

**Sociological Theories**



**Functionalism**

Functionalism is a structuralist theory. This means that it sees the individual as less important than the social structure or organisation of society. It is a ‘top-down’ theory that looks at society rather than the individuals within it. Society is more important because the individual is produced by society. People are the product of all the social influences on them – all of these influences make them what they are. They are born into society, play their role in it and then die. But their deaths do not mean the end of society. Society continues long after they are gone.

Functionalists study the role of different parts of society – social institutions – in bringing about the patterns of shared and stable behavior that they refer to as **Social order**. They might study, for example, how families teach children the difference between right and wrong, or how education provides people with the skills and qualifications needed in the world of work. For functionalists, society is a complex system made up of parts that all work together to keep the whole system going (known as the anatomical analogy). The economic system, the political system, school, work the NHS youth culture ect all have their part to play in maintain a stable society from generation to generation.

A major function of social institutions is to socialize every individual into a system of norms and values that will guide their future behavior and thinking. People need to be taught the core values of their society and to internalize them, so that they become shared and ‘taken for granted’. The end result of this process is **Value consensus** - members of society agree on what counts as important values and standards of behavior. Such consensus produces a sense of Social **solidarity** – we feel a sense of belonging to a group that has something in common.

Another important foundation stone of social order in modern societies is the specialized division of labour. This refers to the organisation of jobs and skills in a society. All members of society are dependent upon this division of labour, which supplies a vast and often invisible army of workers to maintain the standard of living we take for granted. Without the division of labour society would soon descend into chaos.

Criticisms of Functionalism

* Functionalism has been criticized for over emphasising consensus and order, and failing to explain the social conflicts that characterize the modern world. We see clear differences in behavior all around us everyday, and there may be clear cultural differences present in the same society. For example behaviours on which most of society might have been agreed 50 years ago, such as women with young children going out to work, cohabitation, abortion or homosexuality (which were all regarded as wrong), now attract a range of differing opinions. Some functionalists have attempted to explain this by reverence to subcultures. This can be defined as a way of life subscribed to by a significant minority who may share some general values and norms with the larger culture, but who may be in opposition to others for example, in a multicultural society like the UK, some minority ethnic groups may retain very traditional ideas about women’s roles, marriage, homosexuality etc.
* Functionalism has also been accused of ignoring the freedom of choice enjoyed by individuals. People choose what to do – they do what makes sense to them. Their behaviour and ideas are not imposed on them by structural factors beyond their control. In this sense, functionalism may present an ‘oversocialised’ picture of human beings.
* There may also be problems in the way functionalists view socialisation as a positive process that never fails. If this were the case then delinquency, child abuse and illegal drug-taking would not be the social problems they are.
* Functionalists have been accused by Marxists of ignoring the fact that power is not equally distributed in society. Some groups have more wealth and power than others and may be able to impose their norms and values on less powerful groups.

**Marxism**

Marxism is based on the ideas of sociologist Karl Marx (1818-83) - the system we live in (**capitalism**) divides everyone up into two basic classes; bosses and workers. Marx called bosses the **bourgeoisie** or ruling class (because they controlled society), and the workers he called the **proletariat.** The ruling class benefit in every way from how society operates, while the workers get far less than they deserve.

Like functionalism, Marxism is a structuralist theory – that is, it sees the individual as less important than the social structure of society. In particular, Marxism sees the economic organisation of societies as responsible for the behaviour of individuals. This is because Marxism claims that individuals are the products of the class relationships that characterise economic life.

Society is based on an exploitative and unequal relationship between two economic classes. The bourgeoisie are the economically dominant class (the ruling class) who own the **means of production** (machinery, factories, land). The proletariat or working class, on the other hand own only their ability to work. They sell this to the bourgeoisie in return for a wage. However, the relationship between these two classes is unequal and based on conflict because the bourgeoisie aim to extract the maximum labour from workers at the lowest possible cost.

