Introducing Social Theory

Second Edition

Pip Jones, Liz Bradbury & Shaun Le Boutillier

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For Ellen, my wife and true companion
Pip Jones
and
for Jamie Rufus Le Boutillier, with love from Mummy and Daddy
Liz Bradbury and Shaun Le Boutillier

1 AN INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

Introduction

Humans are social beings. Whether we like it or not, nearly everything we do in our lives takes place in the company of others. Few of our activities are truly solitary and scarce are the times when we are really alone. Thus the study of how we are able to interact with one another, and what happens when we do, would seem to be one of the most fundamental concerns of anyone interested in human life. Yet strangely enough, it was not until relatively recently – from about the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards – that a specialist interest in this intrinsically social aspect of human existence was treated with any seriousness. Before that time, and even since, other kinds of interests have dominated the analysis of human life. Two of the most resilient, non-social approaches to human behaviour have been '**naturalistic**'* and '**individualistic**' explanations.

Rather than seeing social behaviour as the product of interaction, these theories have concentrated on the presumed qualities inherent in individuals. On the one hand, naturalistic explanations suppose that all human behaviour – social interaction included – is a product of the inherited dispositions we possess as animals. We are, like animals, biologically programmed by nature. On the other hand, individualistic explanations baulk at such grand generalizations about the inevitability of behaviour. From this point of view we are all 'individual' and 'different'. Explanations of human behaviour must therefore always

rest ultimately on the particular and unique psychological qualities of individuals. Sociological theories are in direct contrast to these ‘non-social’ approaches. Looking a little closer at them, and discovering what is wrong or incomplete about them, makes it easier to understand why sociological theories exist.

Naturalistic theories

Naturalistic explanations of human activity are common enough. For example, in our society it is often argued that it is only natural for a man and a woman to fall in love, get married and have children. It is equally natural for this nuclear family to live as a unit on their own, with the husband going out to work to earn resources for his dependants, while his wife, at least for the early years of her children’s lives, devotes herself to looking after them – to being a mother. As they grow up and acquire more independence, it is still only ‘natural’ for the children to live at home with their parents, who are responsible for them, at least until their late teens. By then it is only natural for them to want to ‘leave the nest’, to start to ‘make their own way in the world’ and, in particular, to look for marriage partners. Thus they, too, can start families of their own.

The corollary of these ‘natural’ practices is that it is somehow *un*natural not to want to get married, or to marry for reasons other than love. It is equally unnatural for a couple not to comprise a man and a woman, or not to want to have children, or for wives not to want to be mothers, or for mothers not to want to devote the whole of their lives to child-rearing. Though it is not right or natural for children to leave home much younger than eighteen, it is certainly not natural for them not to want to leave home at all in order to start a family of their own. However, these ‘unnatural’ desires and practices are common enough in

our society. There are plenty of homosexual couples and people who prefer to stay single, or ‘marry with an eye on the main chance’. There are plenty of women who do not like the idea of motherhood, and there is certainly any number of women who do not want to spend their lives solely as wives and mothers. Likewise, there are plenty of children who want to leave home long before they are eighteen, while there are also many who are quite happy to stay as members of their parents’ households until long after that age.

Why is this? If human behaviour is, in fact, the product of a disposition inherent in the nature of the human being then why are such deviations from what is ‘natural’ so common? We can hardly put the widespread existence of such ‘unnatural’ patterns of behaviour down to some kind of large-scale, faulty genetic programming. In any case, why are there so many variations from these notions of ‘normal’ family practices in other kinds of human societies? Both history and anthropology provide us with stark contrasts in family life. In his book on family life in medieval Europe, *Centuries of Childhood* (1973), Philippe Ariès paints a picture of marriage, the family and child-rearing which sharply contradicts our notions of normality. Families were not then, as they are for us today, private and isolated units, cut off socially, and physically separated from the world at large. Families were deeply embedded in the community, with people living essentially public, rather than private, lives. They lived in households whose composition was constantly shifting: relatives, friends, children, visitors, passers-by and animals all slept under the same roof. Marriage was primarily a means of forging alliances rather than simply the outcome of ‘love’, while women certainly did not look upon mothering as their sole destiny. Indeed, child-rearing was a far less demanding and onerous task than it is in our world. Children were not

