

The general idea, therefore, is that **powerful** groups (such as the police, media and politicians) shape our perception of **powerless** groups (such as young, black, working-class males) through a **labelling process** that justifies whatever action (from increased imprisonment to a range of quasi-judicial actions — ASBOs, curfews, dispersal zones) the authorities want to take against 'deviants'.

This can lead to what [Wilkins \(1964\)](#) described as a **Deviancy Amplification Spiral**: the behaviour of some individuals or groups (**primary deviation**) is singled out for attention, condemnation and action, which leads to **secondary deviation** (increased deviant behaviour as the targeted group reacts to the initial labelling process). This, in turn, justifies further action against 'deviants' — such as widespread arrests, new laws to deal with 'the problem' and so forth — that leads ultimately to the criminalisation of behaviour that may initially have been only mildly deviant.

One (unintended) outcome of this negative labelling process is, [Becker \(1963\)](#) argues, a **deviant career**. The successful application of a label 'confirms the individual' as deviant, both to themselves and others around them (teachers, employers and the like). This can block participation in normal society (a youth with a criminal record, for example, may be unable to find work), which, in turn, means the deviant seeks out the company of similar deviants, resulting in increased involvement in deviant behaviour.

#### OCR examination questions

- |  |            |
|--|------------|
| 1 Identify and explain two characteristics of moral panics involving young people.     | (17 marks) |
| 2 Identify and explain two ways in which youth deviance is influenced by social class. | (17 marks) |
| 3 Outline and evaluate labelling explanations of youth and deviance                    | (33 marks) |

## The experience of youth in education

### The experience of schooling

Education is a form of secondary socialisation involving two related processes that constitute the experience of schooling.

#### The formal curriculum

The **formal curriculum** is the things schools exist to teach (maths, physics, history and so forth). Gaining qualifications in these subjects is a significant part of the educational experience for many young people.

### The hidden curriculum

The **hidden curriculum**, as Jackson (1968) argues, involves the things we learn from the experience of attending school. Skelton (1997) suggests it involves 'messages relating to knowledge, values, norms of behaviour and attitudes that learners experience in and through educational processes'. The messages teachers give to students in the course of their teaching include:

- status messages (such as whether boys are more valued than girls)
- beliefs about ability (who has it and who doesn't)

Some aspects of the hidden curriculum are taught to all pupils:

- respect for authority
- punctuality
- time-keeping

Many, however, are taught in different ways to different pupil categories, according to social class, gender, and ethnicity.

### Social class

#### Formal curriculum

If we measure the quality of an individual's educational experience in terms of qualifications, it rapidly becomes apparent that, for working-class pupils especially, that experience is not particularly pleasant:

- **Key Stages 1–4:** The figures for those claiming free school meals (FSM) is a broadly reliable guide to social class (FSM children are generally working-class). The statistics show FSM children do consistently worse than non-FSM children at all Key Stages.
- **GCSE:** Table 10.4 demonstrates how those with parents at the top of the class system (higher professional) are more than twice as successful in GCSEs as those with parents at the bottom.

Table 10.4 Five or more GCSE grades A\*– C or equivalent at age 16 (%)

	2008	2002	2000	1989
Higher professional	81	77	74	52
Lower professional	75			
Intermediate/skilled manual	61	52	45	21
Lower supervisory	47			
Routine manual	43			
Other/not classified	37	32	26	12

Source: Hughes and Church (2010)

#### Hidden curriculum

This involves a range of ideas and experiences.

**Type of school**

This has an impact on educational experience. A working-class pupil attending an inner city school (such as Lilian Baylis Technology School) has a different educational experience to an upper-/middle-class child who attends a top private school such as Wellington College.

Wellington College

**Insert Photo 5**

James Chetwode/Alamy

Table 10.5 Wellington College and Lilian Baylis Technology School compared

	<b>Wellington College</b>	<b>Lilian Baylis</b>
<b>Size</b>	1,000+	624
<b>Location</b>	400 acres of Berkshire countryside	Inner-city location next to busy road
<b>Type</b>	Independent fee-paying	Technology school
<b>Pupils</b>	Majority from upper/middle class A small number of means-tested bursaries and scholarships available	Majority from deprived or disrupted backgrounds 75% on free school meals 20% pupils are refugees or asylum seekers 50% pupils with learning difficulty or disability 50+ languages spoken in students' homes
<b>Extra-curricular</b>	8 rugby pitches, 2 floodlit Astro turf pitches, state-of-the-art sports hall, 22 hard tennis courts, 12 cricket pitches, athletics track, 2 lacrosse pitches, 6 netball courts, shooting range, 9-hole golf course	Purpose built sports hall, 3 basketball/netball courts, floodlit Astro turf pitch. Use of local swimming pools.
<b>Facilities</b>	6 art studios, professional recording studio, several concert venues, own theatre and TV crew	Careers events Study trips for all Y10 students to a European capital Residential study conferences
<b>Curriculum</b>	Small classes Sets own curriculum, plus International Baccalaureate, GCSE and A-level	Large classes National Curriculum No sixth form
<b>Cost</b>	£30,000 per year	Free