According to Marxists, the result is that the bourgeoisie exploit the labour of the working class. The difference between the value of the goods and services produced by the worker and the wages paid is pocketed by the capitalist class and lies at the heart of the vast profits made by many employers. These profits fuel the great inequalities in wealth and income between the ruling class and the working class.

***If society is so unfair, how come the working class goes along with it? Why aren’t there riots, strikes and political rebellion? Why does society actually appear quite stable, with most people pretty content with their position?***

Marxists argue that the working class rarely challenge capitalism because those who control the economy also control the family, education, media religion – in fact, all the cultural institutions that are responsible for socialising individuals. Louis Althusser (71) argued that the function of those cultural institutions is to maintain and **legitimate** class inequality. The family, education, the mass media and religion pass off ruling-class norms and values as ‘normal’ and ‘natural’. Marxists refer to these ruling-class ideas as **ideology**. Socialisation is an ideological process in that its main aim is to transmit the ruling-class idea that capitalist society is **meritocratic** – that is, if you work hard enough, you can get on – despite the fact that the evidence rarely supports this view. This ideological device is so successful that the majority of the working class are convinced that their position is deserved. In other words, they are persuaded to accept their lot and may even be convinced that capitalism has provided them with a decent standard of living.

Marxists argue that capitalist ideology shapes the way of life of a society – its culture. A good example of this say Marxists is the way that the mass media convince us through advertising and popular culture – television, cinema, pop music, tabloid newspapers etc – that our priority should be to buy more and more material goods. We want to be rich so that we can buy more and more and somehow this will make us happy. What is more, while we are all watching soap operas and reading the latest celebrity gossip, we’re not noticing the inequalities and exploitation of the capitalist system.

The means that most of us are not aware of our ‘real’ identity as exploited and oppressed workers. We experience what Marxist describe as **false class consciousness.** Eventually though Marxists believe, we will learn the real truth of our situation and rebel against the capitalist system.

Criticisms of Marxism

* The notion of ‘false class consciousness’ has been undermined by surveys such as those conducted by Marshall (88) and the government in the form of the British Social Attitudes survey, which found that 69% of people thought their opportunities were influenced by their social class. Most people were aware of social injustices, especially relating to inequalities in the distribution of wealth and income, but felt there was little they could do practically to bring about more equality. However, in support of the concept of ideology, Charlesworth’s 1999 study of working-class people in Rotherham blames the educational system for this indifference and cynicism. He argues that the working-class experience of education results in them devaluing themselves and restricting their ambitions to being disappointed in life.
* Like Functionalism, Marxism has been accused of ignoring the freedom of choice enjoyed by individuals. People choose what to do and think – they are not ‘brainwashed’ by ideology. In this sense, Martxism too may present an ‘oversociaised’ picture of humans.
* Marxism may put too much emphasis on conflict. After all, despite all its inequalities, capitalism has managed to improve most people’s standard of living. Perhaps Marxism also ignores common interests that employers and workers have. If workers work well, then the business does well and employers can afford to increase wages.
* Marxism, in general, has been criticized for claiming that all cultural activity is geared to class interests. Consequently, Marxists neglect the fact that culture may reflect religious, patriarchal, nationalistic and ethnic interests.



**Feminism**

Feminists argue that the most important status difference and source of inequality is not class but gender. They point out that the UK is a patriarchal or male-dominated society – that is, men generally have more power and prestige than women across a range of social institutions. Women generally have less economic power than men. Women do not enjoy equality of access to jobs, especially the top jobs in the city and women are still expected to be predominantly responsible for the upkeep of the home and child-rearing – surveys continue to indicate that family life is not yet characterised by equality between the sexes in terms of household labour.

Feminist believe that sexual discrimination is still a problem today and Walter argues that women still need to achieve financial, educational, domestic and legal equality with men. Liberal feminists are optimistic that this will eventually happen. They believe that there has been a steady improvement in the position of women as old-fashioned attitudes break down more girls do well in education and more women have successful careers.