cosseted and coddled to anywhere near the extent we now consider ‘right’. Many more people – both other relatives and the community at large – were involved in child-rearing, and childhood lasted a far shorter time than it does today. As Ariès puts it, ‘as soon as he had been weaned, or soon after, the child became the natural companion of the adult’ (Ariès 1973).

In contemporary non-industrial societies, too, there is a wide range of variations in family practices. Here again, marriage is essentially a means of establishing alliances between groups, rather than simply a relationship between individuals. Monogamy – one husband and one wife – is only one form of marriage. Polygyny, marriage between a husband and more than one wife, and polyandry, between a wife and more than one husband, are found in many societies. In such societies, domestic life is also far more public and communal than it is in industrial societies. Each family unit is just a part of a much wider, cooperating group of mainly blood relatives associated with a local territory, usually a village. As in medieval Europe, therefore, child-rearing is not considered the principal responsibility of parents alone, but involves a far greater number of people, relatives and non-relatives.

Clearly, then, to hope to explain human life simply by reference to natural impulses common to all is to ignore the one crucial fact that sociology directs our attention to: human behaviour varies according to the social settings in which people find themselves.

Individualistic theories

What of individualistic explanations? How useful is the argument that behaviour is the product of the psychological make-up of individuals? The employment of this kind of theory is extremely common. For example,

success or failure in education is often assumed to be merely a reflection of intelligence: bright children succeed and dim children fail. Criminals are often taken to be people with certain kinds of personality: they are usually seen as morally deficient individuals, lacking any real sense of right or wrong. Unemployed people are equally often condemned as ‘work-shy’, ‘lazy’ or ‘scroungers’ – inadequates who would rather ‘get something for nothing’ than work for it. Suicide is seen as the act of an unstable person – an act undertaken when, as coroners put it, ‘the balance of the mind was disturbed’. This kind of explanation is attractive for many people and has proved particularly resilient in the face of sociological critique. But a closer look shows it to be seriously flawed.

If educational achievement is simply a reflection of intelligence then why do children from manual workers’ homes do so badly compared with children from middle-class homes? It is clearly nonsensical to suggest that your doing one kind of job rather than another is likely to determine the intelligence of your child. Achievement in education must in some way be influenced by the characteristics of a child’s background.

Equally, the fact that the majority of people convicted of a crime come from certain social categories must cast serious doubt on the ‘deficient personality’ theory. The conviction rate is highest for young males, especially blacks, who come from manual, working-class or unemployed backgrounds. Can we seriously believe that criminal personalities are likely to be concentrated in such *social* categories? As in the case of educational achievement, it is clear that the conviction of criminals must somehow be influenced by social factors.

Again, is it likely that millions of unemployed people are typically uninterested in working when the vast majority of

them have been forced out of their jobs, either by ‘downsizing’ or by the failure of the companies they worked for – as a result of social forces quite outside their control?

Suicide would seem to have the strongest case for being explained as a purely psychological act. But if it is simply a question of ‘an unsound mind’, then why does the rate of suicide vary between societies? Why does it vary between different groups within the same society? Also, why do the rates within groups and societies remain remarkably constant over time? As in other examples, social factors must be exerting some kind of influence; explanations at the level of the personality are clearly not enough.

Variations such as these demonstrate the inadequacy of theories of human behaviour which exclusively emphasize innate natural drives, or the unique psychological make-up of individuals. If nature is at the root of behaviour, why does it vary according to social settings? If we are all different individuals acting according to the dictates of unique psychological influences, why do different people in the same social circumstances behave similarly and in ways others can understand? Clearly there is a social dimension to human existence, which requires sociological theorizing to explain it.

