work’ and ‘men’s work’, these are not general types of activity but to specific tasks (men gather honey, women gather vegetables), while the most important task of hunting is carried out by men and women together. Child care is also shared but is carried out by the middle-aged men and women or by the older boys and girls. There is no division by sex between the worlds of domestic labour and economic production.

The Lele practise a very rigid division of labour by sex, although geographical neighbours but the general similarity between them when it comes to distinguishing between the domestic world and the economic:

The situation among the Lele (and among the Mbuti) is the same as that in the majority of traditional African societies: the work done by the women is essential to the economic survival of the society. Despite the ritual allocation of some tasks to men and some to women, men’s work and women’s work are equal in status and importance... the separation between home and work is not a feature of human society as such but of industrialised society specifically.

(Oakley 1974a: 13)

Even if love and marriage do not necessarily go together, we might be tempted to assume that love and sex do. In ‘dynastic marriages’ it was not expected that the marriage would be fulfilling, but ‘courtly love’ provided the opportunity for satisfaction outside marriage. The well-publicized indiscretions of the British royal family in the 1990s suggest that such arrangements are still tolerated. However, in west Africa, Nigel Barley’s (1986) discussion of adultery with a Dowayo elder reveals that even simple rules regarding sexual attraction are by no means universal:

All Dowayos, male and female, were to report on the appointed day and vote. It is the Chief’s responsibility to ensure a good turn-out and Mayo humbly accepted this as his lot while Zuuldibo sat in the shade calling out instructions to those doing the work. I sat with him and we had a long discussion on the finer points of adultery. ‘Take Mariyo’, he said. ‘People always tried to say she was sleeping with my younger brother, but you saw how upset she was when he was ill. That showed there was nothing between them.’ For Dowayos sex and affection were so separate that one disproved the other. I nodded wisely in agreement; there was no point in trying to explain that there was another way of looking at it.

(Barley 1986: 135)

All this discussion has been based on the premise that sexual attraction, courtship and marriage are purely heterosexual activities. However, homosexuality has always been part of social life, even though the cultural and moral response to it varies enormously; while homosexual practice is an offence punishable by death in Iran, it is possible for gay couples to get married in Scandinavia. The issue of non-heterosexual families is raised in Chapter 11.

Monogamy and polygamy

The practice of adultery has meaning only within societies that practise monogamous courtship and marriage. In such cultures, the breaking of these rules can provide the grounds for divorce, justifiable homicide and punishment by the criminal justice system. However, in other cultures, the practice of having more than one partner is not only tolerated but also institutionalized in polygamous marriage.
Among the Nyinba people of north-west Nepal the minority world notion of romantic love is thought of as selfish and greedy and the inevitable cause of sorrow. Instead they practise fraternal polyandry, whereby the wife is shared by the brothers of the family she marries into. Such marriages are often arranged, but even when they are based on the sexual attraction of the bride for one particular brother she must still become the wife of the others, spending her wedding night with the eldest brother irrespective of her preference. For the purposes of family stability, it is also important that the wife shows no favouritism to any individual brother and that she demonstrates this impartiality by bearing at least one child for each man. Strict penalties are maintained for anyone caught ‘fooling around’ outside the marriage.

A more commonly practised version of polygamy is polygamous marriage, which allows a man to have several wives. Despite this being against the teachings of the Bible and the laws of their societies, Mormon fundamentalists still believe that it is a sacred duty for a man to take several brides, even though the Mormon Church rejected the practice in 1890.

Stop and think

➤ Our discussion of cultural diversity has looked at sex roles and love and marriage. Describe the extent of cultural diversity in the areas of (a) fashion; (b) child-rearing; and (c) recreational drug use. (In responding to this, consider diversity over time and from place to place.)

Culture and development

Socialization, and in particular the quality of the cultural experiences of children in the early years of the socialization process, is crucial for physical, intellectual, emotional and social development. This point is demonstrated clearly if we look at what happens when children are deprived of these cultural experiences. The cases that we shall look at illustrate different degrees of exclusion from culture and include examples where children have been partially deprived of what a culture has to offer as well as those extreme cases of children who have grown up beyond the frontiers of human civilization.

Feral children

Children who have been reared in ‘the wild’, outside human society, are termed ‘feral children’. The legends of Romulus and Remus, Mowgli and Tarzan have etched into the minds of many of us distorted and romantic images of children reared in the wild by animals. According to legend these children come to little harm, retain their human characteristics and develop strong identities to become singing and dancing role models of the silver screen. The reality could not be more fantastic or further from the picture portrayed by Greystoke and The Jungle Book. Since the fourteenth century, more than 53 recorded cases have been found of feral children, including the Irish sheep-child, the Lithuanian bear-child and the Salzburg sow-girl. Other unlikely parents include wolves, baboons, leopards and an Indian panther (Malson and Itard 1972: 80–82). Some of these cases may be ‘the stuff of myth rather than experiences’ (Maclean 1977), but Armen (1974) recorded the behaviour of a boy reared by gazelles in the Sahara and noted that the boy not only shared the physical characteristics of gazelles (sense of smell, speed, far-sightedness, etc.) but also seemed to participate in their social habits, rituals and games; as Armen made no attempt to capture and return the child to ‘civilization’ it is difficult to know how long the child managed to survive in the wild by reliance on those skills learned from gazelles.

In 1991 a six-year-old boy, covered with body hair and running wild with a pack of monkeys, was captured in the Ugandan bush and placed with a local orphanage, where he revealed that he had run away from home at the age of three and been reared by the monkeys. John Ssabunnya’s story was doubted at the time but subsequent research established that he had learned the ways of monkeys and could communicate with them. He was raised with the other members of the Wasswa family and became a cherished member of the orphan community. In 1998 a similar story caught the attention of the world’s press, but this time it did not come from the African bush and it did not involve primate foster care: at the age of four Ivan Mishucov opted for a life on the streets of Moscow in preference to the alcoholic chaos of his family and became the adopted leader of a pack of dogs. In return for food, which Ivan begged from strangers, the dogs offered warmth and security. Eventually the police managed to separate the boy from his guardians and placed him with a foster family, who coped with his canine behaviour and helped Ivan make slow progress with language and social skills. In the world in focus boxes we can see not only how important early socialization is but also the extent to which it may be changed by later exposure to human contact.
Kamala and Amala: the wolf-girls of Midnapore

In late September 1920, the Reverend Singh responded to appeals for help from local villagers in Bengal. They were being terrorized by ghosts in the form of ‘man-beasts’, and the Reverend Singh set up a hide from which to observe and destroy the creatures. At first, he tells us in his journal, he saw three wolves followed by two cubs but was then astonished by the apparition that followed:

Close after the cubs, came the ‘ghost’ – a hideous-looking being, hand, foot and body like a human being; but the head was a big ball of something covering the shoulders and the upper portion of the bust leaving only a sharp contour of the face visible. Close at its heels there came another awful creature exactly like the first, but smaller in size. Their eyes were bright and piercing, unlike human eyes . . .

The first ghost appeared on the ground up to its bust, and placing its elbows on the edge of the hole, looked this side and that side and jumped out. It looked all round the place from the mouth of the hole before it leaped out to follow the cubs. It was followed by another tiny ghost of the same kind, behaving in the same manner. Both of them ran on all fours.

(Maclean 1977: 60–61)

The children and wolf cubs were protected by the mother, who was quickly killed by the archers in the hunting party. The offspring were then trapped in sheets and taken into captivity, where the Reverend Singh hoped that he could return the feral children to the fold of God’s love and human kindness in the safety of his orphanage.

His account of this struggle to civilize the wolf-children has been diligently researched by Charles Maclean, who reveals how far from recognizable human beings these children had become as a result of their bizarre upbringing. From the start both girls behaved more like wild animals than human children. They appeared frightened by daylight and slept naked on the floor during the middle of the day. They howled at night and shared the eating habits of dogs; they ate carrion as well as raw flesh and gobbled cockroaches, lizards and mice alive. They ran on all-fours and relied heavily on sense of smell, showing a clear preference for the company of dogs over the friendship of other humans. They snarled and growled in fear when approached and even attacked the orphanage children who dared to get too close.

After three months the Reverend Singh had to record in his diary that the children had made no progress. They did not laugh or smile and were not a free growth as is the case of animal environment. Their progress was consequently very, very slow in all its aspects.

(Maclean 1977: 60–61)

Gradually, however, the new environment began to work its changes. Over the next seven months, the Singh’s belief that ‘love was the key’ produced small signs of adaptation to human society. Amala, in particular, showed signs of intelligence and initiative and learned to recognize the names of food and drink. Vegetables were still refused but the children learned to use their hands when eating and drinking and began to play games when food was the reward. A year later they had mastered the skill of sleeping in a bed.

In September 1921, Amala died as the result of illness and the Reverend Singh claims that her ‘sister’ showed remorse and even cried over the body. Kamala now began to show signs of learning basic skills by copying other children. In June 1923, she stood for the first time and eventually learned to walk upright and moved into the girls’ dormitory. By the time of her death in 1929, Kamala had showed the definite effects of her socialization in the orphanage. She had grown afraid of the dark, learned to sit at a table and came to prefer the friendship of other children. She understood language and developed a basic vocabulary of over 30 words, through her combinations of which she demonstrated a basic grasp of a self-concept. She proved to be pretty hopeless at household tasks but did show signs of recognizing the difference between right and wrong to the extent that the Reverend Singh decided that this ‘sweet and obedient child’ deserved to celebrate New Year’s Day by being baptized.
Extreme deprivation

In the cases above, contact with human beings was replaced by influences from other animals, so that the children learned different survival skills through the processes of imprinting, identification and imitation. We now turn our attention to examples of human beings who have experienced extreme isolation and deprivation, usually as a result of being abandoned, and whose development is retarded rather than different. Again, many of these stories have excited the literary imagination. Alexander Selkirk, abandoned as a castaway on a desert island in 1704, became the inspiration for Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, while Swift based Gulliver's meeting with the Yahoos on his own encounter with Peter of Hanover in 1726. The true story of John Merrick is now famous as the legend of the Elephant Man, and Helen Keller's story has become widely known through her own books and the film of her life.

The most authentic account of such cases, however, remains François Truffaut's brilliant film of Dr JARD's attempts to educate Victor, the Wild Child of Aveyron. Identifying this film as the inspiration for his own research interest into wild children, Michael Newton described his first impressions of L'Enfant Sauvage:

The film was elegant, beautiful, rationally delicate in its calm delineation of the central relationship between the young physician and the speechless wild child he sought to educate. It captivated me, agitated me: it woke me up. 

(Newton 2002: 9)

World in focus

Anna and Isabelle

In the USA in the 1940s two girls were separately discovered who had been living in almost total isolation from human contact. In both cases the girls were illegitimate and had been hidden away to protect the family's honour. They were discovered at around the same stage of development (age six years); both were provided with supplementary care and special education. In the more extreme case, Anna had survived with the barest minimum of human contact. Apart from being fed enough to keep her alive, she was given no love or attention or any opportunity to develop physically through exploration or movement but left instead on filthy bedding in the attic in clothes that were rarely changed. Not surprisingly, Anna had failed to develop physically and appeared to be deaf and blind. She was apathetic, expressionless and incapable of coordination and communication. In his report on the case, Kingsley Davis summarized the situation:

Here, then, was a human organism which had missed nearly six years of socialisation. Her condition shows how little her purely biological resources, when acting alone, could contribute to making her a complete person. (Davis 1949: 205)

After four years of care and attention in a special school, Anna managed to learn to walk, to repeat words and try to carry on conversations, and to keep herself and her clothes clean. She discovered the worlds of play and colour and had begun to develop intellectually and emotionally before she died at the age of ten.

Isabelle had the meagre advantage of being in regular contact with her mother, a deaf mute who had been incarcerated with her in a darkened room by Isabelle's grandfather. Although she had learned to communicate with her mother through a personal system of gesture, Isabelle was severely retarded physically and intellectually. She was fearful of strangers and reacted violently towards men. However, the specialist attention of doctors and psychologists enabled Isabelle to recapture the lost years of her early life through 'a systematic and skilful programme of training'. Isabelle's response to this intense socialization process was as rapid as it is remarkable and clearly demonstrates the essential role played by the environment and education in the stages of child development.

The task seemed hopeless at first, but gradually she began to respond. After the first few hurdles had at last been overcome, a curious thing happened. She went through the usual stages of learning characteristics of the years from one to six not only in proper succession but far more rapidly than normal. In a little over two months after her first vocalisation she was putting sentences together. Nine months after that she could identify words and sentences on the printed page, could write well, could add to ten and could retell a story after hearing it. Seven months beyond this point she had a vocabulary of 1500–2000 words and was asking complicated questions. Starting from an educational level of between one and three years, she had reached a normal level by the time she was eight and a half years old. In short, she covered in two years the stages of learning that ordinarily require six. She eventually entered school where she participated in all school activities as normally as other children. 

(Davis 1949: 206–7)
Thirty years after the discovery of Anna and Isabelle, another well-known case came to light. For most of her 13 years Genie had been imprisoned in a darkened room of her father's house, where she was either tied up or caged. Her isolation appears to have been relieved only by interruptions for food and punishment. If she made a noise her father would respond with growls and barks and often beat her with a stick.

When she finally escaped with the help of her mother, Genie was found to be malnourished, incontinent and barely able to walk. She appeared to be almost blind, salivated constantly and could not speak. Like Isabelle she reacted violently to challenging situations and would urinate and masturbate in public. Under the guidance of a psychologist, Susan Curtiss, Genie learned to dress, eat correctly and use a toilet, but she had probably spent too many years of her bleak early life in isolation to ever catch up on her lost childhood; she never developed her ability with language beyond that of a four-year-old, although her IQ score improved from 38 to 74 in the space of six years.

At the time Genie was seen as an opportunity to test out Chomsky and Lennenberg's new theories on language acquisition; while they both agreed that the origin of language, the ground rules of grammar and the capacity for speech are uniquely human characteristics with which we are biologically programmed, Lennenberg suggested that, for language to develop, it had to be learned during a 'critical period' between 2 and 13 years of age. In Newton's summary of the case, Genie made great progress in her acquisition of vocabulary but did not appear able to develop her natural linguistic potential despite being subjected to intense linguistic experimentation:

The results were disappointing in the end, for despite her wide vocabulary Genie failed to use grammatical structures. She had words, but could not make correct English sentences. Her failure appeared to prove Lennenberg's thesis of the critical period for language acquisition. Yet in one sense, Genie really did learn to communicate through words, if communication means simply making oneself understood, though her linguistic attainments were perhaps not sufficient to enable a fully fledged conversation . . . Nonetheless, she mastered the essential facets of language: she could produce novel sentences, play with words, listen, take turns in conversation, speak spontaneously and refer to people or events displaced in time. (Newton 2002: 224)

The issue was complicated further by the evidence of damage to the part of Genie's brain that governs language; had Genie's brain not been physically impaired, we cannot say how far she may have progressed. Such speculation and other important questions raised by this case remain unanswered due to Genie's father committing suicide and her mother bringing the support programme to an end with a court case in which she sued the children's hospital for damages (Pines 1981). In a more recent case, a 44-year-old woman called Lola Vina Costello was discovered in a pit in the basement of the family home in northern Spain. She had been there since 1957 and was suffering from severe photophobia (fear of light) and physical atrophy. Consequently, she had lost her powers of sight, hearing and speech and behaved more like an animal than a human being (The Times 10.2.97). Such cases are not only historical relics, as the case study below, from Sheffield, reported in the Independent in November 2004, illustrates.

**Case study**

**Doctor blames parents for ‘worst case of malnutrition’**

A doctor who treated twin babies rescued from a house of ‘utter squalor’ told a court yesterday that it was ‘the worse case of malnutrition he had ever seen outside the developing world’. The emaciated boys, one of them close to death, were among five children rescued from a terraced house in Sheffield, South Yorkshire, last June. The parents, David Askew and Sarah Whittaker, both 24, were each sentenced to seven years at Sheffield Crown Court after admitting five counts of cruelty.
Police officers involved in the rescue said they had difficulty not being physically sick in the filthy bedrooms and kitchen, but were astonished to find a neat living room, filled with state-of-the-art electrical appliances.

The Recorder of Sheffield, Alan Goldsack, told the couple: ‘The reality is that behind the closed doors of your home your children were being slowly starved to death. Most members of the public will not begin to understand how in the twenty-first century children can slip through the net in the way yours did.’ The court heard how the horror at the three-bedroom house was discovered when, at her daughter’s behest, Whittaker phoned for an ambulance because one of the twins was ‘lifeless’. Paramedics found the boy skeletal and grey, suffering from hypothermia, hypoglycaemia (deficiency of glucose in the bloodstream) and severe malnourishment . . .

Both boys’ growth was consistent with a four- to five-month-old baby, according to doctors. The other children in the house — now aged eight, four and three — were also living amid dog and human excrement, with urine-soaked mattresses and soiled clothes . . .

The judge heard that relatives who babysat for the couple had found the children in a terrible state and had told them to sort it out. Social services had never been involved with the family. Askew tried to distance himself from the cruelty, saying it was Whittaker’s responsibility to look after the children. He told police that the house ‘could do with tidying up’. Whittaker had become pregnant at 15 and had a number of miscarriages and terminations.

The children are now in local authority care. The court heard all five were thriving, although one of the twins may have permanent problems with his sight and hearing.

(Ian Herbert, the Independent, 24.11.04)

**Question**

1. Suggest both social and personal/psychological explanations for the actions of Askew and Whittaker. Which type of explanation do you find more convincing?
As David Skuse has pointed out, the value of these studies is not simply that they demonstrate the importance of nurture over nature or of the environment over inheritance but that we can go too far in the direction of ‘super environmentalism’ and imagine that behaviour is fixed by experience as opposed to genetic blueprints.

Extreme deprivation in early childhood is a condition of great theoretical and practical importance . . . Most human characteristics, with the possible exception of language . . . are virtually resistant to obliteration by even the most dire early environments. On removal to a favourable situation, the remarkable and rapid progress made by those with good potential seems allied to the total experience of living in a stimulating home and forming emotional bonds to a caring adult.

(Skuse 1984: 571–2)

However, the best-known recent cases of extreme deprivation have been two examples that came to light in Austria and have attracted massive and worldwide media coverage. Natascha Kampusch escaped from her captor in August 2006 after being held a prisoner for many years. She was kidnapped when aged ten and held for more than eight years. In describing her ordeal to Austrian police, she said her captor kept her in a concealed soundproof chamber in his cellar and made her call him ‘master’; she said she dreamed of chopping off his head with an axe. Her captor, Wolfgang Priklopil, killed himself after Natascha escaped. In her interviews Natascha described her kidnapping and how she was shoved into a darkened underground chamber, in which she remained for six months before she was taken upstairs and allowed to bath and read newspapers. Over the next several years, Priklopil became her teacher and mentor as well as her captor and tormentor – giving her toys and presents but also withholding food from her. He never let Natascha out of his sight and told her he would kill her if she tried to contact anyone for help. After her escape (when he turned his back on her while she was vacuuming his car), Natascha was looked after by psychiatrists, therapists and doctors, with some suggesting she may have developed ‘Stockholm syndrome’, whereby a person who is kidnapped gradually comes to sympathize with their captor. Since then, Natascha seems to have recovered from her ordeal and has become something of a media personality in Austria, even hosting her own talk show on television.

In May 2008 police arrested a 73-year-old man, Josef Fritzl, who had kept his daughter locked in a specially built cellar in his house since 1984 (Figure 1.3). Elisabeth Fritzl, now aged 42, was imprisoned in the cell for 24 years and had seven babies by Josef. Of the children, three were kept in the ‘upstairs’ part of the house and lived a relatively normal life with Josef and his wife (who claimed to know nothing of the cellar and its occupants). The other three – Kerstin, 19, Stefan, 18, and Felix, 5 – were kept in the cellar downstairs and had never seen anyone else apart from each other (the other baby died shortly after birth). When they were discovered, they were stooped, anaemic and barely able to communicate apart from through a sort of growling language. It will clearly take many years for Elisabeth and her children to make the transition to ‘normal’ life.

These two cases have shocked Austria, not to mention the rest of the world, and are clear examples of extreme deprivation. However, both Natascha and Elisabeth were kidnapped and imprisoned after they had been through the early, formative years of acquiring
language and culture – Natascha was 10 and Elisabeth 11 when they were kidnapped, so their cases are not the same as children brought up without any meaningful human contact in the early stages of their lives.

Stop and think
➤ The ‘nature/nurture’ debate as to how much we are influenced by our environment and how much we are the product of our biological and genetic inheritance has been long and fiercely argued. In what ways might a sociological perspective add to this debate? How could you use the case studies above to illustrate your argument?

This section has shown that through social experiences we learn how to behave and how to be human in any particular society. Sociologists do not believe that we can explain and fully understand human behaviour in terms of the individual or in terms of some natural, biological instinct. Socialization is the life-long process of learning to be human. Socialization is an important concept for sociologists because it emphasizes the importance of the social context, rather than the individual or biological in shaping our actions. Later chapters explore different ‘agents’ of socialization such as the family (Chapter 11), the school (Chapter 15) and the mass media (Chapter 17). The mass media has a strong influence on our lives and this is illustrated through the contemporary fascination with celebrity culture. We end this chapter with a sociological exploration of celebrity culture as it demonstrates many of the themes discussed so far.

A sociological look at celebrity culture

Celebrity is an industry that creates highly visible products that most of us buy at one time or another and which play a significant part in our everyday lives.

