5 Stratification   
and differentiation

**5.1 THEORIES OF STRATIFICATION AND DIFFERENTIATION**

P.342 GETTING YOU THINKING

**Suggested answers**

**1.** 'Opportunity hoarding' refers to the idea that in practice opportunities for upward social mobility are not distributed equally because the more affluent are able to provide their own children with greater opportunities, for example by supporting them through unpaid internships.

**2.** No set answers.

**3.** No set answers.

**4.** No set answers.

P.350 Focus on skills: in praise of karl marx

**Suggested answers**

**1.** Marx believed that there was an inevitable conflict of interest between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie because the income of the workers – wages - represented a cost to the employers, so whilst it was in the interests of the workers to push for high wages, it was in the interests of employers to keep wages as low as possible. Indeed, Marx believed that because competition between companies would force employers to cut their costs and therefore wages, the workers would – over time – become increasingly impoverished.

However, this pointed to what Marx saw as an inherent contradiction within capitalism: if wages were too low, the workers would be unable to afford to buy the products of capitalist firms and the firms would be unable to make a profit. Yet the logic of the system required employers to pay as low wages as they could get away with.

**2.** Marx recognised the dynamism of capitalism, the economic growth that it was generating during his lifetime. However, he also felt that its internal contradictions would eventually spell its demise: as workers became increasingly impoverished and concentrated in large-scale enterprises they would develop class consciousness and eventually revolt against the system.

In practice, capitalism has survived, partly because political parties have formed that have provided workers with some political power, partly because capitalists have recognised the need to make some concessions in order to preserve the system and for a host of other reasons. Nevertheless, at the time of writing, capitalism is facing both a *crisis of accumulation* – a profit squeeze because of falling demand – and a *crisis of legitimacy*- as people question the growing inequalities that the system is generating.

**3.** ‘Liberty’ refers to freedom, ‘equality’ to being treated equally and ‘fraternity’ to brotherhood or a sense of community.

**4.** This is, of course, a highly charged issue politically. Some writers argue that the collapse of the Soviet Union represented the death knell for Marxism. Others that Soviet-style socialism represented a corruption of Marx’s ideas and that Marxism continues to offer a powerful set of ideas for understanding how capitalism works.

In assessing the continuing relevance of Marxism, it is important to recognise that it is both an ideology and a theory of society. That is to say, it is both a set of empirical propositions about how society works (a theory) and a set of ideas which claim both to describe how society works and how it *should* work (an ideology). Whether it is possible to separate out these two elements of Marxism is a matter of debate. Equally, other sociological perspectives provide alternative perspectives on the nature of society. Ultimately, therefore, the continuing relevance of Marxism is a highly contested issue.

p356. Check your understanding

**Suggested answers**

**1.** Ascribed status’ refers to a social position to which a person is allocated at birth or because of characteristics over which they have little or no control (such as gender or age). ‘Achieved status’ refers to a social position which someone has acquired through their actions (e.g. through work or marriage).

**2.** Stratification is inevitable for Parsons because people will be differentially evaluated in terms of the degree to which they exemplify society's value system, whatever that is (occupational success in advanced industrial societies).

**3.** Functionalists assume that status ranking is the key feature of stratification. Not all theorists agree.

Others point out that some functionally important jobs - nurses, refuse collectors, care workers, say – are not generally highly rewarded; nor are the people who occupy high status positions necessarily the most talented. Also, opportunity hoarding by the higher strata militates against the downward mobility of their children. Consequently, functionalists ignore the fact that class societies are not necessarily meritocratic.

Some groups may be able to use economic and political power to increase their rewards against the will of the majority. High rewards sometimes go to people who play no functionally important roles but who simply live off the income generated by their wealth.

The theory sheds no light on why the *degree* of stratification varies from one society and one time to another. Is *any* degree of stratification functional, never mind how extreme?

**4.** For Marxists, exploitation is a product of the fact that the surplus value produced by the labour of the workers belongs to the capitalists and not to the workers. Critics contend that this is not a simple statement of fact, but a value judgement.

**5.** A ‘class in itself’ refers to the objective position of a collection of people who occupy the same or a similar position in terms of the relations of production. A ‘class for itself’ refers to a collection of people who not only occupy the same or a similar position in the relations of production, but are also aware of this fact (i.e. are class conscious).

**6.** ‘Class’ (defined as a collection of people who share similar life-chances), ‘status’ (defined as a collection of people who share similar status and life styles) and ‘party’ (defined as political power).

**7.** The boundary problem is the issue of where to draw the line between one class and another. For example, given that incomes vary continuously, the decision about where to draw the line between one class and another is inevitably somewhat arbitrary.

