Sociology Central
Teaching Notes

3. Basic Definitions (2)

A. Learning To Be Human: Culture and Socialisation.

1. A *culture* can be defined as a "way of life" that is transmitted from one generation to the next and it consists of two basic elements:

- The *material things* that a society creates. This *material culture* consists of the physical objects (cars, telephones, computers, etc.) that a society produces to reflect their interests and preoccupation's.

- The *non-material things* that a society creates. This *non-material culture* consists of the knowledge and beliefs that influence people's behaviour. We can begin this section, therefore, by looking at the idea of *non-material culture* and in particular how it is taught and learnt.

2. Linton (1945) defines the concept of a non-material culture as:

> *"The way of life of its members; the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation".*

3. The ideas of sharing, teaching and learning are crucial here for understanding the process whereby people learn to become human beings. This is because people are born into an existing cultural system. In order to learn how to behave in society, therefore, arrangements have to be made for people to fit-into existing patterns of behaviour and we call this a process of *socialisation*.

B. The Socialisation Process.

1. Learning how to become human and to behave in ways that accord with the general expectations of others (in short, to be socialised) is a process that begins at birth and continues throughout our life. We never stop learning how to behave, mainly because our society is always changing and we are continually faced with learning how to behave in new and different situations. When starting to look at the socialisation process, therefore, we can begin by identifying two basic types of socialisation:

a. Primary socialisation.

1. *Primary socialisation* occurs between the individual and those people in their life with whom they have primary relationships. A primary relationship is one in which the individual has a close, personal, intimate and face-to-face relationship with the people that are responsible for the socialisation process.

- For most of us, the first primary relationship we form is with our parent(s) or guardians - the people who are charged with the initial socialisation process. As we grow older and start to develop as human beings, we start to form primary attachments with friends and eventually with other adults (through things like marriage, work and so forth).

2. We normally refer to the people responsible for our socialisation as *agents* of socialisation and, by extension, we can also talk about *agencies* of socialisation (such as our family, the education system, the workplace and so forth).

- The first **agency** that takes responsibility for **primary socialisation** is the family, and the main **agents** of socialisation are a child's parents and relations. In a family group, for example, we learn many of the basic characteristics of being human in terms of our particular society. For example, we learn how to:

  - Walk,
  - Talk,
  - Use various tools, such as knives and forks and so forth.

3. The family group doesn't just teach us the physical characteristics of being human, however. Our parents use their values to try to teach us things like:

  - The difference between right and wrong behaviour and
  - How to relate appropriately to others (family, friends, strangers, etc.).

4. Although this **socialisation process** is lengthy and complicated (there is a great deal to learn about the correct way to behave), it is important not to see it just as a situation in which an agent of socialisation, such as a parent, simply teaches behaviour that is then copied without question by the child. Although part of a child's socialisation does involve copying the behaviour they see around them (children frequently copy adult roles through their play - "Mothers and Fathers", "Doctors and Nurses" and so forth), the child is also **actively** involved in the socialisation process.

- Children do not always obey their parents and even at an early age, **conflicts** occur (the wishes of parents, relatives and friends do not always coincide, for example). In addition, while the child is learning how to adapt to their environment they are changing the way the people around them behave, in a variety of different ways.

- Finally, perhaps, as we start to get a little older we start to make decisions for ourselves, based upon our **experience** in the world. We start to try to manipulate our world and the people in it. In this respect, we start to learn how to deal with other people by understanding the type of behaviour that others expect of us.

5. Many of the things we learn through our primary socialisation stay with us for life. This is because, as human beings, we learn the **basic principles** involved with "being human", rather than simply a set of things we must or must not do.

- This is important to us, because it means that we can apply these **principles** to new and different situations. For example, we don't just learn how to relate to adults, we learn how to distinguish between different types of adult on the basis of their status and their relationship to us. For example, we don't behave towards a parent in the same way that we behave towards an adult who is not familiar to us.

- If you watch very young children, just as they are starting to be introduced to adults who not are familiar to them, you frequently find they become quiet and shy. This is because the child is unsure about how to behave appropriately towards the stranger. The same process happens in any new situation. Teenage men and women, for example, tend to be initially shy and awkward in each others company. This embarrassment is simply part of not being sure about how they are expected to behave appropriately in this new situation.