(Turner 2004: 26)

Interest in celebrities is not new, but sociologists would argue that the contemporary interest in celebrities and their lifestyles has become more intense and extensive over the past fifteen years or so. As we have seen, a key role of sociology is to explain how and why society changes over time, in particular looking at the changing nature of social processes and the intended and unintended consequences of social change. In relation to the celebrity industry, sociology strives to explain both the process of production (how people become famous) and consumption (how celebrity culture is used and why). The sociological explanations which emerge are the theories that account for how and why society works in particular ways. Thus ‘theory’ is nothing more scary than an explanation for social processes (see Chapter 2 for a more in-depth discussion). Students tend to struggle with ‘theory’ as they assume it is complicated, but it does not have to mean grand theorizing which explains the whole of society, but small-scale theories about why and how certain aspects of society operate. A detailed look at celebrity culture illustrates ways of thinking sociologically about the production and consumption of celebrity in contemporary minority world societies.

Stop and think
➤ Which aspects of celebrity culture do you engage with and why? For example, are you more likely to watch films that have your favourite celebrities in them? Do you watch talkshows, celebrity reality TV or do you follow the production of new celebrities in reality TV programmes such as Big Brother, X Factor, The Voice or Britain’s Got Talent? Do you buy celebrity endorsed products or celebrity focused magazines such as Closer, Heat, Now, Star, Hello or OK?
➤ Why do you think both the public and private worlds of celebrities appeal to the general public?
➤ Why are ‘ordinary’ people able to achieve celebrity status albeit temporarily? Why are there many ‘wannabe’ celebrities with apparently limited talent?

The recent pervasiveness of celebrity is partly due to new processes of producing celebrities via talent shows and reality TV formats, and partly because of new social media which have increased the visibility of celebrities (Turner 2004). Furthermore, there is currently an enhanced interest in the private lives of celebrities as ‘the advent of certain uses of television and other technologies simply exacerbates this opening-up of the ‘back stages’ that were previously unavailable for private scrutiny’ (Evans 2005: 50). Another recent trend is that being famous is almost seen as a career in itself, linked
to establishing one's personality in a public arena via a mixture of luck and opportunity, resulting in public recognition being valued for its own sake (Evans 2005; Turner 2004). Ordinary people can get lucky in their search for fame, such as being picked as a contestant for Big Brother or having their skills spotted on a talent show. Others may capitalize on an opportunistic moment or on being connected to famous people, such as Liz Hurley quickly became well-known as Hugh Grant's girlfriend after being photographed in a revealing black dress with safety-pins and Pippa Middleton's rise to celebrity status was largely due to her choice of dress at her sister's wedding. As Evans points out: 'Celebrities are cultural products that are manufactured in routinised ways, planned according to a tried and tested formula that results in predictable and repetitious output' (2005: 51). With some celebrities today we even struggle to remember why they were famous in the first place such as Paris Hilton, Kerry Katona or Abi Titmuss.

This contrasts with the past when celebrity status was more scarce and more directly linked with talent, 'star quality' and was often the result of hard work (such as training and high quality performances). Nevertheless, celebrity culture has a hierarchy which distinguishes between more traditional A-list celebrities such as Hollywood filmstars, the medium ranked B-list and C-list, and the bottom-ranked D-list celebrities whose fame is likely to be more fleeting and tends to be related to reality TV formats. Thus notions of power, status and wealth are linked to the ranking of celebrities. Celebrity status is also often gendered in particular ways as well as related to class background. Given the connections to structures of power, status, class and gender, it is no surprise that explaining celebrity culture is of interest to sociologists. Celebrity culture gives rise to a range of polarizations that are complex and contradictory. We may see celebrities as extraordinary or ordinary people, down to earth or fake, deserving of their success or lucky without merit, objects to be admired or ridiculed and, as Turner (2004: 9) reminds us: 'The celebrity is also a commodity: produced, traded and marketed by the media and publicity industries.'

### The celebrity industry and the production of ‘fame’

It is worth remembering that Big Brother is actually an interesting sociological experiment given that it puts a group of unfamiliar people together from a mixture of backgrounds in terms of class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity. The show locks them up in a house without access to the media or communication technologies, and with very little to do as they are not allowed magazines, books or computers. Big Brother allocates them competitive tasks to carry out which determine their weekly food supply, then sits back and watches as the relationships develop or deteriorate whilst 24-hour cameras record their interactions. It has proved to be a successful global format screened in 21 countries and watched by over two billion viewers (Turner 2004: 59). The ‘ordinary’ people which appear on Big Brother are striving to become ‘extraordinary’ celebrities in their search for fame and public recognition.

In the world of celebrity, given the the prevalence of paparazzi and the importance of physical appearance and notions of beauty, high value is placed on looking good. Celebrities tend to have a group of people that surround them in order to ensure that they are presented in the best possible light. Depending on their status and wealth, they are likely to have hair, make-up and fashion stylists, a personal trainer, a nutritionist, and other coaches relevant to their profession as well as a manager/agent and public relations adviser. The manufacturing process of producing a celebrity can involve substantial backstage work by a varied team of professionals. The created celebrity persona can then be used to market particular commodities, such as perfume, clothing, hair and beauty products as well as the marketing of their own song, film or biography. It is no coincidence that before the release of a film or new album, the celebrity provides interviews and appears on chat shows. Celebrities are used to attract audiences and consumers in the capitalist pursuit for profit. As Hesmondhalgh notes:

> . . . fame is socially produced, through the concerted and organised efforts of groups of media personnel, rather than something which happens randomly, or as a result of individual talent.

(Hesmondhalgh 2005: 132)

However, this manufacturing machine receives criticism for emphasizing the ‘phoniness and constructedness’ (Turner 2004: 6) of celebrity. An obvious example of this is Katie Price's creation of her celebrity persona 'Jordan' which is based on fakeness directly related to her cosmetically enhanced body (see Holmes 2006). She boldly capitalizes on her over-emphasized 'stereotypical-in-the-extreme' femininity and actively seeks publicity in relation to her private life. Despite receiving huge
amounts of negative press, she has created a range of successful businesses including her own magazine, four autobiographies, children’s books and television documentaries about her daily life.

A similar example of a fabricated celebrity is that of Myleene Klass whose rise to fame has been managed in a more positive light by emphasizing hard work rather than her partying antics. She first appeared as a singer on Popstars, forming the band Hear’say in 2001. After two years with the band, then some work as a musician, her TV and radio presenting started in 2005, followed by being the runner up on I’m a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here! in 2006. She has featured as a model in a recent Marks and Spencer advertising campaign, and has a series of business ventures including nail products, a children’s clothing range, music albums for mothers and babies and parenting books. Thus both Katie Price and Myleene Klass construct a relationship with their audience in a variety of gendered ways, whilst also raising questions about the relationship between the authentic and the manufactured. Their attempts at re-invention are necessary in order to sustain the interest way they intend it. Nevertheless, self-promotion and image-control might not always be successful or in the authentic and the manufactured. Their attempts at raising questions about the relationship between the celebrity and the consumer. The theory of the sociology of media organizations argues that processes of publicity, promotion, advertising and marketing become essential in the maintenance of processes of publicity, promotion, advertising and between the celebrity and the consumer. The theory of the sociology of media organizations argues that processes of publicity, promotion, advertising and marketing become essential in the maintenance of celebrity status (Hesmondhalgh 2005). This organizational sociology approach is highly marked when a Big Brother housemate is evicted, as we see them: ‘cycled through channel and network news, talk and interview format programmes as well as in channel, network, or sponsors’ promotions, or as presenters in new programming ventures’ (Turner 2004: 59).

The Internet and social media, such as the micro-blogging of Twitter, enhance the possibilities of celebrities to sustain a relationship with their audience. A recent example of this was the high-profile marriage of Demi Moore with Ashton Kutcher, 15 years her junior, which was played out via public messages and photos on Twitter. In 2009 Ashton became the first person on Twitter to reach one million followers, but their public split in 2011 saw them rapidly cut down on their Twitter participation. The publicity surrounding their marriage led to Demi’s struggle to cope afterwards and needing to be hospitalized for anorexia and substance abuse.

Thus, aspects of social change, such as new digital and computer-based technologies, and new forms of social media, combine to create opportunities for the expansion of celebrity culture. The proliferation of websites and magazines discussing celebrity lifestyles lead to both positive and negative consequences for celebrities ‘as objects of ridicule as well as admiration’ (Turner 2004: 73). On the one hand, it enhances their profile but, on the other hand, it provides a critical medium where their flaws are exposed. Hence there are downsides to the pursuit of fame, as illustrated in the physical attacks in 2011 on two of The Only Way is Essex stars as they were leaving a London nightclub. For D-list celebrities in particular, they have to face the fragility of their fame which is likely to be transient. However, all celebrities are subject to the uncertainties of audience reaction and may have to cope with an unanticipated fall from grace. Their often fraught relationship with the media reflects the polarization between admiration and humiliation:

. . . the tabloids deal with the celebrity industries through a see-sawing pattern of scandalous exposures and negotiated exclusives – at one point threatening the professional survival of the celebrities they expose, and at another point contracting to provide them with unparalleled personal visibility.

(Turner 2004: 76)

What’s the point: why do we consume celebrity culture?

An interesting sociological question is to ask about the social and cultural function of celebrity culture. There are different ways of engaging as an audience or consumer of celebrity culture. Some fans blur the boundary between reality and representation, almost believing that the onscreen character is a real person, whilst others are highly critical of the celebrity apparatus (Holmes 2006). The majority of consumers are somewhere in between the cynical resisters and the other extreme of obsessive fans or stalkers. Most of us are likely to view celebrity culture with ambivalence, moving between positive and negative interpretations of the complex world of celebrity, sometimes indulging in the entertainment it provides, other times scorning the excessive, materialistic, capitalist processes that it symbolizes.

Turner argues that as postmodern society suffers from a loss of community we turn to celebrity ‘as a means of constructing a new dimension of community through the media’ (2004: 6). In an extreme form it has
been suggested that the interactions between some fans and celebrities is a ‘para-social relationship’ which substitutes for ‘real relationships’ and offers a sense of belonging, recognition and meaning (Turner 2004). On a less intense scale, celebrity culture can feed into individual and collective constructions of identity. An example of this is the rapid process by which Kate Middleton has become a fashion icon as her outfits are quickly sold out and reproduced for the mass market. Celebrity culture forms part of capitalist, consumerist societies which pursue celebrity-endorsed commodities and in which celebrities become commodities themselves. Holmes and Redmond indicate that celebrities ‘embody the benefits of capitalism’ (2006: 22). The conspicuous consumption practices of the rich and famous, such as Simon Cowell or the Beckhams, are in stark contrast to the everyday life of most of us. This points to one of the reasons we may be curious about celebrity lifestyles, as it enables us to escape the mundanity of everyday life despite the inequality which it represents. As Littler and Cross explain:

...the gross inequalities between the ‘ordinary civilian’ and the ‘extraordinary celebrity’ speak of the social and financial divides between rich and poor, haves and have-nots. Consequently, the proliferation of celebrity discourse over the past two decades can be understood ... in relation to a broader context of the rise of neo-liberal capitalism and its savagely widening global disparities of wealth and power.

(Littler and Cross 2010: 396–7)

A key role of celebrity is as a source of gossip which fulfills a useful social function as a talking point or for banter among friends or colleagues. Celebrity gossip can be ‘an important social process through which relationships, identity, and social and cultural norms are debated, evaluated, modified and shared’ (Turner 2004: 24). Thus gossip can strengthen social bonds and contribute to group cohesion and a sense of belonging to a wider community (Johansson 2006). It may also serve to make us feel better about the boredom of our own routine lives, particularly as we witness the darker side of the glamorous lifestyles: drug and alcohol addictions, public meltdowns, periods in rehab.

The enjoyment of celebrity misfortune or humiliation fulfills a specific cultural function precisely because it offers vicarious pleasure in the witnessing of the powerful being made less powerful; it is an attempt to address or deal with a severe imbalance of power.

(Littler and Cross 2010: 399)

On the one hand, we can identify with the human side of celebrities’ weaknesses and flaws. Yet on the other hand, we distance ourselves from the superficiality and excessiveness of their lifestyles. Thus there is often a complex relationship between the consumer and celebrity ‘marked by a fine line between identification and distancing’ (Johansson 2006: 356). At times we may take delight in following celebrities’ public meltdowns, such as Vanessa Feltz during the first Celebrity Big Brother in 2001 when she scrawled on the house table with chalk and screamed obscenities at Big Brother or Britney Spears shaving her head and mental health-related hospitalizations in 2008. Some consider that ‘bringing down’ the famous is ‘a sort of just desserts or social levelling for their showy influence and/or “lack of talent” in the first place’ (Redmond 2006: 32). This process is often related to class and gender such as Big Brother contestant, Jade Goody, the ‘working-class girl who had to show her desire to improve and who was publicly persecuted for her “failings” in the most extreme way’ (Allen and Taylor 2012).

Often inappropriate celebrity behaviour can be followed by a public apology or confession as they struggle with the rise back to popularity. For example, US actor Charlie Sheen has moved from public rants (initially directed at Chuck Lorre, the creator of Two and a Half Men) and high-profile bouts with drug addiction towards a clean-up process of apology and displays of family reunification. Redmond discusses the suffering and damage of fame which leads to the coping difficulties of some celebrities:

The intensity of the glare and the totalized nature of the surveillance that they are put and put themselves under creates a vision regime that leaves little if any space for them to be offscreen, out of print, switched off. The famous are caught in the collapse of the public/private and are often forced to be continually in role, in performance, as media beings.

(Redmond 2006: 34)

The celebrity scandal-to-forgiveness cycle was also illustrated in the revelations of Tiger Woods’ sex scandals followed by his apology and promise to seek help for sex addiction. The cyclical processes of the rise and fall of fame and celebrity status is reflected in Cheryl Cole’s adulation on the UK X Factor 2008–10 which quickly turned to public humiliation when she...
Part 1 Introduction to the sociological imagination

was sacked from the US version of the show in 2011. Littler and Cross suggest that Susan Boyle, whose celebrity status was discovered in 2009, is one of the fastest examples of the highs and lows of the ride to fame:

The vastly increased speed of the adulation/abjection cycle is exemplified by the case of Susan Boyle, the Britain’s Got Talent 2009 contestant and favourite to win, who went from YouTube darling (100 million hits worldwide) to ‘tragic SuBo’ within three or four weeks.

(Littler and Cross 2010: 396)

Thus as Turner explains: ‘celebrity – as a discourse, as a commodity, as a spectacle – is marked by contradictions, ambiguities and ambivalences’ (2004: 109). By taking a closer look at celebrity culture, a range of sociological themes can be explored including the economic organization of late capitalism, identity and belonging, intimacy and detachment, authenticity, the blurring of public and private worlds, the paradoxical relationship between ordinary and extraordinary, cultural decline, the demise of community, emotional investment and desire (see Redmond 2006).

A closer look

‘Famous-for-knowing-the-famous’

The phenomenon of celebrity reality TV (like Celebrity Big Brother and I’m a Celebrity, Get Me Out Of Here!) is a particularly good example here. These programmes often play on Schadenfreude by encouraging ironic laughter over the ‘washed-up’ nature of the former stars and D-list celebrities who are subjected to various degrees of debasement (whether being made to act as ‘servants’ for other contestants or eating bugs). Watching and laughing at celebrities ‘debase’ themselves, however, serves to pump up their celebrity profile and invent it anew. In terms of the political economy of celebrity, Schadenfreude towards ‘failing’ stars is an integral part of the cycle of celebrity culture: it has become part of the raw material of capitalist accumulation that is used to create further celebrity profit.

(Littler and Cross 2010: 409)

Some celebrities are famous for being famous: ‘entertainers like Dannii Minogue or Pamela Anderson whose media visibility is out of all proportion to their professional achievements’ (Turner 2004: 8). Others included in this recent manufacturing of celebrities are:

- **Kerry Katona**: best known for being in reality TV such as winner of the I’m a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here! and 2004 runner-up of Celebrity Big Brother 2011.

Originally she was a pop singer with girl group Atomic Kitten.

- **Paris Hilton**: her family own the Hilton chain of hotels but she is a rich socialite lacking any notable talent.

- **Tara Palmer-Tomkinson**: rich party girl, runner up in 2002 I’m a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here!

- **Abi Titmuss**: famous for being John Leslie’s girlfriend who stood by him when he was accused of rape. She was voted as the world’s most pointless celebrity by a magazine poll (for discussion of her being ‘famous for being made famous’ see Holmes and Redmond 2006: 19–21).

- **Natasha Giggs**: famous for having an 8-year affair with her brother-in-law and footballer, Ryan Giggs, appearing on Celebrity Big Brother 2012.
Summary

- Sociology helps us to make sense of the world in which we live. It asks questions about and seeks answers for the things that directly affect our lives, such as riots, celebrity culture, social media and new technologies. In studying people and the societies that they live in, sociology relies on rigorous procedures and is informed by rational argument and existing knowledge.

- There is no uniform and all-embracing sociological perspective. Sociologists disagree over research procedures (methodologies) and theoretical perspectives; these different approaches and positions emerged as the subject of sociology developed.

- Modern (minority world) sociology is generally seen as originating from the economic, social and political upheavals and revolutions of the nineteenth century, in particular as a result of developments such as the Industrial Revolution and the move to the factory system of production; urbanization; the growth of capitalism; and the wider acceptance of liberal democracy and the support for the rights of individuals.

- Culture and socialization are two key concepts used in sociology. Culture is used to refer to the values, customs and styles of behaviour of a society or social group and socialization to the process by which people learn the norms, values and roles approved in their society. Socialization depends on social interaction, and without this individuals could not develop as social beings.

- The importance of these concepts is shown if we look at individuals who have been deprived of socialization and of cultural experiences – children brought up in the wild or shut away and ignored by their families and having no contact with other humans.

Links

The case study extracts referring to the English riots in 2011 link with Chapter 14.
The sections on new technologies and celebrity culture links with Chapter 17.
The information on capitalism links with Chapter 2.
The section on socialization links with Chapter 11.

Further reading

An accessible and ‘theoretical’ introduction to sociology that discusses in some depth the relationship between sociology and common sense.

This is the first book in a series of four that aims to provide an introduction to the sociological study of modern society. This book looks at how sociology can throw new light on familiar aspects of everyday life. The different chapters consider a range of sites, including the home, the street, the pub and the neighbourhood. The other books in the series are entitled Social Differences and Divisions, Social Change and The Uses of Sociology.

A classic introduction to the study of sociology.
Part 1 Introduction to the sociological imagination

Further reading continued

This is a very accessible and engaging text which provides a clear introduction to the central concerns and approaches of sociologists. It also has a useful section on developing key skills to study sociology at university, including how to get the best out of lectures and workshops, how to revise and do exams for sociology, and how to write sociology essays (with good and poor examples of undergraduate essay work in the appendix).

This short introduction to the development of sociology highlights its key contributions as a discipline.

An insightful exploration of the mundane micro-level practices of everyday life. Scott makes the familiar strange, encouraging us to rethink daily rituals and routines such as shopping, gardening, queuing, eating out and drinking.

Given that this is an introductory chapter, there are no particular substantive studies that provide an overview of the area. However, the introductory books by Peter Berger and C. Wright Mills have had a tremendous impact and been an important influence on many people currently working in sociology. They are still well worth reading; perhaps more than any other introductory studies they capture the excitement and challenge of studying the human world.

Key journal and journal articles

Key journal

Sociology
This is the official journal of the British Sociological Association which is recognized as one of the leading journals in the field of Sociology.

Journal articles

A fascinating look into why we feel rushed and short of time, despite new technologies speeding up processes (such as transport and production) to provide us with more time.

An exploration of the body, time and work in modernity. Widerberg argues that a ‘sped-up life’ and a ‘life of doing’ at work and at home leads to tiredness: a restless body and irritation.

This paper provides an interesting exploration of the ways in which the Internet has changed our interactions with each other.

Websites

www.britsoc.co.uk
The website for the British Sociological Association (BSA) provides information about sociology as a subject, including its history, where to study sociology, and guidelines on good practice in doing sociology (such as appropriate language to use).

www.socresonline.org.uk
The Sociological Research Online website is a mine of useful information that provides details on sociology departments in the UK and other countries. The site is also host to the key journal: Sociological Research Online.
Activities

Activity 1

Sky burials
Steve Mair describes a burial ceremony in Tibet and demonstrates how the disposal of the dead is dealt with in a radically different manner from the way it is dealt with in the contemporary minority world.

Fly away Peter
During a six-week visit to Tibet, Steve Mair set off from Lhasa early one morning to attempt to witness one of the world’s most startling spectacles. Photographs were forbidden. And unnecessary.

It was six-thirty on a cold Tibetan morning and still pitch black when, stumbling and yawning, we set off out of town towards the nearby hills . . .

Previously I’d had no intention of trying to see a sky burial since, although what I’d heard about this custom fascinated me, I thought that to intrude on other people’s grief was obscene, to say the least. Joe had felt the same, and besides we had been told that we would not be welcome there and had even heard stories about rocks being thrown at Westerners who did try to go. This turned out to be true, but it was Westerners who had tried, stupidity, to take photographs of the burial after being warned not to do so.

However, two days before, we’d met a New Zealander who said she’d been to see a burial that morning and that no hostility had been shown to her. Also, and most importantly, she said that there were no family of the deceased present during the ritual. So that was it, that there were no relatives present was the deciding factor (they apparently arrive later, after it’s over, just to see that the job has been done and their loved ones properly dispatched). Joe and I both made up our minds to try to witness a burial before leaving Lhasa.

Now here we were, on a hill outside Lhasa, standing in the Tibetan pre-dawn chill with the man by the fire silently stropping his butcher’s blade. For a few moments it was quite eerie as we stood gazing at the two covered bodies until finally, in sign language, we asked if we could stay. They asked if we had cameras. We assured them we didn’t. They warned us again we should not take photographs, we said we understood, and then after a little discussion they motioned us to sit.

