

A LEVEL
Topic Exploration Pack

SOCIOLOGY

H580
For first teaching in 2015

Marxism

Version 1



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This Topic Exploration Pack should accompany the OCR resource 'Component 1 Themes and Perspectives: A focus on Marxism' student activities, which you can download from the OCR website.



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Introduction

This pack introduces students to social theory and allows them to apply their knowledge to a range of topics within component 1. A key theme of the revised specification is a focus on the application of theoretical perspectives across the specification. It is important, therefore, that students are competent in understanding how social theories emerged as sociology has evolved. By the end of the course, students should feel confident in being able to apply theoretical ideas to any aspect of the social world.

This pack begins by exploring the fact that sociologists have different perspectives on a range of issues, or ways of explaining social change and the world around them, which can be broadly divided into structural or action perspectives. Perspectives are subsequently divided into further types, consensus or conflict theories. Students need to be aware that the structure vs. action dichotomy has been a central tension within the discipline. Students should be made aware that there is a danger in being too prescriptive about which theory a person belongs to. Students should be aware that sociologists do not necessarily fit neatly into one category or another, but often combine theoretical approaches, or develop theoretical ideas over time.

Finally, some consideration needs to be given to the fact that the theories explored within the A Level mainly represent western social theories which are not necessarily easily applicable to phenomena beyond western society. Western forms of feminism, for example, explore notions of what it means for women to be oppressed in the west. It becomes problematic when western ideas of oppression are applied to non-western societies. Given that the specification has a global theme, this issue is worth picking up throughout the course.

Students should be encouraged to consider their own personal reaction to each theory and decide which they identify most readily with, but also be aware that their task is to discuss the views in a balanced way, considering the contribution that each theory makes as well as the problems with each. In order to teach social theory effectively, students need some basic knowledge of the political spectrum and understand it is another dimension of the debate. This becomes important throughout the course when considering the relationship between sociology and social policy. Students may have little idea of the difference between the political left and right, so the process of unpacking the ideologies which relate to each becomes quite important when locating theories. For students who do understand the political ideologies, stretch and challenge activities can be done which apply social theory to political debates.



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The pack finishes with a series of application activities, focusing on Marxism in particular, in the context of the topics in component 1, in order to consolidate knowledge and develop higher level skills. These activities also encourage students to consider the relevance of social theories to a range of contemporary issues that are relevant to the course.

Aims and Objectives

- To understand what perspectives and social theories are
- To understand the difference between structural theories and agency based theories
- To understand the difference between consensus and conflict theories
- To be able to apply Marxism to a range of topics within component 1: socialisation, culture and identity.

Formative assessment:

A range of tasks throughout the document to check knowledge and understanding.

Summative assessment:

Examine the usefulness of Marxism in understanding the concepts of socialisation, culture and identity within contemporary society.



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Section 1

What do Sociologists do?

Social Theory

- Explaining social changes
- Theoretical position underpins the other parts of sociology

Social Research

- Gathering data through a range of different methods
- This data can be used as evidence to support or challenge theoretical ideas

Political ideology

- Using sociological ideas to form political ideas

Social Policy

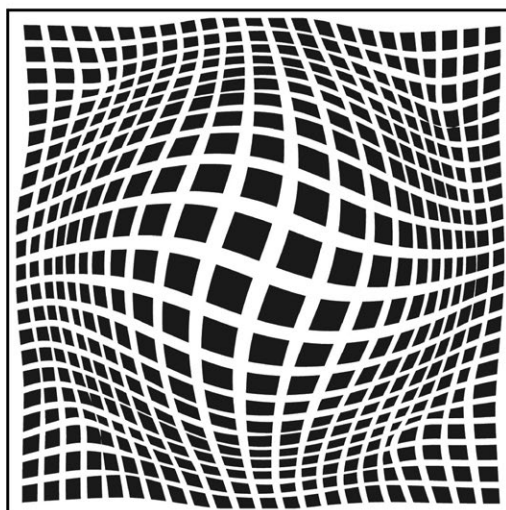
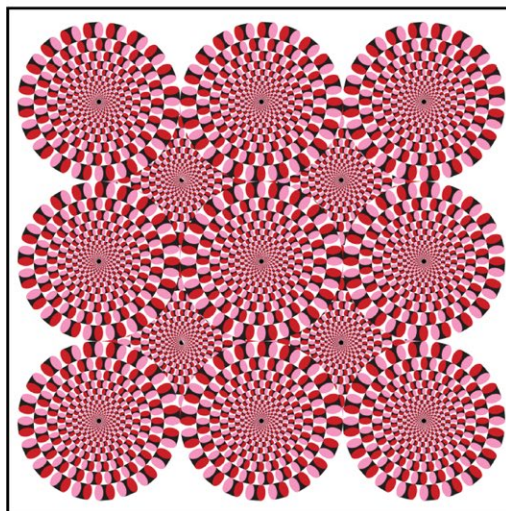
- Laws, rules and ideas created by the state (government) often informed by social theory and social research



