

in the workplace. Others say that feminism has simply gone too far and that men are as disadvantaged as women in many ways. There is no doubt that third-wave feminism is as divided as second-wave feminist thought. However that is not to overlook its contribution. Asking questions and offering commentary help to ensure a healthy debate about gender inequality.

This is not to suggest that feminism is dead, but it is changing. Increasingly, feminist groups use new technology to convey their messages and set up cybernetworks.



Weblink

Finn MacKay is a leading feminist in the contemporary UK. To look at some of her ideas, see 'Websites', page ii.

Preference theory

One of the most comprehensive challenges to all modes of feminist thought comes from Hakim (2000), who argued that not all women are disadvantaged. Employing concepts from rational choice theory, she proposed what is known as **preference theory**, that women do exercise choice in relation to their position in the home and workplace. Her research identified three groups of women, characterised by their relationship to their domestic roles and workplace.

The adaptive group constitute the largest percentage of women, with approximately 60 per cent, compared to 20 per cent each for the other two groups. For Hakim, feminism must move on and accept that women have

choice which they exercise, and acknowledge that many are happy with their position in society. Her typology is useful for beginning to understand the differences between groups of women. However, it has been stated that exercising choice/agency is never really free from structure/circumstance. In this sense although preference theory contributes a great deal to the patriarchy/biology/economic debate that characterised second-wave feminism, it still fails to capture the variety of women's experiences.

Activity 14

Carry out some research into how much choice women of different generations feel they have/had in their lives.



You could repeat the exercise with men.

A questionnaire or an interview would be the most useful method to use.

Collate your results and see if any patterns emerge.

Stretch and Challenge Activity

Find out more about the following contemporary writers and their views of feminism.

- Camille Paglia
- Naomi Walters
- Finn MacKay

	Work-centred	Adaptive	Home-centred
Key characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career-orientated • Often single • If with partners, in egalitarian relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No clear preference for main role • The drifters • Lack clear economic use of qualifications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wives and/or mothers • Work flexibly or part-time

Table 1.13: Hakim's three groups of women (Source: Hakim, 2000, p. 6. Reproduced with the permission of Oxford University Press)

This section on feminism has introduced a variety of different feminist writers and approaches. Many commentators ask whether there is any such thing as feminism – and point out that feminist thought has as many divisions within it as it has similarities to the feminist cause. While feminism may be characterised by diversity, all feminists share a common cause in wanting to eradicate sexual discrimination – they differ in what they see as its cause and crucially in what its solution is.

Stretch and Challenge Activity

Write an essay on the following:

'Feminism is characterised more by disagreement than by agreement.' Discuss.

Section summary

The key theories to consider in this section are functionalism, Marxism, neo-Marxism, Weberianism, feminism and preference theory.

Use the following words to write a paragraph explaining the key themes of this section.

- Patriarchy
- Dual systems
- Glass ceiling
- Preference theory

Exam practice

- 1 Outline the evidence to show how women face both advantages and disadvantages in the contemporary UK. (20 marks)
- 3 Assess sociological explanations of gender inequality in the contemporary UK. (40 marks)

(iii) Inequalities relating to ethnicity

Pause for thought

- Are some ethnic-minority groups more advantaged than others in the contemporary UK?
- Do you think that ethnic inequalities are changing in society?

Differences between and within ethnic groups provide a rich source of data for sociologists studying social inequalities and differences. The workplace in particular provides evidence that some ethnic groups are distinctly advantaged over others in terms of their potential work and market situations. These differences correspond to some degree with differential patterns of educational achievement. In this section we will consider a range of data in relation to social inequalities between ethnic groups. First, however, we will take a brief look at the issues of terminology and classification systems.

Ethnic classification

As you will recall from the AS Sociology course, the concept of 'ethnicity' refers to cultural differences and 'race' refers to biological ones. Everyone belongs to at least one ethnic group. The majority ethnic group in the contemporary UK could be described as white British, although what it means culturally to be white British is a matter of debate. British sociologists are more likely to use the term 'ethnic differences' than American sociologists, who tend to use the concept of race. Throughout this section we use ethnicity as a concept.