**Class sizes**

Private (fee-paying) schools dominate school **League Tables**, and one explanation for this is that teachers give more time to individual students because of smaller class sizes. Figures from the [Department for Education and Skills \(2010\)](#) show average class sizes as:

- state-funded secondary schools: 20.5
- private schools: 10

### Exclusion

Self and Zealey (2007) note around 9,400 pupils were permanently excluded in 2005. The vast majority were working-class. Around 55,000 pupils each day take unauthorised absence from school; again, the majority are working-class. Babb et al. (2006) notes persistent truants are 15 times more likely than those who never truant to leave school at 16 with no qualifications.

**Ability grouping** (a general label for practices such as **streaming**, **setting** and **banding**) is a more subtle form of exclusion. Hallam et al. (2001) noted how lower set pupils were **stigmatised** as 'thick' through the association between lower sets and unemployment, higher sets and good exam grades). Teachers also gave 'more creative work and privileges to higher set students while restricting lower sets to tedious, routine tasks'.

Power et al. (2003) noted how successful middle-class students labelled themselves as failures for their inability to match the achievements of some of their high-flying peers.

### Teacher labelling

Gazeley and Dunne (2005) suggest 'teachers and trainee teachers often hold stereotypical ideas about pupils and parents according to their social class'. The 'class expectations' some teachers hold (working-class pupils as low achievers, middle-class pupils as high achievers) translated into classroom practices that 'located the source of a pupil's underachievement within the pupil or the home'.

Some teachers held **fatalistic** views about the ability of working-class children who were 'destined to fail' because of their class and family backgrounds, regardless of the teacher's efforts. Not all teachers held these views, however. As one put it, 'I believe there is a danger in setting low expectations of a child. If a child already does not expect to do well the last thing a teacher should be doing is reinforcing that view'.

Gazeley and Dunne also found 'middle class pupils and parents were viewed more positively' and 'Teachers had higher expectations and aspirations for the future for middle class pupils than for working class pupils' — ideas that are particularly interesting in the context of the observation that 'Pupils identified positive relationships with teachers as crucial to their learning.'



Suggest two ways the hidden curriculum relates to social class.

### Perspectives on schooling

#### Functionalist perspectives

These locate the experience of schooling within an overall context of the **purpose** and **nature** of education systems in contemporary societies:

- **Purpose:** To sift, sort and grade children (the '**co-ordination of human resources**') as preparation for adult roles — especially those relating to work. Testing and measurement is, therefore, a necessary part of the school experience; children have to be **differentiated** on the basis of their abilities (not their social or class background). Ability measurement must be **objective**: tested against known competence standards (such as GCSE or A-level).
- **Nature:** The education system has to be **meritocratic**. All pupils, regardless of class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality or whatever must have an *equal opportunity* to achieve national standards. In this way, educational 'success' or 'failure' is down to individual levels of effort, motivation and so forth.

As we have just seen, one problem with this idea is that schools are not necessarily meritocratic in practice; not all pupils have an equal opportunity to succeed. [Hattersley and Francis \(2004\)](#) also point to a further problem — as some *whole schools* become labelled as 'failing', their pupils are labelled 'failures' as soon as they start school.

### **Marxist perspectives**

Marxist perspectives take a different approach, focusing on how the education system is biased in favour of those with the **economic and cultural capital** to make the system work to their advantage:

- **Class reproduction:** The underlying purpose of education is to ensure the continued hegemony of a ruling class; while [Willis \(1977\)](#) talks about how working-class kids get working-class jobs, the opposite is also true: upper-class kids are destined to get upper-class jobs. [Mac an Ghail \(1996\)](#), for example, argues that social class origins remain the single best predictor of educational success or failure. [Demack et al. \(1998\)](#) also note: 'social class differences are still the largest differences of all and the children of professional parents have the largest advantage of all'. For middle-class pupils, educational success does come with a price — their experience of education is conditioned by a need to succeed — and parents invest heavily in their children (such as buying a private school education).
- **Emotional labour:** Middle-class parents also invest in non-economic ways. [Reay \(2000\)](#) suggests middle- and upper-class parents are better positioned to draw on **emotional capital** — the ability to decisively influence the focus and direction of a child's education. Middle-class mothers, for example, invest a lot of time and effort (emotional labour) in their children's education. This includes not just the ability to help with things like homework but, more importantly perhaps, a willingness to ensure the school is providing what the parents believe are appropriate levels of support, teaching, testing and so forth — and to act swiftly and decisively if they are not.
- **Correspondence theory** is a [particular strand of Marxist thinking](#). [Bowles and Gintis \(1976 and 2002\)](#) argue education is a proving ground in which the organisation of the workplace is reflected in the organisation of schools. Education, therefore,

becomes a test of control and conformity — those who conform are allowed into the higher areas of education (and, by extension, work) whereas those who do not are excluded (or even self-excluded — they leave school at the earliest opportunity).