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Task 1: Different perspectives

Look at the pictures below, carefully. What can you see?

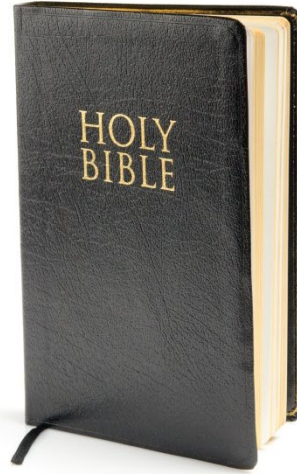


The first activity, looking at optical illusions will demonstrate to students how people can look at the same things in the social world and yet see them very differently. The next activity takes this idea a step further and asks students to discuss their views on a range of contemporary social issues, helping them to understand that people explain events very differently. For example some people regard graffiti as art whilst other people see it as a deviant act. Encourage students to consider the reasons why people may explain events so differently.



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Now look at the next set of pictures and describe what you see. Compare your ideas with the person next to you. Do they interpret what they see in the same way as you?



Write down two different explanations for the images that people might have.



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What does this activity reveal about different ways of explaining the social world?

Section 2

Sociology – Explaining Social Change

Sociologists interpret the social world in different ways. Sociology emerged during the 19th century, a period of dramatic social change. Sociologists tried to make sense of the changes and explain the reasons for them. These explanations, or social theories, fall into two basic perspectives. These two perspectives represent a tension between groups of sociologists. Recently, some sociologists have tried to combine aspects of structural theories with action theories.

Structural theories

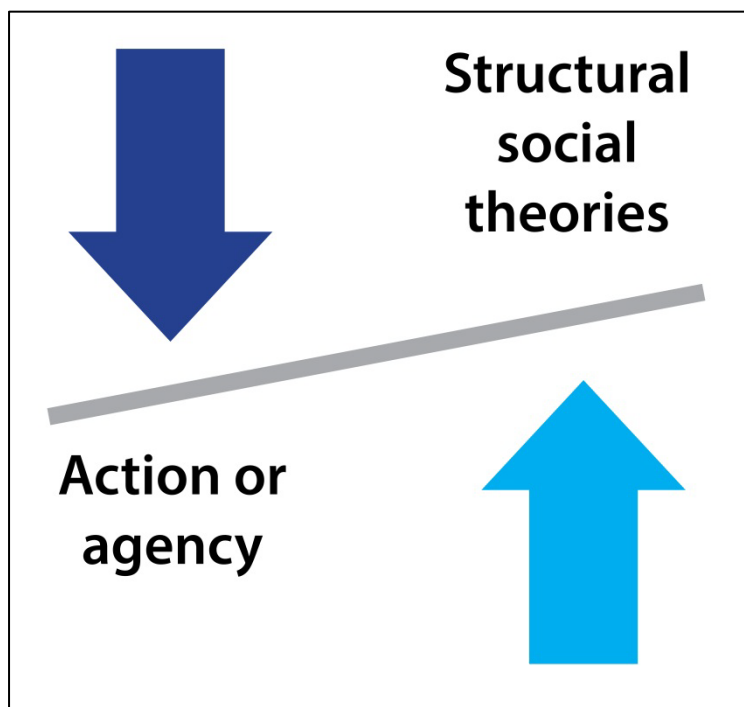
- Society is made up of social institutions (organisations)
- These institutions work together and support each other
- They take the view that society shapes the individual
- The individual has little ability to change their position in society.