Other types of feminists are not so hopeful. Marxist-feminists argue that patriarchy suits the capitalist system as well as men, because women are unpaid domestic labourers who service the male labour force, making them fit and healthy for work, and who produce and rear the future workforce. True equality between the sexes can only occur when the capitalist system is dismantled.

Radical feminists believe that the patriarchal oppression and exploitation of women is built into every aspect of the way society is organized. In particular, the family is identified as the social institution in which patriarchy is rooted. Radical feminists argue that, through gender-role socialisation, women are socialised into accepting female subordination and into seeing motherhood as their main goal in life. Moreover, radical feminists argue that men aggressively exercise their physical economic and cultural power to dominate women in all areas of social life, and particularly in personal relationships, such as marriage, domestic labour` childcare and sex. All men benefit from this inequality – there are no good guys!

Criticisms of Feminism

Feminism has been criticized for sometimes assuming a unity of female experience and interests. This has been challenged by Black feminists and postmodernists, for example, who emphasise difference and diversity among women. According to George and Wilding, feminism may also be accused of committing a mistake attributed to Marxists; confusing the outcomes of a system with its intentions. For example, simply because something has a particular effect (gender discrimination) does not mean it was designed with the purpose to achieve this; it may have come about for other reasons

Feminism also ignores the discrimination faced by some men.

**Social Action Theory (Interactionism)**

This theory rejects the structuralist assumption that social behaviour is determined, constrained and even made predictable by the organization of society. They see people as having a much more positive and active role in shaping social life – it starts with people rather than society.

Social action theorists reject the view that people’s behaviour is the product of external forces over which they have little control. Most people do not feel themselves to be puppets of society. Rater, as Chris Brown (79) notes:

“*They feel they are living their own lives, making their own decisions and engaging, for the most part, in voluntary behaviour. There may be things they have to do which they resent, but resentment is, of course tangible evidence of an independent self, forced to comply, but unwillingly and under protest”*

 However, although we operate as individuals, we are aware of other people around us. Social action theorists argue that the attitudes and actions of those other people influence the way we think and behave – that society is the product of people coming together is social groups and trying to make sense of their own and each other’s behaviour.

People are able to work out what is happening to any given situation because they bring a set of interpretations to every interaction and use them to make sense of social behaviour. In particular, we apply meaning to symbolic behaviour. For example, gestures are symbols – putting up two fingers in a V sign may be interpreted as insulting, because it has an obscene meaning. When we are interacting with others, we are constantly on the lookout for symbols, because these give us clues as to how the other person is interpreting our behaviour for instance, if they are smiling we might interpret this as social approval,

Our experience of this **‘symbolic interaction’** means we acquire a stock of knowledge about what is appropriate behaviour in particular situations. We learn that particular contexts demand particular social responses. For example, I might interpret I might interpret drinking and dancing at a party as appropriate, yet the same behaviour at a funeral as inappropriate. It is likely that other people will share my interpretations and so it is unlikely that the behaviour described would occur at the funeral.

Socialisation involves learning a stock of shared interpretations and meanings for most given social interactions. Families, for example, teach us how to interact with and interpret the actions of others; education brings us into contact with a greater range of social groups and teaches us how to interpret social action in a broader range of social contexts. The result of such socialisation is that children acquire an identity.

Labeling theory (which you covered in deviance) is closely related to this theory.

Criticisms of Social Action Theory

Social action theories have been criticized because they tend to be very vague in explaining who is responsible for defining acceptable norms of behaviour. They do not explain who is responsible for making the rules that so-called deviant groups break. In this sense, they fail to explore the origin of power and neglect potential sources such as social class, gender and ethnicity. For example, Marxists argue that the capitalist ruling class defines how social institutions such as education and the law operate. In other words, social action theories tend to be descriptive rather than explanatory.

**Postmodernism**

It would have been pretty straight forward to plot out the future of a young woman of 100 years ago, attempting the same task for a woman today would be much more difficult. She could choose to marry or not, have children or not, have a career or not. The choices are endless. Life today is much more flexible, uncertain and less predictable than in the past

Sociologists have watched recent social changes and reached the conclusion that society has experienced such major upheavals that the old ways of explaining just does not work anymore. They believe that we have entered a new sort of society which they refer to as the post modern world.