We sat for half an hour in almost total silence, trying to imagine the ceremony, while the Tibetans continued to smoke and drink tea and from time to time produce more large knives to be sharpened . . .

By now it was quite light and we’d been joined by three other Westerners, who had obviously had the same idea, and an old Buddhist monk carrying a large prayer flag, who had come down from the monastery on the opposite side of the hill to preside over the burial. First the monk made himself comfortable in a makeshift altar behind us, and then commenced a soft, rhythmic chanting while setting up a gentle staccato beat on a goatskin drum and blowing down a conch-like trumpet . . .

After he’d been praying for ten minutes or so and with the crisp morning air filled with these strange mystical sounds as well as the sweet smell of burning juniper bushes that one of the workmen had lit all around us, the sun suddenly appeared over the hills to the east instantly bathing the whole tableau in warmth and light. At this point seven of the workmen finished their tea, put out their cigarettes, donned grubby and bloodstained overalls, and set off towards the large rock that was thirty feet in front of us. At last the ceremony began.

Five of the workmen sat down behind the bodies, facing us, while the remaining two drew the large knives from their belts and threw the covers off the bodies. One of the bodies was of a plump female, perhaps in her forties, while the other was that of a skinny, old man. Mercifully they were lying face down so we couldn’t see their faces. This was just as well since I think by now most of us had begun to feel a little queasy. I certainly had.

For most of the time we watched the ‘butcher’ who was working on the woman. He began by making a cut from the nape of the neck down to the buttocks and then on down the back of each leg up to the heel. He pulled off the skin from the back in two pieces and threw them to the ground. One of the bodies was of a plump female, perhaps in her forties, while the other was that of a skinny, old man. Mercifully they were lying face down so we couldn’t see their faces. This was just as well since I think by now most of us had begun to feel a little queasy. I certainly had.

As he proceeded to cut up the torso, the knife pierced the gut, and the blood and juices flooded out over the rock and down its side. He chopped off the limbs and removed the bones, which he tossed in turn to the five men sitting down. They were crushers and, using large stone hammers, they began to reduce the bones to a fine powder . . .

Although we all sat and watched this strange spectacle in silence and awe, I came to realise they were just ordinary workmen doing a difficult and messy job. They could have been a gang of tarmac layers in the north of England . . .

After half an hour all that was left of the bodies were the heads. These were first scalped, cutting off all the hair, and then the skin peeled off to leave just the bare skulls. They placed the skulls in one of the shallow grooves that dotted the rock and
smashed them open with a large stone. After tipping out the two halves of the brain they tossed the pieces to the crushers to do their job.

After 40 minutes the work was complete and both bodies had been reduced to a small, unrecognisable rubble-heap of flesh and powdered bone mixed with tsampa, the coarse flour made from barley that is the Tibetans’ staple diet. By that time a dozen or more vultures had gathered on the slope at the side of the rock and were silently waiting. As the two butchers wiped the blades on their overalls and made their way back to the fire one of the crushers picked up a piece of flesh and tossed it amongst the birds.

It was as if a dinner gong had sounded. A cacophony of screeches erupted from the previously silent birds and suddenly the sky overhead turned black as 60 to 70 of the largest vultures I’ve ever seen (I’d seen quite a few in India) descended on to the slope by the rock . . .

For a few seconds they milled around on the slope until one of the throng finally flew up on to the rock and began feeding. This seemed to be the signal as all at once the rest of the birds jumped, hopped, and flew on to the rock which became at once a brown, seething unidentifiable mass as, with wings folded and heads down, they began tearing at the food. The noise was terrible as they greedily devoured the remains, squawking and squabbling over the larger pieces, but after 10 minutes or so they had finished . . .

The ‘burial’ was over. It had taken less than one hour from beginning to end, and there was not a morsel of food left on the rock, just a few dark stains.

By now the men had removed their overalls and were smoking and drinking tea again as they cleaned and packed away their tools. Myself, Joe, and the three other Westerners rose stiffly to our feet (we had sat virtually without moving for over an hour), thanked the Tibetans, who now showed little interest in us, and started back down the hill, still in total silence, each of us trying to assess what we had just seen.

In a land where wood is scarce and at a premium, and the ground is as hard as rock, and where the Buddhist beliefs of the people proclaim the continuity of all life (birth, death, and rebirth) they had developed this unusual method of disposing of their dead. We had experienced no feelings of disgust or horror, merely a sense of wonderment, and also privilege, at having been allowed to witness this unique Tibetan custom.

On the way back to town I finally asked Joe what he had thought of it all. ‘Bloody incredible,’ he said, ‘there’s no need for photographs at all, it’s something I’ll remember for the rest of my life.’ I totally agreed.

(Guardian 18.10.86)

Questions

1. What aspects of the sky burials are very different from your own notions of a ‘decent burial’?
2. What similarities are there between the Tibetan burial rituals and those practised in contemporary Britain?
3. What possible explanations might there be for the type of burial ceremony described by Mair?
4. How does Mair’s account illustrate the relationship of culture to history and economic necessity?

Activity 2

Identity formation: Who am I?

There are 20 numbered blanks on the page below. Please write 20 answers to the simple question ‘Who am I?’ in these blanks. Just give 20 different answers to this question; answer as if you were giving the answers to yourself – not someone else. Write your answers in the order that they occur to you. Do not worry about logic or ‘importance’.

1. ______________________
2. ______________________
3. ______________________
4. ______________________
5. ______________________
6. ______________________
7. ______________________
8. ______________________
9. ______________________
10. _______________________
Questions

1. Was this a difficult or easy exercise to complete? What can that tell you about the significance of identity in modern culture?

2. Reflect on the influence of institutions and relationships in your answers and the extent to which identity is shaped by them.

Global divisions

Globalisation, some argue, creates a world of winners and losers, a few on the fast track to prosperity, the majority condemned to a life of misery and despair. (Giddens 1999: 15)

Clearly, the capitalist system is dependent on a process of exploitation and oppression that results in social injustice and inequality – in both power and wealth. (Leech 2012: 41)

Key issues

➤ Why are Africa, Asia and Latin America predominantly poor? How can we account for global inequalities?

➤ What is development? Is development a wholly beneficial process, or does it have negative effects?

➤ What are the positive and negative consequences of globalization? Does everyone experience those outcomes in similar ways?

➤ What are the central issues in relation to gender and development?

➤ How do we understand childhoods in the majority world?

Introduction

When studying sociology, it is important to be able to consider a global perspective in order to recognize that what happens in our society, or even in other Western societies, is not necessarily the norm. Probably most of you reading this chapter stand among the most prosperous people in the world. If you are studying at a university in Europe, then you are likely to be among the privileged few in global terms. Certainly you will not be one of the many people in the world who are unable to get enough food and nutrition in order to survive healthily. Our position of advantage in the world means that we have better access to basic services such as electricity, drinking water, decent housing, education and health care than most of the global population. A sociological perspective reminds us that many of the achievements that we attribute to our personal abilities
Figure 9.1  In most countries a combination of tradition and modernity can be seen side by side
© Samantha Punch
are also products of this privileged position that we hold in the worldwide social system. The aim of this chapter is to enable us to consider the ways in which our life chances and our experiences of the social world differ dramatically according to the kind of society into which we are born. In particular, it may encourage us to reflect on our own location in the world and the nature of our relationships with distant others.

The chapter begins by defining the terms used to describe different areas of the world. It explores the nature of global inequalities by considering both economic and social differences. The historical background to global inequalities is highlighted with a discussion on colonialism, before outlining some of the more contemporary causes such as debt, aid and unequal global trading. The chapter then discusses the notion of development, looking at how different parts of the world have developed over time. Key sociological theories of development are presented, including the classical perspectives of modernization theory and dependency theory, and contemporary alternative approaches to development such as participatory development. The following section examines the multiple facets of globalization: economic, cultural and political. It discusses the extent to which processes of globalization are perceived to increase or decrease global inequalities. In order to fully understand both processes of globalization and of development, we need to consider the ways in which they impact on people’s everyday life. For positive changes to take place, all people should have their needs taken into account and be given opportunities to participate in their own development. Consequently, the final two sections of the chapter focus on the roles and contributions of women and children in processes of development and globalization.

Stop and think

➢ What do you know about Africa, Asia and Latin America? What images do you have of these places?
➢ Consider the possible reasons why different parts of the world are so unequal.

Definitions: the majority and minority worlds

A range of different terms are used to describe different areas of the world. This book tends to use the recent terms ‘majority world’ (for the developing world) and ‘minority world’ (for the developed world) because they remind us that most people in the world live in the economically poorer continents of Asia, Africa and Latin America and that only a minority of people live in the wealthier areas of the world (Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, the USA and Canada). The majority of the world’s population live in the majority world, which also has a greater land mass. The minority world consists of fewer people and a smaller land mass, and generally refers to the minority of people who have more privileged lifestyles. The terms also invite us to reflect upon the global inequalities that exist between many of the people who live in Africa, Asia and Latin America compared with the rest of the world (see also Punch 2003).

These are relatively new terms that have come into use in the past ten years or so. The more traditional terms ‘third world’ and ‘first world’ have come to be problematic. As labels, ‘third world’ and ‘first world’ indicate some sort of ranking. Thus, ‘third world’ has become quite derogatory, implying that ‘third-world’ countries are in some way ‘worse’ than or ‘inferior’ to ‘first-world’ countries. This suggests that ‘third-world’ countries should be constantly striving to be what ‘first-world’ countries already are, as if our model of living in these richer countries is the norm to which all poorer countries should aspire. The traditional terms fail to recognize that the ‘first world’ is also undergoing a process of development and is by no means ideal, and they ignore the privileged historical background that has enabled richer countries to prosper. Other terms are used such as ‘north’ and ‘south’ and, more recently, the ‘global north’ and the ‘global south’. These terms try to be more neutral by referring to the geographical distribution of the world’s richer and poorer nations, but they are not always correct, as Australia and New Zealand are located in the south. Terms that are used to denote different parts of the world tend to have negative connotations for the poorer countries by emphasizing what they lack, for example developing, less developed, low-income, undeveloped. Although the terms ‘majority world’ and ‘minority world’ may seem confusing at first, they do make us stop and consider the unequal power relations between the two world areas.

Furthermore, as Panelli and colleagues point out, it is worth remembering that ... there are both limitations and benefits of adopting the terms Majority and Minority worlds. While providing useful conceptual tools, their
potential drawback is that they divide global regions in an exclusive binary manner, when the world is not so neatly separated into clear cut and mutually exclusive categories. (Panelli et al. 2007: 221)

There are increasingly a number of countries that fall in between the majority and minority worlds. Most notable are China, India and some Latin American countries, such as Venezuela, which are somewhere in the middle of the two polar ends. China, in particular, is an enormous and significant country that has the potential to reshape the world order. These intermediate countries are fast changing the picture of the world and challenge the majority/minority world divide. Nevertheless, while acknowledging this difficulty, this chapter broadly compares these two world regions, focusing on some of the key differences between poor and rich countries. The minority world is generally richer than the majority world, but we need to be wary not to overgeneralize and to recognize that both world areas are extremely diverse. However, to a certain extent, what it means to be poor in the minority world is different from being poor in the majority world, and that is what this chapter explores. Hence, although the chapter focuses mainly on the experiences of the majority world, it is important to remember that some very poor people in the minority world may live similarly impoverished lifestyles.

Global inequalities

Until recently, poor countries of the majority world have tended to be primarily agrarian societies, where most people lived in rural areas and worked in agriculture. Still today, almost half of the world’s population lives in rural areas (Elliot 2006). Many people in the majority world continue to farm the land and survive from what they produce. This is known as subsistence farming. Agrarian societies in the majority world, such as Bangladesh, Bolivia, Cambodia, Vietnam and Indonesia, tend to have little industry. These countries rely more on a limited number of raw material products for export rather than on producing their own industrial goods. As Macionis and Plummer point out, poor countries in the majority world tend to maintain traditional lifestyles:

Kinship groups pass folkways and mores from generation to generation. Adhering to long-established ways of life, people resist innovations – even those that promise a richer material life. The members of poor societies often accept their fate, although it may be bleak, in order to maintain family vitality and cultural heritage. Such attitudes bolster social bonds, but at the cost of discouraging development. (Macionis and Plummer 2008: 280)

This is changing, and poor countries are modernizing and developing local industries, but still many traditional ways of life continue to exist. The average number of children per family tends to be higher in the majority world. Partly this is because traditionally in subsistence economies, several children would be required to work on the family land in order to help farm what they need to eat, which would be a labour-intensive process. Another reason is because some of the children would not be expected to survive due to poor nutrition and a lack of adequate basic services (safe drinking water, sanitation, health centres), which meant that they could be vulnerable to disease and could die at an early age.

A key characteristic of the majority world is poverty, and as a result many people suffer from poor diets, insecure housing and vulnerability to illness and famine. Many are also illiterate and uneducated because of limited access to adequate schooling. In the minority world it can be very hard for us to grasp the extent of absolute poverty that many people in the majority world face. We sometimes get a glimpse of famine and starvation in countries such as Ethiopia and Zimbabwe, but it is hard for us to really understand how many people in the world have a daily struggle to survive due to constant poverty and extreme conditions. It is important to remember that many countries in the majority world have experienced the effects of colonialism, and this has tended to have a negative impact on their development. For example, most South American countries were colonized for over 300 years by Spain, and Brazil was colonized by Portugal. Poorer countries have been exposed to many years of exploitation at the hands of richer countries, and this has limited their ability to progress economically (for further details, see the section below on global divisions and the impact of colonialism). In order to highlight some of the stark contrasts between rich and poor parts of the world, consider for a moment how your life might have been different if you were born into a majority world country. For example, assuming that you were born in Europe or North America, compare your life chances with someone who
was born in Sierra Leone, one of the poorest countries in the world today. Your life expectancy would be half of that in the minority world. Most people in Sierra Leone will not reach 45 years old: the life expectancy is 39 years for men and 43 years for women (CIA 2008).

In Sierra Leone, 157 children out of every 1000 die before their fifth birthday, which contrasts with 6 out of every 1000 children in the minority world. In Sierra Leone you would have only a 1 in 50 chance of going on to further education; if you are female, you would have virtually no chance, as 76 per cent of females in that country are illiterate. By contrast, in the UK almost

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**Table 9.1** Broad characteristics of the majority and minority worlds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Majority world</th>
<th>Minority world</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agrarian and rural</td>
<td>More urbanized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited industrialization</td>
<td>More extensive industrialization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More ‘traditional’</td>
<td>More ‘modern’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large populations</td>
<td>Smaller populations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>Wealth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-carbon footprint</td>
<td>High-carbon lifestyles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonized</td>
<td>Colonizers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Figure 9.2** Some women in India have to spend many hours of their time searching for firewood

© Samantha Punch
every other person has some kind of further education. In Sierra Leone, there is only one television set per 60 people, compared with over two televisions for every three people in the UK. In Sierra Leone there is only one telephone line between 240 people. How would you cope with limited or no access to a television or telephone? Not only are media communications scarce in poor countries, but also many other basic services, such as sanitation facilities, safe drinking water, education and health care, are inadequate or lacking.

Many things that we take for granted in the minority world can be so different in other parts of the world. For example, if we want to drink water, we just turn on a tap inside our home, but in places such as rural India and Bangladesh people may have to travel long distances to reach a communal drinking well. Alternatively, they may have no access to safe drinking water and may simply get water from a nearby dirty river. They may not even be able to boil that water to purify it because they may have no gas or electricity. Many people in the majority world have to cook on open fires using firewood, which can be in short supply (Figure 9.2). Daily events such as eating and drinking can take up most of some women’s day, because turning on a tap or a cooker are not options for them.

There are two key types of global inequalities that need to be considered: economic and social. Economic inequality refers mainly to levels of income. Worldwide there are an estimated 1.3 billion people living on less than $1 a day, which is approximately 20 per cent of the world’s population (UNDP 2006). Of these 1.3 billion people in absolute poverty, the lives of at least 800 million are continually at risk. These people do not necessarily know where their next meal is coming from and are in an extremely vulnerable position. Absolute poverty refers to a lack of resources that is life-threatening, such as lacking the adequate nutrition necessary for long-term survival. People who are in absolute poverty may be relying on aid, food relief or their own meagre returns such as from scavenging on rubbish tips (Figure 9.3). Their lack of income means that they will not have access to adequate food, which in turn can lead to malnutrition. Malnutrition contributes to more than half of the deaths of children under five in the majority world. People in absolute poverty are also likely to be vulnerable to diseases; many of these diseases could be easily prevented with access to immunization and dehydration sachets, improved access to safe drinking water, better sanitation conditions and increased education. Whilst absolute poverty refers to those who do not have enough to survive:

Relative poverty is based on the idea that the nature of poverty will be different in different social circumstances and therefore will change as society itself changes. . . . In practice, . . . all definitions and measures of poverty depend on the social circumstances in which they arise. For the most part poverty is therefore contrasted with standards of living that most people enjoy or take for granted in society, often seeking to identify those falling below some average measure.

(Alocck 2008: 39–40)

A closer look

**Children in the majority world**

- Every day 30,500 children under five die from preventable diseases and illnesses.
- One million children die from measles each year.
- Each year nearly 12 million children under five die in the majority world; of these deaths over six million (55 per cent) are attributable directly or indirectly to malnutrition.
- Each year 1.8 million children die as a result of diarrhoea.

(Source: UNDP 2006)

People who live in economic poverty also suffer from social inequalities, including a lack of access to education and health care, inadequate access to safe water and sanitation, lack of adequate infrastructure and inadequate shelter. Half of the population of the majority world, approximately 2.6 billion people, do not have access to basic sanitation:
Part 2 Introduction to social divisions

Figure 9.3 Living a precarious existence in Calcutta, India © Samantha Punch

Figure 9.4 Many houses in the majority world are insecure and unstable, made out of makeshift materials, and with whole families living cramped in one small room © Samantha Punch
Case study

Inadequate access to basic services in rural Bolivia

This case study illustrates some of the ways in which a lack of resources and basic services can affect people’s everyday lives. The two girls pictured in Figure 9.5, Marianela and Luisa, are nine and five years old and live in a relatively isolated rural community in southern Bolivia. They are small for their age as a result of poor diet and lack of adequate nutrition. They have to walk over an hour each way to school every day, but often they are unable to go because they are expected to contribute to the planting and harvesting of crops. They have five siblings so their parents cannot afford to send them all to school. The nearest town is five hours away by bus, but the local bus runs only on Mondays and Thursdays, so if they fall ill on another day of the week, the only means of transport is horseback to get to a doctor in the town.

In Figure 9.5 they are on their way to fetch water from the river, but it is dirty river water that they have to drink. In their community there are no toilets, no showers, no sewage systems, no electricity, no televisions and no telephone lines. It is interesting to compare this with rural Scotland, where even in the most isolated areas people have access to electricity and phone lines, and can even receive their post and have their rubbish collected on a regular basis.

Figure 9.5 Two girls on errands in Bolivia
© Samantha Punch
Most of the 1.1 billion people categorized as lacking access to clean water use about 5 litres a day – one-tenth of the average daily amount used in rich countries to flush toilets. On average, people in Europe use more than 200 litres – in the United States more than 400 litres. When a European person flushes a toilet or an American person showers, he or she is using more water than is available to hundreds of millions of individuals living in urban slums or arid areas of the developing world. Dripping taps in rich countries lose more water than is available each day to more than 1 billion people.

Therefore, global inequalities can be both economic (income levels) and social (access to adequate health services, housing, sanitation and education). The difference in under-five mortality rates between the majority and minority worlds has increased. As can be seen in Table 9.2, in sub-Saharan Africa 171 out of 1000 children die before they are five years old, compared with six in the minority world. If you are born into a minority world country, you can expect to live more than 30 years longer compared with people living in countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Latin America has higher literacy rates than Africa and Asia, where only 60 per cent of the adult population can read and write. Imagine what it would be like, as an adult, not to be able to read and write – 40 per cent of the population in Africa and Asia is in that position. Even when looking at life’s little luxuries, such as owning a television, you can see even greater differences between the majority and minority worlds.

As shown in Table 9.2, Latin America fares better on every count compared with South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Latin America is more economically developed and industrialized than Asia and Africa. The economically poorest continent in the majority world is Africa:

Many African countries are now relatively worse off than they were at independence more than forty years ago. World recession, indebtedness and a shortage of foreign exchange, coupled with limited achievements in agricultural development, poor health and welfare, rapid populations growth and crumbling infrastructures, have all contributed to the poverty in many African countries today.

However, some poor countries in Latin America experience as much poverty as in Africa, so we need to remember that there are inequalities within continents. It is important to recognize that neither the majority world nor the minority world is homogeneous. There are also great differences between and within countries; for example, Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Venezuela are richer and more industrialized than Paraguay, Honduras, Peru and Bolivia. There can also be huge inequalities between people in the same country, such as between those living in rural and urban areas, or between the working and middle classes.

Global inequality is about an unequal distribution of wealth and inadequate distribution of resources. It is not about absolute shortages. For example, millions of people in India suffer from malnutrition, but India exports beef, wheat and rice. Therefore, India’s malnutrition is not a problem of production, as there is enough food; rather, it is a problem of poverty, as many people cannot afford to buy the food that is available (Macionis and Plummer 2008).