Action theories (Agency)

- Society is the product of many meanings
- The meanings that individuals give to actions and behaviour shape society
- Individuals can change society through small scale changes in society
- Individuals therefore, are not passive but active in shaping the social world.



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What were some of the social changes that occurred in the 19th Century?

The 19th century was a remarkable period of social change in many parts of the world. In England the industrial revolution occurred, where people moved to cities to work rather than working on the land as family run farm owners. This period saw the huge growth of factories and mass production of goods as people began to work for wages. At the same time, religious explanations of the world were being challenged and replaced by science. These changes affected individuals and groups in important ways. Some sociologists interpreted these changes positively whilst others saw them as negative.

Consensus and Conflict theories

Consensus theories are theories that argue that the changes that have occurred in society are positive. These theorists also claim that society is in broad agreement, in other words, people share a sense of what is right and wrong as well as individuals having a strong sense of belonging to society. Consensus theories explain problems in society by arguing that they act as a warning and that society can resolve these problems. Because of this optimistic view, it is often claimed that consensus theories are in danger of overlooking serious problems in society.

Example: Functionalism



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Conflict theories are theories that regard society as being unequal, resulting in the oppression of a particular group or groups. These theories focus on the power that some groups have over other groups. Conflict theorists argue that the solution to these inequalities is large-scale social change. Because conflict theorists argue that society is inherently unfair, they are often criticised for failing to acknowledge the positive aspects of society.

Examples: Marxism, feminism

Task 2: Questions about types of social theories

1. What is a social theory?

2. What might influence a sociologist's view of society?

Sociologists' views are influenced by their own experiences of the world and they are certainly influenced by the ideas of other sociologists or scholars.

3. What is meant by consensus theory, and explain how it is different to a conflict theory.

A consensus theory is a theory which argues that there is general agreement in society over what is considered right and wrong and what it is important. A conflict theory is a theory which regards society as based on inequality and conflict. Conflict theorists argue that large scale changes are necessary in order to improve society.

4. Name one consensus theory and one conflict theory.

One consensus theory is Functionalism. One example of a conflict theory is Marxism.

5. Identify one criticism of consensus theories and one criticism of conflict theories.

Consensus theories: exaggerate the extent of agreement; not everyone does agree on what is important and right, especially in contemporary society where there are many different ideas about what is important.

Conflict theories: tend to overlook the fact that there is agreement and harmony in society as well as ignoring the fact that society has reduced some inequalities not increased them.



Section 3

Applying Marxism to Component 1

Marxism

Karl Marx was born in Germany in 1818 and died in London in 1883. He is known as an economist and a philosopher as well as a social theorist, whose ideas have had huge impact around the world. His ideas inspired the foundation for many communist societies. At the turn of the twentieth century, over half the world was being organised and governed under the influence of his ideas.

Marx argued that the relationship that people have with the economy shapes everything else; ideas, relationships, belief systems, culture. Marx argued that throughout history, society has transformed from feudal society into Capitalist society, which is based on two social classes, the ruling class (**bourgeoisie**) who own the means of production (factories, for example) and the working class (**proletariat**) who are **exploited** (taken advantage of) for their wage labour. This means that the ruling class uses the working class to produce goods and services and keep the profit for themselves. Capitalism is based on the idea of **private ownership of property**, which encourages the individual pursuit of profit. Marxists argue that this system creates great inequalities in societies between the two social classes.

Marx was highly critical of capitalism and argued that the ruling class would get more and more rich and powerful while conditions for the working class would continue to be poor. Marx argued that in capitalist society, the working class feel **alienated** (removed from their labour) and **exploited**. Marx claimed that institutions such as religion and the family provide some relief from these feelings of exploitation and alienation. In other words, explaining away inequality and making people accept their oppressed position. He calls this false class-consciousness, the idea that people are not aware of the true extent of their exploitation.