All sociological theories thus have in common an emphasis on the way human belief and **action** is the product of social influences. They differ as to what these influences are, and how they should be investigated and explained. This book is about these differences.

We shall now examine three distinct kinds of theory – *consensus, conflict* and *action* theories – each of which highlights specific social sources of human behaviour. Though none of the sociologists whose work we will spend the rest of the book examining falls neatly into any one of

these three categories, discussing them now will produce two benefits:

- it will serve as an accessible introduction to theoretical debates in sociology; and
- it will act as a useful reference point against which to judge and compare the work of the subject's major theorists.

Society as a structure of rules

The influence of culture on behaviour

Imagine you live in a big city. How many people do you know well? Twenty? Fifty? A hundred? Now consider how many other people you encounter each day, about whom you know nothing. For example, how many complete strangers do people living in London or Manchester or Birmingham come into contact with each day? On the street, in shops, on buses and trains, in cinemas or night clubs – everyday life in a big city is a constant encounter with complete strangers. Yet even if city dwellers bothered to reflect on this fact, they would not normally leave their homes quaking with dread about how all these hundreds of strangers might behave towards them. Indeed, they hardly, if ever, think about it. Why? Why do we take our ability to cope with strangers so much for granted? It is because nearly all the people we encounter in our everyday lives do behave in ways we expect. We expect bus passengers, shoppers, taxi-drivers, passers-by, and so on, to behave in quite definite ways even though we know nothing about them personally. City dwellers in particular – though it is true of all of us to some extent – routinely enter settings where others are going about their business both expecting not to know them, and yet also expecting to know how they

will behave. And, more than this, we are nearly always absolutely right in both respects. We are only surprised if we encounter someone who is *not* a stranger – 'Fancy meeting you here! Isn't it a small world!' – or if one of these strangers actually does behave strangely – 'Mummy, why is that man shouting and waving his arms about?' Why is this? Why do others do what we expect of them? Why is *dis*order or the *un*expected among strangers so rare?

Structural-consensus theory

One of the traditional ways in which sociologists explain the order and predictability of social life is by regarding human behaviour as *learned* behaviour. This approach is known – for reasons that will become apparent – as *structural-consensus* theory. The key process this theory emphasizes is called *socialization.* This term refers to the way in which human beings learn the kinds of behaviour expected of them in the social settings in which they find themselves. From this point of view, societies differ because the kinds of behaviour considered appropriate in them differ. People in other societies think and behave differently because they have learned different rules about how to behave and think. The same goes for different groups within the same society. The actions and ideas of one group differ from those of another because its members have been socialized into different rules.

Consensus sociologists use the term *culture* to describe the rules that govern thought and behaviour in a society. Culture exists prior to the people who learn it. At birth, humans are confronted by a social world already in existence. Joining this world involves learning 'how things are done' in it. Only by learning the cultural rules of a society can a human interact with other humans. Because

they have been similarly socialized, different individuals will behave similarly.

Consensus theory thus argues that a society's cultural rules determine, or *structure*, the behaviour of its members, channelling their actions in certain ways rather than others. They do so in much the same way that the physical construction of a building structures the actions of the people inside it. Take the behaviour of students in a school. Once inside the school they will display quite regular patterns of behaviour. They will all walk along corridors, up and down stairs, in and out of classrooms, through doors, and so on. They will, by and large, not attempt to dig through floors, smash through walls, or climb out of windows. Their physical movements are constrained by the school building. Since this affects all the students similarly, their behaviour inside the school will be similar – and will exhibit quite definite patterns. In consensus theory, the same is true of social life. Individuals will behave similarly in the same social settings because they are equally constrained by cultural rules. Though these **social structures** are not visible in the way physical structures are, those who are socialized into their rules find them comparably determining.

