

An Introduction to AS Sociology

Sociology is the study of human social life. There are many different aspects of Sociology to address, so you must be curious and attentive to looking at the world in a different way!



Look at this photograph the other way; not everything is as it seems!!!

There is usually another way of looking at things - and that is what we do as sociologists. We take normal, taken-for-granted life and turn it upside down, looking for meanings. And very often we end up seeing things very differently.

Social Change

The social world is changing. Some argue it is growing; others say it is shrinking. The important point to grasp is: society does not remain static over time; it constantly changes - through decades, centuries; and across countries, societies.

Task 1

Think of 3 different ways society has changed over the last 100yrs.

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And name 3 ways in which British society is different to another (America, Italy, etc)



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Why has society changed? Why are societies different?

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Sociological Imagination

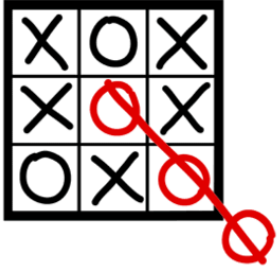
We are all sociologists at heart; we can all identify changes between people, cultures, and social institutions. Much of it is *common sense* or *pub man philosophising*. But with studying Sociology you can put theory and research to your opinions, supporting your viewpoint.

What is useful to start with is to employ what **C. Wright Mills** (1959) labelled the *sociological imagination*.

Mills suggests the sociological imagination could help individuals cope with the social world by helping them to step outside of their personal worldview and thus seeing the events and social structure that influence their behaviour, attitudes, and culture.



**THINK
OUTSIDE
THE BOX**



**THINK OUTSIDE
OF THE BOX!**

Task 2

Look at the following pictures. Write down what you see, and what you don't see, and make a list of possible scenarios for the image - what could be going on? What is it about? Who are they?



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Political and Social Awareness



You may think that politics is for old boring men who rant and rave and do very little for the country; **BUT** it doesn't have to be like that.

If you have an opinion about something then you are involved in the *politics* of it.

For Sociology, it is important to have some idea of what is going on around you: politically and socially; in the UK and globally. **Don't worry; you're not going to transform into a boring nerd!!!! But it does help you to think about what is really going on and why!!**

If you don't know left wing from right wing (or think they live on a KFC menu) it's time to get clued up!



Task 3

Name the three main British political parties. Do you know what ideas they stand for or represent?

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Who is the British Prime Minister?

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What is different about the current government?

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If you were in power, what would your first four items be on your agenda? What would you hope to do?

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What's Going On?

BE AWARE

It is always useful to know what is going on in society around you; locally, nationally and globally.



Task 4

What events have happened in society in the last 3 - 5 years? Either negative or positive; try to name at least 3.

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What has the media coverage been like?

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What effect has it had/ have they had on people, and on the UK?

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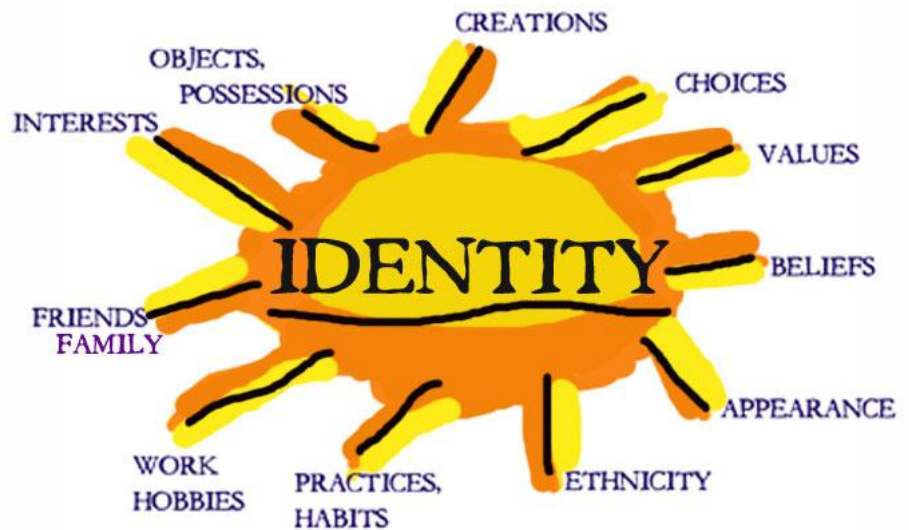
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Identity

Who are you? Are you part of a group, an individual, a student, a sister, a brother?

