

Name:

Introductory Work
Basic Terms in Sociology



By the end of this topic you should be able to outline the following:

- What Sociology is.
- What society is and what makes it work.
- Key terms including culture, norms, values, socialisation, status and roles

How to Build a Society

Sociology is often referred to as 'the study of society'. The purpose of the following activity is to help you work out what 'society' is and to begin to understand how there are alternative ways that society could be organised, apart from the one in which we live.

You will be considering the following questions both individually and in groups. In each case you need to think carefully about your answers and be able to give reasons for them. By doing this you are practising the important skill of evaluation.

The Scenario:

Well into the future, scientists have perfected a bomb which eliminates people without destroying anything else in the environment. At the peak of increasing international tension you are selected, along with 400 other people chosen randomly (of all ages, children without parents, adults with husbands or wives, single adults), to shelter in a deep mine in Wales which, it is hoped, will give you some protection. Well, the worst happens and you all emerge a year later with the remnants of the food and water originally stored in the mine. You are the world's sole survivors. Without anyone to come to your aid, you will be forced to construct a new society. How will you do this?

Your task:

The following questions are designed to help you think of the key issues. Although you are being asked to do something highly unlikely, answer each question carefully. Remember: there are no right and wrong answers to these questions. As you work through the questions, make brief notes of your answers & why you are answering the way you are.



Questions:

1. What will you need to survive?

2. How will the day-to-day tasks for survival be organised? Who will do what? Who says?

3. Will a leader be necessary? If so, how will that leader be chosen? Will everyone have an equal say? What will happen to those who disagree?

4. What about people who cannot look after themselves, such as the old and the young? What about new babies?

5. Will traditional families & marriage be encouraged? How will you manage relationships between the sexes? Will you discourage homosexuality?

6. When the new society finally grows and produces things, how will they be shared out? Who will get what?

7. What about religion and religious differences?

8. What will you do about leisure? Is leisure time important?

9. Will the group agree? If not, how, how will you resolve conflicts?

10. What will you do about rule breakers?

Culture, Norms & Values

Culture:

Culture is simply the way of life of a particular society or social group. It includes beliefs, values, and attitudes, norms of behaviour, customs, traditions and rituals.

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



Activity 2: What differences have you noticed, in terms of behaviour or way of life, between Britain & other countries?

Ralph Linton argues "*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.*"

There are 2 essential qualities of culture:

1. It is **learned**
2. It is **shared** (otherwise we would have confusion and disorder)

(NB example of conversation between a North American & South American, highlights several aspects of behaviour/culture in different societies).

Socialisation:

Socialisation is the process whereby individuals learn the culture of their society.

Activity 3: Discuss with friends and family how we learn this and who from. Jot some ideas down:



A lot of what we take for granted as 'normal behaviour' is a result of **primary socialisation**. Primary socialisation takes place during infancy, where children learn language and basic norms and values, mainly from their parents and immediate family.

Activity 4: Write down what you think a child would be like in terms of behaviour and ability to communicate, if he/she had been deprived of any human contact:

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

Activity 5: Think of as many other places (NOT the family) where we learn society's norms and values throughout our lives:

Norms:

Norms are specific rules, or guides to action, which define acceptable and appropriate behaviour in particular situations.

Activity 6: We have certain norms of appropriate clothing. Give an example:



Activity 7: Norms of behaviour vary over time and between different cultures. Think of some aspects of behaviour we now accept as normal but which were once considered deviant (or wrong). Jot some ideas down:

Can you think of any examples of things which are acceptable in one society, but not in another?

Think about what/who is considered attractive in our culture. How is this 'ideal' different in other cultures, or different from the past?

Social control: norms are enforced through sanctions, i.e. rewards & punishments.

Values:

A value is a belief that something is good and desirable, important and worthwhile. Every society has its own value



system, and these values are the general beliefs which underpin our (more specific) norms, e.g. we value human life, so we have norms that say talking a life is wrong (murder etc).