**8.** ‘Patriarchy’ literally means rule by the father, but feminists use it more loosely to refer to power exercised by men in general.

**9.** Black feminism has criticised other feminists for failing to recognise that racism operates in society and can complicate matters e.g. black women may find themselves victims of racism practiced by white women.

**10.** Postmodernists believe that classes were features of modern (industrial) societies and that many societies have progressed to a postmodern stage in which social classes have become fragmented and in which people’s identity is linked more strongly to consumption than to a person’s position in the system of production.

**5.2 PROBLEMS OF DEFINING AND MEASURING CLASS**

P.358 Focus on skills: SUBJECTIVE CLASS IDENTITIES

**1.** 'Subjective class identity' refers to a person's perception of his or her own class position.

**2.** The majority of the interviewees identified with a social class, but did so in an ambivalent, defensive and uncommitted way.

**3.** By ‘highly charged’, Savage et al probably mean that the interviewees saw the concept of class as a loaded term which carries implications of superiority and inferiority, good and bad, merit and fault, etc. So, by identifying with a class, they inevitably felt that they would be laying themselves open to invidious judgements by others, such as the interviewers.

**4.** The authors themselves argue that their research indicates that class identification towards the end of the Twentieth Century was generally weak, but that this doesn’t mean that class no longer matters because their interviewees understand their individualised identities as linked to broader class structures.

**5.** In any case, though, subjective class identity represents just one aspect of the debate about whether class still matters. For example, people may not see themselves as belonging to a class, but this doesn’t mean that their life chances won’t nevertheless be significantly influenced by their class back ground, whether they recognise this or not.

P.365 Check your understanding

**1.** By saying that (social) class is multi-faceted is meant that, as a concept, it has a number of dimensions. The four identified in the text are:

* a shared economic situation
* shared attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviour ('class sub-cultures')
* awareness of membership ('class consciousness')
* action to promote their shared interests ('class action')

**2.** A ‘gradational view’ sees classes as arranged in a hierarchy of positions; a ‘relational view’ sees this hierarchy as involving antagonistic relationships between the different classes. Functionalists, for example, adopt an essentially gradational view; Marxists a relational view.

**3.** Bourdieu identified four different types of capital that people could possess:

* Economic capital: income, wealth, inheritance and other money assets
* Cultural capital: attitudes of mind, tastes, educational qualifications and so on
* Social capital: the range and extent of peoples’ contacts based on their social networks

**4.** One difficulty is that it is difficult to ask people about class without leading their response: how do you ask people about class without using the term? Another is whether to measure class in subjective or objective terms and a third is how to operationalise ‘class’.

**5.** Occupation has been widely used as an indicator for class because it provides a rough indicator of most people’s standard of living, it is fairly easily established and because most people are indifferent about others knowing what their occupation is.

**6.** The R-G’s scale provided a reliable way of placing households in a hierarchy of ‘classes’ for most of the Twentieth Century. However, it had a number of limitations:

* Assessments of jobs were made by the Registrar General’s own staff – Hence, there was a bias towards seeing non-manual occupations as having a higher status than manual occupations.
* Reliance on occupation meant that those whose economic position was based on wealth and unearned income disappeared from view.
* Feminists criticised the scale as sexist – The class of everyone in a household was defined by the job of the male head of household. Women were assigned to the class of their husbands (or their fathers, if unmarried).
* It glossed over the fact that workers allocated to the same class often had widely varying access to resources such as pay and promotion.
* It failed to distinguish between the employed and self-employed – This distinction is important because evidence shows that these groups do not share similar experiences. For example the shadow economy is much more accessible to the self-employed – they can avoid paying tax and VAT by working at a cheaper rate ‘for cash’, which cannot be traced through their accounts, or by not fully declaring all the work they do.

**7.** It no longer assumes that the manual/non-manual distinction is the basis of the class structure; it recognises the existence of the long-term unemployed/never worked and it treats women as independent of their husbands or fathers.

**8.** The scale is still based primarily on the objective criteria of occupation. This may differ from what people understand by the term ‘social class’ and their subjective interpretation of their own class position; those who do not have to work because of access to great wealth are still not included, nor does it take account of the fact that economic position involves both income and wealth; some argue that the scale still obscures important differences in status and earning power, e.g. head teachers are in the same category as classroom teachers.

**9.** The GBCS, unlike the NS-SEC, is not based on occupation but on combined measures of economic, cultural and social capital.

**10.** A strength is that it does not rely on the single indicator of occupation to identify class location. Additionally, it recognises that class involves types of assets besides economic ones, namely, cultural and social capital.