Identity is about how we see and define ourselves - our personalities - and how

other people see and define us. Many aspects of our individual identity are influenced by **agencies of socialisation**. These are structures or groups of people.



Task 5

Suggest six examples of structures or groups of people that impact upon you:

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Individuals are like moulded putty, squished and squashed by society and its **structures**. But there are decisions we make driven by internal motivations. Behaviour that comes from within us - decisions we make in order to do things is called **agency**. Agency behaviour is meaningful and a reflection of self-will. Sometimes we can challenge and oppose structures,

and in this way we help construct a part of our identity.

List three agency decisions you have made or will make today.

1.
2.
3.

Make a poster of how your identity is shaped by factors in your life.

Consider **agency** factors and **structural** factors.

Brainstorm some ideas first on what you can include in your poster.

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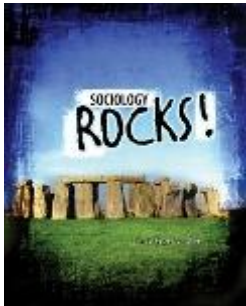


Nature vs Nurture – The Big Debate

There are many ways of explaining why certain people do things in certain ways. For example, biologists think that people behave as they do because they are controlled by nature. This is known as **Nature theory**. Humans are compared to animals and seen to act on **instinct**.



Sociologists believe that people behave as they do because they are taught how to behave. For example the sociologist **Michael Haralambos** states: 'human beings learn their behaviour and use their intelligence whereas animals simply act on instinct'. This is known as a **Nurture theory** of human behaviour. Nurture means the way you were brought up. It is also a reference to **socialisation**, the lifelong process by which we learn our culture, values, norms and how to behave.



Task 6

Write down a list of things that you were taught by other people about how to behave.

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Sociologists reject nature theories for two particular reasons. If people behaved as they do because of nature, they would all act the same as each other. We know that people do not all act the same:

1. **History:** people acted differently in the past from the way that they do today. They had different ideas and different beliefs.



Think of two ways in which we are different from people in the past:

- 1.....
- 2.....

2. **Anthropology:** this is the study of different human societies. Wherever you go in the world, people act differently from the way they do in Britain.

Think of four ways in which people in other countries are different from people in Britain:

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....

Social behaviour and culture

Sociology is the study of human groups and social life in modern societies.

Sociology recognises that as members of society we have to learn social behaviour and this is done through a variety of social institutions and social groups right throughout our lives.



Task 7

Imagine a newborn human infant cast adrift on a desert island. For the sake of this illustration we will assume that it doesn't become an instant snack for some passing predator!

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Look back at the list you have made and see how many of the things have to be learned. If they have to be **learned** they are not really instincts. Instincts are usually defined as complex patterns of behaviour that do not have to be acquired through someone teaching or instructing us.



On the maternal 'instinct' we do not 'instinctively' know how to act as a mother. Little girls learn about mothering via a range of 'learning' experiences (called **socialisation**) such as how their mother behaves towards them or

younger brothers and sisters, toys such as dolls and other related influences.



The green turtle lays eggs on a desert island and when the baby turtles hatch they instinctively make their way to the ocean and swim hundreds of miles to join the adult turtles without their mother's presence.