6. Finally, one of the main things socialised into us during this particular period of primary socialisation is a knowledge of gender roles; that is, what it means, in our society to be either masculine or feminine. This is something that will be discussed in more detail at a later point.

b. Secondary socialisation.

1. *Secondary socialisation* occurs between the individual and those people in their life with whom they have secondary relationships. A secondary relationship is one in which the individual does not have a close, personal, intimate or face-to-face relationship with the people that are responsible for the socialisation process.

•   Secondary socialisation is necessary because it represents the way that we start to learn about the nature of the social world beyond our primary contacts. We have to learn to deal with people who are not emotionally close to us, mainly because the vast majority of the people we will come into contact with in our adult lives will be dealt with unemotionally. We have to learn how to cope with this, which is why this second type of socialisation is necessary.

2. When we think about *agencies* of secondary socialisation we can talk about education, religion, the mass media, etc. *Agents of socialisation* will consequently be teachers, priests, television personalities, rock stars and so forth. In some cases, such as school and teachers, we are in daily, face-to-face contact with the people who are socialising us without ever developing a primary attachment to them. In other cases, such as admiring a particular film or rock star, we may never meet them, yet we can still be influenced by what they look like, what they do and how they do it.

3. Talcott Parsons claimed that one of the main purposes (or *functions* as he called it) of secondary socialisation is to

> *"Liberate the individual from a dependence upon the primary attachments and relationships formed within the family group".*

•   What Parsons meant by this was that, in modern societies, the vast majority of people that we meet will be strangers to us. It would not be possible or desirable to relate to them in the same way that we relate to people that we love and for whom we have affection. We have, therefore, to learn how to deal with people in terms of what they can do for us and what we can do for them in particular situations.

•   For example, think about what life would be like if we only knew how to deal with people on the basis of primary social attachments (love, trust, affection and so forth). Whenever we went shopping, the shopkeeper would deal with us like we were a long lost and very dear friend. We might find this comforting at first, but imagine having to deal with this sort of behaviour every time you met someone or passed them in the street.

C. The Structure of Social Life: Values, Norms, Roles and Status.

1. So far, we have looked at the ideas of **society**, **culture** and s**ocialisation** in very general terms. The next stage in our development of sociological understanding is to look at the significance of these ideas in more specific terms. To help us do this, we need to look at a number of related ideas that give substance to the sociological argument that human social behaviour is learned. In this respect, we take a lead from Barnard and Burgess ("Sociology Explained", 1996) when they note that:

> "Societies work or function because each individual member of that society plays particular **roles** and each **role** carries a **status** and **norms** which are informed by the **values** and **beliefs** of the **culture** of that society. The process of learning these **roles** and the **norms** and **values** appropriate to them from those around us is called **socialisation**".

- The main ideas we need to explore in greater depth, therefore, are those of:

  - Social Role.
  - Social Status.
  - Values and
  - Norms.

2. We are going to use these ideas to show some of the basic ways that social behaviour is structured (that is, how our behaviour as individuals is socially organised).

Values.

1. We saw earlier the idea that all human societies have certain problems that have to be solved if life is to be maintained. There are a variety of ways, as I have suggested, that people can decide to solve these problems and the choices we make concerning such solutions are based upon what sociologists call **values**.

- **Values** are beliefs that we have about what is important, both to us and to society as a whole. A value, therefore, is a belief (right or wrong) about the way something should be. An example here might be the belief that,

  > "It is better for a child's natural mother and father to take the responsibility for raising it into adulthood than for society to take on this responsibility".

- Another example, from the Christian religion, of a set of values is the 10 Commandments. These include values such as:

  - You should not kill another person.
  - You should not steal from another person.
  - You should not be jealous of others.

2. Some values are very personal to us as individuals, whilst others are much more   widely-held by large groups of people. In this case, values become **morals** - things that we consider to be of such absolute and fundamental importance that we believe everyone should hold such ideas as a personal value. A good example of a moral value in our society might be that it is wrong to kill another human being.

