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A Level Sociology Education Revision Notes

Written for the AQA Sociology Specification

Exam paper 7192 (1): Education with Theory and Methods

A Level Sociology of Education – An Overview of the Course

1. Perspectives on Education

- a) Functionalism
- b) Marxism
- c) Neoliberalism and The New Right
- d) New Labour (a response to the New Right)
- e) Postmodernism

2. In school process and education

- a. Teacher Labelling and the Self Fulfilling Prophecy
- b. School organisation (banding and streaming)
- c. School Type, School Ethos and the Hidden Curriculum
- d. School Subcultures
- e. Pupil Identities and the Education System

3. Education Policies

a. The strengths and limitations of successive government education policies:

- I. 1944 - The Tripartite System
- II. 1965 - Comprehensivisation
- III. 1988 - The 1988 Education Reform Act
- IV. 1997 - New Labour's Education Policies
- V. 2010 – The Coalition and the New New Right's Education Policies

b. Evaluating Education Policies

- I. To what extent have policies raised standards in education?
- II. To what extent have policies improved equality of opportunity?
- III. Perspectives on selection as an educational policy
- IV. Perspectives on the increased privatisation of education
- V. How is globalisation affecting educational and educational policy?

4. Social Class and Education

- a. Material Deprivation
- b. Cultural Deprivation
- c. Cultural Capital Theory
- d. In-School Factors
- e. The strengths and limitations of policies designed to tackle working class underachievement

5. Gender and Education

- a. Out of school factors which explain why girls do better than boys in education
- b. In-School factors which explain why girls do better than boys in education
- c. Explanations for gender and subject choice
- d. Feminist Perspectives on the role of education in society
- e. The strengths and limitations of policies designed to tackle gender differences in educational achievement

6. Ethnicity and Education

- a. Cultural factors which might explain ethnic differences in educational achievement
- b. In-School Factors which might explain ethnic differences in educational achievement
- c. The strengths and limitations of policies designed to tackle ethnic differences in educational achievement

Methods in Context- *Here you need to be able to assess the strengths and limitations of using any method to research any aspect of education.*

The different methods you need to be able to consider include –	The different aspects of education you might consider are
1. Secondary Documents 2. Official statistics 3. Field Experiments 4. Lab experiments 5. Questionnaires 6. Unstructured Interviews 7. Overt Participant Observation 8. Covert Participant Observation 9. Non Participant Observation	• Researching how the values, attitudes, and aspirations of parents contribute to the achievement of certain groups of children • Why boys are more likely to be excluded than girls • Why white working class boys underachieve • Exploring whether teachers have ‘ideal pupils’ – whether they label certain groups of pupils favourably! • Looking at whether the curriculum is ethnocentric (racist/ homophobic) • Exploring the extent to which sexist ‘bullying’ disadvantageous children • Examining how ‘gender identities’ enhance or hinder children’s ability to learn • Assessing the relative importance of cultural deprivation versus material deprivation in explaining underachievement • Assessing the success of policies aimed to improve achievement such as ‘employing more black teachers’

The Functionalist Perspective on Education

Functionalists focus on the positive functions performed by the education system. There are four positive functions that education performs

1. **Creating social solidarity**
2. **Teaching skills necessary for work**
3. **Teaching us core values**
4. **Role Allocation and meritocracy**

1. **Creating Social Solidarity**

We have social solidarity when we feel as if we are part of something bigger. **Durkheim argued that school makes us feel like we are part of something bigger.** This is done through the learning of subjects such as history and English which give us a shared sense of identity. Also in American schools, children pledge allegiance to the flag.

Durkheim argued that 'school is a society in miniature.' preparing us for life in wider society. For example, both in school and at work we have to cooperate with people who are neither friends or family – which gets us ready for dealing with people at work in later life.

2. **Learning specialist skills for work.**

Durkheim noted that an advanced industrial economy required a massive and complex **Division of Labour**¹. At school, individuals learn the diverse skills necessary for this to take place. For example, we may all start off learning the same subjects, but later on we specialize when we do GCSEs.

3. **Teaching us core values**

Talcott Parsons argued that education acts as the 'focal socializing agency' in modern society. School plays the central role in the process of secondary socialisation, taking over from primary socialisation. He argued this was necessary because the family and the wider society work in different principles and children need to adapt if they are to cope in the wider world.

In the family, children are judged according to what he calls **particularistic standards** by their parents – that is they are judged by rules that only apply to that particular child. Individual children are given tasks based on their different abilities and judged according to their unique characteristics. Parents often adapt rules to suit the unique abilities of the child.

In contrast in school and in wider society, children and adults are judged according to the same **universalistic** standards (i.e they are judged by the same exams and the same laws). These rules and laws are applied equally to all people irrespective of the unique character of the individual. School gets us ready for this.

¹The organisation of work in society. Eg even in a factory which makes cars each worker has a different job with a different skill. Durkheim pointed out that this is far more complex in industrial than in peasant societies.

4. Role Allocation and meritocracy

Education allocates people to the most appropriate job for their talents using examinations and qualifications. This ensures that the most talented are allocated to the occupations that are most important for society. This is seen to be fair because there is equality of opportunity – everyone has a chance of success and it is the most able who succeed through their own efforts – this is known as **meritocracy**

Functionalism – concepts to use

Write a short paragraph using all of the concepts below:

- Social solidarity
- Secondary socialization
- Specialist skills
- Core values
- Universalistic values
- Particularistic values
- Role allocation
- Meritocracy

Evaluating the Functionalist View on Education

Positive evaluations of the Functionalist view on education	Negative Evaluations of Functionalism (Criticisms)
• Identifies education as an integral part of the social structure. All governments since WW2 have recognized the importance of education • Advanced industrial economies would probably not function without education – universities have become more specialized over time	• Today, school focuses more on developing the individual rather than teaching duties and responsibilities that individuals should adopt towards society – it's more about the individual and less about solidarity • Marxists argue that education is really about transmitting the values of the ruling classes • Research on class and education shows us that role allocation is not meritocratic • Those that fail at school do not feel as if they belong, and thus reject the values of the school, forming subcultures (especially true for working class pupils)

The Traditional Marxist Perspective on Education

Traditional Marxists see the education system as working in the interests of ruling class elites. The education system performs three functions for these elites:

- Reproduces class inequality.
- Legitimizes class inequality.
- Works in the interests of capitalist employers

1. The reproduction of class inequality

In school, the middle classes use their material and cultural capital to ensure that their children get into the best schools and the top sets. This means that the wealthier pupils tend to get the best education and then go on to get middle class jobs. Meanwhile working class children are more likely to get a poorer standard of education and end up in working class jobs. In this way class inequality is reproduced

2. The Legitimation of class inequality

Marxists argue that in reality money determines how good an education you get, but people do not realize this because schools spread the 'myth of meritocracy' – in school we learn that we all have an equal chance to succeed and that our grades depend on our effort and ability. Thus if we fail, we believe it is our own fault. This legitimates or justifies the system because we think it is fair when in reality it is not.