However, Marx argued that the proletariat would become aware of their exploited position, come together and overthrow the system through a revolution, after which society would change radically into a communist or socialist society. Marx argued that this new type of society would remove the private ownership of property, and make sure that everyone was equal, removing social class differences. Contemporary examples of communist societies are China, Cuba and the former USSR.



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Evaluation of Marxist ideas:

- Society has changed a lot since Marx was writing. There are now many attempts to make society fairer through the introduction of free healthcare, benefits, minimum pay, laws to protect people at work.
- The working class uprising and revolution didn't happen in the UK, and where it did happen, communism has been prone to corruption by a small powerful elite while the majority are often hugely disadvantaged (for example in the former USSR).
- How relevant is social class today in shaping a person's identity? There are many other sources of identity and some claim that the lines between different social classes are becoming much more blurred today or less relevant.
- Marx suggested that there was little/no social mobility possible within capitalism, however there is increasing evidence that people do have the ability to change their class position.
- Class is still very important in explaining inequality in society, for example, in determining success in education and at work.
- Feminists claim that Marxists ignore the oppression of women.

Task 3: Evaluation of Marxism

Summarise the Marxist approach, in your own words using the information above.

Marx argues that there are inequalities in society based on social class differences. Marx claims that to improve society and make it fairer there needs to be large-scale change. Marxism is criticised for ignoring other important factors such as gender and ethnicity, focusing too much on social class.

Which of the evaluation statements above are positive and which are negative?

1 – Negative, 2 – Negative, 3 – Negative, 4 – Negative, 5 – Positive, 6 – Negative.

In your own view is Marxism useful for understanding society today? Give reasons

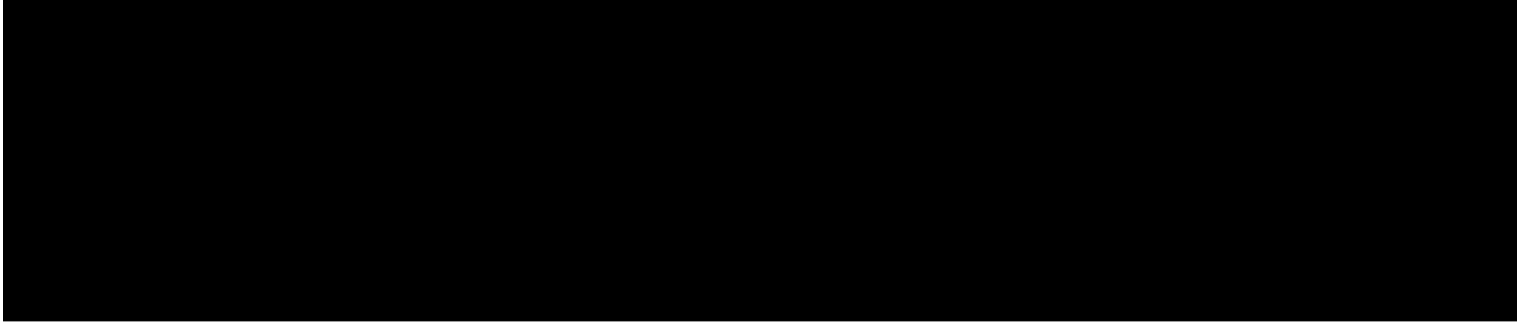
A good opportunity here to ask students if equality is ever possible in society, and why.