History tells us that sociology developed in order to explain the rapid social changes associated with industrialisation and urbanisation during the 19th Century together with centralising government and a new rational, scientific way of thinking. Lives changed so drastically during this period that people began to look for theories and expiations that would help make sense of the bewildering changes taking place. Families left the rural communities where they had lived for centuries to find work in the new cities. They had to adjust to a different lifestyle, different work, different bosses and different kinds of relationships with family and community.

On the whole early sociologists approved of these changes and the kind of society they created – now commonly referred to as modernity or the modern world.

In the past 20 years or so some sociologists have identified trends and developments which, they claim show that modernity is fragmenting or dissolving. They argue that it is being replaced by a post modern world in which many sociological ideas and concepts are becoming irrelevant. Characteristics of postmodernity have been identified in aspects of:-

 **Work** – The nature of work and economic life has changed. Work is no longer dominated by mass factory production in which thousands of people work alongside each other. Work today is mainly located within the service sector and is dominated by either jobs that mainly involve the processing of information or by jobs that involve the servicing of consumption. Our ideas about work have also changed people today are less likely to expect a job for life, and are more willing to accept a range of flexible working practices such as part-time work working from home and job sharing.

 **Culture -** As our society has grown wealthier, so the media and other cultural industries such as fashion film advertising and music have become increasingly central to how we organise our lives. It is suggested that we are a ‘media-saturated’ society in which media advice is available on how we can ‘make over’ our homes, gardens, partners and ourselves. What these trends tell us is that consumption is now a central defining feature in our lives. Postmodern culture is also about mixing and matching seemingly contradictory styles.

**Identity** – our identities are now likely to be influenced by mainstream popular culture which celebrates diversity, consumerism and choice. In other words the old ’me’ was about where I came from in terms of my family and class background, the area I lived in and so on. The new postmodern ‘me’ however is about designer labels, being seen in the right places, the car I drive , listening to the right music. Society has become more about style than substance.

**Globalisation** – The global expansion of transnational companies such as McDonald’s, Sony, Coca-Cola and Nike – and the global marketing of cultural forms – such as cinema, music and computer games – have contributed to this emphasis on consumption. Such globalisation has resulted in symbols that are recognised and consumed across the world. Images of Britney Spears are just as likely to be found adorning the walls of a village hut in the interior of New Guinea as they are in a bedroom wall in Barnsley. Brands like Nike and Coca-Cola use global events to beam themselves into billions of homes across the world. It is therefore no wonder that this global culture is seen to be challenging the importance of national and local cultures and challenging nationalism as a source of identity. Information technology and electronic communication such as email and the internet have played a large part in this process.

**Knowledge** – In the postmodern world people no longer have any faith in great truths. In particular, people have become skeptical, even cynical, about the power of science to change the world, because many of the world problems have been brought about by technology. In the political world, ideologies such as socialism – which claimed they were the best way of transforming the world – have been discredited in many people’s eyes, with the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. Postmodernists insist that the truth is both unattainable and irrelevant in the postmodern world. Instead, they stress the relativity of knowledge, ideas and lifestyles, such that may different yet equally authentic values are possible.

Criticisms of postmodernism

Critics of postmodernism suggest that it is guilty of making too much of recent social changes. Evidence suggests that aspects of the postmodernist argument – especially the decline of social class, ethnicity and nationalism as sources of identity – are exaggerated. For example, surveys indicate that people still see social class as a strong influence in their lives, and use aspects of it to judge their success and status and that of others. There is no doubting that consumption has increased in importance, especially among young people, but it is pointed out that consumption does not exist in a vacuum. The nature of your consumption – what and how much you consume – still very much depends upon your income, which is generally determined by your occupation and social class. Similarly your ability to make choices is still also constrained by our gender and ethnicity, because of the influence of patriarchy and institutional racism.