The levels at which these cultural rules operate can vary. Some rules, like laws for instance, operate at the level of the whole society and structure the behaviour of everyone who lives in it. Others are much less general, structuring the behaviour of people in quite specific social settings. For example, children in a classroom are expected to behave in an orderly and attentive fashion. In the playground much more licence is given them, while away from school their behaviour often bears little resemblance to that expected of them during school hours. Similarly, when police officers or nurses or members of the armed forces are 'on duty', certain cultural rules structure their behaviour very rigidly.

Out of uniform and offduty these constraints do not apply, though other ones do instead – those governing their behaviour as fathers and mothers, or husbands and wives, for instance.

This shows how the theory of a social structure of cultural rules operates. The rules apply not to the individuals themselves, but to the positions in the social structure they occupy. Shoppers, police officers, traffic wardens, schoolteachers or pupils are constrained by the cultural expectations attached to these positions, but only when they occupy them. In other circumstances, in other locations in the social structure – as fathers or mothers, squash players, football supporters, church members, and so on – other rules come into play.

Sociologists call positions in a social structure *roles.* The rules that structure the behaviour of their occupants are called *norms.* There are some cultural rules that are not attached to any particular role or set of roles. Called *values*, these are in a sense summaries of approved ways of living, and act as a base from which particular norms spring. So, for example: ‘education should be the key to success’; ‘family relationships should be the most important thing to protect’; ‘self-help should be the means to individual fulfilment’. All these are values, and they provide general principles from which norms directing behaviour in schools and colleges, in the home and at work, are derived.

According to this sociological theory, socialization into norms and values produces agreement, or *consensus*, between people about appropriate behaviour and beliefs without which no human society can survive. This is why it is called structural-consensus theory. Through socialization, cultural rules structure behaviour, guarantee a consensus about expected behaviour, and thereby ensure social order.

Clearly, in a complex society there are sometimes going to be competing norms and values. For example, while some people think it is wrong for mothers to go out to work, many women see motherhood at best as a real imposition and at worst as an infringement of their liberty. Children often encourage each other to misbehave at school and disapprove of their peers who refuse to do so. Teachers usually see this very much the other way round! The Tory Party Conference will invariably be strident in its condemnation of any speaker who criticizes the police. Some young blacks will be equally furious with any of their number displaying anything other than a strongly belligerent attitude towards the police.

Consensus theorists explain such differences in behaviour and attitude in terms of the existence of alternative cultural influences, characteristic of different social settings. A good example of this emphasis is their approach to educational inequality.

Educational inequality: a consensus theory analysis

Educational research demonstrates, in the most conclusive fashion, that achievement in education is strongly linked to class membership, gender and ethnic origin. There is overwhelming evidence, for example, that working-class children of similar intelligence to children from middle-class backgrounds achieve far less academically than their middle-class counterparts.

To explain this, consensus theorists turn to stock concepts in their approach to social life – norms, values, socialization and culture. Starting from the basic assumption that behaviour and belief are caused by socialization into particular rules, their explanation of working-class underachievement in education seeks to identify:

- the cultural influences which propel middle-class children to academic success
- the cultural influences which drag working-class children down to mediocrity.

The argument usually goes something like this. The upbringing of middle-class children involves socialization into norms and values that are ideal for educational achievement. Because of their own educational experiences, middle-class parents are likely to be very knowledgeable about how education works and how to make the most of it. Further, they are likely to be very keen for their children to make a success of their own education. These children will thus grow up in a social setting where educational achievement is valued and where they will be constantly encouraged and assisted to fulfil their academic potential.

In contrast, the home background of working-class children often lacks such advantageous socialization. Working-class parents are likely to have had only limited, and possibly unhappy, experiences of education. Even if they are keen for their children to achieve educational success, they will almost certainly lack the know-how of the middle-class parent to make this happen. Indeed, sometimes they may actively disapprove of academic attainment; for instance, they may simply distrust what they do not know. As a result, their children may well be taught instead to value the more immediate and practical advantages of leaving school as soon as possible and finding a ‘proper’ job.