The *unstated* role of education, therefore, is cultural reproduction: the inequalities of the workplace are reproduced in the organisation of schooling. The distinction between academic education and vocational training reflects the education–workplace correspondence; academic education is the preserve of those (largely upper- and middle-class) students destined for professional employment, while working-class students (in the main) are encouraged to pursue various forms of vocational training that will prepare and qualify them for (lower paid and lower status) employment.



Suggest one argument for and one argument against the idea the education system is meritocratic.

## Gender

### Formal curriculum

Measuring the quality of educational experiences in terms of qualifications, the general pattern, as [Hughes and Church \(2010\)](#) report, is that girls outperformed boys at every **Key Stage** in 2009 bar one (Key Stage 2 Maths, where levels of achievement were the same), a pattern unchanged for the past 10 years, including Key Stage 4 (Table 10.6).

Table 10.6 Five or more GCSE grades A\* to C or equivalent by gender (%)

	Male	Female
1996	40.6	50.5
1997	41.4	51.3
1998	42.3	52.8
2006	54.3	63.9
2007	56.9	65.8
2008	60.0	69.0

Source: *Hughes and Church (2010)*

At **A-level** the pattern of relative achievement between the sexes is maintained, with 45% of women and 35% of men achieving two or more passes in 2006. In terms of grading, the gender gap has stayed roughly constant over the past 15 years (at around one percentage point): in 2011 the pass rate was 97% for boys and 98.1% for girls.

Although this data suggests gender, in itself, is related to achievement, we need to be careful about drawing this conclusion — not *all* girls do better than *all* boys.

- *Within* social classes: girls generally experience higher achievement.
- *Between* social classes: upper- and middle-class boys achieve more than working-class girls.

In other words, although there's 'something about gender' that is very significant when comparing experiences within the *same* class, it's not that significant when comparing *different* classes.

We should also note that achievement is relative: it is not simply a case of girls over-achieving and boys underachieving; at GCSE, for example, boys gain 50% more passes than they did 10 years ago. In addition, female underachievement (among working-class and minority ethnic group girls, for example), is frequently ignored.

### Hidden curriculum

#### *Feminisation*

In recent times, one set of explanations for changing male and female educational experiences has focused around the **feminisation of school and work**: [Epstein et al. \(1998\)](#) argue wider changes in the workplace and female behaviour have resulted in young males losing control of their unique identities and their lives — with some boys seeing education as irrelevant to their future as a result of changing:

- **Opportunities**: Females have more opportunities to express a range of different 'femininities' — including ones that involve a career rather than just part-time work and family responsibilities.
- **Workplace changes**: These reflect back onto family socialisation processes. Parents, for example, change their perception of their children's future adult roles and, consequently, the relative importance they place on male and female educational experiences.

#### *Educational initiatives*

More specifically, recent changes within education have resulted in changes to the way males and females experience education:

- **National Curriculum**: Introduced into schools in 1990, this made subjects such as maths and science compulsory up to GCSE level and encouraged the breakdown of gendered subject choices.
- **Coursework**: The expansion of this option, mainly through the introduction of GCSE, benefits girls because it demands steady, consistent work over time (something which is supposedly more suited to the way girls work). 'Concerns' about male underachievement have led to a marked reduction in this option.
- **Curriculum initiatives** such as '**Girls into Science and Technology**' (GIST): these encouraged the breakdown of barriers around traditionally male subjects, while work experience initiatives introduced girls to the possibility of full-time work at an early age (although, as [Mackenzie \(1997\)](#) has demonstrated, there are arguments about whether girls and boys are still encouraged to follow 'traditional' employment options). Evidence from vocational qualifications ([Department for Education and Skills, 2006](#)) suggests they are. In 2005, for example, 'Nearly all vocational qualifications awarded for construction, planning and the built environment were

to men...around 90 per cent of vocational qualifications for health, public services and care were awarded to women.'

Francis (2000) argues that changes within the school and wider society have altered the way girls construct femininity (they no longer see it mainly in terms of the home) whereas concepts of masculinity have remained largely unchanged. Walker (1996) similarly identifies changing conceptions of masculinity, in terms of 'finding a role in a fast-changing world', as a challenge many young men are unable to resolve in the education system.