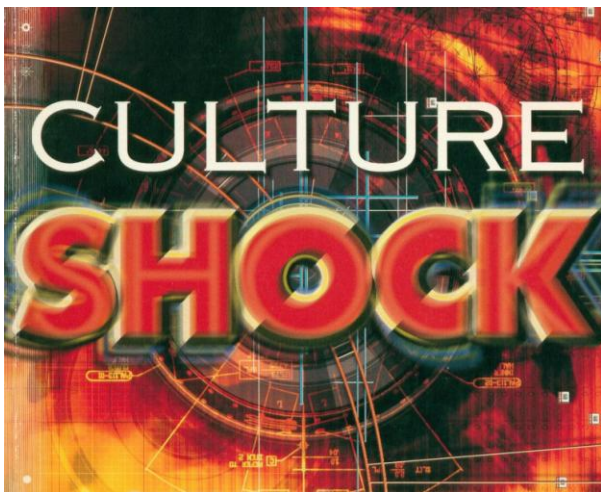
What is Culture?

Virtually all the things that we do have to be learned from others, for example walking, speaking, knowing what to eat, defending ourselves etc., that our desert island baby is unlikely to survive.

We have now established an important principle. Human behaviour is largely learned through a process called socialisation. Therefore what is termed as **culture**, which is our way of life, including the ways in which we behave relates to:

- the language we speak
- the clothes we wear
- the food we eat and whether we eat it with knives, forks and spoons
- the homes we live in
- to the things we believe about the origins of life
- what is good or bad
- or the ways in which we should be governed.

The above are all acquired from other people (this involves the process of **socialisation** into the **culture** of our society)



It is through our membership of social groups that we acquire an understanding of the ways in which behaviour is patterned and organised and of the **values**, customs, **norms** and **roles** of our society. Sociologists refer to this as **culture** — the learned, shared behaviour of members of society. Culture is a social blueprint, a guide for

living. It refers to all the aspects of human behaviour that are learnt rather than genetically transmitted. The following activity shows you the importance of culture.

The Shirbit Tribe

The Shirbit culture believes that the human body is ugly and feeble. The Shirbit, therefore, indulge in rituals and ceremonies designed to avoid this, and so every household has a shrine devoted to the body.

The rituals associated with the shrine are private and secret. Adults do not discuss the rituals and children are only told enough for them to be successfully initiated.

The focal point of the shrine is a box built into the wall where key charms and magical potions for the face and body are kept. These are obtained from medicine men, who write down the ingredients in an ancient and secret language, understood only by the herbalist who prepares the potion.

Beneath the charm-box, is a small font. Every day, every member of the family enters the shrine chamber in succession and bows their head before the charm-box, mingling all sorts of holy water in the font and proceeds with a brief rite of absolution.

The Shirbit have a pathological horror of and fascination with the mouth, the condition of which is believed to have a supernatural influence on all social relationships. Were it not for the rituals of the mouth, they believe their teeth would fall out, their friends would desert them and their lovers would reject them.

Finally, men and women indulge in barbaric acts of self-mutilation. Men engage in a daily body ritual of scraping and lacerating their faces with a sharp instrument, whilst women bake their heads and hair with scorching tools.

Task 8

What aspects seem alien? In what ways, can this resemble British culture?

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SOCIALISATION

Socialisation is the term that sociologists use to describe the life-long process of learning the culture of any society. Culture is socially transmitted from one generation to the next through the process of socialisation.

The American sociologist Charles Cooley (1864-1929) distinguished two types of socialisation: **primary** and **secondary**. These two forms of socialisation are defined partly in terms of the particular groups or 'agencies' in which they occur:

- **Primary socialisation** The Family is the main agency where an individual learns many of the basic lessons for life such as language, how to act as a boy or a girl, how to share and how to love.



- **Secondary socialisation** Associated with the later stages of identity formation, from later childhood and continuing through adulthood. The school is an important example of an agency of secondary socialisation, but all formal organisations, including religion and work, are influential.



Task 9

List 2 ways in which your family teach you something. Similarly, list two ways in which school teaches you something. **Don't be a smart ass! Something other than subjects!!!!**

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SOCIAL CONTROL

Socialisation is not only the process by which we learn the culture of our society; it is also a mechanism of **social control**.

This refers to methods used to persuade or force individuals to conform to those values, norms and patterns of behaviour which the culture of their society requires. Social control involves the use of rewards and punishments. Sociologists refer to these as sanctions.