Critics argue that the inductive methodology used to differentiate the classes is open to challenge and that it produces an essentially gradational view of the class structure, rather than a relational one.

**5.3 DIMENSIONS OF INEQUALITY: SOCIAL CLASS**

P.371 Focus on skills: SOCIAL CLASS IN AN ‘INDIVIDUALISED’ SOCIETY

**1.** The term 'individualised' is in inverted commas because the authors question the extent to which society really has become individualised today.

**2.** Some 58 per cent of those following the long higher education route had parents in the professional and managerial classes (i.e. Classes I and II), but only 9 per cent of those who had taken the long higher education route were from semi-skilled and unskilled backgrounds (i.e. Classes V and VI).

**3.** This research suggests that whilst the transitional routes followed by young people in Scotland are now more varied, broad class-based patterns are still discernible. The authors conclude: "In this article we have tried to show how an apparent fluidity of experience can mask persistent inequalities shaped by social class". (Not quoted in the summary/extract.)

P.372 Check your understanding

**1.** Giddens and Diamond argue that class background is no longer the main determinant of adult status because society has become more meritocratic. They also argue that class is no longer the main determinant of social inclusion or exclusion because this is linked to a range of other sources of social differentiation, e.g. family structure, ethnicity, disability, neighbourhood, etc.

**2.** Single-parent families; those who live in council housing; those living in neighbourhoods with high levels of crime and antisocial behaviour, and little community spirit; those in insecure casual or temporary low-paid work and those who are long-term unemployed; the disabled; certain ethnic groups and older members of society.

**3.** New egalitarians believe that class inequalities have been replaced by a more variegated and fluid set of inequalities that produce patters of inclusion and exclusion (see answer 2 above), whilst new traditionalists believe that there is still an underlying class structure that produces the inequalities identified by the new egalitarians.

**4.** Between 1979 and 1997 (during an unbroken period of Conservative government), income inequality between the rich and poor in Britain widened until it was at its most unequal since records began at the end of the 19th century. Recent data up to the 2012/13 fiscal year suggests income inequality overall has been constant since 2010.

**5.** Kersley and Shaheen (2014) identify six main drivers of growing economic inequality in the UK over the last 30 years:

* globalisation
* technology
* financialisation
* declining trades union membership and labour market liberalisation
* government redistribution policies
* political capture

**6.** Wealth has been redistributed upwards since 1980. For example, half the population shared only 10 per cent of total wealth in 1986, and this had been reduced to 6 per cent by 2003

**7.** The Acheson report (1998) found that class inequalities in health had widened since the Black Report was published in 1980 and the Marmot Report (2010) found that they had not narrowed in the intervening period.

**8.** This is only a partial truth because it ignores both the constraints that restrict some people’s ability to make healthy choices (e.g. choices about the kind of neighbourhood they can afford to live in and their level of knowledge about what is healthy or unhealthy) and the way the choices they make are shaped by agents of socialisation such as media and peer groups.

**9.** Approximately, 7%.

**10.** The ability to pay for education in the private sector with its greater resources and smaller classes; the ability of more affluent parents to buy houses in the catchment areas of more successful state schools.

**5.4 DIMENSIONS OF INEQUALITY: LIFE-CHANCES AND GENDER**

p.379 Focus on SKILLS: WOMEN AND MANUAL TRADES

**1.** The author had to deal with ‘unacceptable language’ and being excluded from the site canteen because male workers took priority.

**2.** Possible factors could include:

* gender role socialisation shaping girls ideas about what kind of work is ‘appropriate’;
* fears of experiencing sexist attitudes and practices given the numerical dominance of men;
* a perceived or actual ‘macho culture’ associated with building work;
* lack of (high profile) female role-models;
* recruitment practices by training organisations and employers;
* fear of being seen as ‘unfeminine’

**3.** It is possible that in the two decades leading up to 1985, the influence of the Second Wave of feminism was encouraging more girls and women to question traditional gender roles, but in the decades since feminism has lost its high profile and the Third Wave has not seen gender segregation in the workforce as a priority.

**4.** According to the European Commission (2009), while the UK is in the middle-range of EU countries for its degree of occupational segregation by gender, it was one of six countries experiencing relatively fast de-segregation between 1997 and 2007 - although it is unclear whether this trend has continued since the financial crash. Nevertheless, gender segregation is still apparent in many areas of employment. The large majority of social workers, nurses and cleaners, for example, continue to be women, whilst the large majority of engineers, IT professionals and police officers continue to be men. Consequently, the notion of 'women's jobs' and 'men's jobs' still retains some traction.