3. Finally, for the moment, it should be apparent that values, by definition, always involve judgements (since they tell us how something should be). In short, the values we hold are general behavioural guidelines. They tell us what we believe is right or wrong, for example, but that do not tell us how we should behave appropriately in any given social situation. This is the part played by **norms** in the overall structure of our social behaviour.

Norms.

1. Every **value** that we hold has a number of associated ideas called **norms** (short for "normative " or "normal"). Norms are expected, socially-acceptable, ways of behaving in any given social situation. Like values they differ from individual to individual and society to society. In our society, for example:

- A norm associated with the value of natural parenthood might be that the parents of a child are expected by others to be the people to raise that child.

- It is acceptable (normal) for people over the age of 18 to drink alcohol in a pub. In Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, the drinking of alcohol is legally banned for everyone.

2. The second example noted above expresses a mixture of values.

- In Britain, the "alcohol norm" reflects the value that we, as a society, place on concepts of childhood and adulthood. An adult is considered to be someone over the age of 18; drinking alcohol in a pub is a pastime we associate with adults, therefore, anyone under the age of 18 should not be allowed to drink alcohol in a pub because they are not legally an adult.

- In Saudi Arabia, the ban on drinking alcohol - whether you are considered to be a child or an adult - is related to religious values (Muslims are not allowed, under their religion, to consume alcohol).

3. Norms, therefore, are very specific rules that govern our behaviour in particular situations. As Thio ("Sociology") puts it:

> **" While norms are specific rules dictating how people should act in a particular situation, values are general ideas that support the norm".**

4. Although we use the term loosely, there are three types of norm we can distinguish:

a. Folkways: These are fairly weak kinds of norm. For example, when you meet someone you know in the street you probably say "hello" and expect them to respond in kind. If they ignore you, they have broken a friendship norm and this might lead you to reassess your relationship with them.

- Another good example of a folkway is the tradition in our society of sending people Birthday and Christmas cards. If you forget to send someone a Christmas card, the worst thing that is likely to happen to you is that they stop sending you a card each year…

b. Mores (pronounced "more-rays"): These are much stronger norms and a failure to conform to them will result in a much stronger social response from the person or people who resent your failure to behave appropriately. An example of a more in our society might be telling a teacher to "Bugger off" when they tell you to stop talking in class.

c. Laws (legal norms): A law is an expression of a very strong moral norm that exists to explicitly control people's behaviour. Punishment for the infraction of legal norms will depend on the norm that has been broken and the culture in which the legal norm develops.

- From the above, we can see that norms can be both written (formal, official and legal norms) and unwritten (informal or unofficial norms).

5. The idea of norms is not only useful as a means of showing the various ways that human behaviour is structured. It also helps to illustrate one of the ideas noted earlier concerning the subject matter of Sociology.

- You will recall that one of the problems we identified was that society does not have a physical existence (we cannot see it, for example), yet sociologists argue that it affects our behaviour because it is a **force**. We can demonstrate the existence of this **force** using the concept of **norms**.

6. Although we cannot see norms, sociologists argue that they act on us in various ways because they represent expected and acceptable ways of behaving in society. If this is the case, we should be able to experiment with norms of behaviour to see the possible effect of disrupting **normative expectations** (the behaviour people see as normal) on people's behaviour.

Disrupting Norms of Behaviour.

1. The American sociologist Harold Garfinkel decided to show how norms exist (and what happens when we break or disrupt them) by asking his students, in a series of experiments, to deliberately (but secretly) break some expected norms. We can look at a couple of examples as follows:

a. Garfinkel asked his students to engage their friends in conversation and deliberately break the "conversation norms" that we all usually take for granted when we talk to other people. The following transcript is an example of what happened...

- (**S waved his hand cheerily).**

  S: How are you?
  E: How am I in regard to what? My health, my finances, my school work, my peace of mind, my...
  S: (red in the face and suddenly out of control) Look! I was just trying to be polite. Frankly I don't give a damn how you are.

- There are a number of possible explanations for the above exchange:

  - One reason might be that we rely upon people behaving in roughly-predictable ways towards us, mainly because if they did not life would be extremely difficult and tiring. In this respect, each time we met someone, even if they were a close friend that we'd known for years, we would have to establish a whole new set of norms for our behaviour - we would have, in short, to "get to know someone" each and every time that we met them.