We have seen that many people in the majority world are poor and undernourished, but it is worth remembering that many people in the minority world are overnourished; that is, we eat too much. On average in the minority world, in rich countries like ours, we consume about 3500 calories a day, which is more than we require to survive (Macionis and Plummer 2008). This excess can lead to obesity and related health

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Sub-Saharan Africa</th>
<th>South Asia</th>
<th>Latin America</th>
<th>Minority world</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GNP per capita</td>
<td>$611</td>
<td>$600</td>
<td>$3649</td>
<td>$32,232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under-fives mortality rate per 1000</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy</td>
<td>46 years</td>
<td>63 years</td>
<td>72 years</td>
<td>79 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult literacy rate</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of TVs per 1000 in 1996</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>638</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: UNICEF 2006)
problems, resulting in many people in the minority world spending large amounts of money on gym membership and specialized diets. In contrast, in the majority world, on average people consume fewer than 2000 calories a day. Many of them also engage in more physical labour than people do in the minority world, and so they require more calories. This means that people in the majority world are not consuming enough calories to maintain long-term survival.

Another grim thought to consider is this: in the time you spend at one university lecture of about 50 minutes’ duration, about 1500 people in the world die of starvation. Approximately 15 million people die of starvation each year (Macionis and Plummer 2008). This emphasizes the extreme global divisions that exist. As well as being aware of the stark contrasts between the majority and minority worlds, we should also consider the interconnections:

For example, problems of ‘over-development’ in the industrialized countries, such as unhealthy diet and obesity, have complex socio-economic causes and effects. High consumption levels with their associated high CO2 emissions in the industrialized countries not only have an impact on these countries, but also impact on developing countries through the global environmental effects of the emissions. Other examples of increasing interconnectedness between industrialized and developing countries are represented by the globalization of terrorism, security issues and pandemics (HIV/AIDS and avian flu for example).

On a global scale, the distribution of poverty between rich and poor continents can be seen clearly. Overall the majority world is much worse off both economically and socially than the minority world, but why is this the case? Why is the world divided up into such extremes of wealth and poverty? We may feel sorry for poor majority world countries in times of crisis, but perhaps we forget that our rich minority world countries have contributed to their economically poor status, both in the past and in the present. Historically colonialism initiated the patterns of global inequalities, and currently debts and the unequal global development of capitalism mean that the richer countries continue to exploit the poorer ones. The dominant role of the minority world has much to answer for in relation to the continued existence of global poverty, and it is to these issues that we now turn.

Global divisions and the impact of colonialism

The economic and social development of the majority world has been shaped to a large extent by its colonial past. It is interesting to note that nearly all the economically poor countries of the world were once colonies of the economically richer countries. It could be argued that rich countries, like most readers of this book are likely to be from, got richer as a result of making poor countries poorer. If we feel some form of moral outrage at the impoverished images of poor people living in the majority world, then it might be worth remembering that our societies in part created this poverty by extracting their riches and making them to a large extent economically dependent on the richer, more powerful countries of the minority world. The aim here is not to make you feel guilty for being born into a wealthy, privileged society, but to encourage you to reflect critically on the reasons for global inequalities.

McMichael (2000: 5) defines colonialism as ‘The subjugation by physical and psychological force of one culture by another – a colonizing power – through military conquest of territory’. Colonialism was a way of controlling overseas territories in order to facilitate further development of capitalism in Europe (Bernstein 2000).

Main periods of colonialism

- **Latin America, 1500s–1880s** – Colonial expansion of the Portuguese in Brazil and the Spanish in the rest of Latin America was much earlier and lasted much longer than the colonization of Asia and Africa.
- **Asia and Africa, 1800s–1950s (sub-Saharan Africa 1880s–1960s)** – In Africa most colonial expansion took place between 1850 and 1900, which is the period known as the ‘scramble for Africa’ by different European countries (the UK, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Spain and Portugal).

Stop and think

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of colonialism that have impacted on the lives of people in the majority world today?

There were differences in the ways that colonial powers ruled and organized their colonies, but there
were also some commonalities. The main aim of colonizers was to enhance their own financial positions and to search for goods to take back to Europe, rather than settling permanently or developing the colonized areas. Many resources were exploited, such as gold, silver and other precious metals, spices and opium. Natural resources were extracted, taken to the minority world, made into manufactured goods, and then sold back to the majority world at a far higher price. Consequently some local markets were developed in order to sell the imported manufactured goods from Europe, but it was only really the wealthy expatriates and indigenous elite who could afford them (Potter et al. 2008). Colonial territories were organized to produce cheap primary products at minimal cost, while simultaneously becoming an increasing market for industrial products (Bernstein 2000). This process reflects the minority world’s control over global markets, which can still be seen today. Colonization thus impacted heavily on both economic and social life, and it has subsequently shaped and contributed to the majority world’s poverty and economic dependency on the minority world.

**Neo-colonialism**

How does domination of the majority world by the minority world continue despite the fact that all the former colonies have now gained their political independence (most by the 1960s)? Why is global inequality getting worse rather than better? How can we explain why richer countries are getting richer and poorer countries are getting poorer? It has been argued that neo-colonialism is the process that continues to sustain the exploitation and poverty of majority world countries:

**Neo-colonialism literally means a new form of colonialism, a form of socio-economic domination from outside that does not rely on direct political control.**

(Webster 1990: 79)

Colonialism had established international laws and regulations in relation to prices and banking systems, and most of these have continued to shape the world economy after colonialism (Webster 1990). Neo-colonialism refers to several things, including economic

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**A closer look**

**Characteristics of colonialism**

Webster (1990) discusses three main features of colonialism that tended to apply to most colonial situations:

- **Control over agricultural production and mineral extraction** — Colonies were a source of cheap raw materials (crops and minerals) and provided a market for manufactured goods from Europe. The process of controlling agricultural production often affected traditional land-holdings, as the focus was on the production of cash crops such as coffee, cocoa, sugar and tea for export rather than on meeting the subsistence needs of local people. As a result, many people lost access to land of their own and had to sell their labour power by working on large plantations or in mines. As Potter et al. (2008: 65) point out: ‘Colonies thus became associated with the production of one or two items, being forced to import whatever else was needed’.

- **The need for wage-labour** — Wage-labour was needed to work the mines and plantations. People had to work as many of them were now landless; they also had to earn money to pay taxes imposed by the colonizers. Forced labour (slaves) was used, and migrant labour was developed by encouraging people to move to areas where the mines and plantations were.

- **The imposition of a colonial system of law and order** — In order to control the colonies, the colonizers had to establish their authority and so they introduced a political, legal and administrative structure. This colonial administration was mainly in place to serve European interests and the development of capitalism in the minority world, rather than to develop the colonies themselves. Thus, internal markets were rarely developed as the emphasis was on production for export rather than on trying to serve local needs.
exploitation by transnational corporations (see the section below on the global economy), disadvantages of world trade, aid, loans and debt. Poorer countries find it increasingly difficult to compete in the global capitalist economy as they are not as able as the richer countries to develop large-scale capital-intensive industrialization. They tend to export raw materials but then have to import manufactured goods, which means that they receive relatively less for their exports while having to pay more for their imports.

Debt

Stop and think

➤ Did Live8 contribute positively towards alleviating debts in the majority world or, as some argue, was it a means for the rich to feel less guilty?

Majority world countries in the past have borrowed money from the richer countries of the minority world, and their levels of debt have increased so much because interest rates are so high. Every year (since 1983) poor countries pay out more money in loan repayments than the richer countries give in aid or invest in transnational corporations. In this sense the word ‘aid’ seems inappropriate, as the ‘aid’ that minority world countries are giving is much less than the loan repayment they are extracting. In recent years there have been many discussions about how to ‘help’ majority world countries to reorganize their massive debt repayments. In the 1980s the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) were created partly to address this issue. Conditions were imposed surrounding how the money would be paid back, and these were known as structural adjustment programmes (SAPs). The SAPs imposed economic rules on poor countries as an attempt to enable them to save money in some areas so they were able to pay back their debts. SAPs consisted largely of controlling wages, devaluation of currency (to improve competitiveness of exports), cuts in public spending, especially on education and health, and promotion of the free market (Green 1997). The opening up of free markets was hugely unpopular and more likely to benefit the minority world. SAPs often had very negative impacts on social and environmental issues, in particular on human wellbeing. For example, many women and children had to enter the labour market to help their families to survive. Wages were reduced, while unemployment and poverty increased:

Throughout the developing world, especially Africa, structural adjustment programmes have destroyed jobs and public services, while shaping local economies to the demand of transnational capital.

(Potter 2000: 92)

Thus, most of the SAPs were not successful and, in the 1990s, the concept of debt relief emerged. Major development charities, such as Oxfam, petitioned world leaders in 1996 to cancel unpayable debts of the poorest countries under a fair and transparent process. It was the first ever global petition, with 24 million signatures, and it increased the public’s awareness of majority-world debt (Potter et al. 2008). As a result, the debt relief initiative of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) emerged. In order to be eligible for relief, a country must be very poor as defined by the WB and IMF, have an unsustainable debt burden, and pursue good policies consistent with poverty reduction and sustained growth (World Bank 2001).

Therefore, in order to qualify for debt relief, countries now have to engage in poverty-reduction strategies (PRS), demonstrating how ‘poverty reduction’ is prioritized in government spending. They can use the funds that they would have used to pay off debts on their PRS, mostly targeting issues such as education, health, water and sanitation. Thus, if the HIPCs meet the requirements of the PRS, they no longer have to pay back their debts. However, this requires them to raise taxation and ensure that any revenue from productive activity is allocated to PRS. No additional resources are being provided to enable them to do this. Some writers argue that debt relief has only increased the levels of interference and policing of the majority world countries by the minority world:

The much vaunted debt cancellation that was rubber stamped at the G8 summit in Gleneagles in 2005 provided no new money or impetus for development for the developing world. In fact, debt relief has helped to entrench Western control, undermine democratic institutions and ensure that economic growth and serious development are not on the agenda for the countries most desperately in need of it.

(Dingle and Daley 2006)
Aid

Stop and think
➤ Is giving aid a good thing? Why do minority world governments give aid to the majority world? Can you think of any drawbacks or negative impacts of giving aid?

Aid is often seen as a way of helping poor countries to develop because they have been so crippled by their debts. Unlike a loan, aid does not have to be repaid. Different types of aid include short-term disaster relief, longer-term development aid and military aid. In 1970 the United Nations (UN) set out agreed targets for aid, suggesting that minority world governments should give 0.7 per cent of their gross national product (GNP) in aid. However, few countries have ever met this level of aid. For example, the UK gave 0.51 per cent of its GNP in 1979, but by 2000 this had fallen to 0.32 per cent (Regan 2002a). This figure is less than half what we should give according to the UN, although in recent years it has risen again. The USA is well below the recommended target, at 0.1 per cent. In 2005, only Denmark, the Netherlands, Luxemburg, Norway and Sweden had met or surpassed the recommended UN figure (Potter et al. 2008).

It is important to consider the reasons for giving aid and the motives of donor countries. Aid from governments in the minority world is supposed to be beneficial, but in the past it has often been ‘tied aid’, given on the condition that the recipient country buys specified goods from the donor country. For example, during the 1980s and early 1990s, 74 per cent of British bilateral aid was linked to contracts that involved buying British goods and services in return for the aid (Potter et al. 2008). Thus, the aid agreement becomes beneficial to Britain and increases the recipient country’s dependency on a richer country. Parfit (2002) refers to aid being used as a political bribe. Aid is often compromised by politics and may be given only to countries that adopt the ‘correct’ political position. This is often used to safeguard capitalism, and so aid from some parts of the minority world may be donated only to capitalist countries in the majority world.

Aid is given not only for humanitarian reasons but also as a way for richer countries to sustain their influence on ex-colonies or exert influence on new territories (Webster 1990). Thus, most aid has direct commercial benefit to the donor country and can be seen as both an economic and a political way of maintaining their dominant world position. Parfit (2002) argues that aid is a form of violence and a destructive force because usually it is a top-down approach imposed on the majority world. In addition, local elites tend to keep aid as urban-centred – for bureaucrats, entrepreneurs, politicians and industrial workers rather than for the mass of poor – and not much reaches isolated rural areas (Webster 1990). Furthermore, the consultants who undertake research into identifying what aid money should be spent on are often expatriates, living comfortably in urban areas, who go for brief field visits and fail to fully understand local situations and are conditioned by donor country approaches and priorities. It could even be said that aid creates jobs for European experts and expatriates still living in the ex-colonies.

A closer look

Critiques of aid
There are two principal critiques of aid, which highlight the different negative impacts of giving money to poorer countries:

● Liberal economic critique – This sees aid as an obstacle to material progress because it is an unproductive and inefficient use of capital (in line with modernization theorists; see below).

● Radical critique of aid – This claims that aid increases dependency on foreign capital and ultimately services minority world interests as they are enabled to continue to extract majority world resources (in line with dependency theorists; see below).

Despite criticisms from both right and left, aid continues to be given by the minority world and continues to be requested by the majority world.

(Adapted from Webster 1990: 162–71)
Potter et al. (2008) argue that, if poverty is to be reduced, then there need to be improvements in both the quality and the quantity of aid. It has been suggested that aid should be aimed at the poorest people in the poorest countries, with a focus on health and education rather than on exports, with reduced costs of delivering the aid, better management by involving local communities and discussing their needs, and an aim to work towards sustainability in improving the quality of life. Similarly, Webster (1990: 171) suggests that perhaps ‘aid should be given as advice/training for subsequent self-reliance so that rural and urban workers can regain control over their livelihoods’. Nowadays, in order to receive aid, governments have to demonstrate that they have effective social policies in place and engage in practices of good governance. The extent to which aid in the future will lead to more advantages than disadvantages for the majority world remains to be seen. It is worth bearing in mind that:

Ultimately, despite more than half a century of loans and foreign development aid, not a single so-called Third World nation has become a First World nation since the end of World War II.

(Leech 2012: 40)

Sociology of development

We have seen that the relationship between the majority world and the minority world is complex. The sociology of development is about explaining these unequal global power relations. The term ‘development’ implies notions of growth, change, accumulation, progress or improvement (Regan and Ruth 2002). Initially development was ‘the deliberate process to “develop” the “Third World” which began after World War II as much of it emerged from colonization’ (Sumner and Tribe 2008: 10). Traditionally, when development studies emerged in the 1940s, the term
‘development’ tended to refer to the economic growth of the majority world, which was widely assumed to be a good thing. However, ideas about development have changed quite dramatically over time and there is a lack of agreement about what it is and what direction it should take. There is also the question of who decides what “development” consists of (Sumner and Tribe 2008: 46). Generally development is about the process of improving people’s standard of living, but we need to recognize that it is as much about social development as it is about economic development. Development is a contested, ambiguous and complex concept. Yet, despite a diversity of definitions, there is

. . . a general agreement on the view that ‘development’ encompasses continuous ‘change’ in a variety of aspects of human society. The dimensions of development are extremely diverse, including economic, social, political, legal and institutional structures, technology in various forms (including the physical or natural sciences, engineering and communications), the environment, religion, the arts and culture.

(Sumner and Tribe 2008: 11)

Over time, the notion of development has been questioned, particularly because the majority world continues to remain poor and arguably ‘undeveloped’. Certainly there is a widening gap between the richest and poorest countries. As Chambers notes:

Development has been taken to mean different things at different times, in different places, and by different people in different professions and organizations. . . . Change is continuous in what changes and how it changes, and in what we see as good.

(Chambers 2005: 186)

A closer look

The meaning of ‘development’

Table 9.4 outlines three different definitions of ‘development’. The first is more historical, the second more related to policy and the third more ideological.

Table 9.4 Definitions of ‘development’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of development</th>
<th>Characteristics of the development process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Development’ as a long-term process of structural societal transformation</td>
<td>A major societal shift with a long-term outlook, for example moving from a rural or agriculture-based society to an urban or industrial-based society (sometimes referred to as a shift from ‘traditional’ to ‘modern’ society)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Development’ as a short- to medium-term outcome of desirable targets</td>
<td>A focus on the outcomes of change, with a relatively short-term outlook; achieving goals that can be measured and compared with targets, such as poverty reduction or changes in income levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Development’ as a dominant ‘discourse’ of Western modernity</td>
<td>A postmodern conceptualization of development based on a view that development has resulted in ‘bad’ change and ‘bad’ outcomes, which have been imposed on the majority world by the minority world. This has led to development being equated with ‘modernity’ and superiority. The “discourse” is socially constructed and places values on certain assets which the South does not have. Thus, it is argued, the South is viewed as “inferior” (Sumner and Tribe 2008: 15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: adapted from Sumner and Tribe 2008: 11–16)

He emphasises that ‘If development means good change, questions arise about what is good and what sort of change matters’ (Chambers 2005: 184). Furthermore, development refers to values, aspirations and social goals and is also linked to ethical and moral ideas (Potter et al. 2008). This is why debates about development can be emotionally charged and linked to strong ideas about how the world should develop and progress.

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Development theories

Competing theories of social change exist in relation to the ways in which the minority world has developed, such as the classic theories of Marx, Weber and Durkheim, followed by those of more modern social theorists such as Foucault, Parsons and Giddens (see Chapter 2). There are many social theorists, and they all have different views as to how and why societies have evolved and developed over time. It is unsurprising, then, that many different theories have been put forward to explain how the majority world has developed (or not developed) over time. Collectively, these are known as development theories, and within this large body of theory there are different schools of thought; the main ones are considered here.

Modernization theory

Modernization theory emerged in the 1950s around the time that the colonized countries were gaining their independence. There was much discussion about how these countries would develop and modernize. According to modernization theorists, development ‘depends on “traditional”, “primitive” values being displaced by modern ones’ (Webster 1990: 49).

Webster suggests that traditional societies have three key features:

- traditionalism is dominant (people are perceived to be tied to the past and not welcoming of new ideas);
- the kinship system is important (one’s role and status in society is ascribed, not achieved);
- traditional societies have an ‘emotional, superstitious and fatalistic approach to the world’ (Webster 1990: 50).

This contrasts with modern societies, where people are more likely to progress culturally than hold on to traditional customs, where kinship is less important as status can be earned through achievement, and where people are forward-looking and willing to be innovative. Modernization theorists argue that tradition acts like a barrier to development and that poor countries can be too reluctant to change and modernize. For example, they suggest that rural peasants are perhaps too keen to hold on to their traditions rather than move forward and change to more modern lifestyles. Modernization theory claims that industrialization is the answer to accumulating wealth (see Rostow’s model of economic development in the case study below). Poor countries in the majority world should follow the industrial model of the minority world, and their resulting economic growth would result in a decline in poverty. As we shall see later in this section, these ideas have been criticized for being too simplistic.

A closer look

Development theories over time

Classic development theories

- 1950s and 1960s: modernization theory – After colonialism there was a perceived need for the majority world to ‘modernize’ and industrialize in similar ways to the capitalist progress of the minority world.
- 1970s: theories of underdevelopment: dependency theory and world systems theory – These theories emerged as a critique of modernization theory, recognizing that it was too simplistic to expect the majority world to industrialize along Western lines when their historical development had been so hindered by colonialism.

Alternative development theories

- 1980s: sustainable development – This is a call to ensure that processes of development are sustainable by not exhausting resources and not compromising the needs of future generations.
- 1990s: participatory development – This reflects a recognition that, if development is to be successful, people should be given opportunities to participate and have a say in their own development. Effective progress cannot simply be imposed from above or from outside; rather, it needs to involve those at the grass-roots level.

Each of these accounts varies as to what the ‘problem’ of development is and what the possible solutions are.
Hettne (1995) notes the strong role of dichotomy in early development thinking. For example, in modernization theory there is a juxtaposition of traditional versus modern societies that is often polarized as backward or primitive societies in contrast to advanced and civilized societies. It is often assumed that there is a dualism between the traditional, indigenous and underdeveloped majority world versus the modern, developed and Westernized minority world (Potter et al. 2008).

Webster (1990) argues that, according to modernization theory, the history of development of industrialization in the minority world is the blueprint for majority world societies and that they should follow the same pathway. Thus, development can be achieved by imitating the Western model. In other words, modernization is often perceived as being the same as Westernization (Hettne 1995) and is also based predominantly on urban industrial growth. The minority world can help the majority world to develop in such a way by introducing ideas and technologies. Thus, the experience of the West can assist other countries in ‘catching up’ by sharing both capital and know-how (Potter et al. 2008).

Modernization theory perceives development to be a relatively straightforward, linear process. It recognizes that different societies are at different stages of development, and that some are more modernized than others, but if countries have the right values and ambition then underdevelopment can be overcome, especially by entrepreneurial innovations (Potter et al. 2008). The important characteristics are individual motivation and capital accumulation (Webster 1990). Thus, modernization theory provided... a great source of justification for the activities of development agencies. A whole range of policies were fostered by modernisation theory... They have included the injection of capital to aid both industrial ‘take-off’ and the commercialisation of agriculture, the training of an entrepreneurial elite in the values and motivations most likely to promote free enterprise, the expansion of educational programmes, and only assisting ‘democratic’ (or notionally democratic) countries.

(Webster 1990: 55)

Modernization theorists assume that developing the urban centre eventually leads to a ‘trickling down’ of growth to the more peripheral backward regions, so that it spreads from urban to rural areas. However, as we shall see in the following section, others strongly disagree with this view. According to modernization theory, these trickle-down effects are assumed to be inevitable (Hirschman 1958, cited in Potter et al. 2008). Hirschman’s view is that governments should not intervene in order to reduce inequalities, as there will be spin-off effects of growth in peripheral areas. This goes hand in hand with the liberal model of ‘letting the market decide’. Modernization theory, although academically criticized (see below), came to represent a framework for much development policy that was strongly associated with the 1950s through to the early 1970s.

**Case study**

**Rostow’s Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto**

Rostow (1960) developed a five-stage model of development, based on an analysis of the British industrial revolution:

1. The traditional society.
2. The preconditions for take-off.
3. Take-off.
4. The drive to maturity.
5. The age of high mass consumption.