These may be either positive sanctions (rewards) or negative sanctions (various types of punishment):

- **Positive sanctions** may range from gifts of sweets from parents to children, to merits and prizes at school, to promotion at work or to knighthoods and medals.



- **Negative sanctions** may range from expressions of disapproval, physical punishment, being ridiculed or gossiped about, dismissal from work to being fined or imprisoned.



Task 10

List and briefly explain three positive and three negative sanctions which affect the way you behave in your daily life:

POSITIVE

1.
2.
3.

NEGATIVE

1.
2.
3.

Key Concepts in Socialisation and Culture

Norms

Norms are social rules which define correct and acceptable behaviour in a society or social group to which people are expected to conform. They are essential to human society. They guide and direct our behaviour and allow us both to understand and predict the behaviour of others.

Norms exist in all areas of social life. In Britain, being late for work or an appointment; jumping queues in supermarkets; laughing during funerals; walking through the streets naked or never saying hello to friends are likely to be seen as rude, annoying or odd because they are not following the norms of accepted behaviour.

Norms are usually enforced informally—by the disapproval of other people, embarrassment, or a 'telling off' from parents.



Task 11

Think of one thing that you do which is all for each of these situations.

School:

Home:

Friend's house:

Values

Values are less specific than norms. They are general guides for behaviour. Values are ideas and beliefs about what is 'right' and 'wrong' and about standards which are worth maintaining and achieving in any society. In Britain, values include beliefs about respect for human life, privacy and private property, about the importance of marriage and the importance of money and success.

There are official legal rules, concerning values, which are formally enforced by the police, courts and prison and involve legal punishment if they are broken. For example, laws against murder enforce the value attached to human life in our society.



Task 12

Think of two ideas that are really important to you as a person. You may have strong views about animals or children.

1.....
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2.....
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Status

Sociologists use the term 'status' to refer to a position in society, for example father, doctor, son, bank manager, teacher. **Statuses** may be ascribed or achieved.

Ascribed statuses are fixed, often at birth and are largely unchangeable. For example, gender and race are fixed characteristics usually given by others.

An **achieved** status involves some degree of choice and results partly from individual achievement. For example, a person achieves his or her job as a teacher, doctor or scientist on the basis of ability and effort.



Task 13

Give some examples of what might give a 16 year old status (both positive and negative)

Positive:
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Negative:
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Role

Each status has an accompanying role. A **role** is a set of norms which defines appropriate and expected behaviour for those who occupy a particular status.

A role can be compared to that of an actor on the stage following a 'script'.

Roles are patterns of behaviour which are expected from people in different positions in society. People in society play many different roles in their lifetimes, such as those of a boy or girl, a child and an adult, a student, a parent, a friend and work roles like factory worker, police officer or teacher. People in these roles are expected by society to behave in particular ways. The police officer who steals or the teacher who is drunk in the classroom, show what these expectations of behaviour are!



Task 14

List some of the roles you play and briefly outline what others expect of you in each of these roles. For example, how are you expected to behave as a student/pupil and what activities are you expected to carry out which you wouldn't have to if you were not a student?

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One person plays many roles at the same time. For example, a woman may play the roles of woman, mother, worker, sister and wife at the same time. This may lead to **role conflict**, where the successful performance of two or more roles at the same time may come into conflict with one another, such as the conflict between the roles of full-time worker and mother which some women experience. For example, what happens if a child is ill? (**Note:** consider why women are referred to and not men.)

From your list of roles, try to pick out two examples of those which conflict with each other. Give a brief explanation of each example of role conflict.



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And finally

This Introductory Toolkit has covered information to help you prepare for this course and develop your understanding of key aspects of the subject of sociology.

But there is much more to uncover and learn.

From now on your 'sociological voyage' begins; we are sure you will enjoy it and hope the year is a worthwhile and interesting one.

The first module for AS is the compulsory core; Culture and Socialisation, followed by Family and Households. Now read on and 'Bon Voyage!'