3. Teaching the skills future capitalist employers need

In '*Schooling in Capitalist America*' (1976) Bowles and Gintis suggest that there is a correspondence between values learnt at school and the way in which the workplace operates. The values, they suggested, are taught through the '**Hidden Curriculum**'. The Hidden Curriculum consists of those things that pupils learn through the experience of attending school rather than the main curriculum subjects taught at the school. So pupils learn those values that are necessary for them to tow the line in menial manual jobs, as outlined below

SCHOOL VALUES	Corresponds to	EXPLOITATIVE LOGIC OF THE WORKPLACE
Passive subservience (of pupils to teachers)	☐	Passive subservience of workers to managers
Acceptance of hierarchy (authority of teachers)	☐	Authority of managers
Motivation by external rewards (grades not learning)	☐	Motivated by wages not the joy of the job

Evaluations of Traditional Marxism

Positive	Negative
There is an overwhelming wealth of evidence that schools do reproduce class inequality because the middle classes do much better in education because • They have more cultural capital (Reay) • The 1988 Education Act benefitted them (Ball Bowe and Gerwitz) • WC children less likely to go to university because of fear of debt (Connor et al)	• Henry Giroux - the theory is too deterministic. Argues that working class pupils are not entirely molded by the capitalist system, and do not accept everything that they are taught • Education can actually harm the Bourgeois – many left wing, Marxist activists are university educated

Neo- Marxism: Paul Willis: - Learning to Labour (1977)

- Willis' research involved visiting one school and observing and interviewing 12 working class rebellious boys about their attitude to school during their last 18 months at school and during their first few months at work.
- Willis argues pupils rebelling are evidence that not all pupils are brainwashed into being passive, subordinate people as a result of the hidden curriculum.
- Willis therefore criticizes Traditional Marxism. He says that pupils are not directly injected with the values and norms that benefit the ruling class, some actively reject these. These pupils also realise that they have no real opportunity to succeed in this system.
- **BUT**, Willis still believes that this counter-school culture still produces workers who are easily exploited by their future employers:

The Counter School Culture

- Willis described the friendship between these 12 boys (or the lads) as a **counter-school culture**. Their value system was opposed to that of the school. This value system was characterised as follows:
 1. The lads felt superior to the teachers and other pupils
 2. They attached no value to academic work, more to 'having a laff'
 3. The objective of school was to miss as many lessons as possible, the reward for this was status within the group
 4. The time they were at school was spent trying to win control over their time and make it their own.

Attitudes to future work

- They looked forward to paid manual work after leaving school and identified all non-school activities (smoking, going out) with this adult world, and valued such activities far more than school work.
- The lads believed that manual work was proper work, and the type of jobs that hard working pupils would get were all the same and generally pointless.
- Their counter school culture was also strongly sexist.

Evaluations of Willis

- Very small sample of only working class white boys
- Overly sympathetic with the boys – going native?

The New Right and the 1988 Education Reform Act

The New Right refers to conservative, right wing political beliefs, best exemplified by the Thatcher government's policies of the 1980s. Please note that the New Right is a political philosophy not a Sociological theory!

Underlying principles of the New Right

- They believe the state (government) cannot meet people's needs.
- The most efficient way to meet people's needs is through the free market – through private businesses competing with each other.
- Economic growth is an important overall goal – to be achieved by allowing individuals the freedom to compete with each other.

Key ideas of The New Right on Education-

1. The New Right created an 'education market' - Schools were run like businesses – competing with each other for pupils and parents were given the choice over which school they send their children to rather than being limited to the local school in their catchment area. This led to the establishment of **league tables**
2. Schools should teach subjects that prepare pupils for work, Hence education should be aimed at supporting economic growth. **Hence: New Vocationalism!**
3. The state was to provide a framework in order to ensure that schools were all teaching the same thing and transmitting the same shared values – hence the **National Curriculum**

Evaluation of the New Right

- Competition between schools benefitted the middle classes and lower classes, ethnic minorities and rural communities ended up having less effective choice – refer to the handout criticising the 1988 Education Act
- Vocational Education was also often poor – refer to the HO on Vocational Education
- There is a contradiction between wanting schools to be free to compete and imposing a national framework that restricts schools
- The National Curriculum has been criticised for being ethnocentric and too restrictive on teachers and schools

Perspectives on Education – Focusing on Work

You might be asked to write about 'the relationship between education and work'

Functionalism

Education teaches us specialist skills for work - At school, individuals learn the diverse skills necessary for this to take place. For example, we may all start off learning the same subjects, but later on we specialize when we do GCSEs. This allows for a complex division of labour to take place.

Role Allocation and meritocracy - Education allocates people to the most appropriate job for their talents using examinations and qualifications. This ensures that the most talented are allocated to the occupations that are most important for society. This is seen to be fair because there is equality of opportunity – everyone has a chance of success and it is the most able who succeed through their own efforts – this is known as **meritocracy**

Marxism

The reproduction of class inequality and the myth of meritocracy - In school, the middle classes use their material and cultural capital to ensure that their children get into the best schools and the top sets. This means that the wealthier pupils tend to get the best education and then go on to get middle class jobs. Meanwhile working class children are more likely to get a poorer standard of education and end up in working class jobs. In this way class inequality is reproduced

School teaches the skills future capitalist employers need through the '**Hidden Curriculum**' (e.g. pupils learn to accept authority; they learn to accept hierarchy, and motivation by external rewards)

Paul Willis

Willis described the friendship between the 12 boys (or the lads) he studied as a **counter-school culture**. Their value system was opposed to that of the school. They looked forward to paid manual work after leaving school and identified all non-school activities (smoking, going out) with this adult world, and valued such activities far more than school work. The lads believed that manual work was proper work, and the type of jobs that hard working pupils would get were all the same and generally pointless.

Feminism

Stereotypical views of teachers and careers advisors as well as peer group pressure means that subject choices are still shaped by traditional gender norms – which limits the kind of jobs boys and girls go on to do in later life. Even though girls do better at school, they still get paid less than men, so qualifications do not necessarily result in more pay!

The New Right

The mid 1970s was a time of rising unemployment in Britain, particularly among the young. It was argued that the education system was not producing a skilled enough workforce and that the needs of the economy were not being met. From the mid 1970s both the Conservative and Labour governments agreed that education should be more focussed on improving the state of the economy by providing training courses for young people in different areas of work.

This emphasis on meeting the needs of industry became known as '**New Vocationalism**' which first took off in the 1980s.

The Tripartite System

The Butler 1944 Act introduced the **Tri-partite system** of Education to give all pupils an equal chance to education. All pupils sat a test at the age of 11 (11+). The test assessed the aptitudes and abilities of pupils, determining which school they went to from 11 to 15 years of age (Grammar, **Technical or Secondary Modern**).

Strengths	Limitations
• Gave children from a deprived background the opportunity to a first class education • Gave the opportunity of education for all up to 15 years of age • To reduce inequalities arising from those attending paying schools • Equality of opportunity due to all pupils sitting the 11+ exam.	• Favoured rich and middle classes. Two thirds of grammar school places were taken by middle class pupils. • The mainly working class pupils in secondary moderns were labelled as failures and so lacked the motivation to succeed • Girls generally achieved better marks than boys in the 11+, yet the pass mark was set higher because there were less grammar school places for girls • Grammar schools specialised in academic subjects leading to university and well paid jobs. Those attending Secondary modern were seen as failures and often not allowed to take exams

Questions

- How was the Education system organised prior to the 1944 Butler Act?
- Why was the Butler act introduced?
- Give three reasons why the tri-partite system was gradually phased out.