  - Other answers might be that E. was deliberately trying to upset S. by taking a greeting literally or perhaps E. had gone mad and genuinely did not know how to answer S. in a socially-expected and acceptable way. This leads us to Garfinkel's second experiment.

b. Garfinkel asked his students, when they returned home during their University vacation, to behave towards their parents as if they were lodgers, rather than sons and daughters. The lodgers were to behave politely and not to show any recognition of ever having met their parents before...

  - As you might imagine, the parents of these students found this situation very difficult to handle - they had no initial idea about why someone who was their son or daughter should suddenly start to behave like a complete stranger. Very quickly, the parents tried to make sense of this "senseless" situation by explaining their children's behaviour in terms of illness or madness.

2. Such experiments show how important norms are and how easy it is to disrupt norms - with frequently alarming results. Because there are thousands of norms that we recognise (frequently without thinking about it precisely because normative conformity seems so natural), it is easy to construct simple everyday experiments to test the existence of norms in your life.

- Although it is not advisable if you value your sanity and freedom, you could:

  - Ignore your friends.
  - Talk to a complete stranger as if they were your closest friend.
  - Walk around wearing a dress (if you are male).
  - Drive your car on the right-hand side of the road.

Summary.

1. If we put these ideas together, we can see that the things people value and the usual (normal) way they obey and express these values gives us the concept of a *culture*.

2. At its most basic, a culture can be defined as a "general way of life" that is characteristic of a particular society. In this respect, a culture represents all of the *values* and *norms* that people in a society share. In very broad terms, aspects of our society's *culture* might include things like:

  - A belief that we should speak a common language.
  - A belief in love and the right of the individual to choose their partner.
  - A belief that murder is wrong and people who murder should be punished.

3. These are general beliefs about behaviour and although we can talk about "English culture", we are unlikely to find very much agreement between people in our society about what counts as "English culture", except on this very general level.

Sub-Cultures.

1. Of more interest to us is the way this sense of belonging to the same culture can be broken down into more specific values and norms since, although we share many things with others in our society, not everyone has exactly the same values and norms.

- Some groups of people share a particular way of life and we term these smaller groups **sub-cultures**. Some examples that show the wide range of sub-cultural groups in our society might be:

  - Football supporters,
  - Trainspotters,
  - Orthodox Jews,
  - Travellers,
  - College students.

4. Although we will be looking in much more detail at the idea of **sub-cultural groups** in various parts of the course, we can use the last example, that of being part of a "College student sub-culture", to illustrate a couple of other sociological ideas.

a. Firstly, by becoming a College student you have chosen to join a particular sub-cultural group with its own particular "way of life" (attending classes, learning, meeting your friends, etc.). However, just because you are part of this sub-culture doesn't mean that you cannot be part of other sub-cultural groups or, indeed, the culture of our society as a whole.

- While some of the values of this sub-culture (for example, wanting to get an A-level qualification) and the norms associated with these values (for example, gaining a qualification by passing examinations) may be different to the values and norms of other sub-cultures, they can still be part of the wider culture in our society. Indeed, the reason you might value an educational qualification is precisely because this qualification has a value in wider society.

  - A prospective employer, for example, might offer you a job on the basis of your educational qualifications, whereas they wouldn't consider you for the job if you didn't have the qualifications.

b. Secondly, we have started to introduce the idea that an individual's place in society can be looked at on two basic levels:

- Firstly, in terms of a general sense of **culture** - what it means to people, for example, to be English, French, American and so forth.

- Secondly, in terms of a specific sense of **sub-cultures**. That is, the various groups we belong to that involve particular sets of norms that apply only when we participate in these groups.

5. Every individual participates in numerous sub-cultural groups. The norms (and sometimes the values) that apply in one group may be different to the norms that apply in another (the norms that apply when you at home with your family may be very different to those that apply when you are out with your friends).

- The problem, here, is that the potential for normative confusion is huge - and we have seen that the penalties for not behaving in accordance with social norms can be very great. As people, therefore, we have to constantly consider how we can manage our lives to produce a sense of order and basic predictability.