According to Rostow the key features for success and development are entrepreneurial ambition alongside capital accumulation and investment. His model suggested that all countries have an equal chance to progress. The central argument was that the majority world needed to industrialize in order to develop (Potter et al. 2008).
Dependency theory

Dependency theory emerged from Latin America in the 1960s as a way of explaining the continued failure of Latin American countries to develop economically. Its followers were also referred to as the Latin American structuralists because they focused on the unseen structures that may be held to mould and shape society (Potter et al. 2008). They argued that ‘persistent poverty in countries like Argentina, Peru, Chile and Brazil was caused by exposure to the economic and political influences of the advanced countries’ (Webster 1990: 85). This school of thought became globally popular in the 1970s, particularly the argument that the growth of the majority world led to the simultaneous underdevelopment of the majority world because the industrialized countries exploited the poorer countries and developed at their expense. It was recognized that the core (the privileged minority world) can learn from the periphery (the marginalized majority world) (Potter et al. 2008).

Thus, in the 1970s, dependency theorists argued that industrialization and economic development as encouraged by modernization theorists had not happened in the majority world. They explained that it would not happen because poor countries would not be able to follow the same path of industrial development as that of the richer countries. Dependency theory states that the colonial past of the majority world cannot be ignored and that the majority world continues to be dominated by the minority world in a form of neo-colonialism, as we saw earlier. Dependency theorists explain global inequality in terms of the historical exploitation of poor societies by rich ones, and argue that this unequal power relationship continues today in a variety of forms (debt, aid, transnational corporations, unequal global trading). According to them, this system of neo-colonialism makes poor societies poorer and more reliant on richer, capitalist societies.

Andre Gunder Frank’s book *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (1967) was widely known for arguing that the continued poverty in the majority world was a reflection of its ‘dependency’ on the minority world. His key argument was that development and underdevelopment are opposite sides of the same coin, and both are the outcome of capitalism (Potter et al. 2008). *The Development of Underdevelopment*, which he wrote in 1966, summarized his approach: ‘the condition of developing countries is not the outcome of inertia, misfortune, chance, climatic conditions or whatever, but rather a reflection of the manner of their incorporation into the global capitalist system’ (Potter et al. 2008: 110). According to Frank (1966), underdevelopment is the direct outcome of development elsewhere. In other words, the advanced capitalist world both exploited the majority world and kept it underdeveloped.

Hettne (1995) points out that dependency theorists emphasize that the international division of labour is a key barrier to development rather than a lack of skill or capital. Frank (1967) argued that colonialism forced a specialization of production on majority world countries. This led them to mainly sell raw materials that the minority world needed and resulted in their production being limited, mostly specialized and export-oriented:

The Third World elites were incorporated into this system and did little to establish a more diverse, independent form of economic activity. They became the mere intermediaries between the rich purchasers and the poor (peasant) producers... While the Third World elite enjoy a high standard of living from this relationship, the masses experience chronic deprivation as their surplus production is taken from them in the local rural region and transferred to the rich farmers and merchants in their own country and then on abroad. (Webster 1990: 85)

Thus, Frank (1967) argues that there is a ‘chain of dependency’ going from rich countries (which he calls ‘metropoles’) to peripheral, subordinate areas (‘satellites’). Then, within ‘satellites’ there are hierarchies running from rich merchants down to peasants. Hence, the process of subordination and exploitation operates both internationally and internally within countries, where backwardness results from being at the bottom of the dependence hierarchy (Potter et al. 2008). Frank suggests that this means that the satellites are held back by the metropoles.

According to dependency theorists, the only way of stopping the exploitation is if the chain of dependency (Figure 9.6) is broken. The working class in the majority world could achieve this through a socialist revolution (Webster 1990). Thus, ‘the development of young economies required withdrawal from the structure of exploitation that existed worldwide’ (Regan and Ruth 2002: 31). The other alternative requires state intervention in order to weaken the dominance of the global system by imposing controls on trade and transnational corporations, as well as facilitating local production and indigenous development (Potter et al.
Thus, dependency theory argues that the historical process of colonialism, and the continued existence of neo-colonialism, is of extreme importance in explaining global inequalities.

Alternative development

From the 1950s to the 1980s modernization and dependency theories dominated the discussions of development theorists. During the 1980s it was recognized that both of these theoretical positions were flawed and did not adequately reflect the contemporary processes of development. This led to the emergence of more context-specific micro-theories based on empirical research:

Modernization theories were criticized for their overriding belief in a linear, common path to development through economic growth and industrialization, especially as the environmental impacts of industrialization became more evident. There were also criticisms of a perceived over-emphasis on the ‘macro’ to the neglect of the ‘micro’. (Sumner and Tribe 2008: 87)

Thus, rather than having grand theories to explain the whole process of development, smaller-scale, context-specific theories were developed, such as participatory development (see below) and sustainable development (see Chapter 10). By the 1990s this new way of thinking about development became known as ‘alternative development’ or ‘another development’. The approach was also referred to as ‘development from below’, ‘grass-roots development’ and a ‘bottom-up approach’. The new paradigm emerged because ‘development’ had not really been working. Although some economic and social advances had been made, on the whole poverty in the majority world was not being alleviated and in some cases, such as sub-Saharan Africa, it was getting worse.

Some argued that development was:

. . . at best, an irrelevance which has failed to meet its own aims to improve standards of living and, at worst, has been a neo-colonial or western imposition on ‘the Other’ by claiming to ‘know’ about ‘the Other’ and what is good for ‘the Other’. (Sumner and Tribe 2008: 164)
Development was not trickling down to the poor, so there had to be a major rethink about what development entails. From the mid-1980s some anti-development thinking emerged, with talk of ‘the end of development’ (see Parfit 2002) or being in an age of post-development. Thus, alternative approaches to development responded to this crisis by focusing on sustainability and participation as a possible way of avoiding some of the mistakes that had been made.

It is thought that one of the key solutions to the problems of development is self-reliance:

- ‘Dependency’ as a concept is too vague and difficult to measure
- Implies that the countries of the majority world are static and that all the surplus is taken out to the minority world so that no internal development is possible
- Focuses on the exchange and transfer of surplus from satellites to metropoles, yet does not fully explain this process, denying that it may lead to some local development
- Fails to analyse production relations properly, overlooking that there is potential for industrial growth in the majority world
- Too economistic: suggests that the only way out is by denouncing the global economy, which nowadays is not particularly realistic
- Fails to recognize the role of cultural processes, and that underdevelopment is also influenced and shaped by local cultures and local political structures
- Fails to recognize that internal obstacles to growth are just as political as economic: the majority world is also at fault – majority world countries not only are passive victims but also must address internal problems, such as unstable governments, political in-fighting and corruption

(Sources: adapted from Webster 1990)

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The concept of self-reliance not only implies breaking the tie of dependency on the industrial centre but also an acceptance of the need to use available resources as efficiently and frugally as possible.

(Webster 1990: 181)

Sustainable development stresses the need for self-reliance and ecological sensitivity (this approach is discussed in detail in Chapter 10). Like sustainability, processes of participation are also central in recent approaches to development. The danger of development is that

. . . the poor are seen almost as passive victims and subjects of investigation rather than as human beings with something to contribute to both the investigation of their conditions and its alleviation. The poor often have quite different interpretations from outsiders about the particular problems they face. Rather than income levels or housing conditions, they place great importance on their vulnerability to sudden stress through insecurity.

(Drakakis-Smith 2000: 133)
Participatory approaches: a way forward?

Frequently in the past ‘outsiders’, often from the minority world, assumed that they knew what poor people wanted. There is a more recent recognition that we need to understand and learn from indigenous knowledge: ‘Participatory approaches essentially developed out of research techniques which sought to give citizens a greater voice in the decision-making processes affecting their lives’ (Drakakis-Smith 2000: 178). This is much broader than merely listening to people’s views; it is about empowering people to change their environment and to take action to improve their living standards. This kind of bottom-up development means ‘facilitating a process through which the poor can begin to define and work towards their own development’ (Parfitt 2002: 159). It is about providing projects that are more responsive to local people’s needs and are less imposed from the outside. Local people are encouraged to identify and analyse their own problems and then to generate local knowledge on which appropriate action can be based (Parfitt 2002).

Robert Chambers (2005) is one of the key figures in promoting participatory development and is known for trying to put the last first (i.e. the poor before the rich). In particular he advocates trying to involve the most marginalized people, ‘the poorest of the poor’. Shepherd (1998) reminds us that participation is also concerned with increasing local people’s control over resources and is related to issues of equity and empowerment. Participatory development should involve collaborative planning, whereby a range of stakeholders are consulted, such as local government and policymakers, rich farmers who own much land, poor farmers who own little or no land, farmers’ families, and young people. This enables issues relating to gender, age and generation to be taken into account, rather than focusing only on the perspectives of male adults. Excluding different groups such as women or children from development initiatives is detrimental not only to the young people or women concerned but also to development goals and the effectiveness of projects or relevance of policies (Chawla and Johnson 2004). This is a much more complex approach to development:

Consultation with groups who are likely to be principally affected (either positively or negatively) by a project, programme or policy can provide a basis for an enhanced positive impact, and/or a reduced negative impact . . . The process of consultation – or participation – can be used as a basis for the modification of the design of a project, programme or policy in order to make it more acceptable and more effective in achieving the objectives and priorities of communities.

(Sumner and Tribe 2008: 142–3)

Participatory research has certainly increased our understanding about the complexity and diversity of poor people’s livelihoods. However, there are different definitions of participation, which reflect the varying degrees to which people participate:

- Participation as a voluntary contribution, where people have some say and their voice is heard to some extent but they do not play a key role in shaping the development programme
- Participation consisting of people’s involvement in decision-making processes, in implementing and evaluating the development programme
- Participation as organized efforts to control resources and be empowered
- Community participation as an active process whereby participants influence the direction, execution and outcomes of a development project (Parfitt 2002).

Different levels of participation range from being tokenistic, to being consulted and informed, to participating fully throughout the development process. There is a danger that development projects may only pay lip-service to notions of participation, and that groups are informed about proposed interventions, rather than becoming agents of their own development in a meaningful way: ‘Often, however, the consultation process is restricted to “key” figures in the community with a corresponding limitation in beneficiaries’ (Drakakis-Smith 2000: 180).

Meaningful participation is extremely difficult to achieve in practice and means changing existing power relations in decision-making and empowering those who previously have been ignored. As we have seen, participatory development is about increasing local people’s control over resources; therefore, it is also linked to power relationships, because in order for effective participation to take place, a redistribution of power has to take place (Shepherd 1998). This has the potential to create conflicts as not everyone will be happy about redistributing power from the powerful to...
the powerless. Many people may find it threatening to their existing position in society.

Participatory development is not a straightforward process, but in order to facilitate hearing the voices of the most marginalized people a range of participatory techniques have been developed. Over the years different terms have been used to describe these methods: participatory rural appraisal (PRA), participatory action research (PAR) and rapid rural appraisal (RRA). The aim of participatory techniques is to bring insiders and outsiders to a closer understanding of each other. Visual and verbal tools are used to encourage local people to express their views and have their opinions taken into account when thinking about community planning and development (Shepherd 1998). The visual and accessible nature of many exercises enables non-literate people to participate.

Critiques of participatory development

It is important to be aware that, while there are strong arguments for participatory development as an appropriate approach to improving people's livelihoods, there are also many problems associated with it. It is extremely difficult to ensure that participation is approached in the right kind of way. Cooke and Kothari's book Participation: The New Tyranny? (2001) puts forward some very strong criticisms that challenge the claims of participatory development, particularly the assumptions about it being more effective than other approaches, and the often misplaced assumption that it always empowers poor people. Participatory development is highly complex and problematic to achieve effectively. McGee (2002) refers to this as being a predominance of rhetoric over authenticity; there can be more talk rather than action in relation to participation. She also recognizes that most participation on the ground is still just about people 'participating in projects' rather than becoming fully empowered and implementing change and improvements in their own livelihoods. Thus, we need to be aware that participation can be used superficially, insensitively and tokenistically.

As Shepherd suggests, there is a danger that it becomes a quick-fix solution, with the assumption that, just because participatory techniques are being employed, then the project must therefore be 'participatory'. He argues that 'Participation requires attitude change: understanding, humility, flexibility and patience' (Shepherd 1998: 182–3). Training in participatory methods is needed at all levels if people are to understand fully how they should work in practice. For example, if development workers are trained only briefly in PRA, then they may use the techniques ritualistically as a way of building rapport initially but then continue the project in a top-down way. Training needs to be continuous and reflexive, not just a one-off session at the start of a development project. Thus, participatory development can be an expensive, time-consuming and very small-scale approach. It involves great time commitments from farmers, development workers, researchers and other participants (Shepherd 1998). Furthermore, it can be a long time before changes emerge; much patience may be required to wait for results. If people do not see any tangible benefits for some time, then their motivation to continue to participate may decrease. Another problem is that enabling people to participate and have their voices heard may lead to unrealistic expectations of what participatory development can achieve.

Parfitt (2002) reminds us that outsiders need to learn from people on the ground, rather than overemphasizing their own views. Sometimes development practitioners impose their ideologies and definitions. Furthermore, many grass-roots people may not be used to criticizing the common discourses of the dominant elites. In addition, if care is not taken to enable the most marginalized people to participate, then it may be that the usual people take part – the most educated and the most articulate. Women, children, disabled people, people from ethnic minorities and very poor people are likely to remain excluded if they are not prioritized (Shepherd 1998). It can be difficult to incorporate everyone's voices, to be sensitive to issues of gender and generation and to have a reflexive understanding of power and participation. As Parpart reminds us, the difficulties of truly listening to others in an open, interactive way should not be underestimated:

*It requires the recognition that differences, and different voices, cannot just be heard, that language is powerful and that subjectivity (voices) are constructed and embedded in the complex experiential and discursive environments of daily life. Overcoming these barriers is not easy.*

(Parfitt 1995: 239)

However, despite all the problems, limitations and 'cautious optimism' associated with participatory
development, McGee notes that the development agenda has now changed as a result of the participation discourse:

At the level of rhetoric, the participation orthodoxy no longer finds it sufficient to permit ‘them’ to participate in ‘our’ projects, but recognizes that ‘our’ projects are not going to change their lives much, and seeks to find out what ‘their’ projects of life might be, and how we – practitioners, academics, NGOs [non-governmental organizations], official agencies and partner governments – might most usefully participate in them.

(McGee 2002: 113)

For participatory development to be effective, a range of facilitating factors need to be in place: appropriate training, political support, decentralization, community organizations, availability of good leaders and managers, and technologies that promote self-reliance.

Thus, a bottom-up approach offers no easy solution, as it needs to be context-specific and linked closely to the particular sociocultural, historical and institutional conditions (Potter et al. 2008). For it to be effective, it should be based on the use of local resources, self-reliance, appropriate technology and participation. What is right for one country may not be right for another. The type of alternative development strategy that is applied needs to be tailored to the particular socioeconomic and cultural context.

Globalization

Stop and think

➤ Is globalization new? Or is it just an extension of earlier global processes?
➤ Is the world really becoming more uniform? Or are inequalities increasing?
➤ Will the benefits of globalization trickle down and improve the lives of the poorest people, or will there be increasing polarization between the rich and the poor?

Whether development is considered to have been successful in parts or a failure at times, there is little doubt that globalization is a fact of twenty-first-century life (Martell 2010). Like the term ‘development’, globalization is also a highly contentious and contested concept. There are different definitions, many of which refer to the blurring of boundaries between the local and the global: ‘a world in which societies, cultures, politics and economies have, in some sense, come closer together’ (Kiely 1998: 3). Hence it is a stretching of social, political and economic activities across countries and continents, when ‘the boundaries between domestic matters and global affairs become increasingly blurred’ (McGrew 2000: 347).

A key feature of globalization is the notion of global interconnectedness (Skilair 1999): ‘the free movement of goods, services, capital, information and, in some
instances, people, across national boundaries' (Potter et al. 2008: 128). People increasingly talk about a 'globalizing world' and an era of global change. This is in relation to a range of changes, such as the notion of a global economy (trade and investment) and a global culture. It also includes recent developments in communications such as the Internet and email. New forms of communication and transport have led to the speeding up of global interaction: goods, ideas, information, capital and people can be linked up increasingly quickly. Globalization also applies to the way in which the effects of distant events can be felt locally:

\[\ldots\text{ it refers to the ways in which developments in one region can rapidly come to have significant consequences for the security and well-being of communities in quite distant regions of the globe.}\]

(McGrew 2000: 347)

What is happening in one part of the world can affect far away locations; local events have global consequences. For example, the events of 11 September 2001 in New York had a big impact on global tourism as many people cancelled or postponed their travel plans. In London, some theatres had to close because they were not being attended by North American visitors, and even as far away as Hong Kong some tourist companies were struggling to get enough people to be able to organize day trips to local attractions.

There are some who connect the negative aspects of globalization to terrorism: 'The linking of globalization, inequalities, division and danger in the post-11 September 2001 world is highly salient' (Potter et al. 2008: 169). Some writers argue that continuing exploitation and increasing global inequalities contribute to the creation and development of terrorist networks. The efficiency of contemporary technology enables such networks to spread throughout the world, so to some extent terrorism is also 'globalized'. As Cohen and Kennedy suggest in relation to the events of 11 September:

In the midst of their grief and anger, it may be that it was too much to expect that the American people would ask, let alone answer, this question: Does the growing inequality both within and between the nations of the world, coupled with a one-sided exercise of power by a few actors go some way towards explaining why violent and abusive acts are perpetrated by criminal and terrorist gangs against innocent citizens?

(Cohen and Kennedy 2007: 3)

'Globalization' is probably one of the most used and abused words in our vocabulary (Potter et al. 2008). Many things are blamed on globalization, and the world is now seen as more global. Many argue that globalization is not necessarily new, but that the rate and intensity of it have increased (McGrew 2000). Certainly the extent of global change is impressive when we consider the relatively recent advent of the Internet, email and mobile phones. Could you go back to 'surviving' without them? You might like to reflect on what changes you would have to make to your life if you no longer had such communication media.

Cohen and Kennedy point out that it is increasingly difficult to live without a global awareness of our connections with other people in distant places. For example, even in remote rural communities,

Jet planes and helicopters fly overhead, travellers appear as if from nowhere, roads are cut into the interior, mobile phones ring, the world's music pulsates from cheap transistor radios, while friends, neighbours and families share what they have seen on the ubiquitous TV screens.

(Cohen and Kennedy 2007: 7)

Even where there are no televisions or telephone lines, people can still be interconnected to the wider world to some extent. They may have more limited knowledge than people from other places, but they are likely to have some global awareness and information about life outside their community. Hence, a process that is related to globalization is 'globality':

Whereas globalization refers to the objective, external ties that bind us together, globality alludes to the subjective, personal awareness that many of us share, and are increasingly likely to share – a common fate.

(Cohen and Kennedy 2007: 7)

A key aspect of globality is reflexivity, and this is an important sociological concept. Reflexivity is the critical assessment of oneself and others. It is when we reflect on the consequences of our own and other people's actions, thereby having self-awareness and self-knowledge as we contemplate how our lives are changing. As we accumulate knowledge about how the social world works, we then revise our own behaviour in response to this new information (Cohen and Kennedy 2007). This happens all the time; for example, we become increasingly aware about using appropriate language in relation to changing understandings of social divisions.
such as race, disability and age. Older terms such as ‘third world’ become unacceptable, and new terms are introduced, such as ‘majority world’. Thus, globality leads to us thinking about ourselves collectively. It means that we have a common interest in collective action to solve global problems, such as having an environmental awareness or a concern for human rights. Globality encourages us to be reflexive about social problems that affect others and not just ourselves. Thus, globalization refers to a series of changes that are taking place, and globality refers to our awareness of those changes.

A shrinking world?

One of the central aspects of global change is the compression of time and space, which makes it seem like the world is getting smaller (Allen 1995). The world is considered to be shrinking as distances are effectively decreased through faster and more efficient transport. Improvements in communications, such as cable, satellite and digital television, mean that we are informed of what is happening in the world more rapidly than ever before. As we are increasingly aware of what is happening in distant places, what are the social implications of this? These global changes call for a rethinking of our ethical and moral responsibilities to people who live far away, as we now are more aware of how they live their lives (Potter et al. 2008). However, it is worth bearing in mind that the mass media tends to refer to the majority world only when reporting bad news such as environmental disasters, riots and famine. There is a danger that we can be bombarded with images of poverty, particularly during a crisis, and we become hardened to it.

Even though the world is shrinking, not everyone shares the benefits of globalization. In some parts of the world, having a television is a luxury that is unaffordable for some people. Places that are not well connected to the global network are strongly disadvantaged. For example, it can be more expensive to fly from poorer countries to rich countries because of limited or less frequent links with other airports. Thus, the process of the shrinking world in terms of time and space can be experienced by people in different ways.

There is increased interconnectivity because of improvements in electronic communication, particularly the Internet and email, but also mobile phones, text messages and faxes. We now have the ability to move information and data quickly and cheaply. This is often referred to as the coming of the ‘information society’ (Castells 1996). This may offer poor countries new opportunities to be more globally connected. However, we need to be wary about assuming that the majority world can benefit from the spread of new technologies (Potter et al. 2008). The expansion of information technology has been highly uneven, creating an international ‘digital divide’. Differences exist in the ability to access the Internet and in the skills required to use information technologies. Access to the Internet in many countries of the majority world is controlled by the state or is available only to a small minority who can afford it. Kiely points out:

At least 80 per cent of the world’s population still lack access to the most basic communication technologies, and nearly 50 countries have fewer than one telephone line per 100 people. There are more telephone lines in Manhattan than there are in the whole of sub-Saharan Africa. While the United States has 35 computers per 100 people, even rapidly developing South Korea has only 9, while for Ghana the figure is as low as 0.11. Although the number of Internet users has expanded dramatically in recent years, its use is still largely confined to Western Europe and the United States.

