

A-Level Sociology 2020-22
Introduction to Sociology

Flying start

Read the text and complete the activities. You will need to bring a printed copy with you to your first sociology lesson. If you do not have a printer at home you can print at college.

Key Terms and Concepts



Name

Tutor Group

Becoming human:

1. Are humans ruled by instincts?
2. How does culture shape human behaviour?
3. What are the main components of culture?

Why do human beings behave the way they do? Naturalistic explanations are those which assume that various kinds of human behaviour are natural or based on innate (inborn) biological characteristics. Theorists who believe this position argue that human behaviour then is a matter of *instincts* - biological predispositions that tell us 'instinctively' what we should do. Instincts are something we are born with rather than something we learn. A great deal of animal behaviour seems to be ruled by instincts. For example, birds seem to follow fairly fixed patterns of behaviour as if they were a set part of their 'nature'.

Nowadays, a popular explanation for human behaviour is to look for the answer in our genes. People vary in their genetic make-up and this might explain why they behave differently. Some scientists claim there is a gene for crime, one for alcoholism, even a 'gay' gene. Some have offered genetic explanations for why men are unable to find butter in the fridge, or why women can't read maps!

If this were the case, then one would expect human behaviour to be the same in all societies. Sociologists accept that humans have natural **reflexes** - for example, we automatically flinch when someone strikes us. They also accept that we have certain biological **needs** that must be met - for example, the need for food and drink. But sociologists believe that human behaviour is too complex and diverse to be explained in simple biological or genetic terms. Rather, they see our actions as the result of our social and cultural environments. We **learn** to think and act in certain ways. And it is our **culture** which teaches us how we should think and act.

ACTIVITY

Do some research on the 'nature versus nurture' debate.

What human behaviours are considered to be 'natural'?

And which are 'nurtured'?

Socialisation, Culture and Identity

Shared meanings and values

Sociologists usually define culture as the shared meanings, values and norms of a society or group.

Meanings: Stuart Hall (1997) describes some of the key features of cultural meanings. First, it is largely thanks to *language* that humans are able to create meanings and make sense of the world. It is through language and other symbols, for example visual images, that people express their emotions and thoughts and communicate with one another. Second, culture is about *shared* meanings. People produce meanings together and so over time each social group builds up shared understandings of the world. Third, humans are constantly creating new meanings and revising old ones - so culture can be seen as a process or activity.

Meanings are things which give sense and significance to people's experiences.

Values are things we regard as important, the most significant standards or principles in our lives. Love is an obvious example. Other examples are religious convictions and political loyalties. In everyday life, most people believe in the values of honesty, consideration towards others, justice and fairness - although we are not so good at living up to these values!

Values are beliefs about what is important, what is worth having, what is right and wrong

Norms are social expectations or rules about how people should or should not behave - for example, you should hold the door open for others, you should not grab the last biscuit. There are different rules for different situations -you can let your hair down at an end-of-term party, but the same behaviour would be frowned upon during normal class time. Norms also vary in their degree of seriousness. Committing murder will result in severe legal punishment but bad table manners might only provoke irritation in others.

Norms are social expectations or rules about how people should behave. Guides to behaviour.

Socialisation is the lifelong process by which people learn the culture of the society in which they live. Socialisation is carried out by agencies of socialisation, such as the family, the education system, religious institutions or the mass media

Values Activity: The Cheyenne



A value is a belief that something is good and worthwhile. It defines



Cheyenne photographed in 1889

what is worth having and worth striving for. Values often vary from society to society.

The Cheyenne Indians lived on the Great Plains of the USA west of the Mississippi River and East of the Rocky Mountains. Their traditional way of life came to an end at the close of the 19th century when they were defeated by the US army and placed on reservations.

The Cheyenne believe that wealth in the form of horses and weapons is not to be hoarded and used by the owner but instead it is to be given away. Generosity is highly regarded and a person who accumulates wealth and keeps it for themselves is looked down on. A person who gives does not expect an equal amount in return. The greatest gift they can receive is prestige and respect for their generous action.

Bravery on the battlefield is one of the main ways a person can receive high standing in the eyes of the tribe. Killing an enemy, however, does not rank as highly as a number of other deeds. Touching or striking an enemy with the hand or weapon, rescuing a wounded Comrade or charging the enemy alone are amongst the highest deeds of bravery. The values of Cheyenne society provide goals for its members to aim to and general guidelines for their behaviour. Values are learned and shared by members of society. Some sociologists argue that shared values form the basis of social unity or social solidarity. They help to bind people into a close-knit group. Because they share the same values, members of society are likely to see others as 'people like themselves'. Therefore they will have a sense of belonging and feel part of a wider social group - part of a wider society.