The government uses a classification scheme that identifies groups sharing a common ethnic background. The scheme used in the 2001 Census is outlined in Table 1.14. This is the most recent nationwide database available on numbers belonging to different ethnic groups.

Ethnic group	Number	Percentage of the population
White	54,153,898	92.1
Mixed	67,117	1.2
Indian	1,053,411	1.8
Pakistani	747,285	1.3
Bangladeshi	283,063	0.5
Other Asian	247,664	0.4
All Asian or Asian British	2,331,423	4.0
Black Caribbean	565,876	1.0
Black African	485,277	0.8
Black other	97,585	0.2
All black or black British	1,148,738	2.0
Chinese	247,403	0.4
Other ethnic groups	23,615	0.4
All minority ethnic population	4,635,296	7.9
All population	58,789,194	100

Table 1.14: Population of the UK by ethnic group, 2001 (Source: Social Trends, Office for National Statistics)

Classification schemes are useful for monitoring purposes and in helping to target and eradicate ethnic disadvantage where necessary. Critics, however, point out that some of the groups are more heterogeneous than homogenous, having as many differences within them as similarities. The government has recently updated its classification schema to include some sub-categories, such as South Asians. Critics also point out that most new immigrants to the UK are not from the Asian subcontinent, that the truly multicultural nature of the UK is under-researched due to the difficulty of conducting research on such a wide variety of groups.

Verotec (2007) notes that there is now a far greater variety of groups and individuals living in the UK, from more places around the world. Alongside the UK's well-established African-Caribbean and Asian communities, there are relatively new, small, scattered groups of Romanians, Ghanaians, mainland Chinese, Afghans, Japanese, Kurds, Zimbabweans, Iraqis and numerous others. These new immigrant groups are highly diverse, and range from the highest-flying professionals to those with little education or training. Many hope to remain in the UK and become citizens, while others plan to stay for only a short period. Verotec uses the term 'super-diversity' to describe this situation.

Activity 15

- 1 What is the problem with using the following concepts:
 - White
 - Black
 - Mixed
 - South Asian?
- 2 How reliable would the Census data in Table 1.14 be?
- 3 Why do you think researching super-diversity is so difficult?

Despite the objections to classification schemes, they are widely used in the contemporary UK and form the basis of much of the quantifiable evidence in this area. Before we consider some of this evidence, we need to look at one other concept: racism.



Weblink

You might be interested to find out about the 2011 Census (see 'Websites', page ii).

Racism

Racism is a contested concept. Broadly speaking, it is concerned with negativity regarding a racial or ethnic group. However, there can be racism

with intent and racism without intent. Intentional racism is overt and conscious. An example would be not offering work to a black British man because of his skin colour. Unintentional racism is more hidden and covert. It could include, for example, the existence of an **ethnocentric** curriculum in schools, which may be racist but without anyone intentionally making it so.

Racial prejudice is when people hold racist beliefs and values; racial discrimination is based on action that goes beyond beliefs (Cashmore, 1984). It is therefore possible to be racially prejudiced without discriminating against any one person or group. Racial prejudice is very difficult to prove, discrimination is more easily demonstrated.

Cultural racism refers to the negativity relating to the attitudes and attributes associated with groups rather than with individuals. A good example of cultural racism is **Islamophobia**. Islamophobia refers to hostility towards Islam, and a distrust and dislike of Muslims. Islamophobia has clearly increased in the UK since 9/11. A report for the Runnymede Trust (1997) identified four aspects of it:

- ◆ Prejudice – for example, in media coverage of Muslim culture
- ◆ Discrimination – for example, in employment practices, health and education
- ◆ Exclusion – from positions of authority in employment, politics and government
- ◆ Violence – physical and verbal abuse against Muslims.

The Runnymede report was subject to criticism for its assumptions about Muslim culture. However, evidence bears out the fact that British Muslims suffer disadvantage: 31 per cent working in the UK have no formal qualifications, there is a high unemployment rate among British Muslims and they are the most likely group to be employed in poorly paid, low-skilled jobs (Office for National Statistics).

Institutional racism is different: it is thought to pervade society and organisations within it. It can be intentional or unintentional, but the result is the same, perpetuating the disadvantage felt by some in comparison with others. The case of Stephen Lawrence, the black teenager murdered in 1994, resulted in the Metropolitan Police being branded 'institutionally racist' for its handling of the murder inquiry.