Comprehensivisation

Tripartite system had not succeeded in creating equality of opportunity. Under the Labour government of 1965 comprehensive schools were introduced as it was felt that educating all children under one roof regardless of class, gender, ethnicity or ability would be a fairer system.

Strengths	Limitations
• Equality for all under one roof • Broad Curriculum provided • More opportunity for every child to take exams • Provided more sport and recreational activities	• Comprehensives did not live up to their ideal as admissions were based on geographical catchment areas, often inhabited by one type of class which meant that social mixing was unlikely • The Tripartite system continued in some areas and independent education remained an option for the most wealthy. • Most classes were organised by ability, e.g. streaming. The higher streams were often dominated by the middle classes due to their social class and achievement

The 1988 Education Reform Act

Details of the Act

- The primary aim of education is to **increase overall standards**
- Schools should be run like businesses – competing with each other for pupils ('consumers'). This is known as **Marketisation**.
- **Parents were given the right to choose** which school they send their children to (known as **Parentocracy**), rather than being limited to the local school in their catchment area.
- Successful schools were given more money to expand
- SATS tests were used, with GCSE's and A-levels results to draw up **League tables** so that parents would be able to judge the quality of schools and make an informed choice.
- OFSTED was introduced to monitor schools
- **The National Curriculum** was introduced to set up a standard for the teaching of a range of subjects

Strengths of the 1988 Education Act

1. **League Tables** show that standards since 1988 have improved
2. Made education more **responsive to the needs of parents**
3. **The National Curriculum** did mean that the nightmare of progressive education did not reoccur in the 1990s. (No William Tyndale Schools!).
4. It has **ensured greater efficiency** - competition has forced schools to make better use of their resources.

Key concepts you must use if an essay on this comes up

- The New Right
- Marketisation
- Parentocracy
- Selection by mortgage
- Cream skinning
- Teaching the test
- Polarisation
- Skilled and disconnected choosers
- Cultural and Social Capital

Criticisms of the 1988 Education Act

1. **Focussing on exam results and league table position causes stress....** Concern has been expressed over the harmful effects of over-testing on pupils, especially younger pupils.
2. **League Tables distort teaching and learning**
 - schools increasingly 'teach to the test' – In order to look good in league tables which may stifle children's creativity and broader learning and expand again
 - Schools put more emphasis on core subjects than on creative subjects
 - The League Tables give no indication of the wider social good a school is doing beyond getting students results.
3. **The Middle Classes had more effective choice because of their higher incomes** because of their higher incomes – this works as follows –
 - **Selection by mortgage** -houses in the catchment areas of the best schools are more expensive, meaning those with money are more likely to get into the best schools
 - **Transport costs** - middle class parents more able to get their children to a wider range of schools because they are more likely to own two cars.
4. **The Middle classes had more effective choice because of their greater cultural and social capital**

Stephen Ball (2003) refers to middle class parents as '**skilled choosers**' - they are more comfortable dealing with schools and use social networks to talk to parents whose children are attending schools on offer. They are also more used to dealing with and negotiating with teachers. If entry to a school is limited, they are more likely to gain a place for their child.

Ball refers to working class parents as **disconnected choosers** – lacking cultural and social capital they tend to just settle for sending their children to the local school, meaning they have no real choice. (SHAUN'S STORY)

5. **Schools become more selective – they are more likely to want pupils who are likely to do well - Stephen Ball talks of the school/ parent alliance:** Middle class parents want middle class schools and schools want middle class pupils. In general the schools with more middle class students have better results. Schools see middle class students as easy to teach and likely to perform well. They will maintain the schools position in the league tables and its status in the education market.
6. **The experience of schooling becomes very negative for those failing students**
 - More testing means more negative labelling for those who fail
 - Schools put more effort into teaching those in the top sets to improve their A-C rates
 - Students who go to sink schools stand little hope of doing well.
7. **Polarisation** of schools occurred – the best schools get better and the worst get worse. Polarisation of schools occurs because
 - The best schools become oversubscribed – often with four or more pupils competing for each place. This means that these schools can '**cream skim**' the best pupils – which means they get better results and so are in even more demand the next year. Schools are under pressure to cream skim because this increases their chance of rising up in the league tables.
 - Building on the above example... The next best school then skims off the next best students and so on until the worst schools at the bottom just end up with the pupils who no one wants. The schools at the bottom turn into **sink schools**...they just get worse and worse as no one chooses to go to them.

1997 – New Labour Education Policy

There are three main strands to New Labour's Education Policies -

1. **Raising standards – which essentially meant building on what the New Right had done previously**
2. **Increasing diversity and choice within education**
3. **Improving equality of opportunity**

1. New Labour Policies designed to Improve Standards

- Class sizes – were reduced to 30
- Literacy and Numeracy Hour – one hour per day of reading and maths
- Extension of school career and the school day – children now start at 4, even younger in Sure Start nurseries and the leaving age is being raised to 18.
- Tougher Line on Inspection – Expanded the role of OFSTED
- City Academies – 10% funded by the private or voluntary sector – extra money should help improve standards
- Higher Education – expanded the number of places available in universities

1. New Labour Policies designed to reduce inequality of opportunity

- Education Action Zones – Extra money for schools in deprived areas
- Sure Start – 12 hours a week free nursery provision for children aged 2-4
- Education Maintenance Allowance - £30 per week to encourage students from low income households to stay on in 16-18 education

1. Policies designed to increase diversity

- Specialist schools – Specialise in various subjects, providing expertise in areas from sciences to the performing arts.
- Child centred learning (differentiation within schools) – Teachers are expected to focus more on each child's individual learning needs and OFSTED focus on this more.
- Special Educational Needs Provision – there has been a massive expansion of study and support under New Labour to support those with Special needs.
- Faith schools – expanded under New Labour

Evaluating the Impact of New Labour's policies

Positive Evaluations of New Labour Policies

– Standards have improved and there is greater choice and diversity -

- SATs and GCSE scores have improved significantly under New Labour
- There are now a greater diversity of schools (Specialist Schools, City Academies) and a greater variety of subjects one can study (AS and A levels, Vocational A levels, the mix and match curriculum), meaning there is **more choice** for parents and pupils.
- New Labour have established a '**Learning Society**' in which learning is more highly valued and created opportunities in which adults are able to relearn new skills in order to adapt to an ever changing economy,

Criticisms of New Labour policies

1. New Labour have not improved equality of educational opportunity

- The gap between middle classes and working classes achievement continues to grow because of selection of by mortgage, cream skinning etc. (see last sheet)
- The introduction of tuition fees in Higher Education puts many working class children off going to University
- The Private school system still means that those with money can get their children a better education
- City academies enable those with money to shape the curriculum

1. Many students have a negative experience of the education system

- Gilborn and Youdell argue that more students have a negative experience of education in the 'A-C economy'
- Schools have become too test focussed, reducing real diversity of educational experience
- Students are too taught to the test and less able to think critically