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Section 4

A Marxist View of Culture



Capitalism

Class based society. Two social

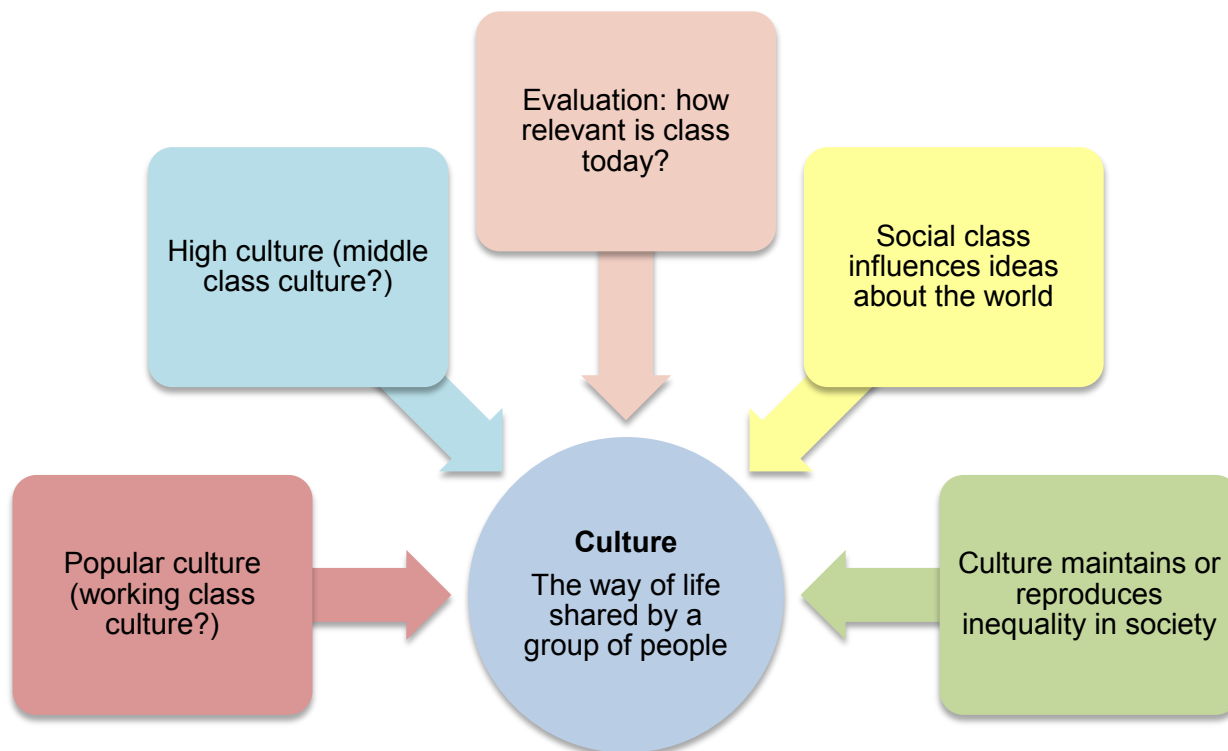
Socialism/Communism

A society where there is no private ownership of property. The state owns everything.



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Task 4: Applying Marxist ideas to understanding culture



1. Using the diagram above, make notes on each box and explain from a Marxist perspective.



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2. Look at the examples below: identify which images represent high culture and which examples represent popular culture.



High Culture: broadsheet newspapers, ballet, opera.

Popular culture: Pop music, theme parks, tabloid papers.



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3. Explain how each example reinforces class differences.

Opera and ballet: often in a foreign language demanding some understanding of language and classical music. Expensive and not always easy to access, take time and effort and energy to appreciate.

Broadsheet newspapers: time consuming to read and use complex language which requires a high degree of literacy and comprehension.

Pop music: easy to access, mass culture, does not require particular knowledge and understanding of music to enjoy.

Theme parks: easy to access, open to anyone and focus on immediate gratification.

Tabloid papers: cheap, easy to access, quick to read.



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Capitalist Culture

What kinds of ideas, norms and values are essential to capitalist society? Using the list of statements below, explain how you feel the statement supports capitalist ideology (set of ideas) or not.



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I want to own my own house and car: This supports the idea of the individual pursuit of profit and greed which is very much in line with capitalist ideology.

Sharing is important: Not a value of capitalist society – inequality between people is central to capitalism.

Being competitive is important: Competition is central to capitalist ideology – competition drives up performance and production meaning capitalism is more successful.

Saving my money and spending it on myself is good and right: The individual pursuit of profit is what drives capitalism forwards. The ruling class acquires wealth and use it on themselves, unlike the working class who have limited access to money and are poorly paid.

Some people have less than others, that is just the way things are: In capitalist society inequality is regarded as natural and inevitable.

The state should help the poor: The ruling class may help the poor a little but this is often a gesture rather than meaningful help. This is because inequality is inevitable and allows the ruling class to have greater control over the working class/poor.