Activity 8: What other values do we have in our society?

Status:

All members of a society are given a social position by their culture. These positions are known as statuses. Some positions are **ascribed** (i.e. fixed at birth), others are **achieved** by the individual themselves through their own efforts.

Activity 9: Give an example of a) an ascribed status and b) an achieved status:

Roles:

Throughout our lives we play various roles. Society expects those of a certain status to behave in a particular way. A set of norms go with any particular status. These are collectively known as a role.

Activity 10: List the various roles you play:

What Happens Without Primary Socialisation? 'Feral' Children.

Isabel Quaresma, the Chicken Girl of Portugal



Confined to a hen coop

Isabel Quaresma was born in 1970 in Tabua, Portugal, to a mentally deficient mother, Idalina Quaresma Dos Santos. Isabel was the only one of three children not fathered by a family member. When she was found in January 1980 at the age of nine, she had spent the last eight years shut in a hen-coop.

Isabel Quaresma: rescued but returned

Neighbours had been aware of the situation, but as in the case of the men in their thirties living in sub-human conditions found in Lameiras, Portugal, in 1989, no one had deemed it necessary to interfere in what was seen as a family matter. It appears Isabel Quaresma was eventually taken at the insistence of Maria João Bichão to various hospitals, where she underwent some tests, but was subsequently returned to live with her mother and the man with whom she co-habited.

Unable to speak

Isabel Quaresma's growth was seriously stunted, she was not toilet-trained, and of course she couldn't talk. She held her arms in the position of hens' wings, and the palms of her hands were calloused. She had been fed on scraps; the same food as the hens received. One eye was affected by a cataract and there was some speculation whether that had been caused by a hen scratch.

Isabel makes very little progress

Eventually she was taken to an institution for handicapped children. 18 years later, Isabel had not grown much and made little progress generally. She could understand simple orders, but if asked to fetch two items, would only understand one request and return with one item. Her mental age was estimated at about two. However, some progress had been made as regards socialisation. She could interpret the expressions of others, and understand if they were happy or sad. Physically, she had learnt to walk, but still suffered a delicate stomach. Not surprisingly, she still couldn't talk.



Gender Socialisation

One of the most important roles we learn to play in life is our gender role. This involves learning to act in an appropriate way for our gender, i.e. 'masculine' & 'feminine' behaviour.

Activity 1: Make a list of what you consider to be appropriate masculine and feminine behaviour:

We have been socialised from birth to act in 'masculine' and 'feminine' ways, by the various agents of socialisation.

Activity 2: Consider the following factors, and jot down some ideas about how these influence our gender roles:

1. Parents' attitudes/treatment/nicknames

2. Toys

3. Books/comics

4. TV/Media (adverts, images etc)

5. School (subjects, teachers' attitudes, careers advice)



How Adults Influence Play

Back in the 1970s, psychologist Phyllis Katz conducted what we now call the Baby X experiment. She put three toys in a room: a small football, a feminine doll, and a gender-neutral toy. Then she dressed a 3-month-old in an unadorned yellow jumpsuit and brought a series of adults (the subjects of the experiment) into the room to meet the baby. Some of the adults were told that the infant was a girl named Mary; others were told that the baby was a boy named Johnny. Most of the adults who thought the baby was a girl gave her the doll to play with. Most of those who believed the baby was a boy gave him the football. Adults were also more likely to hold 'Mary' close whilst playing with her; whereas 'Johnny' was more likely to be seated facing outwards.

This study sparked a lot of heated discussion about the need for gender-neutral toys, and gender stereotyping became the subject of numerous debates, magazine articles, and television programs. Nevertheless, when Dr. Katz repeated the experiment 10 years later, she got the same results. What's more, despite great efforts toward gender equality in recent years, if you walk into a typical nursery or preschool, it won't be hard to guess which children will be brushing Barbie's hair and which will be crashing toy trucks.