Consensus theory: conclusion

Here is a clear example of the application of consensus theory to the facts of social life. From this theoretical point of view, different patterns of behaviour are the product of

different patterns of socialization. It might seem that this contradicts the commitment of these theorists to the idea that social order in a society is the outcome of an agreement or a consensus among its members about how to behave and what to think. But consensus theorists say that despite differences of culture between different groups, even despite opposing sub-cultures within the overall culture, in all societies an overall consensus prevails. This is because all societies have certain values about the importance of which there is no dispute. They are called either *central values* or *core values*, and socialization ensures everyone conforms to them.

In Victorian Britain two central values were a commitment to Christian morality and loyalty to the Queen and the British Empire. Today, examples of central values in a Western capitalist society might be the importance of economic growth, the importance of democratic institutions, the importance of the rule of law, and the importance of the freedom of the individual within the law. (Indeed, anything trotted out as 'basic to our country's way of life' at any particular time is usually a central value in a society.)

For consensus theory then, central values are the backbone of social structures, built and sustained by the process of socialization. Social behaviour and social order are determined by external cultural forces. Social life is possible because of the existence of social structures of cultural rules.

Society as a structure of inequality

The influence of advantages and disadvantages on behaviour

Other sociologists argue a rather different theoretical case. They agree that society determines our behaviour by structuring or constraining it. But they emphasize different structural constraints. For them, the most important influence on social life is the distribution of advantage and its impact on behaviour. Where advantages are unequally distributed, the opportunities of the advantaged to choose how to behave are much greater than those of the disadvantaged.

Educational inequality: an alternative analysis

For example, while it is perfectly feasible for two boys of the same intelligence to be equally keen to fulfil their potential in education and to be equally encouraged by their parents, their culturally instilled enthusiasm cannot, by itself, tell us everything about their potential educational successes or failures. If one boy comes from a wealthy home, while the other is from a much poorer one, this will be far more significant for their education than their similar (learned) desire. Clearly, the unequal distribution of advantage – in this case material resources – will assist the privileged boy and hamper the disadvantaged one.

The advantaged boy's parents can buy a private education, while those of the poorer boy cannot. The advantaged boy can be assured of living in a substantial enough house, with sufficient space to study, whereas the disadvantaged boy may have to make do with a room with the television in it, or a bedroom shared with his brothers and sisters. The advantaged boy can rely on a proper diet and resulting good health, whereas the disadvantaged boy cannot. The advantaged boy can be guaranteed access to all the books and equipment he needs to study, whereas the disadvantaged boy cannot. Probably most importantly, the advantaged boy will be able to continue his education up to the limit of his potential unhindered. For those who are less

advantaged it is often necessary to leave school and go out to work to add to the family income. This stronger impulse usually brings education to a premature end.

Structural-conflict theory

So, one primary objection some sociologists have to structural-consensus theory is that where societies are unequal, people are not only constrained by the norms and values they have learned via socialization. Such theorists argue that it has to be recognized that people are also constrained by the advantages they possess – by their position in the structures of inequality within their society. This emphasis on the effects on behaviour of an unequal distribution of advantage in a society is usually associated with *structural-conflict* theory. Why are such theories called conflict theories?

The kinds of inequality structures in a society vary. Ethnic groups can be unequal, young and old can be unequal, men and women can be unequal, people doing different jobs can be unequal, people of different religious beliefs can be unequal, and so on. The kinds of advantages unequally possessed by such groups can vary, too. Different groups can possess unequal amounts of power, authority, prestige, or wealth, or a combination of these and other advantages.

Notwithstanding the different kinds of inequality conflict theories focus on, and the different kinds of advantages they see as unequally distributed, such theories nonetheless have in common the axiom that the origin and persistence of a structure of inequality lies in the domination of its disadvantaged groups by its advantaged ones. Conflict theories are so-called because for them, inherent in an unequal society is an inevitable *conflict of interests* between its ‘haves’ and its ‘have-nots’. As Wes Sharrock puts it:

> The conflict view is … founded upon the assumption that … any society … may provide extraordinarily good lives for some but this is usually only possible because the great majority are oppressed and degraded … Differences of interest are therefore as important to society as agreements upon rules and values, and most societies are so organised that they not only provide greater benefits for some than for others but in such a way that the accrual of benefits to a few causes positive discomfort to others. (Sharrock 1977: 515–16)

So conflict theory differs from consensus theory not only because it is interested in the way an unequal distribution of advantage in a society structures behaviour, but also because it is interested in the conflict, not the consensus, inherent in such a society. According to conflict theory, there is a conflict of interest between a society's advantaged and disadvantaged, which is inherent in their relationship.