P.381 Check your understanding

**1.** The increased rates of employment of married women and mothers.

**2.** The main reason is that women continue to take the major responsibility for child care.

**3.** Horizontal (gender) segregation is to do with the types of jobs done by men and women, whilst vertical (gender) segregation is to do with the level (or seniority) of work done.

**4.** The ‘glass ceiling’ refers to an alleged invisible barrier that keeps women out of the top jobs.

**5.** Dual labour-market theory argues that the labour market is split between relatively secure, well-paid jobs and insecure, poorly-paid jobs and that men predominate in the former and women in the latter.

**6.** Human capital theory argues that men possess more human capital because, historically, they stayed in education longer, took more advantage of training opportunities and took fewer career breaks. Given that girls now outperform boys in terms of gaining educational qualifications, the theory now seems dated. Olsen and Walby (2004) argue that women are systematically disadvantaged when it comes to acquiring human capital.

**7.** With the decline of gender segregation in employment, women’s employment patterns are no longer as distinct as they were in the past. Also, the belief that a ‘woman’s place is in the home’ is no longer widely held.

**8.** Home-centred, adaptive and work-centred.

**9.** Feminists have argued, for instance, that part-time women workers are no less committed to their jobs than full-time women workers, that there are many factors besides 'personal preference' that shape women's attitude to paid employment and that the 'choices' women make are heavily constrained by the structure of employment opportunities (the availability of flexible working, for example, and women's earning power relative to men's), the availability and affordability of child care, men's willingness to take on child care responsibilities, and so on.

**10.** Females.

**11.** It is difficult to establish whether men or women experience more ill-health because it is difficult to find valid and reliable indicators of morbidity (unlike mortality). For example, women visit their GPs more frequently, but this could reflect a greater willingness to acknowledge *feeling* unwell rather than *being* unwell. Similarly, there are gender differences in absenteeism from work because of (alleged) ill-health, but it could be that women use ‘ill-health’ to justify staying off work to look after children because they are expected to play this role, not because they actually experience more ill-health.

**5.5 DIMENSIONS OF INEQUALITY: RACE AND ETHNICITY**

P.388 FOCUS ON Skills: SOCIAL INEGRATION

**Suggested answers**

**1.** Multiculturalism is the belief that the best way to promote social integration in an ethnically diverse society is for the state to provide some level of public recognition and support for ethnic minorities to maintain and express their distinct identities and practices, rather than expect them to abandon these and assimilate into the culture of the ethnic majority.

**2.** The first generation, having been born abroad, are likely to find British culture strange and seek out others from their country of origin for both practical and moral support. The second generation will have been born here and, whilst their parents are likely to encourage them to value their traditional culture, will be exposed to influences of secondary socialisation, such as school and the mass media, which will acculturate them to British values and customs. The third generation will not only have been born here, but raised by parents who were also born here, so one would expect the influence of the traditional culture to be even less strong and involvement in the wider society greater.

**3.** For the reasons outlined in the answer to Q2, it is surprising to find that 13 to 17 year olds appear to be less integrated than 20 and 30 year olds. This suggests a drawing-back-in to the ethnic minority culture. There are various reasons why this could be occurring. One is the expression of greater hostility to ethnic minorities by the wider society (often a consequence of economic recession, where ethnic minorities find themselves scapegoated. The recent rise in support for UKIP would fit in with this hypothesis.) Another possibility is the growth of Islamaphobia impacting on how Muslim minorities feel about living here. A third possibility is the growth of minority religion faith schools as a result of the Academy programme. A final possibility is the growth of alternative (social) media which means that younger age groups are less exposed to mainstream TV and radio.

**4.** This finding suggests that social integration has gone into reverse. In a press report issued in October, 2014, the Social Integration Commission wrote:

“The Commission estimates that a lack of social integration today could cost the UK as much as £6 billion each year, nearly 0.5% of the UK’s total GDP. This cost is caused by impacts on employment, productivity and career progression, and wellbeing.   
  
A lack of integration makes it harder to find employment due to a lack of diverse networks and reduced access to job opportunities. In addition, a lack of integration within diverse communities leads to lower levels of trust, resulting in increased fear of crime and fewer positive social interactions.   
Matthew Taylor continued:

**“Unless we pull down the barriers that can divide us, ethnic and social divisions in our schools could grow, gated communities could become the norm, and widespread distrust and fear of crime could rise. This is not a UK that is currently recognisable, but the seeds of its existence are being sown.”**

The Commission’s first report, issued in June 2014, revealed the extent of a lack of social integration within Britain. The Commission’s final report, due in early 2015, will provide a set of specific recommendations for how policymakers, businesses and individuals should tackle this problem and promote social integration.”