### *Stereotyping*

**Labelling** and **stereotyping** suggest educational experiences have changed, with a reversal of traditional forms of gender labelling; girls are increasingly positively labelled (as high achievers who work hard and have least behavioural problems). Boys, on the other hand, are increasingly negatively labelled in terms of underachievement, laziness and behavioural problems.

### *Hypermasculinity*

In this respect, **hypermasculinity** is an exaggerated form of masculinity ('laddishness') that emphasises and values things like physical strength and sexual virility — ideas that are at odds with educational achievement.

Changing male and female experiences of school

**F**eminisation  
**I**nitiatives  
**S**tereotyping  
**H**ypermasculinity



Suggest two gender trends in educational achievement.

## Ethnicity

### Formal curriculum

Different ethnic groups have different educational experiences when measured in terms of achievement:

- **Key Stages 1–3:** Department for Education and Skills (2005) figures, for example, show attainment by ethnicity (in descending order):
  - Chinese Indian
  - white British
  - Mixed ethnicity
  - Bangladeshi
  - black Caribbean
  - black African
  - Pakistani
- **GCSE:** The Key Stage pattern is largely reproduced, the main exception being the relative underachievement of black Caribbean children (Table 10.7). Although their performance has improved significantly over the past 15 years, they still achieve least at GCSE.

Table 10.7 Five or more GCSE grades A\*–C by ethnicity (%)

	1989	1992	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004
<b>Indian</b>	n/a	38	48	54	60	60	72
<b>White</b>	30	37	45	47	50	52	54
<b>Bangladeshi</b>	n/a	25	25	33	29	41	46
<b>Pakistani</b>	n/a	23	23	29	29	40	37
<b>Black</b>	18	23	23	29	39	36	35

Source: Babb et al. (2006)

When we include **gender**, girls outperform boys in all ethnic groups. Similarly, for all ethnic groups boys are more likely to leave school with no A\*–C passes at GCSE.

### Participation

Post-16 **participation** rates for black youth (especially in Further Education colleges), rank second only to Indian youth. This suggests that black parents and children value education but have problems with schools. Blair et al. (2003) suggest colleges 'provide a space where young Black men are supported by a community of Black students, an opportunity to study a curriculum that celebrates Black cultures and histories and to develop positive relationships with tutors'. Mirza (1992) additionally notes one reason for higher black participation is the number of black women staying in education post-16.

### Hidden curriculum

The hidden curriculum impacts on the experience of education for ethnic minority groups in a range of ways:

#### Racism

Post-16 participation rates suggest racism plays some part in the black experience of schooling:

#### Overt racism

Aymer and Okitikpi (2001) argue black Caribbean boys are more likely to report negative abuse and harassment from their peers. Kerr et al. (2002), for example, found British students had less positive attitudes towards 'immigrants' than students of many other countries. This, they argued, shaped peer group interaction and black experiences of education.

Mirza (1997) sees the development of 'Saturday schools' (supplementary teaching involving parents and teachers) as indicative of a general dissatisfaction among black parents and children with 'white institutions' that seem to regularly fail them.

#### Cultural racism

**Cultural racism (ethnocentrism)** is a more subtle form, expressed in areas like:

- **The curriculum:** This may involve, according to Blair et al., teaching practices and expectations based on cultural norms, histories and general cultural references unfamiliar to many ethnic minority pupils.
- **Role models:** Blair et al. also point to a lack of role models within the school for ethnic minority pupils. Ross (2001) estimates 5% of teachers are currently drawn from ethnic minorities (around 15% of English school pupils have an ethnic minority background).

### *Teacher–pupil interactions*

The Runnymede Trust (1998) argued that a range of hidden processes occur within schools that ‘deny equal opportunities’. Ethnic minority students, for example, reported:

- high levels of control and criticism from teachers
- stereotypes of cultural differences, communities and speech that betrayed negative and patronising attitudes

### *Identity*

One feature of the educational experience of black Caribbean boys is that as they move through school, achievement seems to fall (until, at GCSE, they have the worst academic performance of all children). Reasons here include:

- **Masculinity** is sometimes defined in terms of rebellion against ‘white’ schooling. Foster et al. (1996) suggest the over-representation of black Caribbean boys in low status sets and bands within the school is the result of ‘unacceptable behaviour’.
- **Discipline:** Diane Abbott (a black Labour MP) has argued (Hinsliff, 2002) that ‘a failure to challenge disruptive behaviour leads to an escalating situation which results in Black boys being *excluded* from school (Black Caribbean boys are more frequently excluded than any other ethnic group)’.
- **Family structure:** Children from single-parent families generally have the worst educational experiences across all ethnic groups; black Caribbean families have the highest rates of single parenthood and the lowest rates of educational achievement.