However, there is another objection to consensus theory too. Conflict theorists not only accuse consensus theorists of putting too much emphasis on norms and values as determinants of behaviour at the expense of other influences; they also argue that in any case, consensus theory misunderstands and therefore misinterprets the role of its key concern – socialization into culture.

Ideas as instruments of power

Consensus theory argues that people behave as they do because they have been socialized into cultural rules. The outcome is a consensus about how to think and behave, which manifests itself in patterns and regularities of behaviour. In contrast, conflict theorists argue that we should see the role of cultural rules and the process of socialization in a very different light. For them, the real

structural determinants of behaviour are the rewards and advantages possessed unequally by different groups in a society. Other things being equal, those most disadvantaged would not put up with such a state of affairs. Normally, however, other things are *not* equal. Where a society is unequal, the only way it can survive is if those who are disadvantaged in it come to accept their deprivation. Sometimes this involves naked coercion. Plenty of unequal societies survive because their rulers maintain repressive regimes based on terror. However, the exercise of the force necessary to maintain unequal advantage need not take such an obvious or naked form. There are two other related ways in which structures of inequality can survive – and with a surer future than by the naked use of force. First, they can do so if those most disadvantaged by them can somehow be prevented from seeing themselves as underprivileged, or second, even if this is recognized, the disadvantaged can do so if they can be persuaded that this is fair enough – that the inequality is legitimate. According to the conflict view, the way this happens is through the control and manipulation of the norms and values – the cultural rules – into which people are socialized. In effect then, for conflict theorists, far from being the means to social order via consensus, socialization is much more likely to be an instrument of power – producing social order by means of force and domination.

Imagine the following scenario. It is early morning in a Latin American country. A group of agricultural labourers, both men and women, are waiting by a roadside for a bus to arrive to drive them to work. Suddenly two vans draw up and four hooded men jump out. At gunpoint they order the labourers into the backs of the vans, which then race away deep into the surrounding countryside. At nightfall they are abandoned and the labourers transferred into a large covered lorry. This is driven through the night, deep into

the mountains. Before daybreak it reaches its destination – a huge underground mine, built deep into the heart of a mountain. Here the labourers are horrified to find a vast army of slaves toiling away, under constant surveillance by brutal guards. After being given a meagre meal, the labourers are forced to join this workforce.

As they live out their desperate lives within this mountain world, some of the slaves try to escape. When caught they are publicly punished as a deterrent to others. Two attempts to escape result in public execution. As the labourers get older, they rely on each other for companionship, and on their memories for comfort. They keep sane by recounting stories of their former lives. In the fullness of time, children are born to them. The parents are careful to tell these children all about their past. As the children grow up and have children of their own, they, too, are told tales of their grandparents' land of lost content. But for them these are handed-down, historical stories, not tales based on experience. As the years go by, though the facts of life within the mountain remain the same, the perception of life in it by the participants alters. By the time five or six generations of slaves have been born, their knowledge of the world of their ancestors' past lives has become considerably diminished. It is still talked about, sometimes. But by now it is a misted world of folklore and myth. All they know from experience is slavery. So far as any of them can remember, they have always been slaves. In their world, slavery is 'normal'. In effect, to be a slave means something very different to them from what it meant to their ancestors.

A similar process occurs with the oppressors. As the slaves' view of themselves has altered over time, so the necessity for naked force has become less and less. As, through socialization, their subordinates have begun to acquiesce in their own subordination, the guards no longer brandish

guns and clubs. Because of this, they no longer see themselves as the original guards did. Both the dominant and the subordinate, knowing nothing else, have, through socialization, come to see the inequality in their world in a very different light from the original inhabitants.

