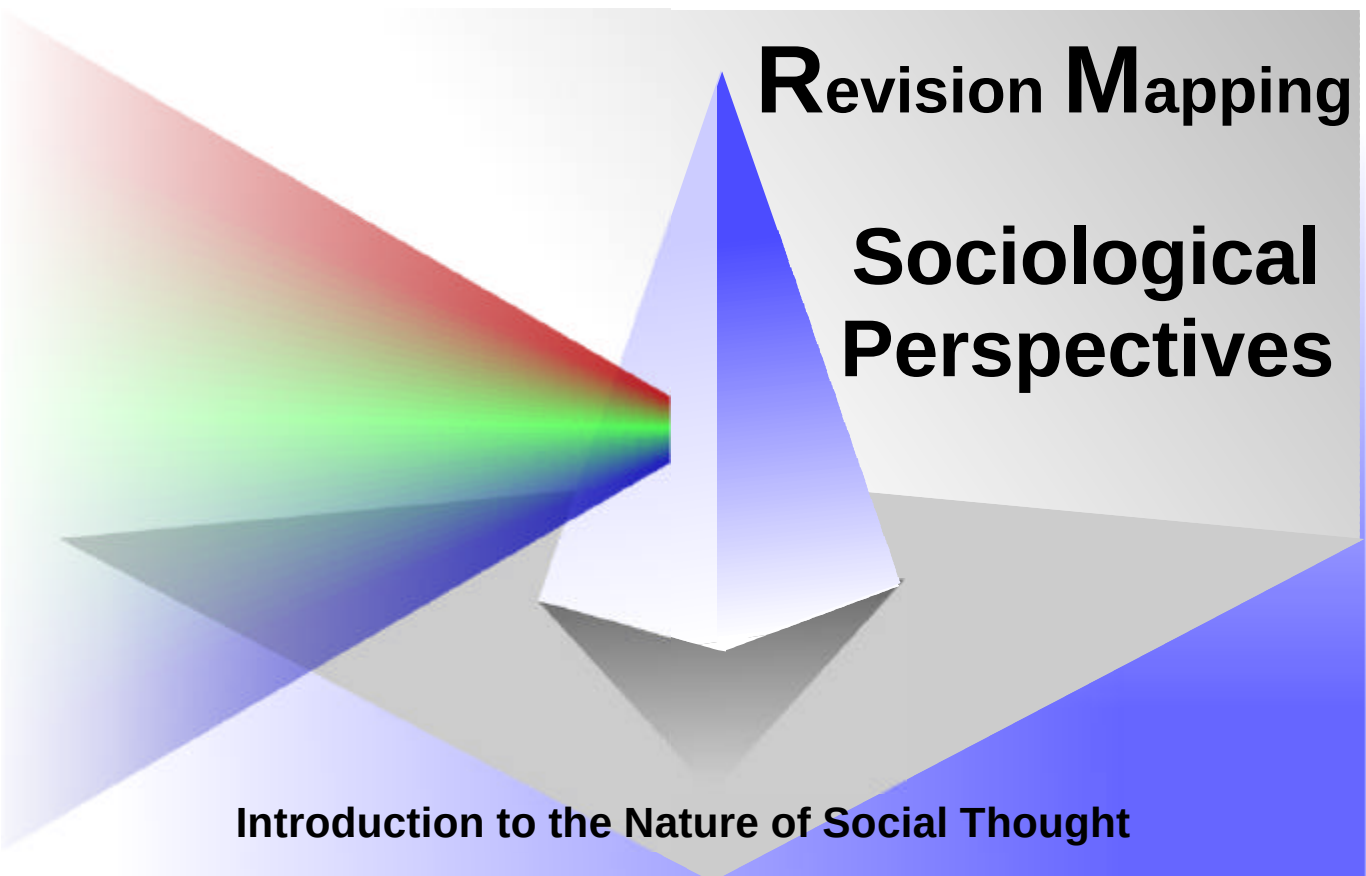


AS Sociology



Revision Mapping

**Sociological
Perspectives**

Introduction to the Nature of Social Thought

**Social structure and social action
Conflict and consensus
Macro and micro perspectives**

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Structure

Social behaviour is governed by rules (informal norms and formal laws) that surround and limit choices of behaviour. Every social relationship (family, school, work etc.) involves roles that, in turn, involve values and norms associated with the role - in combination these provide a behavioural framework for our lives.