### *Labelling*

If we leave open the question of whether schools are **institutionally racist** (the idea that racist attitudes and practices go unchallenged — or are covertly encouraged — at all levels of the school), various forms of subtle labelling and stereotyping (intentional or otherwise) do seem to impact on ethnic-minority experiences of education.

Generally positive teacher attitudes to Indian pupils (based on knowledge of their high levels of attainment) may be offset by negative beliefs about black Caribbean pupils. Gillborn (2002) argues schools are institutionally racist, especially in the light of curriculum developments ‘based on approaches known to disadvantage black pupils’:

- selection in schools by setting
- schemes for ‘gifted and talented’ pupils
- vocational schemes for ‘non-academic’ pupils

Teachers, Gillborn argues, 'generally underrate the abilities of black youngsters', which results in their assignment to low-ability groups, a restricted curriculum and entry for lower-level exams. The [Pupil Level Annual School Census \(2002\)](#), for example, shows black pupils are more likely to be classified in terms of Special Educational Needs (SEN):

- 28% of black Caribbean secondary pupils
- 18% of white pupils

### *Stereotyping*

Figuroa (1991) suggested teachers frequently limit ethnic minority opportunities through the use of culturally biased forms of assessment (the way students are expected to speak and write, for example) and by consigning pupils to lower bands and sets on the basis of teacher assessment. Teachers also have lower opinions of the abilities of some ethnic minority groups, which results in a **self-fulfilling prophecy** of underachievement.



Identify and explain one way the hidden curriculum impacts on minority ethnic groups.

## Patterns and trends in subject choice

This section examines patterns and trends in subject choice across two variables — the conventional one of **gender** and the less conventional one of **social class**.

### Gender and subject choice

#### **Institutional choices**

Some choices are made for students by the schools they attend — the most obvious examples here being **types of school**. Before the general introduction of comprehensive schools, pupils were allocated to one of two types of secondary school based on their performance in IQ tests (the 11+):

- **Grammar schools**, for those pursuing a mainly academic education (there were more grammar schools available for boys, which meant they had a greater chance of being selected). The intake was also mainly white and middle-class (although not exclusively so).
- **Secondary modern schools**, where the curriculum was split between vocational training and academic subjects (with a bias towards the former). The majority of pupils were working-class, with much higher levels of ethnic minority representation. The vocational bias of these schools frequently meant boys and girls followed different educational paths. They were encouraged to follow traditional masculine and feminine routes into adulthood — the former in terms of practical skills such as bricklaying, car mechanics, metalwork, woodwork and sciences, the latter in terms of subjects and skills designed to prepare them for both their role within the family (child care, cooking and needlework) and traditional female occupations (nursing and secretarial work).

The introduction of **comprehensive schooling** changed this situation, although there was still evidence of **subject differentiation** within, rather than between, schools (with more males opting for subjects based around maths, science and technology and more females opting for humanities subjects).

The **National Curriculum** (introduced in 1988) made selected subjects (English, maths, a modern foreign language and so forth) **compulsory** up to GCSE. This development meant fewer subject options were available and consequently fewer subject choices were made on the basis of gender.

### Individual choices

Although subject choice does exist in secondary schooling (such as the choice of academic or vocational GCSEs), the main evidence for curriculum gendering now comes post-16, at **A-level** (Table 10.8). When given the opportunity, males and females make different subject choices.

Table 10.8 UK A-level or equivalent entries for young people

Subject	Males (%)	Females (%)
Physics	76	24
Computer studies	73	27
Economics	70	30
Design and technology	65	35
Mathematics	60	40
Biology	38	62
English literature	30	70
Social studies	30	70
Modern languages	30	70
Drama	30	70
Art and design	30	70
Home economics	06	94

Source: Babb et al. (2006)

The [Department for Education and Skills \(2007\)](#) suggests: 'Gender differences in subject choice become more accentuated post-16: girls' most popular subject is English, while boys' is Maths. Psychology, Art and Design, Sociology and Media/Film/Television Studies are amongst the 10 most popular choices for girls, while Physics, Business Studies, Geography and Physical Education are in the top 10 for boys.'



Identify two trends in male and female subject choice.

## Explanations

### *Socialisation*

Eichler (1980) highlighted how the different socialisation experiences and social expectations of males and females help to construct different gender identities and adult role expectations. In the past, for example, the education system contributed to the way women saw their primary adult role in the *private sphere* of the family (as mother and housewife, for example). Although female horizons have widened over the past 25 years, feminists argue traditional assumptions about masculinity and femininity continue to influence both family and work relationships. Educationally we can note:

- **Textbooks and gender stereotyping:** Males appear more frequently and are more likely to be shown in *active* roles ('doing and demonstrating') rather than *passive* ones. Best (1992), for example, demonstrated how pre-school texts designed to develop reading skills remain populated by sexist assumptions and stereotypes. Gillborn (1992) also notes how the hidden curriculum impacts on ethnic (as well as gender and class) identities through citizenship teaching, where the content of the subject teaching (democracy, racial equality, etc.) frequently clashes with the 'learned experiences' of black pupils.
- **Subject hierarchy:** Both teachers and pupils quickly appreciate that some subjects are more important than others — both *within* the school curriculum (English, maths and science have a special status in terms of the time and testing given over to them) and *outside* the curriculum — subjects that are not considered worthy of inclusion and hence knowing (sociology, psychology, politics and media studies, for example). The argument here is that gender hierarchies reflect these subject hierarchies, with males opting for *special status* subjects in far greater numbers.