I feel exploited in my work, and removed from it (alienated): The working class feels alienated and exploited in their jobs within capitalism. This is because they do not own the means of production and therefore they are expected to do menial, mundane tasks to make profit for the ruling class.

I want to speak to other people who feel oppressed and exploited and join together to create a revolution to overthrow the current system: This statement runs counter to capitalist ideology; it is revolutionary and represents a desire for large-scale social change.

Religion helps me to feel better about my position in society and explains why I am poor: Marx argued that religion acts as an 'opium of the people' that, by explaining inequality as god given and telling people that they would go to heaven if they work hard during their lives, makes sure that the working class do not challenge the system and makes them feel better about being exploited.



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Cultural Capital

The French Marxist, Pierre Bourdieu, developed Marx's arguments and stated that the middle class possesses cultural capital, which means the appropriate norms and values which can lead to material rewards.

In pairs, explain how different forms of culture below lead to cultural capital in education, work and beyond.

Understanding:

- Literature
- Theatre
- Art
- Classical music
- Contemporary issues, the news, for example.

Literature: understanding complex texts outside school/work develops linguistic skills and general knowledge which increases success.

Theatre: increases general knowledge, provides an opportunity to meet other middle class people thus creating opportunities/connections.

Art: understanding art means to understand culture, politics and history which increases general knowledge.

Classical music: requires some understanding of history, music and again provides opportunities to meet others at concerts.

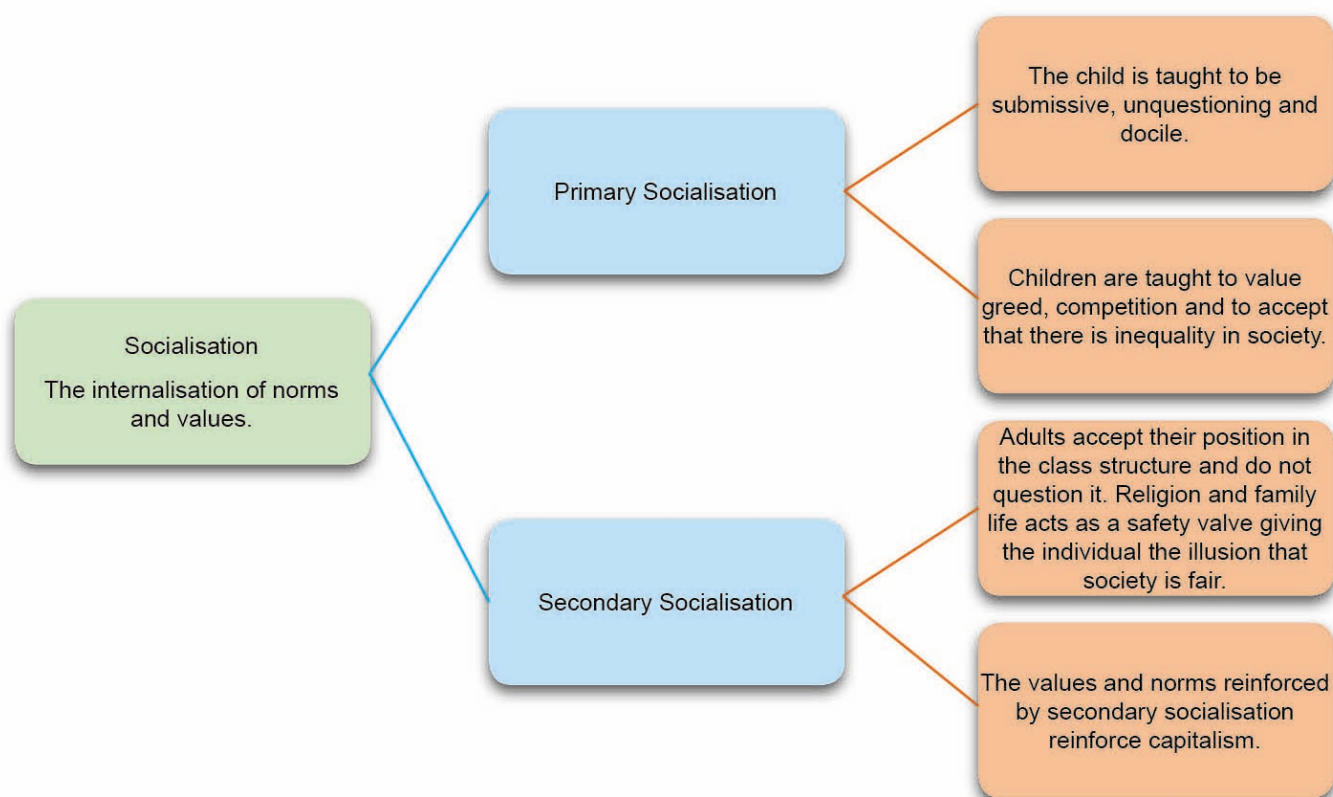
Contemporary issues, the news, for example: may be useful in work/education in a number of different ways, understanding concepts/ideas and views.