Jones (1987): For Structuralists, society is "A structure of (cultural) rules".

Haunting

Meighan (1981): Social actions are always surrounded by the *ghosts of social structures*. We are *haunted* by things we cannot see but which affect our behaviour.

Synoptic Link

Meighan's concept "haunting" can be applied to our understanding of the role and purpose of the education system.

Examples

Classroom interaction haunted by:

Physical environment (conducive to learning?)

Knowledge being taught (e.g.. Theoretical or practical)

Language of education (do elaborated codes favour the middle classes?).

Demands of employers (are qualifications the only educational objective?)

Synoptic Link

Crime and Deviance

The relationship between structure and action is demonstrated by **Merton's** "Strain Theory" of deviance.

Chess illustrates the difference between **Structure** (the physical boundaries of the playing area for example) and **Action** (players, for example, are free to choose their own particular strategies within the game). While social structures limit choice of action (in chess play is bounded by certain rules), actions may modify social structures ("breaking the rules" - deviance - may produce changes in the organisation of society).



Everything we say or do means something to both ourselves and others. No form of behaviour is ever meaningless.

Society as a "framework of rules".
A rule is something you're supposed to obey and a framework is the way rules are created, maintained and policed.

Behaviour is constantly open to interpretation, both by ourselves and others. Interpretation reflects back on meaning (how we interpret the behaviour of others depends on what it means to us) and negotiation (it's possible to change the way people interpret behaviour).

Negotiations: Interaction involves different levels of negotiation - from situations where no negotiation is involved (people are ordered to do something) to situations where they are able to "discuss" (in the widest sense) the meaning of their actions and how others should interpret them.

Action involves knowledge of how our behaviour might impact on people at whom it's directed. Conversations, for example, involve social action - how you behave is influenced by how the other person behaves and vice versa.

Behaviour differs from action in the sense it doesn't involve knowledge of how it impacts on others - a barking dog, for example, influences the behaviour of other dogs but the dog has no awareness of how its behaviour influences others.