(**Note**: the Commission looked at integration/segregation in terms of age-groups and socio-economic groups as well as ethnic groups).

p.392 CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

**Suggested answers**

**1.** To say that both ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ are social constructs is to claim that both have more to do with society than with biology. In other words, although they may appear to be based on biological features, they involve ways of understanding those features that are determined by society and therefore vary from time to time and cross-culturally.

**2.** Because only the first generation have been born abroad.

**3.** Fourteen percent.

**4.** The 5 evils were: ignorance, idleness, squalor, want and disease.

**5.** ‘Institutional racism’ can exist even if the members of organisations are not themselves racist if the normal practices and routines of those organisations disadvantage members of BAME groups. For example, if they normally recruit through word of mouth they are only likely to recruit from members of ethnic groups who are already employed by the organisation.

**6.** According to the Equality and Human Rights Commission: “**Direct Discrimination** occurs when someone is treated less favourably than another person because of a protected characteristic they have or are thought to have, or because they associate with someone who has a protected characteristic”. A ‘protected characteristic’ means a characteristic which the law seeks to protect against discrimination (e.g. skin colour).

**“Indirect discrimination** occurs when an organisation's practices, policies or procedures have the effect of disadvantaging people who share certain protected characteristics. **Indirect discrimination** may not be unlawful if an employer can show that there is an 'objective justification' for it.”

**7.** It fails to recognise that cultures are not fixed and monolithic and underplays the significance of racism as opposed to ethnocentrism.

**8.** ‘Social closure’ refers to the attempts made by members of dominant groups (e.g. social classes or ethnic groups) to exclude people whom they view as potential competitors for the privileges they enjoy. If dominant ethnic groups discriminate against minority ethnic applicants for jobs they are practicing social closure.

**9.** Marxists argue that racism benefits capitalism by a) dividing the working class along lines of ethnicity so that the working class is less likely to unify against capitalism, b) providing handy scapegoats to blame when capitalism is faced with economic problems such as recession.

**10.** One criticism is that this overlooks the fact that identity is not only chosen, but is also imposed on people, particularly those in a weak social position. Consequently, however a member of a BAME group chooses to view themselves, others may impose a negative identity on them based on their ethnicity.

**5.6 DIMENSIONS OF INEQUALITY: AGE**

P.399 FOCUS ON SKILLS: ‘BABY BOOMER’ MYTH CHALLENGED

**Suggested answers**

**1.** The label ‘baby boomers’ applies to those aged between 55 and 70 (in 2015). In other words, those born in the 15 years after the end of World War Two.

**2.** Among this group are men who can expect to live to 70+ years in good health, but also those who can expect to live to only 52 in good health; 6.7m people in the 55 to 64 age group have a long-standing illness or disability; under 1 in 5 between 55 and 64 have a degree; almost 3 in 10 have no pension provision.

**3.** Some people see this group as particularly fortunate because they benefited from the creation of the post-war Welfare State (including free secondary and higher education, the NHS and the growth of council housing), from the period of full employment and economic growth that took place following the end of WW2 and – for home owners - from rising property prices.

**4.** In recent years, some commentators (particularly those on the right politically) have argued that the baby boomer generation have feathered their own nest at the expense of younger generations. For example, the Conservative politician, David Willetts, published a book in 2010 called *The Pinch: How the Baby Boomers Stole Their Children’s Future* in which he argued that the generation of boomers has concentrated wealth in their own hands, adopted a hegemonic position over national culture and failed to attend to the needs of the future. In response, a think-tank/pressure group called The Intergenerational Foundation was established in 2011 “that exists to research fairness between the generations in order to protect the rights of younger and future generations in British policy-making”.

It is true that some of the baby boomers have benefited from the social changes outlined above in the answer to Q3 and it is also true, as the chapter makes clear, that many young people are currently struggling as a result of the austerity policies pursued by governments since the 2007/8 crash. However, commentators on the left politically would argue that a discourse which pitches one generation against another misrepresents the situation. Firstly, because it implies that *all* the baby boomers are doing well, which isn’t the case (see the answer to Q2 above). Secondly, because it ignores the fact that older people inevitably tend to accumulate assets over time (if they’re lucky) which younger generations won’t yet have had the chance to do. Thirdly, because it comes close to implying that what has happened has been *deliberately* engineered by the baby boomer generation rather than being an unintended outcome of policies pursued for other reasons. Finally, and most importantly, because it transfers blame onto a generational group instead of seeing what has happened as a product of the neoliberal policies pursued by governments since the Eighties which have deepened class inequalities and left many young people victims of a house price bubble and precarious employment.

p.400 CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

**Suggested answers**

**1.** To describe age-strata as social constructs is to say that they have more to do with society than with biology. This is demonstrated by the fact that both the number of age-strata distinguished and how they relate to chronological age varies from time to time and society to society.