The extent to which the contemporary UK is racist is a thorny issue, due to different definitions of racism and the difficulty of researching whether society is racist or not.

Activity 16

Devise a research proposal to find out the extent of racism in one NHS hospital. Identify your method(s) and sample, and think about who you would employ to carry out the research. What problems would you experience?

The concepts and ideas covered in this section will be useful as we consider the evidence relating to ethnic disadvantage in the contemporary UK.

Data on ethnic inequalities

Workplace

Some ethnic groups are much more likely to be employed than others, and gender is a crucial variable here too. There are also noticeable differences in relation to earnings for different ethnic groups (see Table 1.15).

	Full-time employment	Part-time employment
White	91	9
Mixed	85	15
Indian	91	9
Pakistani	80	20
Bangladeshi	61	39
Black Caribbean	87	13
Black African	78	22
Chinese	82	18

Table 1.15: Male employment rate (%) by ethnic group in the UK, 2005 (Source: Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2006, p. 14)

The fourth Policy Studies Institute (PSI) survey (Modood and Berthoud, 1997) carried out an analysis of household income by ethnic group; this was the first time such data had been

collected. A key finding was the extent of poverty among Pakistani and Bangladeshi households. Caribbean, Indian and African Asian households were all more likely than whites to experience poverty; Chinese households were close to white households in terms of experience of poverty. The data led Berthoud (1997) to name Pakistani and Bangladeshi households as among the social groups most likely to experience poverty. However, such findings need be treated with caution, as the recent changes in the educational success of groups suggests that this pattern is likely to alter.

Heath and Yi Cheung (2006) carried out statistical analysis to find out the extent of the ethnic penalty in the contemporary UK. The **ethnic penalty** is defined as the disadvantage that ethnic minorities face in the labour market compared with British whites of the same age and similar human capital. They concluded that some ethnic minority groups were more likely than others to experience the ethnic penalty: Pakistanis and Bangladeshis appeared again, alongside Caribbean men and women. They also concluded that first-generation migrants may have experienced a greater ethnic penalty than second-generation groups. Particularly



Figure 1.7: The new middle class?

interesting was their finding that the patterns of disadvantage could not be explained by factors such as age, education or foreign birthplace and, although the research does not state discriminatory practices as a finding, there is a clear feeling that the weight of sociological evidence, both quantitative and qualitative, points in the direction of discrimination within the workplace.

Following an analysis of research in this area spanning many decades, Mason (2003) stated that it is difficult to argue against the fact that members of some ethnic groups are severely disadvantaged in the labour market, and one reason for this may be employers' attitudes. For this reason it is not surprising that ethnic minorities figure prominently in entrepreneurial activities in the UK.

Evidence from Business in the Community included the following:

- ◆ Black Caribbean men have the highest unemployment rate of all ethnic groups: 14 per cent
- ◆ 75 per cent of working-age Bangladeshi women and 69 per cent of working-age Pakistani women are not working or seeking employment
- ◆ 10 per cent of all business start-ups in the UK are by individuals from minority ethnic groups
- ◆ Chinese and Indian men are the most likely of all ethnic groups to be in the professional and managerial social classes
- ◆ Young people from minority ethnic groups are more likely to be in full-time education aged 18
- ◆ South Asian minority groups own a quarter of the UK's small businesses, they have been dubbed the 'new middle class'.

Diverse experiences according to ethnic group and generation are supported by evidence from Iganski and Payne (1999), whose research on social mobility suggested that while first-generation immigrants were disadvantaged by the decline of a manufacturing-based economy in the UK, second-generation immigrants may have gained from the move to a service-sector economy. However, this social mobility is not true for all ethnic-minority groups.

Ginn and Arber (2001) argued that ethnic-minority groups, especially women, are disproportionately dependent on state pensions later in life. Having earned less throughout their working life, they have been unable to pay as much into private pension schemes and as government policy shifts further towards private provision this situation is likely to result in disproportionately more women from ethnic-minority groups ending up in poverty.