Meanings

Negotiations

Interpretations

Goffman

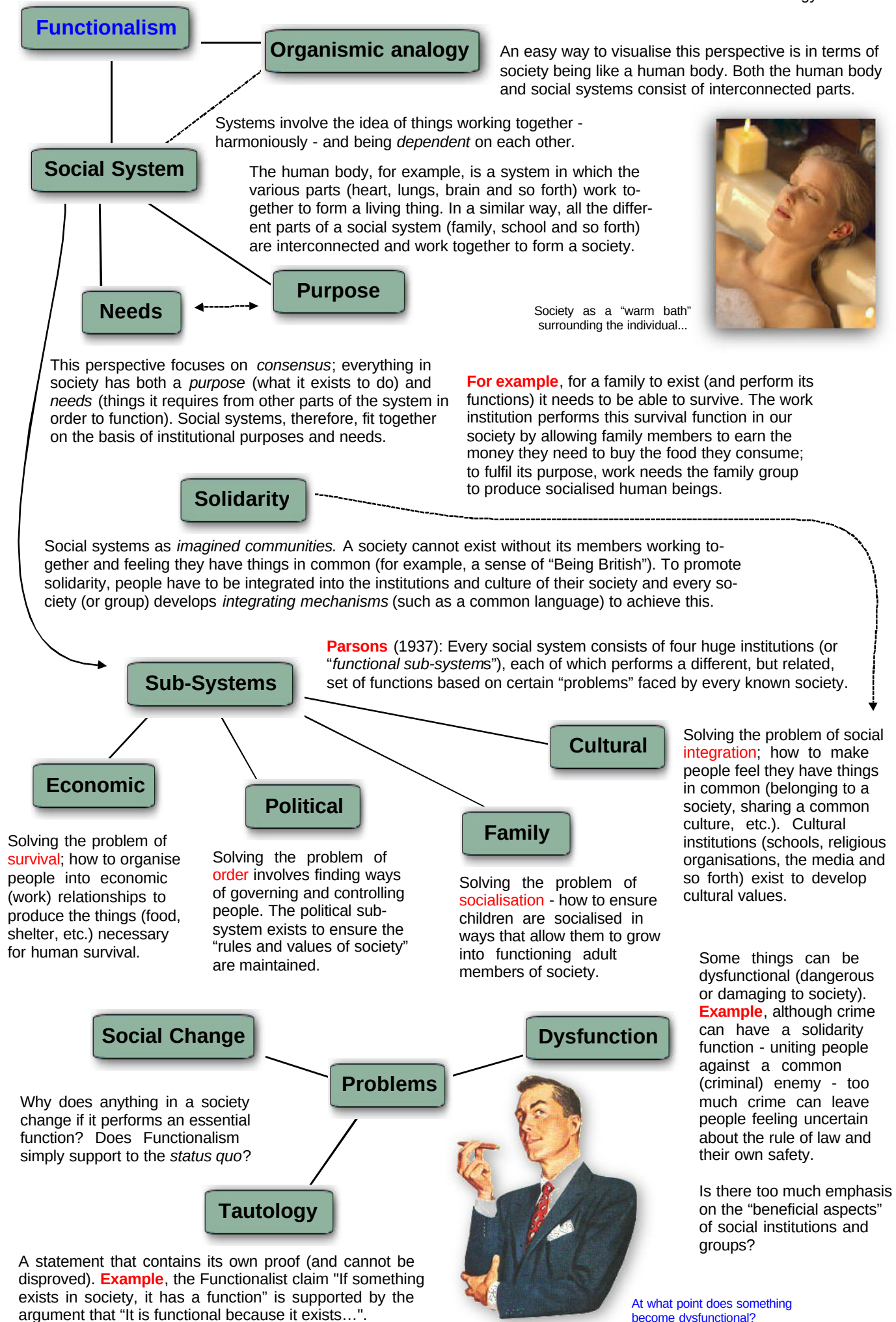
Action

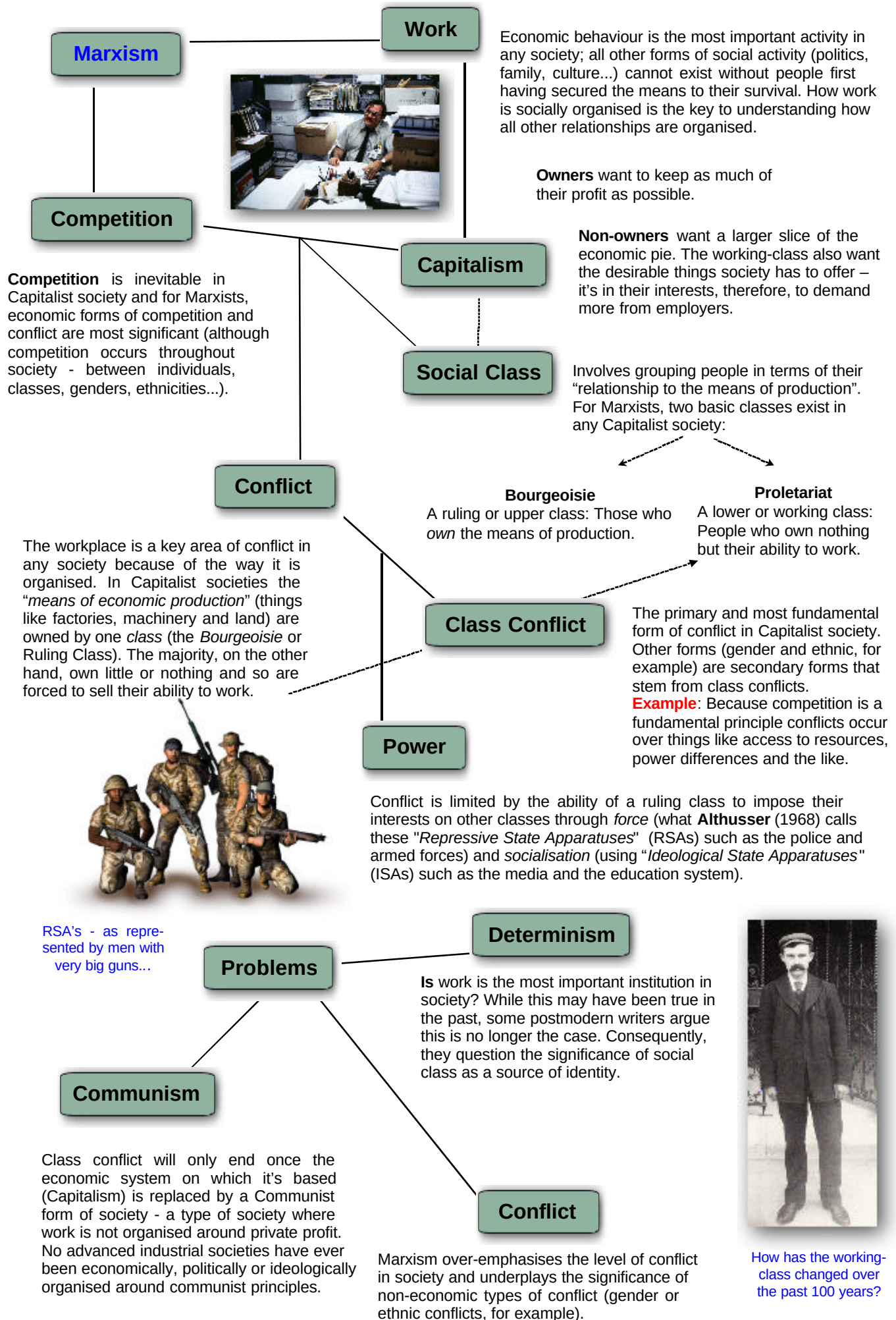
Focuses on our ability to make choices about behaviour - about obeying or disobeying rules, for example.