(Kiely 1998: 5)

There is massive global inequality in access to telephones and even greater unequal access to computers. Thus, as Potter et al. (2008) remind us, the role of the Internet in improving the development of the majority world is based on misplaced optimism as poor people are likely to be further marginalized as a result of technical advances. Without wide access to phones and computers, majority world countries are going to be even less able to compete in the global economy. Therefore, expensive technologies mean that the relatively rich become the information-rich and that the ‘digital divide is likely to exacerbate the differences existing between the world’s haves and have-nots in the twenty-first century’ (Potter et al. 2008: 145).

It is recognized that the impacts of globalization are very uneven and vary from region to region and from one social group to another. The impacts, like the term itself, are highly debated, uneven and diverse (Hoogvelt 2001). However, we do have to be wary about our use of the term ‘globalization’. It is a highly contested term in current social science thinking, and there are many different perspectives on it. Globalization is a complex process; the three main strands of globalization that we consider here are economic, cultural and political.
A closer look

Travel and new technologies

New technologies have facilitated the possibilities for travel around the globe. For example, before emails and the Internet, gap years, where minority world students took a year off to travel (often in the majority world) before university, would have been much more daunting adventures. Communication back home would have been infrequent and expensive, typically queuing up in a telecommunications office in a city waiting for the operator to connect them to their parents’ landline and hoping they would be there. Nowadays, locally bought SIM cards for mobile phones and international offers enable phone calls home to be far cheaper, more accessible and mobile. Communication technologies, such as emails, Skype and Facebook, have transformed the kind of contact that can be maintained across spatial boundaries. Some people who are travelling for a long period, may even feel that they have more contact with family and friends back home whilst they are at a long distance away compared with their usual levels of interaction. This may be because they have more time and possibly because they have more need to communicate. Furthermore, the Internet offers information about distant destinations which makes the booking and planning of travel far more straightforward. Technologies of transport (such as cheap travel) and communications (via computers or mobile phones) mean that remote places are now connected more easily and it seems that the world is shrinking.

A global economy?

There are three key economic aspects of globalization that this section considers: global cities, transnational corporations (TNCs) and the new international division of labour (NIDL). The majority world experiences the fastest rates of urbanization (the proportion of a national population living in urban centres):

For much of human history, life was rural. In the year 1800, 97 per cent of the world's population lived in rural areas. Wind the clock on 200 years and we find that 254 cities each contained over one million people. (Cohen and Kennedy 2007: 14)

One of the patterns of urban change in the majority world is that a high proportion of the urban population in some countries is concentrated in one or two major cities (Elliott 2006). ‘Megacity’ is a recent term used to describe a large sprawling urban complex with a population of more than eight million; many such cities are in the majority world. In contrast, ‘global cities’ or ‘world cities’ are those that dominate world affairs, and most of these are in the minority world; they include London, New York, Paris and Tokyo. Potter et al. (2008) argue that, despite this emerging network of world cities, these cities are highly centred and are not distributed evenly throughout the world. Most are located in the richer countries, although there are some important cities in certain parts of the majority world, such as Singapore, Bangkok, Johannesburg, Shanghai and Mexico. Overall most large cities in the majority world are not linked to global networks, compared with their counterparts in the minority world (Kiely 1998).

Friedmann (1995) argues that there are several key features of world cities that make them centres for capital accumulation. They have large populations and large manufacturing bases, they are finance and service centres, and they are a key link for transport to other places. Global cities are important as individual cities but also because of their relationship to each other. As Cohen and Kennedy point out:

Increasingly, many wealthier people living and working in global cities, or travelling there, find that they share conditions of life, attitudes, behaviour patterns and tastes with equivalent residents of other global cities. They lose their national culture or downgrade it in favour of an international and cosmopolitan culture. (Cohen and Kennedy 2000: 17)

It is worth remembering that not only wealthy people live in such cities; many poor people can suffer greater
marginalization and social exclusion as a result of living in world cities surrounded by so much wealth.

Transnational corporations (TNCs) are multinational firms that have the power to operate in more than one country. There has been capital investment from TNCs to the majority world, taking advantage of poorer countries being a source of cheap labour. The global economy is increasingly unstable because of fluctuations in commodity prices and exchange rates, and so TNCs have to cope with this uncertainty and take risks that majority world countries are less able to do. The location of TNCs in the majority world is limited geographically, focusing on South East Asia, South Africa, Mexico and parts of South America. Thus, like global cities, the distribution of TNCs is uneven and concentrated in particular areas. This can lead to increased inequalities between areas of the majority world. Some TNCs have annual turnovers that exceed the gross national products of some poor countries (Potter et al. 2008). TNCs represent the increasing concentration of capital on a world scale. Their growth is one of the key features of neo-colonialism as they exert control over the raw materials and labour power of the majority world.

There is a debate about the extent to which TNCs are beneficial or detrimental to the development of the majority world. Modernization theorists claim that multinational corporations will boost the host country’s economic development and that there will be a trickle-down effect of wealth (Webster 1990). They argue that TNCs create many jobs for local people and introduce new technologies and foreign capital, and that this will lead to some industrial development locally. In contrast, dependency theorists argue that TNCs do not benefit the majority world, as they do not serve their long-term needs. They suggest that TNCs do not lead to a redistribution of resources, nor do they enhance majority world countries’ capacity for self-determined development. Many of the benefits of TNCs are for the minority world companies themselves rather than for the host countries. For example, new production, innovations, capital and social surplus are unlikely to trickle down to the majority world (Potter et al. 2008).

Those in favour of dependency theory argue that multinationals only intensify global inequality, as they stifle the development of local industries that would provide a better source of local employment. Furthermore, TNCs tend to produce expensive consumer goods for export to rich countries rather than food and other necessities that local people need. Dependency theorists point out that TNCs set up in poor majority world countries because the cost of labour is so much cheaper there, and ‘most transnational companies invest the bulk of their capital in their home country, and most of these same companies’ foreign investment is in other ‘advanced’ capitalist countries’ (Kiely 1998: 11). Thus, TNCs move to poorer countries in order to exploit their cheap labour power, not to help them industrialize.

Investment by TNCs in the majority world has often been justified in the name of development, claiming that TNCs create employment, provide investment of capital and introduce new technologies. However, others argue that TNCs do not provide majority world people with many new skills, as the jobs often involve menial repetitive tasks and only a limited amount of the profit goes back into the local economy (Kiely 1998). In many ways it could be argued from a perspective of dependency theory that TNCs increase global divisions rather than decrease them, although modernization theorists are likely to disagree with this view.

Furthermore, industrial growth is distributed unequally at a global level. Nowadays economic activity is more globalized, as production processes have become more mobile and dispersed. This is often referred to as the new international division of labour (NIDL), which is ‘the shift from manufacturing in Northern countries to industrial production in the South where land and labour costs are cheaper’ (Willis 2005: 175). This ‘global shift’ (Dicken 2003) came about partly because of reduced industrial profits in Europe and the USA due to increasing costs of wages and the need to meet environmental standards in the minority world. New manufacturing plants were set up in the majority world, where costs are lower.

In October 2003, HSBC Bank announced that it was going to cut about 4,000 jobs from call centres in the UK and move them to Hyderabad in India. The Indian city has a suitably-qualified workforce at a fraction of the cost of the British workforce. In addition, telephone charges between the UK and India have fallen greatly, so making this movement financially viable. Before January 2001 a call from India to the UK would cost about 48.0 rupees, but by October 2003 this had fallen to 7.6 rupees.

(Willis 2005: 176–7)

This process was also facilitated by the recent developments in communications technology and the increasing mobility and flexibility of financial services. The speed of financial transactions has increased enormously in recent years; money can now exist in
electronic form only and can be sent around the world in seconds. For example, to send a Moneygram from a high-street travel agent in Scotland to a bank in Argentina, the money is guaranteed to be available for collection ten minutes after the transaction is completed. Thus, distance is now less important, as corporations and financial transactions move around in a ‘borderless’ world.

A global culture?

Stop and think

➤ To what extent can we talk about the existence of a global culture? If there is such a thing, whose culture is becoming more global?
➤ Are we increasingly becoming more similar in terms of cultural styles?

There has certainly been a rise of global corporations and marketing activities, and this has resulted in the availability of standardized products across the world. For example, product names such as McDonald’s, Coca-Cola, Nike and Levi can be seen everywhere. Even television programmes can become globalized, and series such as Big Brother and Pop Idol now appear in many different countries. Consequently some writers argue that, as a result of these global products and markets, places are becoming very similar but in a particular Westernized or ‘Americanized’ way. Minority world forms of consumption and lifestyles tend to be dominant, and it can be argued that cultural homogenization is a form of cultural imperialism:

Cultural imperialism is rooted in a common-sense notion many of us understand: that the reduction in cultural differences around the world – for example, that France does not seem as distinctive as it did 30 years ago – is because of the distribution by global corporations of commodified Western culture, a process which has worked to the advantage of the USA and Western nations ... Cultural flows are profoundly imbalanced, and dominant cultures are seen as threatening more vulnerable cultures. (Mackay 2000: 60)

Terms such as ‘Hollywoodization’, ‘Coca-Colanization’ and ‘McDonaldization’ reflect how this process tends to be an expansion of Western knowledge, capital and culture to the rest of the world (Tomlinson 1999). Some perceive this to be a negative process that encourages ‘rampant individualism, the trivializing obsession with consumerism and the endless search for distracting entertainment ... an empty materialism where money has become the sole measure of all things and people’ (Cohen and Kennedy 2007: 5).

The increasing similarity in consumer preferences and habits is often referred to as ‘cultural globalization’ or ‘global convergence’ (Potter 2002). The mass media have a strong influence in this process, as television, newspapers and magazines spread their advertising campaigns. Those people most able to engage with this global culture are from the middle and upper classes. Many poor people in the majority world may not be able to afford to eat in McDonald’s. However, although they may not be able to participate to the same extent as wealthier people in certain aspects of a globalized culture, they may take part at times, such as by owning a pair of jeans or drinking Coca-Cola. The capitalist system has a vested interest in globalizing the expectations of consumption aspirations and tastes so that more products can be sold (Potter et al. 2008):

Few individuals living under today’s global condition can escape being influenced by glimpses of the dazzlingly seductive lifestyles lived by the world’s celebrity figures, or by the temptations of other people’s cultural repertoires. This is because of our ceaseless exposure to the flows of ideas and information through the media, or because of migration and the stories and souvenirs brought by returning travellers. (Cohen and Kennedy 2007: 5)

However, we need to be wary about assuming that local traditions are being lost as a result of the invasion of outside influences and global images. The notion that the world is engaging in the same global culture is an exaggeration and an oversimplification. We may live in a more globalized world, where TNCs dominate world patterns of consumption and production, but this is not the same as becoming increasingly similar. Furthermore, global cultural processes can lead to new opportunities for cultural hybridization, as new and old processes are mixed, taking on new forms and being reinterpreted locally (Willis 2005). For example, Bollywood is India’s own version of Hollywood, which illustrates that different meanings can be attached to minority world consumption and lifestyles in different places.

Thus, rather than serving to erode local differences, global culture works alongside them (Allen 1995). It is
also important to recognize that, in relation to aspects of global culture such as fashion, music and tourism, it is not merely a one-way flow from the minority world to the majority world. Majority world products can also become popular and influential in the minority world, such as curries, reggae music and salsa dancing. Consequently, globalization increases the spread of cultures throughout the world, but it could be argued to lead as much to diversity and difference as to uniformity and sameness.

Global politics?

Processes of both economic and cultural globalization have led to changes in global politics:

It is apparent that the stretching of social relations across space is giving rise to new networks through which political demands and power are transmitted, and these may be both formal (for example, transnational governmental institutions such as the UN) and informal (for example, grassroots political communities such as the anti-globalization movement).

(Murray 2006: 169)

There are global links between national and international organizations. Murray (2006) explains that there are now three basic types of institution: national governments, international organizations (such as the UN, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank) and transnational organizations (such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), TNCs, environmental groups and international protest groups).

This has led to a debate over the role of the nation-state in contemporary societies. It can be said that globalization has, to some extent, eroded the role and power of the nation-state. States once held clear authority within their borders, as countries were clearly divided and protected by border controls. Now there is a notion of a more porous nation-state, partly because of the transnational movement of capital and uncensored forms of communication, like the World Wide Web. For example, it is very difficult for governments to control and police the Internet. Furthermore, there has been a rolling back of the state in relation to economic policies, as there has been a tendency to open up markets and have less state intervention:

The last two decades have witnessed a dramatic shift away from state intervention to the market as the emphasis upon deregulation, privatization and economic liberalization continue to make economies and societies more open to the world.

(McGrew 2000: 348)

There are two relatively polarized views on the extent to which globalization has affected the role of the nation-state. Waters (2001) argues that the ‘modernizers’ believe that globalization has led to the erosion of the nation-state as it now has less power and a smaller role compared with the past. Held (1991) asserts that cultural and economic processes along with increasingly powerful TNCs are reducing the power of nation-states. In contrast, more ‘realist’ thinkers such as Dicken (2003) argue that the role of nation-states is changing but that they are adapting and still hold an important regulatory role. Murray suggests that ‘Nation-states remain active in the reproduction of cultural values and norms, and perhaps even more so in the era of accelerated globalization as they seek a distinctive place on the global stage’ (Murray 2006: 185).

The anti-globalization movement

Unequal global trading and economic liberalization have brought a wave of anti-globalization and anti-capitalist protests:

The anti-globalization movement (AGM) is a nebulous term used to describe a wide range of protest, lobby and interest groups. Although the movement broadcasts its message through a variety of channels it is the proliferation of street protests, often planned to take place at the same time as important capitalist summits or events, that has brought the AGM to the attention of the world. Actions have been staged in places as diverse as Seattle, Genoa, London, Hyderabad and Wellington. Some see this ‘globalized resistance’ as a unified reaction/resistance to transnational regulatory processes from above.

(Murray 2006: 205)

Protesters feel that ‘a different world is possible’ and that globalization should be shaped by human intervention to enable it to be more sustainable and empowering for everyone. Global controls, standards, policies and even taxes could be introduced to make globalization more effective at reducing inequalities rather than increasing them:

... global institutions will need to be reformed and strengthened in appropriate ways if they are to deal
The war on terror

The war on terror instigated by the first George W. Bush administration (2000 to 2004) following the attacks of 9/11 is, arguably, shaping a new global geopolitical order. The USA and its major allies, including the UK, Spain, Pakistan and Australia, have undertaken both military and ‘diplomatic’ offensives in countries including Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Yemen, the Philippines, Indonesia, Syria, Sudan and Lebanon, in an attempt to neutralize the terrorist networks that were behind 9/11. Intelligence sharing at the natio-state level has also formed a central part of this ‘war’. The principal target is al-Qaeda, an alliance of radical Islamic groups that have used terrorist and military tactics for over two decades to defend what they perceive as the oppression of Muslims. The group was formed in 1988 by Osama Bin Laden in order to expand the mujahideen resistance to the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan. Despite US backing for this movement in the context of the Cold War, the USA and its Western allies (including Saudi Arabia) became the group’s principal targets in the 1990s, motivated principally by the West’s intervention in the Gulf War of 1990 to 1991 and the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The events of 9/11 represented the climax of this conflict and unleashed US efforts designed to remove the threat, although attempts to uproot the network, and to invade Iraq, were ongoing during the Clinton years and before. The rhetoric of al-Qaeda is that the West, led by the USA, is waging a new crusade in the Middle East designed to impose its will and culture, and as such the conflict has far deeper historical roots. The terrorist networks that have evolved, partly in response to the war, are thought to be truly worldwide in their extent and represent an amorphous and globalized target for the USA and its allies. In this sense the war is the first of its kind – fought against a group that is not spatially bounded and that does not identify itself with any one nation-state. The International Institute for Strategic Studies has estimated that al-Qaeda has over 18,000 militants at its disposal spread across sixty countries. Critics have argued that this greatly overestimates the true extent of the network and that such claims should be seen as part of the USA’s wartime propaganda.

The rhetoric of the USA during this ‘war’ has been ‘you are either with us or against us’, an approach which seeks to draw new geopolitical lines in ways which echo the Truman Doctrine. Those who clearly demonstrate that they are with the USA can expect grand rewards, as the issuing of reconstruction contracts in Iraq following the ‘end’ of the war there in 2004 illustrated . . .

Is it possible that we are moving into other defining moments in global geopolitics in the post-Cold War world? The Washington Consensus of neoliberalism and good governance is certainly being eclipsed by simplistic notions of ‘with us or against us’. If this were not the case, why has the West increasingly turned a blind eye to the most illiberal and undemocratic politics of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Indonesia, for example? What is clear is that, as always, the lines around which imagined global geopolitical divisions are drawn are contingent on the desires and needs of those who are most powerful.

What is for sure is that the broader war on terror has already been used as a means to promote the diffusion of neoliberalism . . . The challenge for the USA, as the hegemonic global force, is that it must have legitimacy in what it does – lest it fall prey to accusations of isolationism and self-interest. That the will of the United Nations was flouted in assembling the invasion of Iraq, that WMDs (weapons of mass destruction) were not found, and that some terrorist suspects have been held without trial in the US base Guantanamo Bay for over three years, has spurred on the global resistance movement which seeks to counter the unregulated and illegitimate actions of the US-led coalition. As it stands, however, it is probably most accurate to see the war on terror as an expansion of the post-Cold War order propagated by the world’s only superpower in its efforts to spread neoliberalism and the political models that best support this.

(Murray 2006: 197–201)

Questions

1. What, if any, are the links between globalization and terrorism?

2. Could it be argued that increasing global inequalities contribute to the emergence of global terrorism? If so, what are the sociological explanations for this?
with the transnational flows of the contemporary world in an effective and equitable way. In this context, the reinvigoration of the United Nations is absolutely essential for global stability. (Murray 2006: 217)

As Potter et al. (2008) point out, pro-globalists are in favour of global free trade but are far less global in relation to globally based taxes or the unrestricted movement of labour across borders. Minority world governments tend to maintain strict border controls and restrict access, particularly to people from the majority world. Some argue that the introduction of global taxes, such as on international financial transactions, could be used to decrease global poverty (Potter et al. 2008). Real efforts to strive towards a global redistribution of wealth seem sensible but have little support in practice. A global tax would also be difficult to monitor, collect and redistribute; but certainly, if the negative impacts of globalization are to be addressed, then some assertive action needs to be taken.

Migration

Many aspects of globalization, such as ‘the growth of transnational corporations, the competition for skilled labor, growing income inequality, and the opening of emerging economies’, have led to the contemporary period being referred to as an ‘age of migration’ (Goldin and Reinert 2012: 160). Worldwide there are currently more than 200 million migrants which is nearly 3 per cent of the world’s population. The majority are economic migrants alongside increasing numbers of students, refugees, asylum seekers and those migrating for family reasons. International migration can be beneficial and detrimental to both the sending and destination countries:

International migrants can bring highly motivated labour, economic skills and cultural renewal to many countries. They fill gaps in the labour market, particularly in affluent Western countries where the population is ageing and fertility is low. Nonetheless, they have managed to inflame public sentiments in many countries and politicians have consequently sought to control and restrict their movement. (Cohen and Kennedy 2007: 11)

The decision to migrate is often complex involving a weighing up of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors in both the home and destination regions (Punch 2007b; 2009). Goldin and Reinert argue that there are three key characteristics of migration which are intertwined:

. . . the individual agency of a migrant, the social dynamics of migration processes, and political and economic structures. To the extent that the decision to migrate is a choice, it is one that is influenced and constrained by a variety of factors. Migration assumes different levels of cost and risk for each individual depending on their level of education, financial resources, social capital, access to information, social networks, and other endowments. (Goldin and Reinert 2012: 208)

High levels of international migration have led to a marked increase in ‘transnational families’ who participate in social and economic networks which traverse national borders, linking places through a range of practices’ (Gardner 2012). For example, many working-class women from the majority world migrate to look after the children or older parents of middle-class women in the minority world, leaving their own children behind to be cared for by their husbands, parents or other kin. This is referred to as the global care chain (Hochschild 2000) and leads to the challenges of maintaining family ties at a distance. Such transnational families ‘learn to develop new, globalized parent–child relationships’ (Chambers 2012: 120). Transnational connections and identities involve complex emotions and communications across cultures and place (Gardner 2012).

A globalizing world?

One of the key questions to consider in relation to globalization is whether we are living in a shrinking world or a more unequal world. As we have seen, ‘the actual processes of globalisation that have occurred have been intrinsically uneven, unequal and unstable’ (Kiely 1998: 11). The world may be getting smaller for those living in the minority world or the elites in the majority world, but for the majority of the world’s population they may face greater vulnerability and exclusion as a result of global processes. Places are linked together in a globalizing world, but they are interrelated in very unequal ways. Given current patterns, inequality is more likely to increase rather than decrease. As Potter et al. (2008: 164) argue: ‘globalisation is not leading to uniformity, but to heterogeneity and differences between places. They suggest that, in the light of global norms of
consumption, there is a tendency for convergence and increasing similarity. In contrast, in relation to production and ownership, there is a tendency towards divergence. There are increasing differences in ownership of capital and productive capabilities, which are spread unevenly and concentrated in specific world areas. Thus, it could be said that patterns of consumption are becoming more similar across the world, but patterns of production are becoming increasingly different.