**Sociological Theories of Youth Culture**

Functionalism

This theory is based on the idea that everything in society has a function (think back to the analogy of the body). Therefore youth culture serves a purpose in society. What functions do you think Youth culture serve? 

In most traditional societies young people go through a ‘rite of passage’ (ceremony marking the move from childhood into adulthood). Only a few of these remain in western society such as 18th Birthday party, Bar Mitzvah. According to **Parsons**, youth culture has taken over this ‘**rite of passage’** role extending it over a number of years and including a number of small unofficial rites of passage. Consider some rites of passage that you have gone through in your lifetime.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Rite of Passage | Age | What affect if/any did this have on your identity? |
| 1.2.3. |  |  |

**![MCj04257720000[1]]()Eisenstadt** (1956) suggested that through fostering and adopting a shared way of life with their peers, young people develop feelings of community and togetherness, it binds young people into society. They need to move from the **ascribed** status of being the child of a particular adult, to the **achieved** status of being an adult in their own right.

The function of youth culture is based on:-

* **Drawing boundaries between youth and adulthood** – How do we draw the boundaries in our society?
* **Transition** – moving from being a child to being an adult, **Parsons** (1954) argues that “youth culture provides a bridge” enabling young people to detach from their parents and make a start on living an independent life.

What evidence could we provide to show that young parents are detaching from their parents?

* **Social integration** – we all need to feel a sense of belonging in society otherwise ***anomie (*** *uncertainty/breakdown of norms and values)* occurs.
* **Age and generation** – despite differences between groups in tastes, dress etc. Youth groups are a homogenous age group which are created by social changes of the time with a clear generation gap between youth and adulthood. Roszak (1970) argues that the new values, interests and behaviours of youth replaced divisions based on class, gender and race making them outdated and irrelevant
* **To help manage the social pressure young people face** - Youth culture provides a mechanism for coping with this period of stress by providing a peer group who adopt the same norms and values.

In groups of two or three;

Outline social pressures that young people may face in contemporary society.

How could the peer group help to ease this stress? Give examples.

Could any other agent of socialisation ease this stress?

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Are other agents of socialisation likely to add to this stress?

Give explanations for each of your answers.

According to **Eisenstadt** the style, content and form of the youth culture is of no importance the purpose of the culture which is one of transition and social integration is the same.

Evaluation of Functionalism

* Differences between youth groups are often based on important social divisions such as class and ethnicity and so cannot be ignored.
* Youth is treated as an age-specific category and so cannot explain that ‘youth’ can be a state of mind.
* Vast majority of the researchers look at the groups that they themselves come from which is white, middle-class American males.
* Functionalists only look at the functions of youth culture and do not offer any explanation of the meanings behind it.
* Youth is often associated with social disorder, so functionalists may overestimate how much of a positive a role youth culture has.

Marxism

Marxist theory states that capitalist societies are based on the exploitation of the population, but especially the working class by a small ruling class. Because of this exploitation, the working class and the ruling class are routinely in conflict. The ruling class uses a variety of mechanisms to control the working class. The obvious form of control is the criminal justice system and the police. However a much more important method is by controlling the very values of society, so that capitalism and inequality seem ‘natural’. This concept of controlling values is known as **hegemony** and is achieved through control of the mass media and of the values taught in schools.

![C:\Users\c.johnson\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\X9X55231\MCj04344110000[1].wmf]()This control in school is achieved via the ‘hidden curriculum’. The hidden curriculum refers to factors that are taught in school, other than the national curriculum (subjects)

Complete the following table:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Factor that is taught via the hidden curriculum** | **How is this taught** | **How does this control values/behaviour** |
|  |  | Failure is seen as the fault of the person failing so they have to **work hard** in order to fit in/succeed |
| Obedience |  |  |
|  | Head teacher is at the top, students at the bottom  |  |
| Achievement |  |  |
|  | Everyone wears a uniform |  |

In the 1970’s & 80’s the Centre for Contemporary cultural Studies (CCCS) developed radical theories of youth subcultures. They were highly critical of the class inequalities found in capitalist societies. They argued that working-class young people were the weakest point in ruling class control of society, as unlike adults they were not tied into capitalist society through jobs and family commitments.