Education

Some ethnic groups are more likely to be educationally successful than others, and some groups are more likely to experience truancy and display anti-school and anti-education cultures. The blame for this has been placed with schools – through, for example, the existence of an ethnocentric curriculum – and with the cultural background of the ethnic group(s) themselves.

Activity 17

Using pages 75–79, produce evidence to show which ethnic groups over- and under-perform in education.

Crime

Some ethnic groups are more likely than others to be stopped and searched by the police in the UK, and to spend time in prison. Again, the blame for this has been attributed to structural and cultural factors.

Activity 18

Using pages 27–30, produce evidence to show which ethnic groups are advantaged/ disadvantaged in the British justice system.

Media

Some ethnic groups and individuals are misrepresented in the media. Whether it is overexposure or underexposure, there is evidence that media representations of ethnicity are frequently distorted. Sections of the media could be accused of cultural bias or cultural racism.

Activity 19

Using pages 117–119, produce evidence to show which ethnic groups are advantaged/ disadvantaged by the British media.

Politics

Dawn Butler is one of the few black women MPs in the UK, and has documented frequent racism experienced from politicians throughout her career. In her personal reflections, she describes many instances of direct and non-direct prejudice during her political career and her rise as a Labour MP (Mossa, 2008). Her stories form part of a personal study of racism in British politics.



Activity 20

- 1 Find out how many black and Asian MPs there currently are in the House of Commons.
- 2 Find out how many members of the Cabinet are from minority ethnic groups.
- 3 Compare these figures with the official national percentage of ethnic minorities in the UK (9 per cent). What conclusions would you make about the political representativeness of the UK Parliament?

This section has highlighted evidence relating to ethnic disadvantage in the contemporary UK, and you should be able to add to it from your AS notes and the A2 Power and control topic. We will now look at the ways in which sociologists have explained these patterns.

Theoretical explanations of ethnic inequalities

Functionalist

Functionalists explain ethnic inequalities with reference to the common value system. Ethnic differences and inequalities are temporary and based on cultural differences between minority or immigrant groups and their host nation. Such differences are inevitable for a period of time, but functionalists argue that the maintenance of social order and the collective solidarity meant that minority groups slowly adapt to the majority culture over time. This process is sometimes referred to as **assimilation**, where a group gives up its own cultural values and adopts those of the ethnic majority – a kind of cultural melting pot. Assimilation was considered as a positive outcome of racial and ethnic inequality and a means of preventing a state of anomie. Writing in 1966 in the USA, Parsons argued that the 'American Negro' was a second-class citizen. At that time skin colour symbolised inferiority and was used as a justification for placing black Americans at the bottom of the social ladder (Parsons, 1966). However, Parsons argued that over time the common value would change: minority ethnic groups would either become assimilated or integrated into an emerging shared value system and would play a full role in the meritocratic society.

The functionalist approach has been subject to criticism. First, there is no agreement as to what constitutes the common value system. Is it in fact the white, middle-class, male perspective? Secondly, there is no evidence that minority ethnic groups assimilate into mainstream culture, the multicultural UK is a good example of diversity over time. Finally, the persistence of racism against the same minority groups and between minority groups would suggest that long-term evolution cannot explain inequalities between different ethnic groups. The functionalist approach also treats societies as though they are homogenous entities, whereas evidence suggests that inequalities experienced by different ethnic groups are based on the area/region they live in. The experience of a minority ethnic worker in multiethnic London may differ vastly from life in rural Scotland.



Weblink

You can access and read the article 'Ethnic middle classes join the "white flight"' (see 'Websites', page ii).

Stretch and Challenge Activity

Read extracts from Monica Ali's novel, *Brick Lane* (2003) and consider what it suggests about the process of ethnic assimilation.

Closely related to the functionalists' views are those of the new right, where attempts have been made to foster assimilation and ethnic integration. In the UK, for example, there have been attempts to legislate that the English language must form part of compulsory training for minority groups at risk of marginalisation and ethnic separatism. Such approaches have been blamed for fuelling ethnic conflict in some parts of the UK, where uneasy relationships exist between and within all cultures.

Marxist

For traditional Marxists, racism and ethnic inequality play an important role in the capitalist economic system. One of the earliest Marxist writers, Cox (1948), proposed that racial differences and racism itself had been the creation of the economic system – that racism was created and sustained by capitalism. Racism helped to maintain a false class-consciousness by using a divide-and-rule tactic: by creating divisions within the working class itself, there is less opportunity for the working class to unite in revolt.