Section 5

Socialisation

Marxists argue that individuals learn capitalist ideology through socialisation, a process of internalising norms and values throughout life. This process is vitally important in maintaining and perpetuating capitalism, as it prevents people from questioning their position and makes sure that they continue to work hard.



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Task 5: Applying Marxism to the concept of socialisation

Using the table below, suggest how each agency of socialisation reinforces capitalism:

Agency of socialisation	Explanation of how this agency maintains capitalism	Examples of values and norms which support capitalism
Family	Through accepting the authority of parents, children learn to accept hierarchies unquestioningly, to be docile and conformist. The notion of love makes us feel that we have some form of fulfilment. The family also operates as a form of safety valve so that when people feel frustration with capitalism it is vented in the family without posing a serious threat to capitalism.	Children not questioning the authority of their parents. The idea of loving family members means that we do not consider changing the system. Marriage and inheritance makes sure that ruling class families stay wealthy and working class families stay poorer.
Peer Group	Peer groups put pressure on individuals to conform to certain values, which are usually (although not always) in support of capitalism.	Needing to have particular expensive consumer goods e.g. smart phones/Xbox etc. which means more money for businesses. Peer pressure to do certain expensive activities such as festivals/drive a car.
Media	The media places pressure on people to buy products and services which means profit for the ruling class.	Buying cars, holidays etc. without which people may feel they are lacking.



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Agency of socialisation	Explanation of how this agency maintains capitalism	Examples of values and norms which support capitalism
Religion	The idea that religion provides a form of social control, which encourages people to behave in a conformist way or else face hell or misfortune. The ultimate authority since it is impossible to argue with god. The church is a powerful institution that is run mainly by the ruling class.	Explains inequality for example as suffering now in order to get rewarded in the afterlife.
Education	Reproduces capitalism by producing docile workers who learn how to do mundane repetitive tasks and accept hierarchy. The ruling class use their cultural capital to do well in education while the working class are judged as less able by teachers and therefore underachieve.	Working class pupils achieve significantly less than the children of the ruling class. Private schools enable the ruling class an opportunity to get better results.
Workplace	At work, the ruling class becomes the owners of the means of production and the working class is exploited for their wage labour.	Large bonuses for Bankers in London, while the lower paid workers do not receive proportionate pay or conditions.



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Althusser (1971)

Althusser, a French Marxist, claimed that a range of formal and informal agencies of social control are necessary to maintain capitalism. Althusser argued that if people were simply forced to co-operate with capitalism, that they would eventually reject the system. Therefore Althusser argued that people are manipulated into loving the system so that they find it harder to challenge it. He described these two mechanisms as the **Repressive state apparatus (RSA)** such as the police and the army and the **Ideological state apparatus (ISA)** such as education, where students are rewarded for working hard. Althusser argued that capitalism is maintained by carefully manipulating people into accepting an unfair system as well as using force to control them.



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Task 6: Questions on Althusser

1. What is the difference between Repressive state apparatus and Ideological state apparatus?

2. Give three examples of ways in which students are rewarded in school

Rewards such as house points, awards and good grades.

3. How might rewards at school prevent people from challenging the system?

Students feel like they are progressing and therefore likely to succeed later in a career as a result.