![C:\Users\c.johnson\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\X9X55231\MCj04344110000[1].wmf]()Consider the above point from the CCCS. How could this cause problems for the bourgeoisie?

**![C:\Users\c.johnson\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\X9X55231\MCj04344110000[1].wmf]()Jefferson (**1975) saw working class youth culture as a form of **resistance against a class-divided society.** One of the unusual things about this resistance was that it was largely **symbolic.** It was through their sub cultural styles that these youths expressed their protest – **resistance through rituals**. The CCCs researchers set out to interpret the underlying meanings of the symbols and rituals employed by the new youth sub cultures. For example, the bizarre gear of punks seemed designed to challenge and undermine ‘respectable values’.

Look at the picture below. Identify which elements of punk style could support these points.



![C:\Users\c.johnson\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\X9X55231\MCj04344110000[1].wmf]()The aggressively masculine behaviour of skinheads was interpreted as an exaggerated defense of traditional working-class male lifestyles.

Why do traditional working class lifestyles need defending?

A common CCCS argument was that working-class youth were trying to win some cultural space for themselves. A space where they could defend and assert themselves. By creating new subcultures with their own meanings, rituals and identities, working-class youth refused to accept other people’s low opinion of them. Phil Cohen (1972) pointed out that this symbolic resistance was a **Magical solution** (ie, it only gave the appearance of being an effective solution). It did not succeed in abolishing class inequalities in wealth or power. Also when the new styles of music, dress and dance were copied by lots of other people in society, the rebellious subcultures began to appear a bit tame rather than subversive.

To summarise:-

* Subcultures arise from and show resistance to the dominant capitalist culture.
* They provide an outlet for some young people who feel oppressed.
* They are based on an exaggerated form of working-class identities.
* They are part of the magical solutions to the economic and social problems faced by many young people.

Evaluation of Marxism - Use the AS Sociology text book to evaluate the Marxist views of youth.

**Feminism**

One of the criticisms leveled at the CCCS studies was that they neglected young women indeed the term **‘invisible girls’** is often used. But feminist researchers have since tried to fill in the gaps. The discovery of the **‘bedroom culture’ (McRobbie et al)** This culture was based around romance, fashion and he private domestic space of the Girls’ bedroom) is one example. Early feminist research made two main points. First of all, gender makes a difference – males and females have different subcultural styles, and secondly girls tend to be disadvantaged at every class level compared to boys.

A look at any of the subcultures show that girls were clearly involved in the music, fashion and social behaviours for example there were female hippies, Mods and teddy girls, but the place of young women in youth culture reflects their general position in society. Although they are present they are pushed to the margins. McRobbie argues that the range of possibilities open to females in subcultures is much more limited than that of the males. According to her, youth cultures let males have ‘temporary flights’ away from the responsibilities and constraints imposed upon male adults in society, but females are denied this possibility because of greater parental control and the constraints imposed by other females concerning appropriate sexual conduct. This is linked to the ideas about the natural place of women being in the home rather than hanging around in the streets.

In a study “**Its different for girls”, sue Lees (1993)** interviewed pupils aged 15-17 in some London inner-city schools. She was particularly interested in the way they developed gendered identities. The boys in her study were scared to appear soft and feminine and so they quickly learned that they had to resort to hard language and avoid the sort of intimate talk which they associated with girls. Girls, on the other hand feared being identifies as slags and so they cultivated softer ways of talking. They also took a great deal of care over the way they dressed (stylish enough to be sexually attractive but not so extreme as to be though loose or easy) . Lees argues that this detailed attention to physical appearance is not so much a natural feminine thing but rather something that girls are taught.