Though this story is rather larger-than-life, it does allow us to see the role of socialization into cultural rules as conflict theorists see it. Their argument is that we must be careful not to dismiss the presence of conflict in societies just because a consensus seems to prevail. Naked force is only necessary so long as people see themselves as oppressed. If they can be persuaded that they are not oppressed, or if they fail to see that they are, then they can be willing architects in the design of their own subordination. The easiest way for the dominant to exercise power, and maintain their advantage as a result, is if the dominated are complicit in their own subordination.

Conflict theorists tell us, therefore, that rather than simply describe cultural rules in a society, we must carefully examine their content. We must ask: 'Who *benefits* from the *particular* set of rules prevailing in this society, rather than some other set?' Cultural rules cannot be neutral or all-benevolent. Of course, consensus theorists are right to say that people are socialized into pre-existing norms and values. But for conflict theorists this tells us only half the story. We must also find out whether some groups benefit more than others from the existence of a particular set of rules and have a greater say in their construction and interpretation. If they do, then the process of socialization into these is an instrument of their advantage – it is an instrument of their power.

Ideas exercising power: the example of gender inequality legitimation

For example, even a cursory glance at the kinds of occupations held by women and the kinds of rewards they receive for doing them clearly indicates the advantages men have over women in our society. Of course, Britain once had a female prime minister, and today has some female civil servants, MPs, judges, and university vice-chancellors as well as an increasing number of women in leading positions in business. But this cannot hide the fact that there is still markedly unequal occupational opportunity, and unequal economic reward, based on gender. The facts are that males dominate the best-rewarded and most prestigious occupations and (despite the Equality and Human Rights Commission) usually receive greater rewards when they perform the same jobs as women.

Clearly, there is a considerable potential conflict of interests between men and women here. It is in men's interests for women not to compete in large numbers for the limited number of highly rewarded jobs. It is in men's interests for women to stay at home and provide domestic services for them. If women were to want something different, this would conflict with the desires, interests and ambitions of men.

So why is it that more women do *not* object to this state of affairs? If women are as systematically deprived of occupational opportunities and rewards by men as this, why do so many of them acquiesce in their deprivation? For example, why are some of the fiercest critics of the feminist movement women? Why do so many women *choose* to be (unpaid) houseworkers for the benefit of their husbands and children? Why is 'starting a family' the main ambition of so many girls? Why do they not wish to explore their potential in other activities more thoroughly?

Clearly, a substantial part of the answers to these questions is that women have been socialized into accepting this definition of themselves. For conflict theorists, this is a clear example of particular norms and values working in the interests of one section of society and against another. Through the ideas they have learned, women have been forced to accept a role that is subordinate to men.

There is one final question to be asked about this theoretical approach. How does the exercise of force by means of socialization into particular ideas happen? Conflict theorists say it can be intentional or unintentional. The rulers of many societies in the world today deliberately employ propaganda to persuade the ruled of the legitimacy of this arrangement. They also often control and censor mass media in their countries, to ensure lack of opposition to this controlled socialization.

The exercise of this kind of force can be less deliberate too. Take our example of the inequality between men and women in our society. To what extent does the image of women presented in advertising promote an acceptance of this inequality? Though the intention is to sell various products – from lingerie and perfume to household goods, alcohol, cars and office equipment – the images of women used in advertising are so specific that there are other, less intentional effects, too. Two images dominate. One is of the woman as the domestic at home, using the 'best' products to clean, polish, launder and cook. The other is of the woman as a sexually desirable object, guaranteed to magically adorn the life of any male who is sensible enough to drink a certain sort of beer, for example.

Such advertising socializes both men *and* women, of course. The outcome is a **stereotypical** view of womanhood and of the place of women in society, a view Raewyn Connell summarizes as that of 'emphasised