Compensatory education

Compensatory Education is additional educational provision for the culturally deprived to give them a helping hand to compete on equal terms. It began in the 1960's with extra resources allocated to low income areas and supplements to the salaries of teachers working in these deprived areas. Below are examples of compensatory education

Compensatory education to improve lower class education

- **Education action Zones** set up in **1998**. These have since been steadily replaced by **Excellence in Cities (EiC)**. These programmes directed resources to low-income, inner city areas in an attempt to raise educational attainment.
- **Sure Start** – Free nursery places for 12 hours a week targeted mainly at lower income areas
- **Educational Maintenance Allowance** -

Compensatory education and gender

- **Boys into reading scheme** – involved famous people such as Garry Linekar telling boys how cool reading was
- **Girls into Science (GIST)** – For example - employing more female science teachers to encourage girls to take up science subjects
- **More active learning through play** – helps boys who have shorter attention spans than girls

Compensatory education and ethnicity

- **Aiming High** – in 2003 the government provided more resources to 30 schools in which African Caribbean pupils were achieving below average
- **Multi-cultural education** – involves having assemblies and lessons focussing on educating the whole school about different cultures in the United Kingdom
- **Employing more black teachers** – some schools employ more black teachers to provide positive role models for young black boys
- **Anti-racist education** – educating teachers to prevent stereotyping of ethnic minority pupils

Criticisms of Compensatory education

- Critics have argued that by placing the blame on the child and his/her background, it diverts attention from the deficiencies of the educational system.
- Likely to only have limited success in raising achievement because they involve quite a modest redistribution of resources to poor areas. They are unlikely to do much for the inequalities in the wider society which lead to poor achievement

Vocational Education under The New Right: 1983 - 1997

The mid 1970s was a time of rising unemployment in Britain, particularly among the young. It was argued that the education system was not producing a skilled enough workforce and that the needs of the economy were not being met.

From the mid 1970s both the Conservative and Labour governments agreed that education should be more focussed on improving the state of the economy by providing training courses for young people in different areas of work. This emphasis on meeting the needs of industry became known as '**New Vocationalism**' which first took off in the 1980s.

Key Vocational Policies of The New Right in the 1980s

1. **Youth Training Schemes.** was a one year training scheme combining work experience with education of school leavers. The only requirement was for employers to ensure trainees followed some sort of training programme leading to level 2 NVQ
2. **The Introduction of NVQs and GNVQs.** The former were focussed on getting an individual ready for a specific career, the latter are more academic, with some focussed career-specific training and some academic work, allowing the individual to keep their options open.

Vocational Education under New Labour: 1997 to Present

New Labour has continued the New Right's drive for more Vocational Education and has two main objectives for its Vocational Education:

- To provide individuals with the training needed for a high skilled/ high waged economy so that workers are competitive in a global labour market.
- To reduce unemployment, especially for young people.

Key New Labour Vocational policies

- **The Introduction of Vocational A levels** – These hybrid A levels were introduced to raise the status of Vocational qualifications
- **The New Deal for young people**– Provided some kind of guaranteed training for any 18-24 year old who had been unemployed for more than 6 months
- **The Apprenticeships scheme** - Combined training at work with part-time attendance at college with the aim of achieving an NVQ at level 3.

Strengths of New Vocationalism

- Has provided a higher skilled workforce suited to a changing labour market in a globalised economy
- Putting more youths in work reduced youth unemployment
- Provided greater opportunities for less academically minded students to gain appropriate qualifications

Criticisms of Vocational Education

1. **Jobs not training needed** – a number of critics argued that youth unemployment in the 1980s was due to lack of jobs rather than lack of skills. In other words, the problem was the economy rather than untrained young people. Similarly with the New Deal, some of the training courses are no relevant to the types of job available in the job market.
2. **Quality and relevance of learning** – In the 1980s many trainees on youth training schemes spent most of their time running errands and making tea rather than actually receiving any training.
3. **Academic/Vocational divide** – Surveys suggest that universities and employers see the new vocational A levels as being of lower value than more academic A levels.

Material Deprivation and Social class differences in educational achievement

Gibson and Asthana (1999) pointed out that there is a correlation between low household income and poor educational performance. There are a number of ways in which poverty can negatively affect the educational performance of children. For example -

1. Higher levels of sickness in poorer homes may mean more absence from school and falling behind with lessons
2. Less able to afford 'hidden costs' of free state education: books and toys are not bought, and computers are not available in the home
3. Tuition fees and loans would be a greater source of anxiety to those from poorer backgrounds.
4. Poorer parents are less likely to have access to pre-school or nursery facilities,
5. Young people from poorer families are more likely to have part-time jobs, such as paper rounds, baby sitting or shop work, creating a conflict between the competing demands of study and paid work.

Supporting evidence for the importance of material deprivation

- **Stephen Ball (2005)** points out how the introduction of marketisation means that those who have more money have a greater choice of state schools because of selection by mortgage
- **Conner et al (2001) and Forsyth and Furlong (2003)** both found that the introduction of tuition fees in HE puts working class children off going to university because of fear of debt
- **Leon Feinstein (2003)** found that low income is related to low cognitive reasoning skills amongst children as young as two years old
- The existence of private schools means the wealthy can afford a better education. Children from private schools are over-represented in the best universities

Evaluations of the role of material deprivation

- To say that poverty causes poor educational performance is **too deterministic** as some students from poor backgrounds do well. Because of this, one must be cautious and rather than say there is a causal relationship between these two variables as the question suggests, it would be more accurate to say that poverty disadvantages working class students and makes it more difficult for them to succeed.
- There are other differences between classes that may lead to working class underachievement. For example, those from working class backgrounds are not just materially deprived, they are also culturally deprived.
- The Cultural Capital of the middle classes also advantages them in education.
- In practise it is difficult to separate out material deprivation from these other factors.

Cultural deprivation and Social class differences in educational achievement

A lot of research has indicated that **class subcultures** influence educational achievement. All of the studies below suggest that working class cultures are deficient and that working class children are deprived as a result. These explanations thus put the blame for working class underachievement on the working class families themselves. In these explanations, working class parents basically teach their children norms and values that do not equip them for education in later life.

Five ways in which cultural deprivation can disadvantage children in education

1. Working class parents may show a **lack of interest** in their children's education
2. Lower class parents **are less able to help their children with homework**
3. Lower class children are more likely to speak in a **restricted speech code**. Rather than the elaborated speech code- **Basil Bernstein** argued this.
4. Working class children are more concerned with **Immediate Gratification** rather than **deferred gratification** – **Barry Sugarman** argued this.
5. **The underclass** has a higher than average percentage of single parent families. **Melanie Philips** argued this.

Supporting evidence for cultural deprivation theory – *two studies which show that cultural and material deprivation are related*

Connor et al (2001) conducted focus group interviews with 230 students from 4 different FE colleges from a range of class backgrounds, some of whom had chosen to go to university and some who had not chosen to go to University. WC pupils discouraged from going to uni for three main reasons:

- a. Firstly, such candidates want 'immediate gratification'. They want to earn money and be independent at an earlier age. This is because they are aware of their parents having struggled for money and wish to avoid debt themselves
- b. Secondly, they realise that their parents cannot afford to support them during Higher Education and did not like the possibility of them getting into debt
- c. Thirdly, they have less confidence in their ability to succeed in HE.