**2.** Eighteen percent.

**3.** Ageism is reflected in negative stereotypes of old people (such as that they are all dependent, senile and cantankerous). It is also reflected in practices which involve discrimination, such as requiring magistrates to retire at 70 irrespective of their capability to continue sitting on the bench.

**4.** One beneficial policy was the introduction by the 2010 Coalition government of a ‘triple lock’ on the value of the state pension. Another was the outlawing of compulsory retirement in 2011.

**5.** New Right thinkers have assumed, almost without question, that the increasing numbers of elderly people are going to be dependent on younger people, that they are going to put intolerable strain on services such as healthcare, and that they will be a drain on the economy because of the disproportionate costs of the healthcare, social services and housing assistance they will supposedly need.

**6.** The above view can be criticised because it assumes that the elderly will inevitably be dependent on younger generations. Some will, but not all old people are sick or disabled and many continue to work either for pay or doing voluntary work. Arguably, the notion of a ‘demographic time-bomb’ is based on ageist assumptions.

**7.** ‘Disengagement theory’ is a functionalist theory which posits that, as people age, a process of mutual adjustment takes place with old people increasingly drawing in on themselves and close kin and relinquishing wider societal roles and society facilitating this withdrawal by reducing the expectation of productive work and engagement in civil society.

**8.** Old people are marginalised in capitalist society, according to Marxists, because once they cease work they are no longer seen as having value.

**9.** In the view of feminists, women are hit harder by ageist attitudes than men because patriarchal ideology values women for their looks and nurturing capacities and once women reach the menopause they are no longer able to bear children (under normal circumstances) and their looks (allegedly) begin to fade. The treatment of older women compared to older men by TV is claimed to illustrate this inequity.

**10.** Postmodernists such as Blaikie (1999) argue that chronological age, ageism and age-determined inequality are less likely to shape people’s life experience in the 21st century. He suggests that UK society has undergone a social transformation from social experiences based on collective identities originating in social class and generation to an increasingly individualised and consumerist culture in which old age can be extended by investing in a diverse choice of youth-preserving techniques and lifestyles. Featherstone and Hepworth (1991) talk about the “mask of ageing” in describing how the outward physical signs of ageing conceal the essentially still-youthful self beneath: ’inside, I don’t feel any different’. The conditions of postmodernity will allow older people to experiment with roles and identities made available by the erosion of cultural constraints defining what is – and what is not – ‘age-appropriate’. For example, people will be able to use emerging technologies, such as cosmetic surgery, to modify the appearance of ageing.

**5.7 DIMENSIONS OF INEQUALITY: DISABILITY**

P.408 FOCUS ON SKILLS: DISABLED BY SOCIETY

**Suggested answers**

**1.** The term ‘mongol’ or ‘mongoloid’ is no longer seen as acceptable today. Instead the term Down syndrome or Down’s syndrome is used, after the British doctor – John Langdon Down – who first fully described the syndrome in 1866. It is also commonly referred to as Trisomy-21, the most common form of Down syndrome caused by an extra copy of chromosome 21. ( Down himself used the term ‘mongoloid’ to describe this condition based on the apparent facial similarities people with Down syndrome shared with the ‘Mongoloid’ race, one of the racial categories identified by nineteenth century scholars intent on identifying the different ‘races’ human beings supposedly belonged to.)

**2.** The abusive terms listed in lines 1 and 2, and 6-8 all provide illustrations of this phenomenon.

**3.** Until recently – and sometimes even today – it was common for adults with learning disabilities to be treated as if they were still children, for example, in terms of the clothes they were given to wear. This is an interesting example of how a particular feature of someone’s identity can act as a master status, in this case their (so-called) ‘mental age’. Thus, if an adult with Down’s syndrome had a mental age of 10, they were dressed as a 10 year old rather than in a way appropriate to their chronological age.

**4.** The poem illustrates very well one of the social barriers faced by people with disabilities in terms of being socially included, namely attitudinal barriers in the form of prejudicial views held by others about them.

p.409 CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

**Suggested answers**

**1.** According to the Office for Disability Issues, in 2011/12 approximately 11.6 million people in Great Britain were disabled, or 19% of the population.