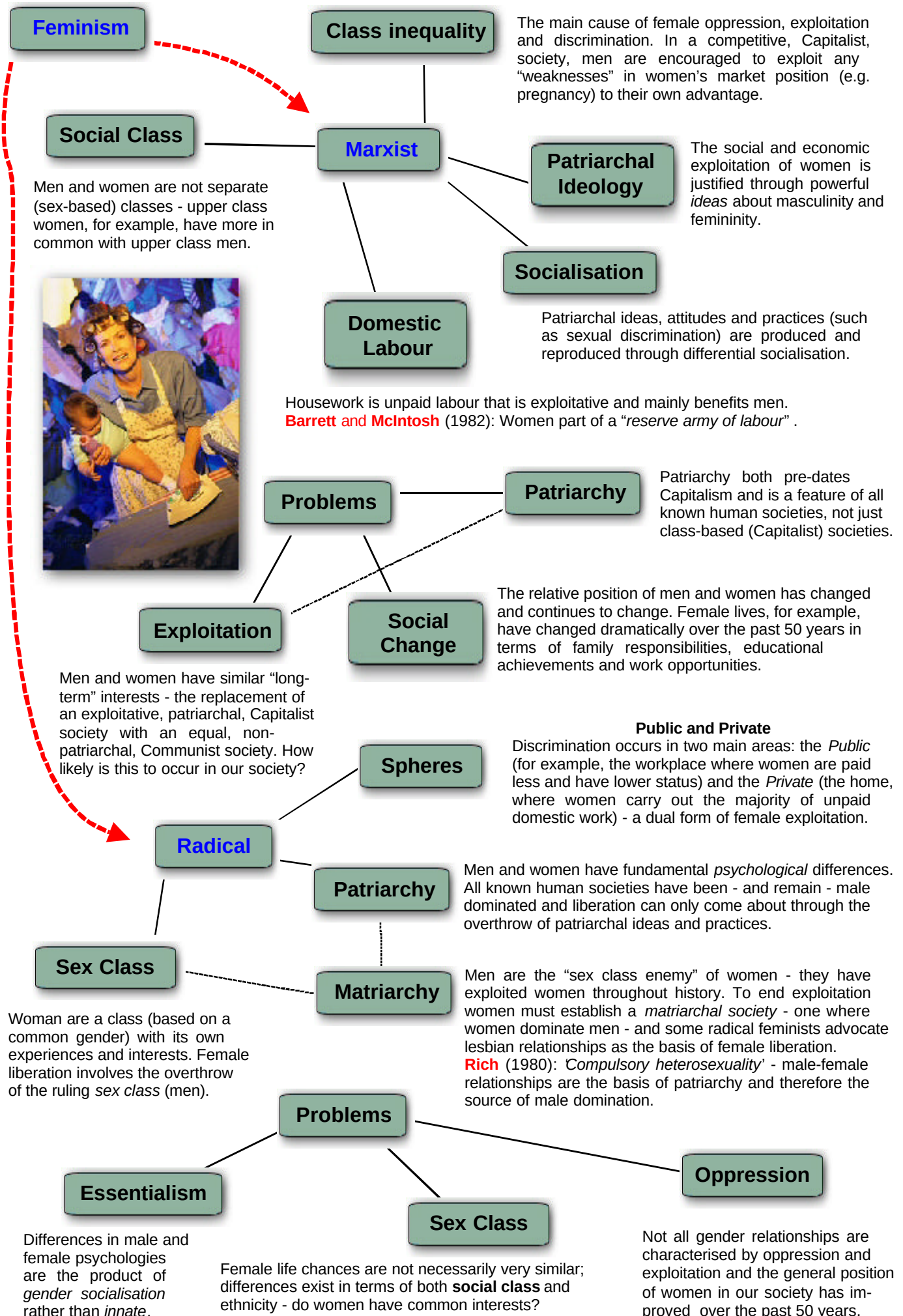
Weber

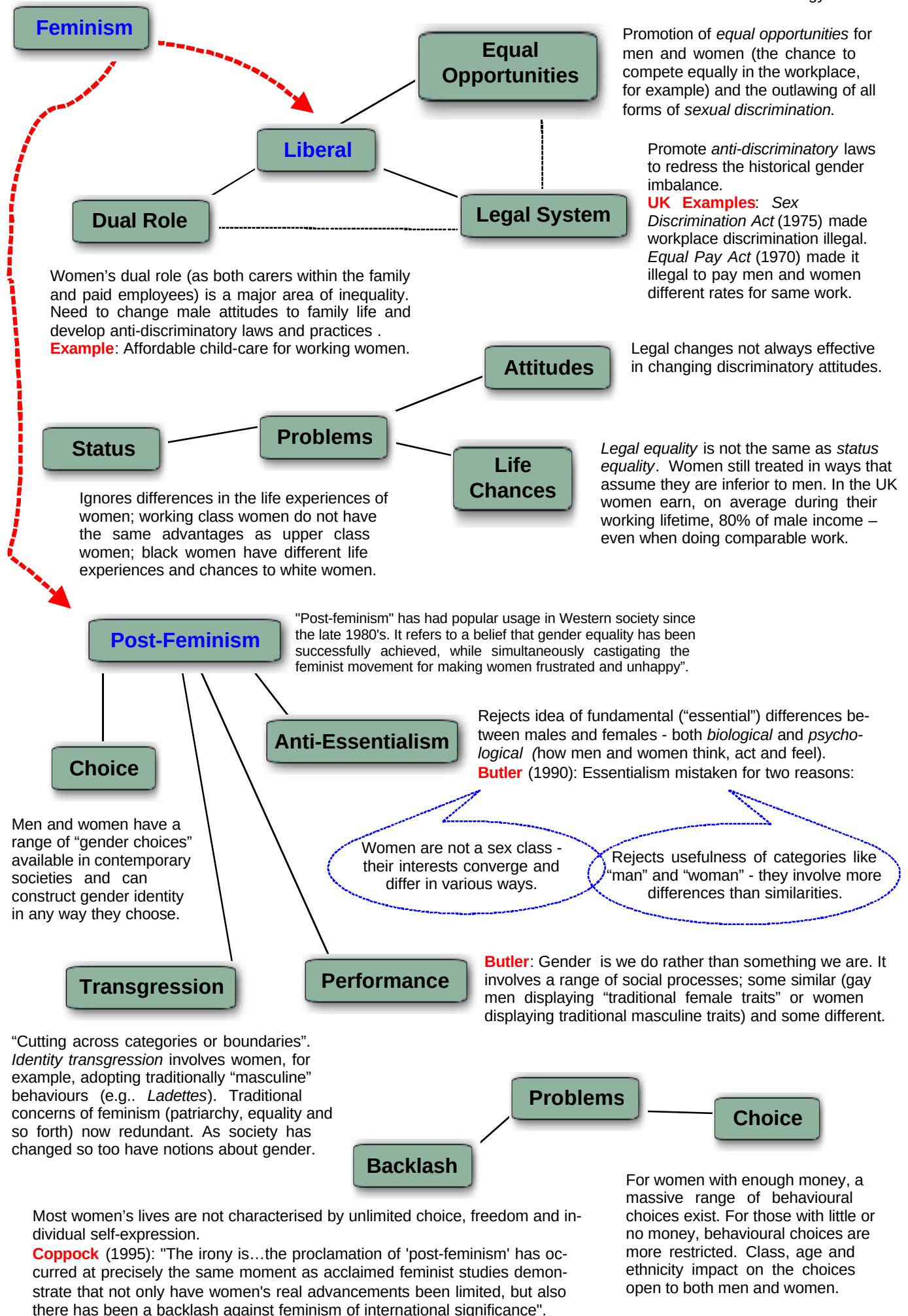
Behaviour

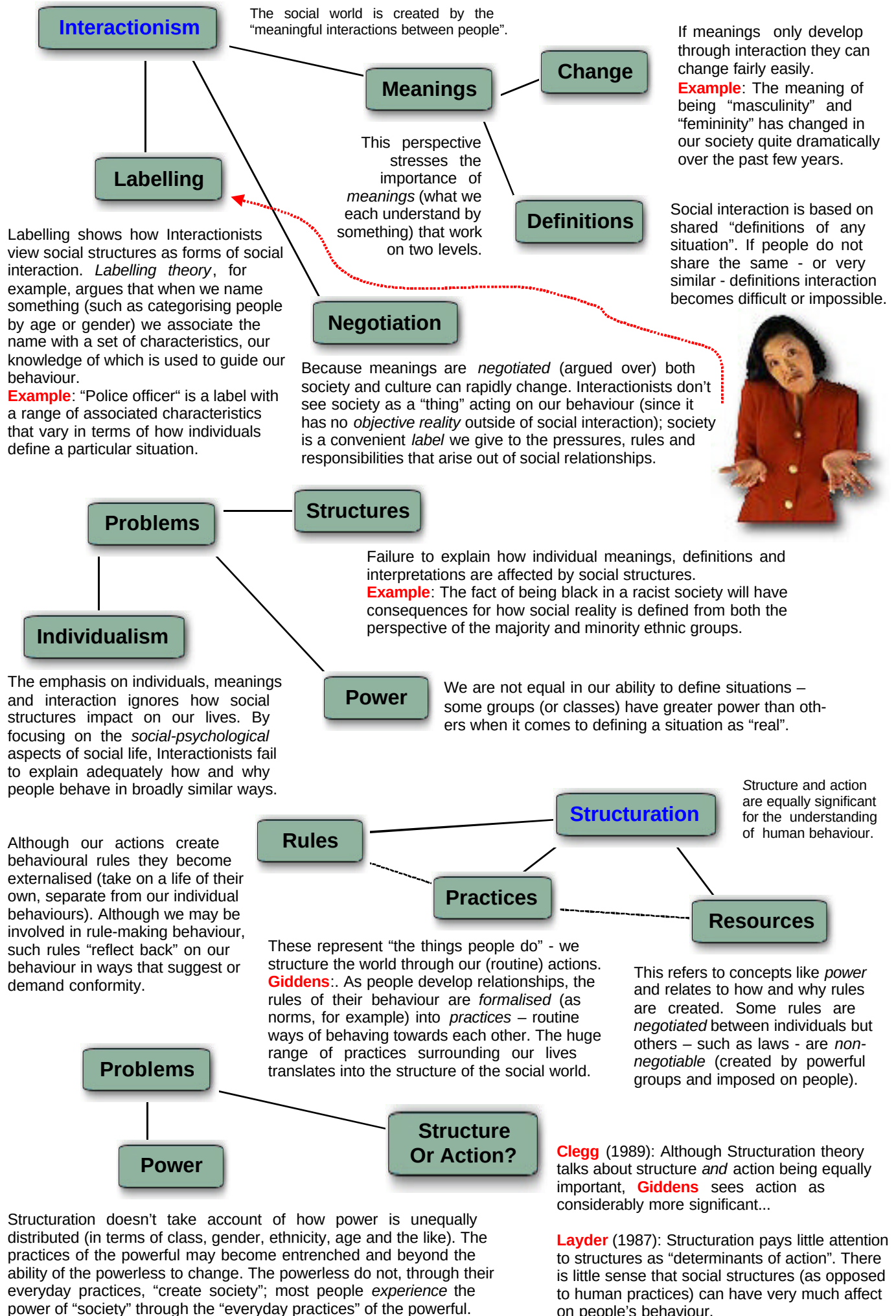
Action











Narratives (or stories) are central to understanding social behaviour; people's lives are viewed as a seamless web of interlocking narratives which we define and move between at will. Social life, therefore, consists of a multiplicity of different narratives.

Metanarratives

"Big stories", culturally constructed to explain something about the nature of the social / natural worlds.

Examples: Religions (Christianity or Islam) and political philosophies (Socialism or Conservatism).

Lyotard (1986): Postmodernism characterised by an "incredulity towards metanarratives" - big stories about the world are not believable or sustainable since, at some point their claims to explain "everything about something" are challenged, breakdown or co-exist uneasily.

Narratives

Globalisation