Research by Leon Feinstein found that low income was related to the restricted speech code. His research revealed that children of working-class parents tend to be more passive; less engaged in the world around them and have a more limited vocabulary. Children from middle-class households had a wider vocabulary, better understanding of how to talk to other people and were more skilled at manipulating objects.

Evaluations of cultural deprivation theory

- If we look at ethnicity and gender differences in achievement – to triangulate, it does seem that cultural factors play a role!
- It seems that it isn't just cultural deprivation but also material deprivation that explains underachievement
- Marxists would argue that cultural deprivation theorists blame the working class parents for the underachievement of their children whereas these parents are really the victims of an unequal society in which schools are run by the middle classes for the middle classes

Cultural Capital and Social class differences in educational achievement

For the sociologists in this section, the cause of lower class failure is the very existence of inequality itself in society and differences in power held by the working and middle classes.

Cultural Capital refers to the skills and knowledge middle class parents have that they can use to give their children an advantage in the education system.

Social Capital is the support and information provided by contacts and social networks which can be converted into educational success and material rewards.

Three ways in which middle class parents use their cultural capital

- Middle class parents are better educated and are more able to help their children with homework
- Middle class parents are more skilled in researching schools
- Middle class parents teach their children the value of deferred gratification

Two ways in which middle class parents use their social capital

- They speak to parents of children who already attend the best schools
- They are more likely to know professionals who work in the best schools

Supporting evidence for the importance of cultural capital

Diane Reay (1988) - Mothers make cultural capital work for their children. Her research is based on the mothers of 33 children at two London primary schools. The mothers of working class children worked just as hard as the middle class mothers. But the cultural capital of the MC mothers gave their children an advantage.

Middle Class Mothers had more educational qualifications and more information about how the educational system operated. They used this cultural capital to help their children with homework, bolstering their confidence and sorting out their problems with teachers.

Stephen Ball argues that government policies of choice and competition place the middle class at an advantage. Ball refers to middle class parents as '**skilled choosers**'. Compared to working class parents (**disconnected choosers**) they are more comfortable with dealing with public institutions like schools, they are more used to extracting and assessing information. They use social networks to talk to parents whose children are attending the schools on offer and they are more used to dealing with and negotiating with administrators and teachers. As a result, if entry to a school is limited, they are more likely to gain a place for their child.

The school/ parent alliance: Middle class parents want middle class schools and schools want middle class pupils. In general the schools with more middle class students have better results.. Schools see middle class students as easy to teach and likely to perform well. They will maintain the schools position in the league tables and its status in the education market

The role of Cultural Capital – Evaluations

- Cultural capital has proved difficult to operationalise and measure
- However, more and more research suggests this is important in explaining middle class success and working class failure
- Helps to explain why the Middle classes always do better despite compensatory education

Class Differences in Education – In school factors

This revision sheet looks at how in school processes such as teacher- pupil relationships, subcultures, banding and streaming and the Hidden Curriculum all relate to class differences in education.

1. Teacher pupil relationships

Howard Becker: Labelling and the Ideal Pupil - In the 1970s, Howard Becker argued that middle class teachers have an idea of an 'ideal pupil' that is middle class. This pupil speaks in elaborated speech code, is polite, and smartly dressed. He argued that middle class teachers are likely to view middle class pupils more positively than working class pupils irrespective of their intelligence.

Rosenthal and Jacobsen argued that positive teacher labelling can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy in which the student believes the label given to them and the label becomes true in practice.

2. Pupil Subcultures

Willis' (1977) research involved visiting one school and observing and interviewing 12 working class rebellious boys about their attitude to school during their last 18 months at school and during their first few months at work. Willis described the friendship between these 12 boys (or the lads) as a **counter-school culture**. Their value system was opposed to that of the school. They attached no value to academic work, more to 'having a laff' because they thought that their future work roles in factories would not require them to have qualifications. They saw school as irrelevant.

Mac an Ghail's study of Parnell School (1994) - Found that there was a greater variety of working class subcultures than Willis' research suggested. He found three types of subculture

- The Macho Lads – just like Willis' Lads
- The Academic Achievers – these were working class kids who were doing well and tended to come from the upper end of the working classes
- The New Enterprisers – these focused on vocational subjects and were interested in business and technology – were still concerned with success rather than rejecting school.

Class and gender- *Boys from different class backgrounds experience school differently*

- Working class boys are generally under pressure to express traditional anti-school masculinities
- Middle class boys are more likely to try hard at school, expressing their masculinity through being competitive in examinations
- However, middle class boys still feel some pressure to be seen to not be making an effort in school.

3. The organization of teaching and learning

Banding and Streaming disadvantages the working classes and some minority groups - **Stephen Ball (1980s)** found that following comprehensivisation working class children were more likely to be put into lower sets

Bourdieu argues that schools are middle class environments full of teachers with middle class values and tastes. It has been argued that the absence of working class teachers with their distinct accents and dialects means that teachers fail to relate to working class children

Ethnicity and Differential Educational Achievement

Knowledge checklist

Key concepts - You need to be able to define the following key concepts, explain how they are related to class and educational achievement, and assess their relative importance in explaining ethnic differences in educational achievement

- Social class
- Cultural deprivation
- Material deprivation
- Linguistic deprivation
- The ethnocentric curriculum
- Institutional racism
- The A-C economy
- Pupil subcultures
- Labeling
- The self fulfilling prophecy

Key research studies

- Steve Strand – the Longitudinal study
- Crozier – some Asian parents keep their distance
- David Gilborn – teacher labelling
- Cecile Wright – teacher labelling
- Mac An Ghail - pupil subcultures
- Tony Sewell – pupil subcultures
- Gilborn and Youdell – the A-C economy

Sample short answer questions

- Suggest three home based cultural factors which may account for why Chinese and Indian children outperform other ethnic groups (6)
- Suggest three ways in which the school curriculum may be said to be ethnocentric (6)
- Suggest two criticisms of labeling theory (4)

Sample essay questions

- Briefly examine the relationship between cultural factors and ethnic differences in educational achievement (12)
- Using material from item A and elsewhere, assess the claim that 'ethnic difference in educational achievement are primarily the result of in-school factors' (20)

Test yourself

1. Make sure you can define all of the concepts above – Multi choice quiz [here](#)
2. Use the notes above to complete the following essay - **Using material from item A and elsewhere, assess the claim that 'ethnic difference in educational achievement are primarily the result of in-school factors' (20)**

Statistics on differential educational achievement by ethnicity

- Chinese pupils – 71.6 percent of pupils achieved 5 or more A*-C grade GCSEs
- Indian pupils – 67.0 percent of pupils achieved 5 or more A*-C grade GCSEs or equivalent
- Mixed White and Asian pupils – 62.3 percent of pupils achieved 5 or more A*-C grade GCSEs or equivalent
- Pakistani pupils, 42.9 percent achieved 5 or more A*-C grade GCSEs
- Pupils from the mixed White and Black Caribbean ethnic group, 42.3 percent achieved 5 or more A*-C grade GCSEs or equivalent
- Black Caribbean pupils, 39.4 percent achieved 5 or more A*-C grade GCSEs or equivalent