**2.** According to the World Health Organisation, an impairment is “any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function”, such as suffering from clinical depression, being blind or lacking a limb. Disability, by contrast, is “the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers” (Barnes, 1992).

**3.** Two sources of diversity among disabled people are: the nature of their impairment and their socio-demographic characteristics (e.g. their social class, ethnicity, age, etc.). A third is the type or types of barrier/s they face in society.

**4.** Eugenics is the ‘science’ of improving humankind by selective breeding. As applied to disability, it involves the idea that humankind could be improved by controlling the reproductive activities of people with impairments.

**5.** Disabled rights activists are opposed to charitable support for disabled people because they believe that it should be the responsibility of the state to meet the needs of disabled people, rather than their being reliant on philanthropy.

**6.** Disabled people face three main types of social barriers that can disadvantage them: physical, organisational and attitudinal.

**7.** What is meant by saying that an impairment can act as a master status, is that the impairment can come to completely define someone’s social identity, so that they are seen by others solely in terms of this single aspect of their identity – as in ‘the blind’, ‘the deaf’, ‘the disabled’, etc. This is why disabled rights organisations insist that disabled people are people first and foremost and that the impairment is secondary.

**8.** The term ‘disablism’ has been defined by Thompson (1993) as “the combination of social forces, cultural values and personal prejudices which marginalises disabled people, portrays them in a negative light and thus oppresses them”.

**9.** One strength of the medical model is that many, though by no means all, disabled people rely on medical intervention to function or, in extreme cases, to stay alive. One weakness is that it individualises the nature of the problems faced by disabled people.

**10.** One strength of the social model is that it highlighted the way in which society can itself enable or disable people with impairments. One weakness is that it implies that both the nature and the severity of the impairment are unimportant in terms of understanding disability.

**5.8 CHANGES IN INEQUALITY AND CLASS STRUCTURE**

P.414 FOCUS ON SKILLS: THE RICH – THE ELEPHANT IN THE SOCIOLOGY ROOM

**Suggested answers**

**1.** The phrase ‘the elephant in the room’ is used to describe a situation where the people involved in a discussion of some kind seem to be ignoring what, to an outsider, seems to be the most important issue – as if the people in a room had failed to notice the presence of an elephant! Sayer is suggesting that the meteoric growth in wealth concentration in the UK in recent years has been similarly overlooked by sociologists.

**2.** In the early 1900s, the share of national income going to the top 1% was around 20%. By the 1960s it had fallen to around 6%, but it has since risen again to over 15%.

**3.** Among the likely reasons for the growing concentration of national income in the hands of the top 1% in recent decades are: the decline in reach and power of the trades union movement; corporate capture of governments; the dominance of neo-liberal political ideologies; government policies in relation to taxes and benefits; the growth of the financial sector and of ‘light-touch’ financial regulation and the failure of the Left to forge a coherent narrative as to why this development is undesirable for the health of British society and the economy.

**4.** ‘**Upper class’**: for: draws attention to the class-structural nature of the position of the rich; against: suggests that their position is simply a matter of degree in terms of their relative wealth.

**‘Ruling class’:** for: draws attention to the political clout of the rich; against: difficult to square with the nature of representative democracy, however diminished those democratic features have become.

**‘Elite’:** for: draws attention to their position at the top of society without requiring the acceptance of the existence of a class structure; against: implies that the rich possess distinctive qualities of superiority.

**‘The establishment’:** for: suggests that the rich are able to ensure that society operates in a way that serves their interests primarily because they occupy key strategic positions; against: it’s a rather nebulous concept (i.e. hard to pin down). Interestingly, Owen Jones in his book of that name fails to provide a simple definition of the term.

p.418 CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

**Suggested answers**

**1.** Transnational organisation, based on an integrated, global production and financial system. The development of a transnational capitalist class. The creation of a transnational ‘state’ apparatus into which nation-states are increasingly incorporated. New global relations of power and inequality that cut across the old north-south, east-west divisions.

**2.** a) Owners and controllers of TNCs and their local affiliates, b) globalising bureaucrats and politicians, c) globalising professionals, d) consumerist elites (merchants and media).

**3.** ‘Secrecy jurisdictions’, or tax havens as they are also known, are places that intentionally create tax regulations for the primary benefit and use of those not resident in their geographical domain. This regulatory framework is designed to undermine the legislation or regulation of another jurisdiction.

**4.** There has been a renewed interest in studying the wealthy mainly because of the rapid increase in the concentration of wealth in society and the apparent increase in their political influence.

**5.** By favouring recruits who have been to private schools and/or elite universities and through helping their children through their social networks.