Feminists also argue that male and female are not just ‘different’ – they are also unequal in the sense that males have greater power. This male power is called **patriarchy.** For example in the schools studied by Sue Lees there was a sexual ‘double standard’. If a girl went around with different boyfriends or engaged in intimate sexual behaviour, then her reputation was damaged. But if a boy behaved the same way with girls his reputations was enhanced.

 Despite the more public role of women there are very few studies of all-girl British subcultures. In the USA there are girl subcultures such as the Riot Grrls and SK8er girls

Evaluation of Feminism

* If the CCCs researchers can be criticized for focusing on males, then feminist researchers have sometimes been guilty of the opposite bias. It is important to get a balanced picture in order to see whether gender differences have declined.
* Many of these approached deal only with gender-related issues, neglecting social class and ethnicity.
* Recent developments in youth cultures suggest a more androgynous development.

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**![MCj04344030000[1]]()Postmodernism**

Postmodern theories highlight the diversity and fragmentation of youth culture in the postmodern age. The boundaries between subcultures have become very blurred, since young people now follow lifestyles based on their individual tastes.

![MCj04352780000[1]]()Youth subcultures in the past seemed to be stable and distinct. People from the same neighborhood, school or social class usually adopted the same sub cultural style and followed it for a number of years. The old subcultures were authentic in the sense that they were based on a consistent meanings and values for example rebellion. But that is changing; nowadays we are faced with a ‘**supermarket of style’ (Polhemus),** there are simply too many choices and options. Young people are less committed to one particular style and they are reluctant to give themselves sub cultural labels. This is also referred to as a ‘**pick and mix’** society.

In the work of Bennett, Hetherington and other writers, a key difference from earlier sub-cultural approaches is that they reject the view that the cultural behaviour of young people is shaped or determined by social class or social and economic conditions faced by young people.

Hetherington (1998) for example, in a study of new age travellers, found that they came from a wide-range of backgrounds and not from one class position.

Both Bennett and Hetherington emphasise the element of choice in young people’s cultural behaviour. Young people choose particular lifestyles, rather than being pushed into patterns of cultural behaviour by structural forces such as class.

Widdicombe & Wooffitt (1995) encouraged young people to talk about their experiences and views of the world; they argued that youth subcultures did not have fixed meanings or any real independent existence. They suggested instead that young people used the notion of a youth subculture in many different ways. There was, therefore, no one meaning of youth culture or subculture. The anarchy of punk, the oppositional attitudes of working—class youth were in fact, merely meanings imposed upon young peoples’ activities by sociologists.

**Maffesoli (1998)** suggests that youth subcultures as such had ceased to exist and instead were being replaced by **Neo Tribes –** a fluid association which people can move in and out of over time, reflecting the nature of modern youth. These neo-tribes tend to be based on networks that have developed through the choice to be together for ‘elective sociality’ (based simply on the desire to be together) rather than for any particular collective purpose.

Bennett supports this point and argues that we should use the term ‘neo-tribe’ rather than youth subculture in order to emphasise the elements of choice and fluidity in contemporary youth lifestyles. By ‘neo-tribes’ Bennett means a social grouping with a loose structure organised around lifestyle themes and consumer choices, rather than a shared position in the social structure. They share a common state of mind rather than class position.

![C:\Users\c.johnson\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\6UDN5UL0\MCj01983860000[1].wmf]()

Bennett illustrates his arguments by referring to his study of dance music in Newcastle in the 1990s. He argues that cultural identities are much more fluid and less stable than they were in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. Young people no longer have fixed commitments to just one set of cultural influences and tastes, whereas skinheads, punks etc fiercely identified with these identities to the exclusion of others.

Other postmodernists such as Kahane argue that contemporary subcultures are very real attempts to construct new and original subcultures from the vast choice of music, styles, and language available to young people.

Sarah Thornton suggests that although many subcultures are the product of commercial ![C:\Users\c.johnson\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\AIM9WW8H\MCj04403760000[1].png]()interests, many young people subvert them and make them original in ways never thought of by the fashion/music industry.