We live in a global society and no-longer think or behave in terms of national boundaries. How we think about, communicate and interact with people is changing rapidly, with unforeseen consequences for social and economic organisation (such as the changing nature of work).

Choice

Economic, political and cultural globalisation has created almost "unlimited choice" in terms of how people live their lives. Choice extends from goods and services, through lifestyle choices to areas like sexuality (from heterosexual through homosexual to transgendered).

Identity

"Who we believe ourselves to be" or how we define ourselves. In the past, identities more:

Post Modernism

Uncertainty

The downside to "almost unlimited choice" (from which we *pick-and-mix* our identities) is confusion about who we are and how we're supposed to behave. The "old certainties" of class, gender, age and ethnicity no longer tell us how to behave "appropriately". Fear (at having made the wrong choices) is a feature of postmodern society.

Centred

Clear, relatively fixed and certain.

Example: Clearer ("centred") ideas about the meaning of masculinity in the past because there were relatively few choices available to men. In postmodern society, there exists a range of possible choices about "how to be a man"; this leads to uncertainty and identities that are:

Decentred

As the range of possible meanings about something (like sexuality or lifestyle) expand, people become *less certain* ("de-centred") about how they are supposed to behave. The *globalisation* of culture, for example, involves categories such as class, gender, age and ethnicity being combined to create a new range of identities.

Example: British Asians defining themselves as *Brasian* – a mix of British and Asian cultures and identities.

Problems

Choice

For the majority of people in any society "choice" is an illusion - they do not have the money, power or resources to exercise choice in any significant way. Postmodernism ignores the ways choice is socially produced.

Identity

Large numbers of people in our society still define themselves (or are defined by others) in traditional ways when it comes to categories such as class, gender, age and ethnicity.