Material deprivation, social class and ethnic differences in education

1. Poverty can prevent a child gaining a good education because parents are less able to meet the Hidden costs of education such as finding money for school trips and home resources such as computers. Poverty also means a family is more likely to live in a deprived area with worse schools. Lack of money impacts negatively on family dynamics, especially parental involvement in education, and have the effect of lowering educational aspirations.
2. Some ethnic minority groups experience higher levels of poverty than white people. According to the Labour Force Survey 2004/05 20% of White British households are in income poverty compared to 25% of Indian, 30% of Black Caribbean, 45% of Black African, 55% of Pakistani and 65% of Bangladeshi households.
3. 42% of White British students are from homes in the top two social classes, compared to 37% of Black Caribbean, 36% of Black African, 29% of Indian, 19% of Pakistani and only 9% of Bangladeshi students.
4. At the other end of the scale, the proportion of students from homes where the head of the household has never worked or is long term unemployed is 3% for White British but 7% for Indian, 8% for Black Caribbean, 23% for Pakistani, 26% for Black African and 40% for Bangladeshi households.

Limitations of material deprivation explanations

1. According to Strand (2007) only Pakistani and Bangladeshi underachievement can be explained in terms of their social and economic disadvantages – he argues that the high rates of poverty relate directly to their relative underachievement in education
2. Children of African Caribbean origin experience lower rates of poverty than Bangladeshi and Pakistani children yet do worse in education, suggesting that there must be other factors that explain their underachievement.
3. Children of Indian origin suffer higher levels of poverty than white children yet outperform them by 10% points.

Ethnicity and achievement - Family background and cultural factors

1. Indian and Chinese families have higher levels of Parental control and expectation - Strand's (2007)'s analysis of data from the 2004 Longitudinal Study of Young People found that Indian students are the ethnic group most likely to complete homework five evenings a week and the group where parents are most likely to say they always know where their child is when they are out.
2. African Caribbean families have a higher proportion of single parent households –The New Right argues that the high proportion of lone parents fail to 'provide a home environment conducive to learning'. There have also been concerns about the development of 'gangsta' culture with the absence of positive Black male role models at home as well as in schools (Abbott, 2002)
3. The culture of anti-school black masculinity - Tony Sewell (1997) observes that Black Caribbean boys may experience considerable pressure by their peers to adopt the norms of an 'urban' or 'street' subculture. More importance is given to unruly behaviour with teachers and antagonistic behaviour with other students than to high achievement or effort to succeed.
4. Acting white and acting black! Fordham and Ogbu (1986) further argue that notions of 'acting White' or 'acting Black' become identified in opposition to one another. Hence because acting White includes doing well at school, acting Black necessarily implies not doing well in school.
5. Trust in the system and Language barriers Crozier (2004)– found that Pakistani and Bangladeshi parents 'kept their distance' from their children's schools because they trusted the professionals to do their jobs; they lacked confidence in use of English and there were no translators.
6. White children have lower educational aspirations than most ethnic minorities. Professor Simon Burgess and Dr Deborah Wilson (2008) found that among Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean and Black African families, over 90 per cent of parents want their child to stay on at school at age 16, compared with 77 per cent of white families – which correlates with lower numbers at university.
7. South Asian women go to university despite cultural pressures - Bagguley and Hussain (2007) found that aspirations to higher education for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women were often complicated by cultural pressures. Many had to negotiate decisions around marriage and the expectations of their parents. Many Muslim students consequently studied at a local university in order to placate their parents' concerns about morality, being in the company of men and their family honour or 'izzat'. In contrast, Indian students currently at university appeared to have had the option of leaving home. Indian women often spoke of a natural progression into higher education that was assumed by both their parents and their schools

The Limitations of cultural factors in explaining differences in achievement by ethnicity

1. Family background helps explain Indian performance in education because this makes up for the greater level of poverty experienced compared to whites.
2. Cultural barriers to SE Asian women are greater than for boys
3. Cultural barriers for AC boys are greater than for AC girls.
4. Strand argues that it is relative poverty of Bangladeshi and Pakistanis that explains their underachievement at GCSE rather than cultural factors
5. Cultural barriers can't explain everything as all groups except Bangladeshi women are more likely to go to university than whites.
6. Strand argues that even if we take into account material and cultural barriers institutional racism leads to lack of opportunity for young black students and holds them back.

Ethnicity and Achievement – in school factors

Teacher pupil relationships

1. Cecile Wright (1992) Found that teachers perceived ethnic minority children differently from white children. Asian children were seen as a problem that could be ignored, receiving the least attention and often being excluded from classroom discussion and rarely asked to answer questions. Teachers assumed their command of the English language was poor but they were highly disciplined and well motivated. African Caribbean children were expected to behave badly and received considerable attention, nearly always negative. They were seen as aggressive and disruptive. They were often singled out for criticism even in action ignored in other children.
2. David Gilborn (1990) Found that while vast majority of teachers tried to treat all students fairly, they tended to see African-Caribbean children as a threat when no threat was intended and reacted accordingly with measures of control. Despite the fact that teachers rejected racism their ethnocentric perceptions meant that their actions were racist in consequence. African-Caribbean children experienced more conflict in relationships with pupils, were more subjected to the schools detention system and were denied any legitimate voice of complaint
3. Tony Sewell (1996)– Black Masculinities and schooling He was primarily interested in the experiences of black boys in education and he found that some black students were disciplined excessively by teachers who felt threatened by these students' masculinity, sexuality and physical prowess because they had been socialized into racist attitudes. He also found that the boys in the study found that their culture received little or no positive recognition in the school.

The organisation of teacher learning

1. Banding and Streaming disadvantages the working classes and some minority groups
2. Gilborn and Youdell point out that Black Caribbean children are overrepresented in the lower sets and talk of how those in the lower sets get 'written off' because they have not hope of achieving A-Cs.
3. The Ethnocentric Curriculum - In education this refers to the ways in which what happens in schools can seem irrelevant to ethnic minority pupils. The curriculum is described as Ethnocentric – for example students having to study British history from the European point of view, out of date textbooks that racially stereotype and some subjects having a narrow, white British focus.
4. Crozier (2004) – experiences of Racism amongst Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils Bangladeshi and Pakistani pupils are often seen as 'keeping to themselves' in school, this research found that if they do so it is because they feel excluded by their white peers and marginalized by the school practices. The researchers discovered that Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils had experienced the following - Anxieties about their safety; Racist abuse was a lived experience of their schooling; Careers advisors at school believed South Asian girls were bound by tradition and it was a waste of time advising them; Not being allowed off during Ramadan; Not feeling that assemblies were relevant
5. Tariq Modood (2005) says - If we look at the best universities Whites are more likely to get an offer than other identical candidates. For example, while a White student has a 75% chance of receiving an invitation to study, a Pakistani candidate, identical in every way, has only a 57% chance of an offer.