**6.** The salariat, the technical middle class and the established middle class.

**7.** There has been a decline in working class solidarity because of the disappearance of jobs in primary and secondary sectors where manual work was concentrated, because of the weakening of trades unions and because of the growth of individualism.

**8.** Casualisation, informalisation, agency labour, part-time labour, phoney self-employment and crowd-labour.

**9.** Standing refers to the precariat as the ‘new dangerous class’ because he believes that it has the potential to become class conscious and threaten the status quo.

**10.** Standing sees the underclass as, what he calls, a ‘lumpen precariat’ – a small group consisting of “sad people lingering in the streets, dying miserably”. Neoliberal social scientists see it as a large group of people living off the state with a distinctive culture centred on single parent families, criminality and sporadic involvement in the shadow economy.

**5.9 THE NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF SOCIAL MOBILITY**

P.425 FOCUS ON SKILLS: WHAT THE HELL AM I DOING HERE?

**Suggested answers**

**1.** An imposter is someone who takes on an identity to which they are not entitled. The author is saying that she *feels* like an imposter as a student at Cambridge even though we can safely assume she gained her place on merit.

**2.** The author appears to be worried about coping, not with the academic demands of being a student at Cambridge, but the social demands: taking part in college rituals (like formal dinners) and mixing with other students from more privileged backgrounds. She also appears to be anxious about her ability to plan for the future.

**3.** The idea of a ‘class ceiling’ is that people from lower class backgrounds will find it hard to achieve elite positions in society, not because of a lack of ability, but because of their lack of cultural and social capital. This is illustrated in the blog by the author’s lack of experience of attending plays, shows and museums as a child and her lack of self confidence when it comes to mixing with people from social backgrounds different from her own.

p.427 CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

**Suggested answers**

**1.** ‘Intergenerational mobility’ refers to social mobility between generations (e.g. comparing the position of a daughter with her mother’s or father’s status at the same age). ‘Intragenerational mobility’ refers to social mobility during a person’s lifetime (e.g. comparing their position at age 50 with their position aged 30). The latter is sometimes referred to as ‘career mobility’.

**2.** Absolute mobility is a measure of the overall amount of upward and downward mobility within a population over a specified time period. Relative mobility involves comparing the chances of upward or downward mobility for a person relative to the chances of someone from a different social group (say, a different class).

**3.** The main reason for this increase was the expansion in middle class jobs (i.e. there was ‘more room at the top’) and decline of working class jobs. It was also a product of differential fertility rates between social classes: if middle class parents had started having bigger families, their children would have blocked the opportunities for upward mobility that became available to those from working class backgrounds.

**4.** The ‘1-2-4 rule of relative hope’ was the name given to the key findings of the OMS by the Sunday Times about relative social mobility. The OMS found that, comparing the chances of upward mobility for boys born around the time of the second world war with those born around the time of the first world war, for every one chance a boy born into the working class had, a boy born into the intermediate class had twice the chance and a boy born into the service class had four times the chance.

**5.** In the last couple of decades, upward social mobility has increased significantly for women and downward mobility has declined. However, women are still more likely to be downwardly mobile compared to men and there is evidence of the continued existence of a ‘glass ceiling’ hampering women’s entry to elite positions.

**6.** According to the Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity (2013), ethnic minorities in Britain over the last couple of decades have been experiencing increasing absolute upward mobility with growth in clerical, professional and managerial employment , but still face significant barriers to enjoying the levels of social mobility of their White British peers (relative mobility).

**7.** Saunders’ four social mobility ‘myths’ are:

* the myth that Britain is ‘a closed-shop society’ in which life-chances are heavily shaped by the class you are born into;
* the myth that social mobility, already limited, is now getting worse;
* the myth that differences of ability between individuals either do not exist or are irrelevant in explaining differential rates of success;
* the myth that governments can increase social mobility via top-down social re-engineering within the education system and forcing more income redistribution.

**8.** He says that middle class children have higher rates of upward mobility because they are naturally brighter and have parents who are better able to support their educational achievement.

**9.** The existence of a ‘class ceiling’ suggests that bright working class children are likely to be less occupationally successful than bright middle class children, not because of a lack of ability, but because they and their parents possess lower amounts of cultural and social capital. (This illustrates the concept of social closure.) The existence of a ‘glass floor’ suggests that not-so-bright middle class children will be protected from downward mobility because they and their parents possess high amounts of cultural and social capital. (This illustrates the concept of opportunity hoarding).

**10.** The ‘Great Gatsby Curve’ shows that countries with lower levels of income inequality have higher rates of income mobility than countries with higher levels of income inequality.