A closer look

Managing globalization

According to McGrew (2000), there are three key strategies for managing globalization:
- ‘Regulation’ can mean developing states both attempting to reform the international institutions which embody the rules of the global system and trying to see those rules enforced favourably. For example, the WTO is used by majority world countries to ensure that minority world countries abide by multilateral trade rules.
- ‘Regionalism replaces global solidarity among all developing countries with effective economic groupings on a regional basis.’ For example, the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) and the South American Common Market (MERCOSUR) retain some protection from competition from minority world countries.
- ‘Resistance refers to challenges “from below” as social movements, citizen’s groups and communities build transnational alliances to contest the neoliberal vision of globalization and promote an alternative programme.’ For example, a global campaign consisting of social, environmental, women’s and development movements joined forces to protest against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), which then collapsed in 1998.

(Adapted from McGrew 2000: 360–64)

In respect of homogenization–heterogenization, two generalized views have emerged concerning the relationships between globalization and patterns of development. The first view is the familiar claim that places around the world are fast becoming, if not exactly the same, then certainly increasingly similar. ... The second and far more realistic stance present almost the reverse view, that rather than uniformity, globalization is resulting in greater difference, flexibility, permeability, openness and hybridity, both between places and between cultures. Following on from this perspective, far from leading to a uniform world, globalization is viewed as being closely connected with the process of uneven development and the perpetuation of spatial inequalities.

(Potter 2002: 192)

As we have seen, globalization is a highly contentious issue. There are heated debates about the extent to which globalization has positive and negative effects. On the one hand, there are those who perceive it positively, as having the potential to make societies richer through trade and improved communication around the world. On the other hand, there are others who perceive globalization as contributing to the exploitation of the poor by the rich and as a threat to traditional cultures as the process of modernization changes societies. The rise of countries such as China and India raises questions of whether or not globalization and free trade can help solve poverty and inequality. The debate is torn between those who argue in favour of neoliberal globalization and free trade on the one hand and arguments for protectionism and regionalism on the other. For example, Wolf (2004) suggests that the growth of China illustrates that globalization and free trade are the answer, whereas authors such as Wade (2004) and Kaplinsky (2005) argue that China’s recent development does not show this clearly. China is an interesting case as it somewhat paradoxically combines economic liberalization and a strong state (Fernandez Jilberto and Hogenboom 2010). Furthermore, China has recently been seeking alliances with countries in the majority world, leading to the development of both economic and political benefits as well as challenges (see below). Thus, the changing world stratification complicates and alters the picture of global inequality.
The rise of China

The rise of China might be the most important single event in the world’s recent economic developments. To most developing countries, the last quarter of the twentieth century was ‘dominated’ by economic crises, increasing indebtedness and financial crises, political instability and a profound shift of development model that did not produce the ‘expected’ results, but to China this period stood for quite something different: an amazingly high and continuous economic growth, an increasing budget and trade surplus, political stability, and all of this based on a profound shift of developmental model that produced more results than anyone imagined. In effect, although still being a developing country, China has steadily climbed up the ladder of the world’s largest economies and now comes immediately after the ‘top three’ – the United States, Japan and Germany. This growth is based on a globalization strategy that has rendered China a central position in global production, global trade and global finance.

Fernandez Jilberto and Hogenboom argue that China has benefited most from globalization compared with any other country as it has become ‘a central place for production, investment, import and export, which are all heavily tied up in China’s role as “the factory to the world”’ (2010: 3). In terms of trade, China has forged strong economic links with many parts of the majority world and this economic cooperation in turn strengthens their strategic relations in terms of global politics and world trade. China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 aligning itself with countries like Brazil, India and Russia in the G20 (group of more than twenty majority world countries). China’s support in the G20 enhances the majority world’s negotiating power with minority world regions such as Europe and North America. However, whilst there are many mutual economic and political benefits of China’s alliances with the majority world, there are also many challenges and potential threats. For the majority world countries who work with China, the positives include the diversification of their export markets, increasing world prices and investments from Chinese companies. The main negatives are having to compete with an abundance of cheap labour in China, resulting in cheap, low technology products, such as clothing and footwear, which can threaten their own local industries.

China offers an alternative development model which combines a strong, state-led economy with controlled liberalization where foreign companies invest, sometimes referred to as ‘market socialism’. However, it is not all positive as some argue that China’s rapid economic development has been achieved at the expense of the environment and human rights. Thus China presents complex but interesting possibilities and challenges for future development trajectories.

By joining the G20 in the WTO negotiations, China has been of great support in advancing the interests of developing regions in global politics and the world market. Meanwhile, as a new export market and an emerging source of foreign investment, there is a ‘China effect’ in this area as well. Having increased growth in developing countries, which are benefitting from exports to China and rising world market prices, diminishes these countries’ dependency on international financial institutions and their policies. And countries that receive Chinese investments or development assistance find that there are no economic policy conditions attached. On the other hand, China’s global agenda has a clear and purely economic goal, and it has been its economic – and not political – liberalisation within a neoliberalising global system that paved the way for China’s remarkable economic development. As a result, China can be expected to further enhance the South–South agenda and support international demands of developing countries, it may also further enhance a globalisation that seriously neglects human rights and environmental degradation, while also making it hard for Latin American manufacturing to survive and modernise.

(Fernandez Jilberto and Hogenboom 2010: 26)
Globalization theories

Different names have been given to globalization theories. They fall broadly into three categories: those in favour of (‘globalizers’) and those against (‘sceptics’) globalization, and a third approach (‘transformationalist’) that falls somewhere in between (Table 9.6).

Globalists

Globalists argue that international capitalism will generate more and more wealth, and ultimately more countries will be able to gain from it. They argue that, if globalization is well managed, then the benefits will outweigh the costs and will decrease world poverty in the long term. Thus, they tend to perceive globalization as a beneficial process that provides people with greater choices and better communications. From this modernization perspective, international competition is seen as a good thing and Westernization is seen as positive in spreading progress and development. Globalists generally believe that globalization will bring benefits to those in poverty. However, there are some globalists who are not quite so positive, seeing globalization as ‘an inevitable development which cannot be resisted or significantly influenced by human intervention’ (Cochrane and Pain 2000: 22).

Sceptics

The sceptics strongly disagree with the globalists and perceive globalization to have many negative impacts. Sceptics argue that globalization creates only a few winners but many losers and that ultimately it increases global inequalities (McGrew 2000). For dependency theorists who are sceptical about globalization, trade liberalization, the opening up of free markets and the minimization of the role of the state are likely to contribute to further exploitation and poverty at a global level. This negative view of globalization is similar to the negative perspectives towards the spread of capitalism. Rather than believing that this will lead to a more equal, more homogeneous world, it is feared that it may lead to greater inequalities and polarization between the majority and minority worlds (Potter et al. 2008):

... globalization as currently practised is exacerbating global inequalities, failing to raise people out of relative deprivation, and locking whole regions into an exploitative capitalist global economy.

(Murray 2006: 311)

The sceptics argue that there is room for economic independence and for a significant role for nation-states. Economic and social activity can be regional rather than global, and it does not have to be built on global interdependence. They also argue that the significance of globalization as a new phenomena has been exaggerated because ‘in spite of increases in global flows of trade and money around the world, these are not substantially different to the economic and social interactions that have occurred between nations in previous historical times’ (Cochrane and Pain 2000: 23).

Transformationalists

Transformationalists suggest that neither of the above two views is a sufficient explanation for recent global processes. They argue that globalization is creating a reordering of world relations (McGrew 2000). It is not about the minority world versus the majority world, as these divisions no longer make sense. Transformationalists point out that there are wealthy powerful elites in the majority world and there are poor, socially excluded people in the minority world. There are new complex patterns of global hierarchies, with new patterns of domination and subordination across, and within, regions. Transformationalists ‘believe that globalization represents a significant shift, but question the inevitability of its impacts’ (Cochrane and Pain 2000: 23). They acknowledge that important global changes are taking place, but they see the outcomes as being more complex, diverse and unpredictable than either the globalizer or the sceptical perspectives recognize.

Table 9.6 Globalization theories

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Globalists</td>
<td>Modernization theorists support this view; also known as the neoliberal school, hyperglobalists, globalizers and modernizers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sceptics</td>
<td>Dependency theorists support this view; also known as the radical school and traditionalists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformationalists</td>
<td>Also known as structuralists and neostructuralists</td>
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Dimensions of globalization

Key aspects of globalization include economic, technological, social, cultural and political elements. Each of these dimensions reinforces and impacts on the others. However, we need to be cautious and critical about the extent to which globalization is happening. In particular, we should bear in mind that not everyone experiences the process of globalization in the same way and that it can have both positive and negative consequences:

... globalization is a highly uneven process: it results in clear winners and losers, not just between countries but within and across them. For the most affluent it may very well entail a shrinking world – jet travel, global TV and the World Wide Web – but for the majority of people it tends to be associated with a profound sense of disempowerment as their fate is sealed by deliberations and decision-making in chancelleries, boardrooms, and bureaucracies many thousands of miles away... For these reasons globalization has to be understood as a process which both unites and divides peoples and communities.

(McGrew 2000: 348)

Gender relations in the majority world

Stop and think

➤ What hinders women’s participation in the process of development? What policies could be introduced to enhance women’s contribution to development projects?

A closer look

Feminist perspectives on development

A variety of feminist theories have emerged in relation to development. The main ones are outlined here:

● Women in Development (WID) – This was the first perspective to emerge in the early 1970s and is linked to modernization theory, which it sees as male-dominated. WID argues that the benefits of modernization have not reached women but it tends to see women as an undifferentiated category, overlooking diversity among women as a result of class, race and culture.

● Women and Development (WAD) – This perspective emerged in the mid-1970s and is linked to dependency theory, suggesting that women’s inferior status is linked to their work roles. It argues that...
Instead of improving women’s rights and status, the development process was at best bypassing them and at worst contributing to a deterioration in women’s position in developing countries. (Pearson 2000: 390)

WID argued that the experience and implications of poverty are different for men and women because they face different sets of constraints and responsibilities. The key goal for WID was to focus on improving women’s lives and increasing their access to resources, rather than raising questions as to why women were subordinated in the first place. This is where Gender and Development (GAD) differed in its approach. GAD was particularly concerned with problematizing relations between men and women in a range of settings and highlighting the ways in which gender relations impact on development programmes. Young (1997a) argues that women are seen as agents of change rather than as passive recipients of development assistance. This does not assume that women have perfect knowledge or understanding of their social situation. They can be aware of their subordinate position but not necessarily of the structural roots of discrimination and subordination.

GAD is a holistic perspective that considers women’s productive and reproductive roles:

In order to understand fully the nature of sex discrimination, women’s wages, women’s participation in the development process and implications for political action, analysts must examine the two areas of production and reproduction as well as the interaction between them. (Beneria and Sen 1997: 49)

It goes beyond economic well-being to address individuals’ social and mental needs. GAD recognizes that household conflicts can arise from both gender divisions and generational differences (Visvanathan 1997b). It stresses the importance of a gender analysis of distribution of power within households; that men, women, girls and boys have differential access to land and resources. As Young (1997a: 53) points out, ‘GAD is much less optimistic about the role of the market as
distributor of benefit. GAD includes a definite role for the state in implementing development programmes that bring about equality between the sexes, in particular by focusing on strengthening women's legal rights (including changing inheritance and land laws). It strives to address existing power relations between men and women in society and also recognizes a need for organization. It emphasizes the need for women to organize themselves for a more effective political voice. It recognizes that patriarchy oppresses women and that there should be an emphasis on women's empowerment and male responsibility (Young 1997a).

In terms of gender planning in relation to development, Moser (1993) distinguishes between the needs of poor women and the issues relating to their gender subordination. She refers to these as practical needs versus strategic needs:

Practical gender needs are a response to immediate perceived necessity . . . and often are concerned with inadequacies in living conditions such as water provision, health care, and employment. (Moser 1993: 40)

Women's needs are varied and depend on the particular context, but they may include an adequate food supply, convenient access to safe water, a steady source of income, availability of safe contraception, access to education, and access to training and credit. Moser contrasts practical needs with strategic interests:

Strategic gender needs are the needs women identify because of their subordinate position to men in their society . . . They relate to gender divisions of labour, power and control and may include such issues as legal rights, domestic violence, equal wages and women's control over their bodies. (Moser 1993: 39)

Strategic needs enable women to achieve greater equality and challenge women's subordinate position, which may include male control of women's labour, women's restricted access to valued social and economic resources and political power, and issues of male violence against women (Moser 1993). Women's work is undervalued, but for it to be valued the pervasive ideology of male superiority has to be changed (Kabeer 1994).

Case study

Gender analysis of micro-credit

Pearson (2000) explores the different WID and GAD approaches to development in relation to micro-credit. Giving small amounts of credit to poor farmers in rural areas became a popular tool of poverty alleviation in the 1990s. It was thought that lending small amounts of money would enable farmers to diversify their livelihoods and set up small-scale business to improve their income-earning potential and increase self-employment opportunities. One of the best known rural banks is the Grameen Bank, which began in 1976 in Bangladesh, with the aim of providing micro-credit for poor households.

WID sees this as an effective strategy for empowering women as it enables them to improve their productive economic activities (Pearson 2000). Most borrowers of the Grameen Bank are women, and this raises their involvement in income-generation, which in turn increases their status within families and communities. Women are regularly found to be more reliable as borrowers, as they are more likely to pay back the money and are more prompt with their repayments than men (Kabeer 2001). Furthermore, women are more likely to spend money on the general welfare of the family, especially on children (Kabeer 1994). As Pearson (2000) points out, this WID position focuses on targeting resources at women as a way of improving poor people’s livelihoods, but the problem with such an analysis is that it ignores wider gender relations.

In contrast, the GAD approach considers the implications that such a development project may have on household relationships. It may lead to potential gender conflicts, as women have to juggle their new productive roles with other domestic reproductive work; when women gain greater access to financial resources, this can lead to difficulties within the household. For example, it has been found that in some cases women’s access to credit does not increase their control over economic activities and the credit is used for activities controlled by men (Pearson 2000). The women may just end up having the responsibility of paying back the money, which means that it may actually increase women's dependence on men because of their responsibility for...
Case study continued

additional debts and the burden of repayment. It may affect the quality of relations between spouses because, as women gain more financial authority and increased assertiveness, this can in some cases lead to increased domestic violence if the husband feels threatened.

However, other research has pointed out that, in the long term, micro-credit increases women’s voice in intra-household decision-making and may actually improve relationships between spouses and decrease family violence (Kabeer 2001). Hence, there are disputes over the extent to which this kind of project really does end up empowering women, and there are diverse experiences in different cultural contexts. Nevertheless, this case study illustrates that gender relations are an important factor in shaping the outcomes of development projects. Thus, relations between men and women must be taken into account, rather than only considering the position of women. The status and role of women need to be problematized and the gender implications of development programmes should be considered holistically.

However, most recent development strategies have recognized that in reality it is often very difficult to make distinctions between women’s practical and strategic needs. It is now acknowledged that they are interlinked and that both need to be addressed. Women need to be empowered and there should be a commitment towards seeking gender equality, but also the basic needs of poor women should be met. One type of need should not be sought at the expense of the other: ‘Women’s interests span the household, workplace and community; women’s issues are, therefore, public issues’ (Wiegersma 1997: 363). Thus, women’s perspectives should be seen as central to development programmes, as Young (1997b: 366) suggests: ‘Planners have a great responsibility: both to listen to women and to build their vision into planning strategies.’

Nowadays it is widely recognized that women are potential beneficiaries of development and that their views have to be sought. However, we must bear in mind that women are not a homogeneous social category and we must take care not to misrepresent the diverse positions of different women... women’s power is dramatically fractured by age and life cycle’ (Pearson and Jackson 1998: 7–8). Women’s conflicting and multiple interests should be taken into account, although Young reminds us that most feminists:

...whilst accepting and even emphasizing diversity, maintain that women share a common experience of oppression and subordination, whatever the differences in the forms that these take.

(Young 1997b: 372)

Nevertheless, empowerment is not only about economic conditions and improving women’s income-generation or self-employment opportunities because: ‘It also implies some degree of conflict: empowerment is not just about women acquiring something, but about those holding power relinquishing it’ (Young 1997b: 372).

One of the key goals of feminists was to achieve ‘gender mainstreaming’, which meant that gender would be considered a central part of development processes:

The new strategy was to mainstream gender into general development policies, programmes and projects in order to counteract the tendency for women’s concerns and gender issues to become marginalized, underfunded and ignored by the ‘real’ development experts and activities.

(Pearson 2000: 400)

Most recent discussions of gender and development have raised concern about ways of including men’s perspectives of gender issues. Rather than merely seeing men as being part of the problem and the root cause of women’s subordination, there is a shift towards considering how men can also be part of the solution. This requires the recognition that male domination is not necessarily universal; not all men try to oppress women. Furthermore, there are many different ways of being a man in the majority world, just as there are many different ways of being a woman. Men may experience social pressure to conform to dominant ideas about being a man, and this is often referred to as ‘hegemonic masculinity’. Hence, the most recent recognition is that gender analysis is not only about women and their relations with men but also about men and issues of masculinity.


Childhoods in the majority world

Stop and think

➤ Do you think that child labour should be banned? What are the arguments for and against making child labour illegal?
➤ Should all children have primary and secondary education? Are there any reasons to suggest that forcing children to go to school is not a sensible strategy?

In the media, the conventional image of majority world children is that of starving, desperate, passive, exploited victims who evoke strong emotions of pity and concern. Such depressing photographs are frequently used in the minority world to elicit donations for charities. Yet, while they may facilitate the success of fundraising campaigns, such negative images only perpetuate the stereotypical notion that all majority world children are helpless and dependent. Majority world childhoods tend to be portrayed in stark contrast to minority world childhoods, where

The child is spared the responsibilities and anxieties of economic life, the world of work and the many worries which are to be inherited upon maturity. Childhood is a period of unconstrained freedom, a time for play, education and learning.

(Franklin 1986: 4)

This image of carefree childhood is perceived as the ideal to which all childhoods should aspire, and so there is a notion of a globalized model of childhood. However, this is based on minority world middle-class ideals (Boyden 1997). It is important to remember that the majority of the world's children live in the economically poor world regions of Latin America, Asia and Africa. Broadly comparing the majority and minority worlds, the most common type of 'childhood' is therefore that of majority world children (many of whom work). Yet paradoxically, majority world childhoods tend to be considered deviant when examined within the globalized model of childhood, which is based on a minority world perception that children should play and study but not work (Boyden 1997). Quantitatively, in global terms, it is more common for children to combine work and school rather than to have a childhood based on play and school (see also Chapter 7). We need to be wary about overgeneralizing in relation to different kinds of childhood, as children's lives are greatly varied in different geographical areas, according to the cultural, socioeconomic and historical context. Nevertheless, it can be argued that work is more commonplace and visible in majority world childhoods, whereas play tends to be considered more central to those in the minority world (James et al. 1998). Although not denying that some child work can be extremely exploitative, recent academic studies have shown that work is a key part of many majority world childhoods and that it is not necessarily detrimental, often having both positive and negative effects (Ansell 2005; Woodhead 1998).

There has been an ongoing debate about whether to use the term 'children's work' or 'child labour'. Some consider 'child work' to be acceptable, a social good and a positive form of socialization useful for the child's future. In contrast, 'child labour' is generally perceived as unacceptable, a social evil and a negative form of exploitation that is detrimental for the child's future (Ansell 2005). There may also be a distinction between two categories of child work: unpaid family work, and paid work outside the family circle. Recent thinking on children's work abandons the work/labour dichotomy and recognizes the complexity of the nature of child work.

Particular activities are perceived to be more appropriate, less harmful and even beneficial for child workers. Children working with family members, especially in rural environments, are less likely to be exposed to the same risk of exploitation as those working in labour-intensive industries or in urban areas. Boyden reported that in Peru domestic service and agriculture are legally considered more appropriate for children because

The assumption is that young people involved in non-waged activities, recruited into the labour market through kinship networks, or working in family enterprises, are in some way guaranteed protection. Exploitation is seen solely as a function of waged employment in large impersonal concerns.

(Boyden 1988: 199)

Nevertheless, it should not be assumed that child work is protected when it occurs within kinship relations. Exploitation may be more hidden and difficult to accept in family enterprises, but that does not mean that it is non-existent. Furthermore, it is often harder to intervene in cases of child exploitation when the child is dependent physically and emotionally on the exploiter.
Domestic service is one of the main forms of child work but is also highly exploitative, as the child can be vulnerable to psychological, physical, verbal and sexual abuse. Paradoxically, it is one of the activities considered most appropriate and least harmful for children. Consequently, domestic service is often not included in legislation or is most lenient on the entry age of the child. It can lead to children being a source of cheap labour for wider family members. Ideologies of kinship should not lead to assumptions that kin relations are always based only on reciprocity and mutual support rather than exploitation and oppression (Boyden et al. 1998).

Similarly, it is wrong to assume that waged employment for children is necessarily exploitative. It can be positive, as it enables children to earn an income, however small, which enables them to support themselves or their families. Paid work can stimulate children's personal growth and development. By earning their own money, children have access to greater decision-making and bargaining power (Ansell 2005).

In contrast, unpaid family work can reinforce children's economic dependence on their parents. Thus, some children prefer paid employment outside the home rather than engaging in unpaid 'taken for granted' family work. For example, children in Indonesia said they preferred to work for low wages in factories rather than for no wages within the family (Johnson et al. 1995). Some children say they prefer paid work because it has greater future prospects and is less exploitative.