Marxist sociologists such as Castles and Kosack (1973) have argued that ethnic-minority groups could also be used as part of a reserve army of labour, supporting the capitalist system while providing an illusion of meritocracy. These workers are forced to work for lower wages than their white counterparts in order to survive. For these Marxist writers, minority ethnic groups form a sub-section of the working class and prevent the development of a *class in itself* to a *class for itself*, a key process in Marx's theory of class development. Westergaard and Resler

(1976) disagree with this analysis and argue that minority groups form part of a unified working class, not a divided one.

These economic arguments are powerful, however historical evidence shows that racism precedes the development of capitalism (Solomos, 1986) and most neo-Marxists would reject Cox's over-simplistic argument that capitalism created racism. They have developed the economic position and blended it with some cultural arguments. Similarly, it is perhaps over-simplistic to argue that ethnic-minority groups form part of a united working class.

Neo-Marxist

Neo-Marxist writers on ethnicity have combined elements of the economic arguments with work on cultural differences, and acknowledge that ethnic differences cannot adequately be explained in such a deterministic manner as they had been by traditional Marxists. Miles (1980) made an important contribution when he argued that minority ethnic groups are part of the same class structure as the majority group; however, they form a **racialised** part of it. By this he meant that ethnic minorities may always be treated or perceived as being different, because of racial factors. This does not, of course, imply direct racism, but may be a form of cultural racism. Miles used the concept of *racialised class fractions* to explain the existence of ethnic minorities in the petite bourgeoisie, or middle classes (which do exist, as the neo-Marxists argue). In short, ethnic minorities can be found in all social classes, but their ethnicity means they will be subject to differential treatment.

Other neo-Marxist writers have developed the traditional economic arguments and shown how ethnic minorities can be scapegoated by the ideological state apparatus. Hall (1979) made an important contribution when he argued that ethnic relations are historically specific and subject to change over time. His work highlights the immigration problems of the 1970s, which he argues were used by the media to divert attention away from the economic recession facing the government of the day.

The neo-Marxist studies begin to fuse economic and cultural arguments in explaining inequalities. They could be well applied to the position of Polish migrant workers in recent times, who enter

the UK legally as members of the European Union, but who face difficulties fitting into British society as they are perceived by some to be 'taking jobs' and by others to be culturally different and therefore troublesome. The fusion of economic and cultural arguments is a powerful force in explaining ethnic inequalities in the UK.

However, neo-Marxists have still not tackled the formation of racist attitudes themselves, which does not fit with the growth of capitalism. There is also a strong argument put forward by Weberian-based sociologists that ethnic/racial differences override economic differences in explaining inequality.

Weberian

Weberian-based explanations differ from the Marxist ones in suggesting that ethnic differences may be viewed as more important than economic differences in explaining inequalities. In this sense Weberian explanations are more flexible and multi-dimensional, certainly than traditional Marxist ones. Some sociologists have suggested that the neo-Marxists actually use a great deal of Weberian theory in their work.

Parkin (1968) terms minority ethnic groups as 'negatively privileged status groups'. He uses the concept of social closure to argue that the more privileged groups can operate a system of social segregation and keep minority groups out of positions of authority. The concept of the glass ceiling can be used here, although some have suggested that for minority workers the ceiling is actually concrete as they are denied vision of the white male-dominated boardrooms.

Rex and Moore (1967) argued that minority groups were severely disadvantaged in the labour market, that they formed part of the dual labour market, being placed in the secondary labour market. Their life chances and market position were noticeably weaker than their white counterparts; they were marginalised and risked forming an underclass in society. It was racial differences rather than economic differences that had created this situation.

Questions have been asked about the difference between these approaches and the neo-Marxist idea of racialisation and class fractions. There are clear overlaps, but the Weberian explanations probably do give more credibility to ethnic differences than to economic ones,

and for Marxist writers the opposite is true. The main criticism against them comes from the postmodern views, but these can be taken as a critique against all of the classic sociological theorists.