Pupil subcultures

1. A culture of anti-school black masculinity - Tony Sewell (1997) observes that Black Caribbean boys may experience considerable pressure by their peers to adopt the norms of an 'urban' or 'street' subculture. More importance is given to unruly behaviour with teachers and antagonistic behaviour with other students than to high achievement or effort to succeed, particularly at secondary school.
2. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) further argue that notions of 'acting White' or 'acting Black' become identified in opposition to one another. Hence because acting White includes doing well at school, acting Black necessarily implies not doing well in school.
3. Mac an Ghail (1998) *Young, Gifted and Black* - Mac an Ghail was a teacher in two inner city colleges. He looked at three subcultures – the Asian Warriors, the African- Caribbean Rasta Heads and the Black Sisters. He used mainly participant observation both in the school and through befriending the students and socializing with them outside of the school. What he found was that the African Caribbean community experienced the world in very different ways to white people – namely because of institutional racism in the college and he argued that any anti-school attitudes were reactions against this racism. He mainly blamed the school rather than the students

External factors that explain the gender gap in Education

1. Changes in women's employment

According to **Social Trends (2008)** the number of men and women in paid work is now virtually the same. There is a growing service sector where women are increasingly likely to be employed over men and employers increasingly seek women for higher managerial roles because they generally have better communication skills than men. This means women now have greater opportunity than men in the world of work which makes education more relevant to them than in the 1970s when there was a relative lack of opportunity for women compared to men.

Conversely, there is now less opportunity for men. The decline in manufacturing has led to a decline in traditional working class men's factory based jobs. Mac An Ghail argues this has led to a '**crisis of masculinity**': boys like the lads studied by **Paul Willis** would have intended to go into these jobs. Now these jobs have gone, many working class boys perceive themselves as having no future.

2. Changes in the family

The Office for National Statistics suggest that changes there have been changes in family structure: Women are more likely to take on the breadwinner role; there is now more divorce, and more lone parent families; women are more likely to remain single. This means that idea of getting a career is seen as normal by girls.

However, the increasing independence of women has lead to a more uncertain role for men in British society, leaving many men feeling vulnerable and unsure of their identity in society – suffering from a crisis of masculinity.

3. Girl's changing ambitions

Sue Sharpe did a classic piece of research in the 1970s, repeated in the 1990s in which she interviewed young girls about their ambitions. In the 1970s their priorities were to get married and have a family, but by the 1990s their priorities were to get a career and have a family later on in life.

4. The impact of feminism –

Feminism has campaigned for equal rights and opportunities for women in education, the workplace and wider society more generally. Feminist sociologists argue that many of the above changes have been brought about by their attempts to highlight gender inequalities in society and their efforts to encourage the government, schools and teachers to actually combat patriarchy and provide genuine equality of opportunity which has lead to raising the expectations and self-esteem of girls.

5. Differential socialisation

Fiona Norman in 1988 found that most parents think the appropriate socialisation for a girl is to handle her very gently, and to encourage her in relatively passive, quiet activities. Parents are also more likely to read with girls than with boys. Gender stereotypes held by parents also mean that 'typical boys' need more time to run around and play and 'let off steam', and parents are more likely to be dismissive if their boys are in trouble at school often seeing this as just them being 'typical boys'. These gender stereotypes and differences in gender socialisation disadvantage boys and advantage girls in education.

The Limitation of external factors in explaining differential educational achievement by gender

1. The decline of manufacturing and crisis of masculinity only affects working class boys, possibly explaining their achievement relative to girls, but middle class girls outperform middle class boys too, who are less likely to associate masculinity with factory work.
2. McDowell – research on aspirations of white working class youth. A sample of males with low educational achievement living in Sheffield and Cambridge aged 15-16. Followed from school to work. Criticizes the notion of a crisis of masculinity leading to aggressive male identities. These lads had traditional laddish identities but were not aggressive or put off by 'feminized work'. They are best described as reliable workers making the most of limited opportunities available to them.
3. Willis in 1977 argued that the Lads formed a counter school culture and rejected education even when they had jobs to go to, meaning there are other causes of male underachievement besides the crisis of masculinity.
4. It is difficult to measure the impact of Feminism – changes in the job market that lead to improved opportunities for women may be due to other technological and cultural changes.
5. The Socialisation girls does not explain why they started to overtake boys in the late 1980s – if anything gender socialisation has become more gender neutral in recent years.

Concepts to remember

- Crisis of Masculinity
- Gender socialisation
- Gender stereotyping

Research studies to remember

- Kat Banyard - research into gender stereotyping in the family
- Sue Sharpe – the aspirations of girls.

What is The Gender Gap?

- Up until the late 1980's boys outperformed girls in O'Levels (before they were replaced by GCSE's) as well as A Levels. They were also more likely to attend university than girls.
- However, since the late 1980's there has been a significant rise in favour of girls gaining GCSE's. As of 2006 figures show that 63% of girls and 53% of boys are achieving 5+A*-C GCSE's or equivalent.
- Since the mid 1990's girls have also overtaken boys in university attendance. Sociologists refer to this higher achievement of girls over boys as 'the gender gap'.
- In 2009, 70.5 per cent of females achieved GCSE grades A*-C compared with only 63.6 per cent of boys.

Internal (In school) factors that explain the gender gap

1. Teacher Labelling

Swann and Graddol (1994) found that teachers tend to see boys as unruly and disruptive and are more likely to spend time telling them off than helping them with schoolwork. Teachers have lower expectations of boys and so are less inclined to push them hard to achieve high standards. Because of their disruptive behaviour they are more likely to be excluded. Four out of five permanent exclusions are boys. With **Ladette culture** this may be changing (**Jackson, 2006**)

John Abraham (1986) asked teachers to describe a typical boy and a typical girl – The typical boy was described as not particularly bright, likes a laugh and always attention seeking, often by messing around. The typical girl is bright, well –behaved and hard working, being quiet and timid. As a result he found that boys were told off much more easily than girls.

2. Subcultures and 'Laddishness'

Working class boys especially tend to form anti-school subcultures. **Paul Willis (1977)** found this with his research with the lads, **Tony Sewell (1997)** argues that there is a black –anti school masculinity and **Diane Reay et al (2003)** found that boys felt they had little control over their educational learning and so seek power through other negative strategies.

Unlike the anti-social subculture discovered by Paul Willis, some researchers such as **Abrahams (1988)** and **Mirza (1992)** have found evidence of pro-school female subcultures who actively encourage each other to study.

Carolyn Jackson (2006) – Found that laddish behaviour had important benefits – it made students seem cool and thus popular. She also argued that it was a response to the fear of failure – it made students seem unbothered about failing, so if they did FAIL they would not look bad. Furthermore, if lads and ladettes did well, they would be labelled as a genius – doing well with apparently no effort

Frosh and Phoenix – Mainly focus group interviews but some individual interviews Sample of 245 boys and 27girls in 12 schools **Young Masculinities (2000)** Found that few boys were able to be both popular and academically successful Conscientious boys who tried hard at school were often labelled as feminine or gay.