It is too simplistic to assume that child labour in the urban world of business and industry is automatically exploitative, whereas child work in traditional occupations of farming and domestic service is a beneficial and essential form of socialisation (Boyden et al. 1998). White (1996) argues that children's work should be viewed on a continuum, rather than trying to categorize it as one of two extremes. UNICEF supports the view that work is not just good or bad for children but moves on a continuum from best to worst:

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**Primark: on the rack**

In June 2008 the BBC1 documentary programme Panorama presented an investigation into the suppliers for the clothing shop Primark. Panorama had sent a team of reporters to pose as industry buyers in India in order to test out Primark’s claim that it could provide cheap clothing without breaking ethical guidelines. During the programme it emerged that some garments were being produced using child labour that had been unofficially subcontracted without Primark’s knowledge. Primark’s response to the investigation was to sack three of its suppliers in India and announce that it would set up a ‘Primark’s Better Lives Foundation’. However, this sparked a debate about the ethics of Primark’s reaction. Instead of trying to improve working conditions for the children and families involved, Primark took away a vital source of their income by placing a total ban on the use of child labour. Some of the children had been working at home, sewing garments by hand, alongside other family members. Denying them a source of income and somewhat naively labelling all child labour as unethical paradoxically may mean that some of these children end up working in more hidden, more exploitative forms of employment. Panorama revealed the minority world assumptions (underlying Primark’s response) that all child labour is negative and should be banned without showing an understanding of the detrimental consequences of doing so.

At one end of the continuum, the work is beneficial, promoting or enhancing a child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development without interfering with schooling, recreation and rest.

At the other end, it is palpably destructive or exploitative. There are vast areas of activity between these two poles, including work that need not impact negatively on the child's development.

(UNICEF 1997: 24)

However, it is difficult to decide where particular employment should be placed along the continuum, since most work has both positive and negative effects.
simultaneously, both in the present and for the child's future. Children's work can be considered in either positive or negative terms:

For large numbers of children work is an ordeal, a source of suffering and exploitation, and a fundamental abuse of human rights. Often, child labour results in educational deprivation, social disadvantage and poor health and physical development. Yet child work can be an important element in maturation, securing the transition from childhood to adulthood. It can also be essential for family survival. (Bequele and Boyden 1988: v)

Ways in which children are perceived to be 'exploited' vary and depend on one's definition of 'exploitation' (Bequele and Myers 1995). It can be considered in relation to the short-term or long-term detrimental consequences. Children's work can have many benefits for children themselves and their families. Woodhead (1998) found that children in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, the Philippines, Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua demonstrated an ability to reason about which work was best for them. They considered a variety of advantages and disadvantages, including relative income, security, safety, hazard, exploitation, independence and autonomy. Woodhead also showed that children's perceptions of the benefits of their work, such as enhanced self-esteem and sense of responsibility, often outweighed the drawbacks, such as poor working conditions. Therefore, in order to reach an adequate understanding of the nature of children's work, one must take into account the long-term and short-term outcomes, the specific social and cultural environment, the historical and economic context, and both adults and children's perceptions of their own situation (Woodhead 1998).

Whether children work is not a question of choice for many children or their families in the majority world. The causes of child labour usually stem from poverty and underdevelopment. However, children also work as a result of other structural constraints, including the failure of the education system, the vested interests of employers, rapid rural–urban migration, lack of parental awareness of the implications for children's health and development, social and cultural attitudes, and lack of political will for effective action (Boyden et al. 1998; Panelli et al. 2007). It is worth bearing in mind that some children choose to work to help their families, to enhance their independence and competencies, to gain access to consumer luxuries, to gain useful skills, and as a means of self-actualization (Boyden et al. 1998). Family dynamics and household composition also influence whether children work. For example, Boyden et al. (1998: 138) observed that in many places, a disproportionate number of working children appear to be from homes headed by a single woman. They noted that family emergencies, such as death or incapacitation of an adult earner, loss of a job, harvest failures and severe weather, may also increase the likelihood of children beginning to work.

### Table 9.7 The advantages and disadvantages of children's work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive aspects</th>
<th>Negative aspects</th>
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<tr>
<td>Useful contribution to the survival of their household; may increase their status as a family member</td>
<td>Low pay, long hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work as a source of pride, satisfaction and self-esteem</td>
<td>Lack of legal protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral value of work, giving children a sense of efficacy and responsibility</td>
<td>Sexual, physical or emotional abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides access to a wider social network</td>
<td>Slave-like or socially isolating conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides an income and enhances their ability to access consumer goods</td>
<td>Work that is mundane and repetitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal autonomy: increases sense of independence and self-reliance</td>
<td>Health and safety risks of dangerous working environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enables the development of useful skills for their future</td>
<td>Use of unsafe tools and equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May enable them to pay for their own schooling</td>
<td>May have adverse effects on schooling</td>
</tr>
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(Source: Boyden et al. 1998)
The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that exploitative child labour should be eliminated, but the Convention’s recommendations ‘may not be realistic for all countries, especially those whose economies and educational facilities are insufficiently developed’ (Bequele and Myers 1995: 93). The International Labour Organization (ILO) has been striving to ban child labour since 1919. However, recent discussions of policymaking and legislation have shifted from a desire to ban all child labour to providing legislation to protect children from overexploitation. The illegal status of children’s work forces it underground, to be denied by governments, employers, parents and the children themselves. Where it is concealed, it is not included in protective legislation, and it may be disguised as an ‘apprenticeship’ or ‘training’ when it becomes a convenient excuse to pay even lower wages. Illegal child labour tends to be confined to industrial or commercial jobs, especially factories, mines and other hazardous employment. Labour legislation prohibits children under a certain age, usually 12–14 years, from doing certain jobs, which tend to exclude the agricultural and domestic sectors. However, Bequele and Myers (1995) argue that, even where comprehensive legislation exists, it is rarely enforced in the majority world. This is because there is a shortage of inspectors, who are poorly paid and often easily bribed. They also recognize that ‘protecting children against a particular hazard, and making their work more tolerable, may encourage them to stay in it’ (Bequele and Myers 1995: 156). There is no disputing that exploitative child labour conditions should be regulated, but the children’s views, the context and the consequences should also be taken into account (Woodhead 1998).

A closer look

Why do children work?

- On the demand side employers prefer to employ children as they can do labour-intensive tasks for lower wages than adults, they are a good source of casual labour, and they tend to be a docile labour force as they are unprotected by legislation and workers’ rights.
- On the supply side, whether children work or not tends to depend on the wealth of the household, the employment status and wage rates of employable adults within the household, the availability and cost of schooling, and the social and cultural environment.

(Source: based on Bequele and Boyden 1988)

Related closely to the debate on whether child labour can be regarded as exploitation or socialization is the discussion of the value of school versus work for children in the majority world. This debate considers which form of socialization is more appropriate or realistic for the child and household concerned: that of formal education at school, or that of unpaid work at home or paid work outside the household. For many children in the majority world, full-time, long-term schooling is not a readily available option because of both the direct and indirect costs of formal education. Direct costs of schooling include fees, uniform, school supplies and transport. Even where an official school uniform is not required, children still need reasonable shoes and clothing. Additional costs of board and lodging may occur where children have to migrate in order to continue their schooling. A major indirect cost of schooling is the labour or earnings lost while the child is at school. In some cases this can mean that hired help is needed to replace the child’s labour.
The immediate costs of schooling are by no means the only reason why children may work (whether paid or unpaid, with family or non-kin) rather than attend school. The opportunities for attending school and the perceived returns from schooling relative to work are essential factors. Schooling does not always guarantee better employment prospects, and so it does not necessarily lead to a brighter future (Jeffrey and McDowell 2004). Consequently, parents may prefer their children to learn a trade, as they see little value in sacrificing limited resources to invest in formal education. Particularly in rural areas where children are thought most likely to end up working in traditional occupations of farming, parents are even more likely to consider school a pointless investment.

Thus, the main reasons why children do not go to school or why they drop out are the direct and indirect costs, limited access to schools, lack of available schools, the perceived returns of schooling, limited future working opportunities, and the poor quality of schools and teaching. Woodhead’s (1998) research on children’s perspectives of their working lives found that most children felt that combining work and school was their only feasible option. His study revealed that children saw both positive and negative aspects of education.

The benefits of schooling included:

- acquiring literacy and numeracy skills;
- improved work prospects;
- a sense of achievement and respect;
- making and playing with friends.

The negative aspects included:

- harsh and humiliating teaching methods;
- feelings of failure and boredom;
- teacher absenteeism;
- the costs of schooling;
- competing pressures of school and work.

It is recognized that children's views need to be taken into account when trying to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of work versus school. In many cases, the decision as to whether a child should attend school or should work can be avoided by combining the two. The feasibility of this depends on the nature of the child’s work, the distances and hours involved, and whether the two can be coordinated. A common, but ill-founded, assumption is that work that can be combined with school is more appropriate for children. However, combining school and work may be more of a burden for children, and so it should not be assumed simplistically that doing both is necessarily more beneficial to the child than doing work alone (Boyden et al. 1998).

It is no longer acceptable to consider development issues without including an analysis of the impact on women’s and children’s lives. In the past, development tended to be perceived from the perspective of adult men, but now the views of women and young people must also be taken into account, as Ansell argues:

Since the 1980s, growing global economic inequalities have left many children in situations of worsening poverty. Yet, paradoxically, the neo-liberal policies that have fed poverty have also led to funds being directed away from government-led macroeconomic policies to an NGO sector that is highly concerned about development’s negative impacts on children and youth. Only recently, however, have policy-makers and practitioners begun to recognize children and youth as subjects with their own ideas, able to act in their own interests. Increasingly it is recognized that failure to listen to young people’s voices has often meant failure to address many of the issues that confront children and youth.

(Ansell 2005: 61)

Chawla and Johnson (2004) provide examples of projects that have installed water taps that are too high for children to reach and income-generating activities that result in children missing school to help their parents. They also argue that

... the basic needs that children express are conditions for well-being for all ages in society – such as safety, secure homes, adequate food and clean water, attractive environments, the protection of the natural world, education, fair livelihoods, friendly acceptance, and a hopeful future. Attention to children’s needs also requires a timeframe that considers the consequences of decisions far into the future... Therefore development programmes that put children at the centre are well positioned to unify diverse groups and to build a strong foundation for broad alliances for progressive change.

(Chawla and Johnson 2004: 66)

In order to ensure that effective development policies for addressing global inequalities benefit all sectors of the population, issues of both gender and generation must be considered.
Figure 9.8 Even in communities where schools exist, the enrolment rate can be low, as it can be considered tiresome and time-consuming to walk long distances to school
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World in focus

Youth transitions: migration for work or education?

In many parts of the majority world, young people migrate in search of better opportunities for their future (Punch 2009). Here we illustrate the dilemmas that children in ‘Churquiales’ (a pseudonym for a rural village in southern Bolivia) face when deciding whether to migrate in order to continue their schooling or whether to seek paid employment.

To a certain extent, children’s experiences at school can enhance their social and intellectual autonomy. They learn basic literacy and numeracy skills, but this does not offer them a better social status and an alternative future livelihood. Young people from Churquiales are most likely to end up working in agriculture or the domestic service either within their community or in the migrant destinations of Tarija or Argentina. Only if they can continue on to secondary education and complete that cycle can they really expect a different sort of future livelihood. Such an option is not available to most rural children as it depends on economic resources, as well as supportive parents and the personal desire of the children themselves. In many cases secondary education is not a viable alternative to the more immediate material gains of work and migration.

This is partly because of their geographical location which, on the one hand, is in a relatively isolated, poor rural area with limited available agricultural land and a lack of employment prospects. On the other hand, it is relatively near the agricultural plantations in northern Argentina which require a large seasonal labour force. The higher wages and employment opportunities in Argentina thereby provide a logical alternative to the uncertainty, expense and perhaps wasted effort of pursuing education beyond primary school in Bolivia. Although migrant work is arduous and low skilled it offers more security and tangible benefits compared with the nebulous outcomes of following an educational pathway.

However, on the one hand, school acts as an important site of socialisation, providing children an opportunity to assert their social autonomy by socialising with their peers, especially in rural areas where they may otherwise lead relatively isolated lives. The importance of play at school should not be overlooked, since the enjoyment which children experience through having fun at school is a major reason for their enthusiasm in attending. On the other hand, there is a range of constraining factors including lack of resources, low wages, poor teaching quality, household work demands and climatic conditions which all lead to high rates of absenteeism, drop-out, repetition and failure. Such factors combine and result in a lack of confidence in the benefits of the formal education system. Paradoxically problems such as teacher absenteeism and poor training for the multi-grade system enable children to create opportunities for play. Yet ultimately this is at the expense of the quality of their education.

The structural constraints which surround teaching combined with household work demands and climatic conditions result in restricted educational choices for children in Churquiales. The drawbacks of primary education lead to a poor perception of schooling held by both parents and young people, diminishing the likelihood of pupils continuing to secondary education. Many children struggle to complete the six years of primary education, even though the community school is reasonably accessible in terms of both cost and distance. Some do not finish primary schooling, resulting in an early transition to work at 10 or 11 years old. Others feel that once they have completed those six years and have acquired the basic skills of literacy and numeracy it is time to move into the world of work either within or outside their community. The hurdle of completing secondary education is perceived, by many, to be unrealistic and extremely costly in both time and money. Consequently it is perhaps unsurprising that most major decisions about school-to-work are made on completion of primary school at 12–14 years of age. This relatively early and rapid transition from school into work contrasts with the delayed and extended youth transitions of much of the minority world (Wyn and Dwyer 1999).

In such a context, seeking migrant work becomes an attractive opportunity for young people as it enhances both their economic and social capital, enabling them to be more flexible. They have the choice of continuing to migrate seasonally, to return to their community or to live more permanently in Argentina or Tarija.
Chapter 9  Global divisions

World in focus continued

Migration is often used by young people as a bridge between being part of their parents’ household and forming a new household of their own (Punch 2002a). It allows them to accumulate savings whilst also maintaining links with their families by sending remittances home. Furthermore, since young people’s migratory experience is seasonal, it provides them with a sense of collective identity during periods spent within their home community. With better access to consumer markets, they return home with material goods and new clothes as their symbols of success and increased prestige. It is during this time that they meet and learn from one another’s migratory experiences whilst also having a substantial impact on the social life of the community. This emphasises the importance and impact of informal social networks on young people’s transitions to adulthood. Thus, migration, unlike education, offers young people a source of identity as well as enhancing their social and economic autonomy.

Therefore, in this rural community, migration rather than education is an important part of youth identity. On the one hand, migrants have significant social freedom during their time back home which is linked to their transitional youth status and their acquisition of greater independence. On the other hand, although they work extremely hard in Argentina, their migrant employment facilitates increased consumerism and enables them to continue to maintain interdependent family ties by contributing financially to their households (Punch 2002a). Furthermore, since migrants return with their newly acquired material goods, they provide children with stronger role models than the exceptional few who have achieved academic success beyond primary level. The economic and social status attached to the migrant identity is particularly influential for children in the community who are more likely to want to follow in the migrants’ footsteps rather than continue with secondary education. Therefore, the image of the young migrant representing economic success and social freedom should not be underestimated as a powerful mechanism in encouraging more young people to leave their community in search of work. However, this is not necessarily negative, particularly given the range of constraints associated with schooling, the limited agricultural land and the lack of employment opportunities in a country suffering from the ills of neo-liberalism and increased indebtedness (Green 2003). Thus migration for work, rather than for education, is perhaps a convenient and appropriate coping strategy for young people to pursue.

(Source: Punch 2004: 176–9)

Question

1. What are the possible constraints that young people in the majority world face when deciding whether to pursue secondary education? Consider a range of issues, including the impact of birth order, class, ethnicity, gender, household composition, and access to resources and work opportunities.

Summary

- Most poor countries in the majority world continue to have a subordinate role within the global economy. There is a widening gap between rich and poor countries, and this seems likely to increase as processes of globalization have uneven global impacts.

- Development theories explain how development has occurred and the directions it may take in the future. A range of different development theories exist, including the classics of modernization theory and dependency theory, and more contemporary alternative approaches such as participatory development and sustainable development. Each has its strengths and weaknesses in relation to offering effective explanations for processes of development.
Issues of gender and generation are now central to development thinking. Relationships between men and women, and between adults and children, should be considered when developing policies and programmes to address global inequalities.

The relationship between work and education for children in the majority world is a complex one. It is too simplistic to assume that school is beneficial and work is detrimental for children. The wider social, economic, cultural and historical context needs to be taken into account when weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of children’s work and schooling.

Links

Issues in relation to alternative development link to the discussion of sustainable development in Chapter 10.

The discussion of TNCs in the global economy section links to the globalization of economic life in Chapter 12.

Further reading

A key text that addresses both historical and contemporary topics in relation to global divisions. It is clearly written and provides an accessible overview of poverty and development in the majority world.

A very accessible text that highlights the diversity of children’s and young people’s experiences in the majority world. It effectively draws on a wide range of examples from Africa, Asia and Latin America and includes chapters on health, education, street children, child soldiers, work and participation.

Excellent clear overview of the complex potential and challenges that face the continent of 53 countries. It explores Africa’s people, rural and urban environments, the impact of HIV/AIDS, issues relating to conflict and post-conflict reconstruction and future development trajectories.

This book covers a wide range of sociological topics from a global perspective, including globalization, work, nation-states, global inequalities, crime, migration, health, tourism, culture, the media, sport, religion and urban life.

This book provides an overview of the key issues surrounding globalization and development, such as poverty, trade, finance, aid, migration, knowledge and global policies.

This is a challenging collection of papers that addresses the tough question: ‘Has globalization affected inequality?’

This book provides a thorough introduction to the cultural, political and economic dimensions of globalization and critically evaluates the causes and consequences of a globalizing world.

A clear, broad overview of key gender issues in both rural and urban contexts, drawing on a wide range of case studies from Africa, Asia and Latin America. The text includes chapters on reproduction, health, violence, the environment and globalization.
**Key journal and journal articles**

**Key journal**

*Development and Change*

This is an interdisciplinary journal which covers a broad range of development topics.

**Journal articles**


This interesting article considers aid motives, the way aid is delivered and the links between aid and development outcomes.


This paper examines three foreign policies: South–South cooperation, health, and environment which have led to the development of Brazil whilst also benefiting other majority world countries.


Examples from Bolivia, Ecuador and Argentina are used in this paper to indicate the return of the state in order to enhance national development and build collective responsibilities.

**Websites**

**www.worldbank.org**

World Bank

This site is useful for many issues related to global poverty, including up-to-date research, statistics and publications.

**www.undp.org**

United Nations Development Programme

A range of news stories and useful publications, such as human development reports, are available from this site.

**www.foodfirst.org**

Institute for Food and Development Policy (Food First)

The Institute for Food and Development Policy is concerned with analysing the root causes and injustices of global hunger, poverty, and ecological degradation.

**www.dfid.gov.uk**

Department for International Development (DFID)

The British government’s development website, which includes many country profiles, case studies and publications relating to global inequalities.

**www.opendemocracy.net/globalisation/index.jsp**

Open Democracy

A discussion forum offering news and opinion articles from established academics and journalists covering contested debates about the effects of globalization.

**www.worldwrite.org.uk/damned**

Damned by Debt Relief

This website has a short version of the film Damned by Debt Relief and useful articles in relation to debt in the majority world.

**www.younglives.org.uk**

Young Lives

Young Lives is an international study of childhood poverty tracking the changing lives of 12,000 children in Ethiopia, India (in the state of Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam over a 15-year period. The website presents findings from the project, including children’s views of their own experiences.

**www.ilo.org**

International Labour Organization

**www.imf.org**

International Monetary Fund

**www.wto.org**

World Trade Organization

**www.un.org**

United Nations

**www.globalisationguide.org**

Globalisation Guide

**www.tni.org**

Transnational Institute

**www.oneworldaction.org**

One World Action

**www.plan-international.org/resources/development**

Development dictionary
Activities

Activity 1

Applying development theories

Bolivia is one of the few countries of the world that does not have a McDonald’s outlet. Imagine you are visiting Bolivia and your role, as chief executive of McDonald’s, is to convince the Bolivian government to allow a branch of McDonald’s to open in La Paz (the biggest city). Use modernization theory as a basis to put forward your arguments indicating that McDonald’s would be beneficial to Bolivian development.

Now imagine you are the minister for development in Bolivia and are opposed to the introduction of McDonald’s in your country.

Questions
1. Using globalization theories (the perspectives of globalists, sceptics and transformationalists), assess whether the introduction of McDonald’s to Bolivia would be perceived as having positive or negative impacts on the lives of people in La Paz.
2. Consider your arguments from the perspectives of both rich and poor urban residents.

Activity 2

HIV/AIDS and development

Read the following extract from Regan (2002b: 190) and reflect upon the links between HIV/AIDS and development:

According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) poverty is the driving force of the AIDS pandemic in Africa: in poor communities men are forced to migrate to urban areas in search of work, which means that husbands may be away from their wives for a year or more and may seek extramarital relations. This is particularly true when they frequent bars, usually the only form of entertainment provided by their employers.

At the same time, poor women are being forced into prostitution as the only means of earning an income to feed their children. As a result, southern Africa has become the global epicentre of the AIDS epidemic. One of the most high-risk groups is married women, who are often powerless in matters of sexual relations. In some communities, up to 48% of routinely tested pregnant women are HIV-positive.

Despite decades of development in rural Africa most people still do not have access to clean water, hygienic sanitation, electricity, affordable health care, education and food security.

The causes and consequences of the HIV/AIDS crisis are closely linked to wider development issues, including poverty, malnutrition, exposure to other infections, gender inequality and insecure livelihoods. The loss of labour to the epidemic cripples the household.

Questions
1. What are the social and economic consequences of the HIV/AIDS crisis?
2. Consider the different ways in which men, women, girls and boys within households may be affected when one or both parents are infected by HIV.