Postmodern

Postmodern sociologists in this area are keen to extend the analysis of ethnicity beyond that of recalling disadvantage and offering structural solutions. In a world characterised by diversity, fluidity and fragmentation, postmodern writers have engaged with the concept of super-diversity and are producing work which documents the range of diversity within the UK. They are working to bring about lasting change, not only in material circumstances but also in seeking to

ensure that grand themes and analyses are no longer applied to whole ethnic groups – who are, they argue, not all experiencing the same advantages and disadvantages and who are as diverse as they are common.

Modood leads the way here in wanting to develop a more plural approach to ethnic relations that will extend into the future, rather than looking backwards. His work stresses difference and diversity of experience rather than commonality, and is critical of the portrayal of ethnic-minority groups as being victims (Modood and Berthoud, 1997). Work on hybrid identities and code-switching also form part of the postmodern contribution. You should be familiar with these from the AS course.

Section summary

The key theories to consider in this section are functionalism, Marxism, neo-Marxism, Weberianism and postmodernism.

Use the following words to write a paragraph explaining the key themes of this section.

- Super-diversity
- Assimilation
- Racialised
- Ethnocentric
- Islamophobia
- Ethnic penalty

Stretch and Challenge Activity

Create a log of evidence relating to ethnic disadvantage in the contemporary UK. Look for evidence relating to specific ethnic groups and gender divisions. Following the media closely will be helpful in this task.

Exam practice

- 1 Outline the evidence that ethnic disadvantage is a feature of life in the contemporary UK. (20 marks)
- 2 Assess Weberian explanations of ethnic inequality in the contemporary UK. (40 marks)

(iv) Inequalities relating to age

Pause for thought

- What age groups do you think are most disadvantaged in the UK, and why?
- At what age should people stop 'working'?
- What are your views on having a minimum wage law that does not cover people under the age of 17?

You should recall from your AS course that the older age categories are the fastest growing in the UK, where increasing life expectancy and a falling birth rate have resulted in changing demographic patterns. You may also remember examples of age-related restrictions in the UK. Schools are based on chronological age, and the right to vote, to learn to drive, buy alcohol and be eligible for a state pension are all age related. In this section we will focus on evidence of social inequalities relating to age and the sociological explanations for this.

The main site of disadvantage is related to the workplace and incomes, which evidence suggests shows examples of discrimination and ageism. Bytheway (1995) however explains how **ageism** is a misleading concept as age is experienced so differently by sections of the population. Age discrimination may be prevalent in the UK, but finding evidence of shared experiences can be difficult.

Workplace

Age disadvantage in the workplace is complex. Increasingly, people are experiencing compulsory early retirement, where they lose their once-secure employment and may find themselves unemployable, many years short of state retirement age. The phrase 'too old to employ' is frequently related to this growing group of workers, and the cost of the economically inactive over-fifties is a considerable drain on government resources. However, other people choose to work past the state retirement age, not wanting to lose their employee status. Others are in a position of relying on part-time work in retirement to maintain their standard of living. There are no

clear patterns of age-related behaviour in the workplace. Featherstone and Hepworth (1999) argue from a postmodern perspective that this is an example of how individual life-courses are becoming destructured and fragmented.

European legislation passed in 2006 made age discrimination illegal, however legislation often takes time to have the desired effect and loopholes are often present. One in five workers from all age sectors told a MORI survey that they had experienced discrimination at work, with 38 per cent citing ageism as the cause (MORI, 2002).

However, for employers there are often benefits associated with employing workers from particular age-related categories. Younger people are often cheaper to employ as they have not accumulated years of experience to justify higher wages; they are also likely to be easier to train and mould. Middle-age categories are associated with higher earners and those seeking career progression. Employing older people can be costly, as they are likely to remain in that employment until retirement, and if their skills are no longer required this can result in costly redundancy or retraining packages. While the idea of age-diverse workplaces is an inclusive one, in reality they are not always 'easy to find'.

Economically and culturally, old age is experienced differently by different people (Vincent, 2006). Life expectancy favours women, hence the concept of the 'feminisation' of later life. Many women have been the most affected by material disadvantage during their lives. Material disadvantage in youth and middle age is structured around class, gender and ethnicity; in old age this becomes more pronounced and can be related to the issue of pensions.