3. The Feminisation of teaching

There are more female than male teachers, especially in primary school. In line with women increasingly going into more professional careers, secondary schooling has also seen a rise in female teachers. This means that girls increasingly have positive role models while boys may fail to identify with female teachers. Some sociologists have suggested that one possible explanation for these gender differences in attainment is the 'feminisation of education'. This is the idea that there are not enough male teachers working in primary schools and that, as a result, the curriculum, teaching styles and means of assessment, are more appropriate to the learning styles of girls. Consequently government strategies of teacher recruitment now suggest that pupils will benefit from 'gender-matching' with teachers.

4. **The introduction of coursework**

Coursework was introduced with the 1988 Education Act and this is precisely when girls started to outperform boys in education. Coursework may benefit girls in education because they are better organised and more likely to do work outside of lessons.

5. **Boys' overconfidence**

Michael Barber (1996) showed that boys overestimate their ability, and girls underestimate theirs. **Francis** research in 3 London schools (1998-9) found that some boys thought it would be easy to do well in exams without having to put much effort in. When they fail they tend to blame the teacher or their own lack of effort, not ability and feel undervalued.

Limitations of in school factors in explaining differences in educational achievement

1. The introduction of coursework in 1988 seems to have had a major impact on girl's surging ahead of boys because girls suddenly surged ahead at this time

2. **Research by Skelton et al found that the Feminisation of teaching does not have a negative impact on educational performance of boys.** They found that most pupils and teachers reported that matching pupils and teachers by gender did not significantly affect pupils' educational experiences. Sixty-five per cent of children rejected the idea that the gender of the teacher mattered, with no major differences between girls and boys. The majority of pupils also believed that the behaviour of male and female teachers in the classroom was generally very similar in terms of fairness, encouragement and discipline.

3. **Out of school factors must also play a role** – boys learn to be 'typical boys' at home first of all and then their peers just reinforce this.

4. **Don't exaggerate the extent of male underachievement** – boys are still improving in education and are now catching up with girls once more.

Gender Identity and Education

Research on the development of gender identity has shown that children become keen to demonstrate their awareness and knowledge of gender at the age of five to six. Consequently, seven to eight year olds have a relatively well-established sense of gender identity. For children, being accepted as a 'typical boy' or a 'typical girl' tends to be important, and in order to prove that you are a boy or a girl requires that you 'act out' your gender identity. School is an important arena in which one can act out one's gender identity and affirm one's masculinity or femininity and thus affirm one's gender identity.

Some Sociological research shows that there is pressure in school to conform to traditional gender identities. If one is a boy, one is often expected to display aspects of traditional masculinity such as enjoying sport and being competitive; and if a male student displays traditionally feminine traits they are criticised. Similarly, girls who act masculine may be subject ridicule. This type of thinking is typically associated with Interactionism – labelling theory.

However other research, from a post-modern perspective suggests that gender-identity is much more fluid and complex and that it is more accurate to speak of gender-identities. Today boys and girls have much more freedom to construct alternative gendered identities – It is acceptable to act out a range of different gendered identities – Ladettes and Metrosexuals for example, while open expressions of homosexuality are also much more accepted today.

Key Term – Hegemonic Masculinity – Refers to the norms and values associated with traditional masculinity – such as physicality, competitiveness and aggressiveness.
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Do Peer Groups in school reinforce Traditional Gender Identities?

Two studies arguing that they do...

1. **Male Peer Groups – reinforce the idea that working hard is unmasculine for boys**

Mac an Ghail's study of Parnell school (1994) found that Male peer groups put boys under pressure to not take school work seriously. There were differences across social classes

- **Working class boys** - genuinely didn't make an effort – part of being male for them meant being cool, and not caring about school work. For them 'real boys don't try hard at school' and are more interested in dossing around (like the Lads Paul Willis studied in 1977). These boys referred to boys that wanted to do well as 'dickhead achievers' 'queer' or 'gay'.

- **Middle class boys** - Behind the scenes, many middle class boys would try hard to succeed but in public they projected an image of 'effortless achievement' – pretending they were weren't really making any effort and being smug when they did well because of this.

- **In terms of identity then, not working hard is part of working class masculinity and being seen to not working hard is part of middle class masculinity**

1. **Female peer groups reinforce ideas of traditional femininity**

Louise Archer – Interviewed 89 young people, looking at the identities of young working class girls. She found that girls that didn't conform to traditional gender identities (passive and submissive) were at a disadvantage because they came into conflict with the school. For most of the girls, constructing and performing a heterosexual, sexy feminine image was the most important thing to them. Each of the girls spent considerable money and time on their appearance, trying to look sexy and feminine which gave the girls a sense of power and status. The peer group policed this.

Archer also interview one Laddette - who felt as if the school had a grudge against her. Over one summer she transformed her identity to a classically feminine one and got on much better with staff at her new college as a result.

2. **Verbal Abuse can reinforce traditional gender identities**

Connell argues that **verbal abuse** is one way in which dominant gender and sexual identities are reinforced.

Paetcher (1996) argued that male pupils use terms such as 'gay' or 'queer' in a derogatory manner. Such labels are often given to students who are disinterested in or bad at sport or who prefer traditionally feminine subjects.

Sue Lees (1986) found that boys called girls 'slags' if they appeared to be sexually available and 'drags' if they didn't, negatively labelling girls for being promiscuous or not. According to Lees this is one way in which male dominance starts to assert itself.

Two counter arguments

1. **Carolyn Jackson** argued that Laddishness amongst girls is on the increase – girls are increasingly loud, aggressive and drink excessively. She argued that the advantages of this behaviour are that this allows girls to seem carefree about education, reducing the risk of them losing face if they fail.

2. **Mark McCormac** argues that today's male sixth form students are much less concerned with displaying traditional masculinity – they are much more comfortable with physical contact and much more accepting of homosexuality for example.

Do Teachers reinforce traditional gender identities?

Arguments and Evidence for this view...

1. Research shows that teachers also play a part in reinforcing dominant definitions of gender identity. **Chris Haywood (1996)** found that male teachers told boys off for 'behaving like girls' and teased them when they gained lower marks in tests than girls. Teachers also tended to ignore boys' verbal abuse of girls (calling them slugs etc)
2. There is also some evidence that male teachers sometimes display a protective attitude towards female teachers, coming into their class to rescue them from disruptive pupils who display threatening behaviour.
3. John Abraham's research found that teachers' idea of a 'typical girl' was of her being well behaved and studious, whereas their ideas of 'typical boys' were of them being troublemakers – thus boys received more negative feedback than girls which could reinforce their notion of masculinity being associated with messing around in school.
4. **Tutors and subject advisors** - If male students want to do traditionally female subjects, tutors are more likely to question them critically asking them if they are really sure about their decision, meaning students are under more pressure to avoid those subjects that do not fall into their traditional 'gender domains'

Analysis point - Gender identities can be different for different ethnic groups...

Sewell and Mac An Ghail

- Sewell argues that African Caribbean males are more likely to form anti-school subcultures
- Mac An Ghail agreed but argued that this was a response to institutional racism

Crozier...

- Girls outperform boys in all ethnic groups at GCSE and are more likely to go to university than boys in all ethnic groups
- But Bangladeshi and Pakistani girls are less likely to attend university than their male peers. Research suggests this is due to cultural pressure to stay close to home and get married