- 1. Define what we mean by values**
- 2. What are the values of traditional Cheyenne society?**
- 3. What are the main values of British society?**
- 4. How do the Cheyenne values differ to our society's values?**
- 5. Why are values important?**

Norms Activity

Norms are specific guidelines for conduct. They define appropriate behaviour in particular

What norms do our culture and others have governing how to eat (implements, manners, etc.)?	What norms do our culture and others have governing what should be eaten when (time of day/year, special occasions, etc.)?

Culture:

Linton (1945) puts it, *'The culture of a society is the way of life of its members; the collection of ideas and habits which they learn share and transmit from generation to generation.'* It's the language, beliefs, values and norms, customs, dress, diet, roles, knowledge and skills, and all the other things that people learn that make up the 'way of life' of any society.

Culture is simply the way of life of a particular society or social group.

It includes language, beliefs, values and attitudes, norms of behaviour, customs, traditions and rituals, dress, music, diet, roles, knowledge and skills

Culture is essential to the operation of human society. Without shared meanings, people would be unable to communicate. Without shared values, they would be pulling in different directions. And without norms directing behaviour, there would be no order in society.

From a sociological viewpoint, human behaviour is primarily organised and directed by culture. We are not ruled by instinct, governed by our genes, or directed by biological needs and impulses. If we were, then human behaviour would be much the same in different times and in different societies. It isn't, as can be seen from the wide variation between cultures in different time periods and places.

Activity 1: Jot down features of British culture. What are considered typically British or English things?



Stages of Socialisation - Primary socialisation

The main most important component in primary socialisation is the family.

Children learn through imitation, some examples of this are movements, words, the way they walk. We learn this in the early years of our childhood from our parents, family and siblings.



Infants and children also learn rights and wrongs in life and consequences and awards for what they do. Such as we learn to eat with a knife and fork properly and not mess around with food. For doing correct things we may get rewarded with a new toy and for doing something incorrect we may be sent to our bedroom.

Actions made by immediate family, family friends and siblings provide children with guide lines for actions. We may learn play with certain toys, or how to act in a certain place and around certain people.

Close social relationships with other people are important in order for children to learn to interact and communicate. If children do not learn these skills it may be hard for them to grow up in society and therefore may be hard to interact with others.

Children who have been raised by wild animals (known as feral children) have less of a chance at being able to talk and communicate so therefore will not be able to socialise. This minimises the chance of the child being able to talk and sometimes even the chance of the child acting like a human being.

Baumeister (1986) notes that family socialisation provides children with an identity. A baby has no life apart from its role in the family, therefore a child will believe that the family will love and care for it as long as it does what it is supposed to do.

Morgan (1996) suggests that a great deal of socialisation is concerned with social control and encouraging conformity (a social influence in behaviour or belief in order to fit in with a group).

Sanctions encourage a conscience in a child which will help them learn what is right and wrong and will help them in growing up. However sanctions and wrong and rights will change as a child gets older and moves into secondary socialisation.

Morgan suggests that the function of toilet training is to teach the child some sense of bodily control. This will help a child develop and understand that they will need this skill in the future to be able to be accepted in society.

Children will also learn what a boy or a girl entails. Culture expectations will regard femininity and masculinity and therefore the children will need to learn the traditional gender roles.

Primary Socialisation and identity

- Identity refers to the understandings people hold about who they are and what is meaningful to them.
- Social identity refers to the characteristics that other people attribute to an individual, and it is our social identity that connects us to the people around us. They are the markers that indicate, at a very basic level, who we are.
- **Baumeister** (1986) says family socialisation provides children with an identity
- Young children have no life except its family role
- Social roles are and the significant roles and are played by the parents

Stages of Socialisation - Secondary socialisation

Secondary socialisation is carried out by other institutions outside of the family, and continues through the rest of our lives.

Listed below are secondary agents of socialisation (NOT the family) where we learn society's norms and values throughout our lives. What norms and values are we taught? How is culture 'shared'?

Education	
Mass Media	
Religion	

Work	
Peers	

Check Your Understanding

- 1. Explain what sociologists mean by the term socialisation.**
- 2. What is the difference between primary and secondary socialisation?**
- 3. What is the main institution or agency that shapes a person's primary socialisation?**
- 4. Suggest three things that individuals learn from primary socialisation.**
- 5. There are occasions where an individual will need to learn how to 'fit into' new situations and so experience re-socialisation. State three situations in which re-socialisation can happen.**
- 6. Explain how primary socialisation within the family can be undermined by the mass media. (Does the media teach different norms & values to those taught at home?)**

7. Some sociologists have pointed out that whilst religion has declined in importance as a means of primary socialisation, the mass media has grown in importance. Give two pieces of evidence that would support this argument.