### *Teachers*

Norman et al. (1988) argue **teacher expectations**, especially in early-years schooling, emphasise female roles related to the mother/carer axis. While this may no longer *automatically* translate into women seeing their primary role in terms of caring for their family, work roles continue to be framed around the idea of different male and female (mental and physical) capabilities.

Thirty years ago Stanworth (1981) found that both male and female A-level pupils underestimated girls' academic performance and teachers saw female futures in terms of marriage, childrearing and domestic work (while future careers were stereotyped into 'caring' work such as secretarial and nursing). The question we have to consider is the extent to which, for all the changes in male and female educational performance, the general picture is *still broadly similar* in terms of the adult roles performed by men and women in our society.

### Identity

Feminist research in the recent past focused on ideas like the gendering of the school curriculum, in terms of how pupils saw different subjects as ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’. Such gendered perception, Woods (1976) argued, helped to explain things like lower levels of female participation and general achievement in science subjects. Similarly, social policy initiatives, such as **Girls Into Science and Technology** (GIST), explored why girls were under-represented in science subjects:

- Sciences were seen as both difficult and demanding (and hence more suited to male aptitudes).
- The image of ‘scientists’ was seen by girls to be both unflattering and unfeminine.

### Academic hierarchies

Abbot and Wallace (1996) point out feminist research has shown how concepts of masculinity and femininity are influenced by factors such as **academic hierarchies** — how the school is *vertically stratified* in occupational terms (men at the top being the norm). Mahony (1985) argued staffing structures reflected male importance in the workplace (the highest status teaching jobs were — and remain — occupied by men). Mirza et al. (2005) note ‘Women make up 53% of the secondary teaching population, but are still under-represented in secondary school senior management positions, particularly headships’ (around 30% of secondary heads are women). In the nursery/primary sector, although 16% of teachers are male, 34% of head teachers are male.



Suggest two explanations for the trends in male and female subject choice.

### Social class and subject choice

This is a significant, if less widely researched, relationship considered in relation to choices.

#### Institutional choices

As we have seen with gender, before the development of comprehensive schooling subject choices for working-class pupils were largely limited by their over-representation in secondary modern schools, whose technical curriculum was geared towards *vocational education* rather than the academic curriculum of grammar schools. Both subject choice and the level to which subjects were examined were conditioned by the *type of school* attended (grammar school pupils mainly took O-levels, secondary modern pupils mainly CSEs — a top grade in the latter equated to the lowest grade in the former).

Contemporary examples focus mainly on differences between private, fee-paying schools (which do not have to follow the National Curriculum) and state-maintained schools (which do). The main difference here is that pupils in the former generally have a wider range of curriculum (in terms of things like modern and ancient languages,

for example) and extra-curricular choices. (Wellington College, for example, offers 'Wellbeing' as a core subject and options in philosophy and religion, Mandarin, Latin, Greek and Classical civilisation.)

### Individual choices

Sullivan et al. (2003) found subject choice was influenced by things like **parents' social position and interests**:

- Middle-class children were likely to choose the prestigious university subjects of medicine and law, independent of ability.
- Children were more likely to choose subjects that corresponded to their parents' interests.
- Children of the 'economic elite' were more likely to choose subjects related to commercial and financial skills.
- Children whose parents had high levels of cultural resources were more likely to focus on 'cultural' subjects (such as social sciences or literature) that have less direct economic value.
- Working-class children were more likely to choose technical subjects that reflected their parents' manual job experiences and because these had more secure job market prospects.

## Pro- and anti-school subcultures

A range of writers have explored the idea that the experience of many young people in education is shaped by a range of **school processes** (such as positive and negative teacher labelling, racism or the denial of status) that, in turn, lead to a variety of pro- and anti-school subcultural responses (the focus, in other words, is mainly on the development of **reactive subcultures** based around the way different groups adapt to the school situation).