4. Sort the following agencies into ideological state apparatus or repressive state apparatus:

police	family	law/legal system
media	courts	education
military forces	peer groups/subcultures	religion

Ideological state apparatus	Repressive state apparatus
Family	Police
Education	Courts
Peer groups/subcultures	Military forces
Media	Law/legal system
Religion	



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Section 6

Identity

Values and norms shape a person's identity, that is, how they see themselves and how others see them. Marxists argue that the most significant part of a person's identity is their social class. A person's social class determines the way that a person sees the world around them. At the time that Marx wrote, this was very likely to have been the case since working class culture was so distinct from ruling class culture. For example, the class you belonged to used to be likely to determine how a person voted, what they did in their free time and what kind of education a person might receive. Today, although social class is still significant, some argue that there are a whole range of factors which influence a person's identity. Some sociologists, notably positivists and interactionists claim that identity is far less fixed and is complex and chosen and negotiated by the individual.

Task 7: Applying Marxism to the concept of identity

Using the images below and the mixed up statements, describe the kinds of identity that were typical of traditional working class and ruling class person in the modern era, when class was a significant part of a person's identity. Draw arrows from the statements to the correct image.

- Factory worker
- Wears informal clothing or uniform
- Wears a suit
- Votes for the Labour party
- Enjoys high culture in their spare time
- Saves money and is wealthy
- Spends leisure time in the pub with other workers
- Enjoys football
- Has financial security
- Factory owner
- Works behind a desk
- Reads tabloid papers
- Reads high quality, broadsheet newspapers
- Votes for the conservative party
- Belongs to a trade union to protect workers' rights



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What are the problems with applying these ideas about social class to contemporary society?

In contemporary society, class is likely to be a less significant part of a person's identity; other factors may shape the way a person may see themselves. Think about your own identity and what influences it. Consider the following list and decide how important the following are in shaping your own identity, making any notes in the box below:

- Class
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Sexual orientation
- Location
- Your nationality
- Disability
- Religion
- Consumption patterns – what you buy
- Leisure activities for example what type of music you belong to
- Political views
- Belonging to a particular group or subculture.



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Task 8: Consolidation activity

Using the words below, fill the gaps.

education	secondary	media
work place	religion	proletariat
profit	means of production	capitalism
competition	classes	bourgeoisie
mobility	structural	conflict
question	high	popular
ideology	jobs	Bourdieu
gender	primary	class
mobility		

Marxism is a **conflict** theory. This means that society is based on inequalities between different groups, or social **classes**. Marxists argue that the individual has little free will, making it a **structural** social theory. They claim that there is little social **mobility**, which means that people are unable to move between different social classes.

According to Marx there are two social classes, the working class or **proletariat**, who only have their labour to sell, who are controlled by the ruling class or the **bourgeoisie**.

The ruling class owns the **Means of production**, for example, factories and extract **profit** from the working class. This system of class-based inequality is known as



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capitalism. The ruling class engage with **high** culture, which includes the theatre, art and classical music, while the working class take part in **popular** culture which includes pop

music, for example. Cultural patterns are significant according to the French Marxist **Bourdieu**, who claims that the middle class possess **Cultural capital** (having the appropriate norms and values which lead to material rewards). For example, knowing about high culture gives ruling class children a significant advantage in **education**, allowing them to achieve better grades and to get better paid **jobs**. This shows how, for Marxists, it is important to understand that capitalism is supported by a particular set of ideas, or **ideology**, expressed through cultural practices.

In order to maintain capitalism, Marxists argue that every individual needs to be socialised into particular norms and values. These include **competition**, valuing the ownership of **private** property and to accept the system and not to **question** it.

Socialisation occurs both in the early years of life (**primary** socialisation) and also throughout life (**secondary** socialisation) through a range of agencies such as the **media**, **religion**, and the **Work place**.

In the past, identity was very much **class** based, fixed. A person's social class would determine, for example, how they would spend their leisure time and who a person would vote for.



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Today however, people's identity is shaped by a variety of factors other than class including,

gender

, ethnicity and nationality. Postmodernists and interactionists claim that identity

is far more negotiated than given and many claim that there is a much greater degree of social

mobility





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