Another important part of postmodern thinking is the impact of globalisation on youth subcultures. Luke and Luke argue that cultural influences are now global rather than national or local. This means that hybrid youth subcultures are emerging, in which elements form global youth cultures and adapt them according to local ideas and values

**Hebdige** argues that new technologies such as the Internet have resulted in the creation of virtual or proto youth cultures that require no collective physical interaction and in which class, gender and ethnicity are less important.

**![C:\Users\c.johnson\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\6UDN5UL0\MPj04422630000[1].jpg]()Reimer (1995)** argues that the central feature of youth in modern societies is the preoccupation with 'fun' ‑ the constant search for excitement and stimulation that cuts across all other sources of identity (class, gender, ethnicity, and so forth).

An evaluation

* However, not all sociologists are convinced that class no longer shapes the lives of young people, as postmodernists suggest. Harriet Bradley(1997) argues that postmodernists have no consistent definition of class. They ignore the extent to which economic class differences still affect what people can afford and therefore what lifestyle choices they can make.
* Marshall (1997) argues that they are highly selective in the arguments and evidence they use and tend to neglect evidence that economic class inequalities are stíll a major factor in shaping people's lives.
* Westergaard (1997) accepts that lifestyle and consumption have become increasingly related to identity. However, he sees these as strongly influenced by economic differences such as wage inequality.
* Postmodernist exaggerate the differences between the past and the present. Perhaps the old subcultures were not quite as fixed and stable as they imagine. Also, distinct youth subcultures have not entirely disappeared in the present day – Goths are one example
* Although there is more choice in youth styles than in the past, young people do have dress conventions to follow.
* There are still youth styles associated with different genders ethnicities and social classes.

**Theoretical Explanations of Youth Deviance**

Functionalist Explanations

A certain amount of youth crime and deviance is a natural and inevitable feature of life in a contemporary society. The concept of **status frustration** has often been used to explain youth deviance amongst the working class youth. Crime is seen as a way of gaining status – normal ways of gaining status such as money or career is denied to them. However this does not explain middle class or female offending. Other ideas are that youths are living up to the norms and values of traditional masculine role models and expectation.

Marxist Explanations

The work of the CCCS refers to the concepts of **exaggeration** and **resistance,** young offenders turn to crime and deviance as a way of reacting against and resisting capitalism. Faced with unemployment or working for low wages in dead end jobs provides the necessary fuel to kick back against the capitalist system and one way of doing this is through committing crime. Also disadvantaged young people want the same opportunities as everyone else in society but because they have little money or social opportunities they do not have the means to legally attain them. As with functionalist explanations these ideas still fail to explain the existence of middle-class and female crimes.

Interactionist Explanations

Interactionists believe that people are not puppets of the social system. They believe that people behave in certain ways because of their beliefs about the world. People are not simply given these beliefs by the social system; they are conscious and reflect on the world. It is important to understand what people are thinking and feeling in order to understand their behaviour . This means that in order to understand crime and deviance, we need to understand the inner world of the criminal or police officer rather than focusing on the impact of poverty or the value consensus.

**See labeling and deviance amplification**

Feminist Explanations

Very little work has been done on reasons for female crime.

Early theories of crime and gender put differences in offending down to biology. Today some still argue that genes explain the difference in offending between men and women some argue the hormonal imbalances may make women commit crime.

Heidensohn (2002) explains the difference in the lower levels of crime committed by women because of the patriarchal controls place on women. This begins at an early age when girls are taught to be less adventurous and see their mothers passively conforming. This socialisaton is continued through school. As housewives they are unlikely to be in places that allow crime and their role gives them little time to commit crime.

Adler explains the rise in female crime over the last few decades. By arguing that women throughout the western world are committing crime as a result of the impact of feminism and women becoming more involved in traditionally male spheres (laddets)

Postmodernist Explanations

Postmodernists do not really concern themselves with theories of crime because they see crime as being the result of personal choice. They see all of the above theories as outdated and are more concerned with the issues of style and choice.