Woods (1979), for example, argued for a range of **subcultural responses** ('adaptations') to school culture:

- **ingratiators** at one extreme — pupils who tried to earn the favour of teachers (the most positive adaptation)
- **rebels** at the other extreme — those who explicitly *rejected* the culture of the school

The subcultural responses in Mac an Ghail's (1994) study, on the other hand, were a more subtle outcome of a complex interplay of class, race and sexuality:

- **Macho lads**, for example, were similar to 'the lads' in Willis's (1977) study. While both were 'anti-school', Willis's lads could eagerly look forward to leaving school at the earliest opportunity and entering paid work; for the macho lads this type of work had all but disappeared (creating what Mac an Ghail called a 'crisis of masculinity'). All they had left to cling to was an outdated mode of masculinity focused around traditional forms of manual waged labour that no longer existed —

and they frequently employed racist explanations ('the blacks have taken our jobs') to explain/rationalise this situation.

- **Academic achievers**, by contrast, were the *pro-school* youth, similar to Willis's conformist 'earoles' — pupils who had a strong schoolwork ethic and looked to academic qualifications as a route to social mobility.
- **New enterprisers**, also *pro-school*, had bought into the 'new vocationalism' and rejected the academic route to mobility. They focused instead on developing practical skills (business and IT in particular) they hoped would be rewarded in the changing labour market.

Blackman (1995) also captured how tensions within the school contribute to subcultural development. He noted:

- **Boffin boys** were generally conformist and *pro-school*, with a group identity based on working hard and aspiring to social mobility.
- **Boffin girls** were the female equivalent. They worked hard and were *pro-school*, although their conformity was sometimes *instrumental* rather than committed: if school practices (such as poor teaching) clashed with their academic aspirations, for example, the latter took priority.
- **New Wave girls** were more ambivalent in their attitude to the school and shared Boffin girls' instrumental approach. While Boffin girls 'specialised in academic superiority', New Wave girls had wider interests and tastes. On the one hand they generally conformed academically but, unlike Boffin girls, they were sexually active and more confident in their ability to challenge ideas and practices (particularly those they saw as patriarchal and sexist).
- **Mod boys**, the male counterparts of New Wave girls, were similarly ambivalent, walking a fine line between deviance and conformity. These boys were generally *anti-school* but *pro-education* — they wanted academic qualifications but didn't particularly value their schooling.

Sewell (2000) examined how black youth adapted to the experience of schooling in terms of four main responses:

- **Passive accepters** — those African-Caribbean boys who passively (unconsciously) accepted the white cultural values of the school. They accepted the conventional wisdom it was 'black kids' who gave the school a bad name and were generally *pro-school*.
- **Active accepters** — those who 'acted white' in the school. Sewell found this to be the most common *pro-school* strategic response.
- **Passive resisters** — those who developed 'innovative' ways of maintaining a delicate balancing act between satisfying the demands of their peer group (through relatively minor acts of deviance) while simultaneously avoiding direct and open confrontation with teachers. Sewell argues this type was particularly characteristic of black girls and was neither particularly *pro-* or *anti-school*.

- **Active resisters** — those pupils who recognised the racist assumptions of the school and worked in ways that actively rebelled against their teachers and the school.

Shain (2003), on the other hand, examined the subcultural responses of Asian girls:

- **The Gang** were generally *anti-school*. They adopted an 'Us and Them' approach that involved a positive assertion of Asian identity. They generally opposed the dominant culture of the school, which they saw as white and racist.
- **The Survivors** were *pro-education* and *pro-school*. They were generally seen as 'ideal pupils' who worked hard to achieve success, avoided confrontation and were labelled by teachers as 'nice girls' and 'good workers'. This group played up to the stereotype of Asian girls as shy and timid while being actively engaged in a strategy of self-advancement through education.
- **The Rebels** who, despite the name, were generally *pro-school*. Their rebellion was against their cultural background: they adopted Western modes of dress and distanced themselves from other Asian girl groups. Their survival strategy was one of academic success, and school was equated with positive experiences not found in their home life.
- **Faith girls** whose identity was based around religion rather than ethnicity. Although this group fostered positive relations with staff and students and pursued academic success (they were *pro-education* in this respect), they were aware of racism as a major source of oppression in the school (which in some instances made them *anti-school*).

The various studies we have outlined generally share a preoccupation with the behaviours of 'extraordinary youth' (Blackman, for example, clearly found the New Wave girls far more exotic and interesting than their Boffin counterparts).

Brown (1987) noted the existence of subcultural groups:

- **Rems** — pupils generally seen as not very bright ('remedials')
- **Swots** — the most academically able (and despised) kids

He was, however, more interested in examining the '**ordinary kids**' whose lives are generally ignored by teachers and sociologists alike. He was interested in how economic changes — a rapid increase in youth unemployment during the time these pupils were in secondary school — impacted on their passage towards adulthood and their understanding of their working-class backgrounds.

Ordinary kids, Brown argued, entered into a tacit agreement with the school (and society): in return for conformity and working towards qualifications, they would get 'tidy jobs', jobs that had some status, were relatively secure and reasonably well paid. While this agreement held, ordinary kids would be *pro-education* and not *anti-school* (it's often difficult to see them as *pro-school*). However, Brown argued, if this agreement

broke down — the ‘tidy jobs’ disappeared, as they have done in the 25 years since the study — the ordinary kids would become both anti-school and anti-education.



Identify and explain one difference (other than being pro- or anti-school) between pro- and anti-school subcultures.

## Pro- and anti-education subcultures

While school subcultures focus on orientations to schools as **institutions**, education subcultures develop around orientations to the idea of education itself. Lees (1993), for example, noted:

- **Pro-school girls** who valued school as an enjoyable place for socialising with friends, but who were generally *anti-education*; qualifications were not particularly important.
- **Pro-education girls** — some who *intrinsically* valued education (as enjoyable and worthwhile), and others who took a more *extrinsic* or *instrumental* approach to their studies, seeing qualifications as a necessary means towards a desired end (they did not value school ‘for its own sake’).
- **Anti-education girls** who were *anti-school* and *anti-education*; school was a pointless waste of time, a disagreeable and uncomfortable period in their life that they had to get through before escaping into the adult world of work and family.

A number of studies have found youth who are **pro-education but anti-school**. Mac an Ghail (1994), for example, identified **Real Englishmen** — a group of middle-class pupils who aspired to university and the professional careers enjoyed by their parents. This group played an elaborate game of ridiculing school values while simultaneously working hard (mainly in private) to achieve success (which they saw as being gained on their own terms).

Similarly, Fuller (1984) found the black girls she studied were strongly *pro-education but anti-school*. They valued qualifications but resented the negative labelling by some teachers (a combination that made them work harder to ‘disprove the label’).

In terms of more explicitly **anti-school, anti-education** subcultures:

- For Willis (1977), ‘the lads’ generally saw school as a place to be tolerated (a place to ‘have a laugh’ with your mates) while waiting to leave.
- Johnson (1999) described schools in Northern Ireland where some pupil subcultures were marked by ‘hostility and indifference’ to learning, which correlated with high levels of absence and lower levels of achievement.
- Power et al. (2003), as we have seen, examined how some groups of middle-class children who found themselves situated in lower sets and streams were pro-education while not valuing their school experience.



Suggest one way pro-education subcultures differ from pro-school subcultures.

## Alternative education

A slightly different take is to consider a range of **social movements** (or **educational subcultures**) that, while stridently **pro-education**, are **anti-conventional** forms of schooling.

### Supplementary schooling

**Supplementary schooling** refers to what Strand (2002) defines as ‘extra schooling organised by and for particular ethnic groups outside of mainstream provision. These schools are organised mainly on Saturdays, hence are also sometimes called Saturday schools’. This type of school, as Mirza et al. (2005) note, is particularly popular with black Caribbean parents and pupils. The aim is to provide a setting where:

- black rather than white is the norm
- parents are included rather than excluded
- the curriculum is negotiated between teachers, parents and pupils

The pro-education nature of these schools is suggested by Mirza (1997) when she argues: ‘The image of mainstream schooling is that these children don’t want to learn, that they are not interested in education. But that is not true — these schools would not exist if it were. There is a desire and motivation to learn.’

### Non-conventional schooling

A different form of pro-education alternative is evidenced through schools such as **Summerhill**, a private, fee-paying school established by **A. S. Neill** in 1921 to reflect his educational philosophy that placed the happiness and personal freedom of the child at its centre. At Summerhill the pupils decide whether they will attend formal lessons or take exams, and the school is run democratically with regular school meetings held to decide and enforce rules. The basic aim is to develop self-discipline rather than external control.

**Steiner** schools reflect Rudolf Steiner’s philosophy that education involves children developing a ‘love of learning’ and ‘enthusiasm for the school’ with an emphasis on the development of ‘the imagination as integral to learning’. This approach is based on children learning at their own pace in a creative environment rather than being forced to learn specific things at specific times (as in conventional state schools). Such schools are pro-education while rejecting the ideas on which conventional schooling is based.

### Home tutoring

A final form of alternative schooling is the idea of **home tutoring** — a movement that is much larger in America than in the UK. As the name suggests, children are educated outside mainstream education (by parents or private tutors). Again, the general philosophy here is pro-education but anti-conventional schooling.

**OCR examination questions**

- 1** Identify and explain two ways in which ethnicity may affect a pupil's experience of education. (17 marks)
- 2** Outline and evaluate the view that school subcultures are a product of the social class background of the young people involved. (33 marks)
- 3** Outline and evaluate the view that pupils' experience of school is related to their gender. (33 marks)
- 4** Outline and evaluate the view that pupils' experience of school is related to their ethnicity. (33 marks)