- How, in short, do we establish a structure of rules governing behaviour that we can immediately recognise and conform to in a variety of different situations?

  - The answers to these questions can be found by introducing another important sociological idea, that of **social roles**.

Social Roles.

1. An initial definition of a **role** is that it represents the way that someone is expected to behave in a particular social situation. Roles, therefore, are the parts that we play in our relationships with others and this idea is similar to that of an actor playing a part in a play. Each individual plays many roles in society, some examples being:

- Teacher,
- Student,
- Mother,
- Son,
- Employer,
- Employee and so forth.

2. Each **role** (part that we play) has a number of associated characteristics. It involves:

a. **Norms** of behaviour. A person playing the role of a student is expected to behave in a particular way (one that is different to a person playing the role of a teacher, for example).

b. A group of other roles that relate specifically to the role we are playing. This is called a **role-set** and examples of the College student's role set might be:

- Other students.
- Your class teacher.
- Other teachers.
- College caretakers.
- College Administration staff.
- College librarians and so on.

- The main reason for mentioning the idea of a **role set** is to impress on you the idea that we can only play a role in relation to other people. There would be little point, for example, of my trying to play the role of teacher if I had no students to teach.

c. A **status**. Briefly, a status can be defined as "the level of respect we are expected to give to a person playing a particular role" and every role we play has an **associated status**. We can, for example, measure the status of a student against the status of a teacher. Alternatively, we could measure the status of a teacher against the status of The Queen.

- Status is important in our society and the way that we feel about our status in relation to others will affect the way that we behave in certain situations. This is because status is closely related to the idea of **power** - the ability to get people to do things, regardless of their ability to resist (an idea we will develop at a later point).

- A teacher, for example, may believe that their status is greater than that of their students; therefore, he or she might feel justified in:

  - Setting students work do outside their class.
  - Telling a noisy student to be quiet.
  - Making an unruly student leave the class.

3. Having noted that our life consists of playing out a wide variety of roles, we can note two further aspects to role play:

  a. There are some roles that we choose to play. These are called **achieved roles** precisely because we have to chosen to play them; we have done something to achieve them. Your role as a College student is an achieved one because you have chosen to play it.

  b. There are some roles we are forced to play. These are called **ascribed roles** because they are roles that are given to us by other, more powerful, people. For example, between the ages of 5 and 16 in our society, everyone is given the ascribed role of schoolchild. The government has decided that everyone must play this role, whether they want to or not.

4. Similarly, **status** can also be achieved or ascribed. A teacher has a higher status than a student because they have **achieved** the level of qualification and training necessary to qualify for this role. On the other hand, your status as male or female is an ascribed status - it is something that derives from your biological status.

5. Roles have two further dimensions that are worth noting here:

a. Firstly, what is called the prescibed aspect of a role. Each role you adopt, whether achieved or ascribed, contains a set of normative expectations about how you should behave when you are in that role. The norms associated with the role tell us and others how to play the role successfully.

- For example, you have all adopted the role of student and you understand many of the prescriptions that go with this role. An A-level student is expected to:

  - Attend classes.
  - Do homework.
  - Take notes.
  - Listen attentively etc.

b. Secondly, what we term **role performance**. This relates to how successfully you play your **prescribed role**. If you think about it, all students play the same basic role, but their performance - success or failure in that role, for example - will vary dramatically. Alternatively, there may be more than one way to perform a role successfully.

6. This distinction is useful because it tells us something about role play. The prescribed element in any role provides a basic structure (or norm-based framework) governing the way people are generally supposed to interact. Thus, the teacher -student relationship will always be based on a set of norms particular to the culture in which the roles exist.. However, the actual relationship between teacher and student (role performance) can be modified by a range of other relevant factors.

- For example, the age of the individual playing the student role may alter the way the role is performed (very young children have a different relationship to their teacher than do older students).

7. For sociologists, the idea that human beings do not have instincts (we do not have genetic programming that tells us how to behave) means that we have to develop a sense of how to behave towards each other. The fact that we have to develop and learn role play is, in this respect, strong evidence against the existence of instincts.
In addition, by playing roles we introduce two things into our life:

a. A sense of order.

- Each role we play is associated with a set of norms (rules of behaviour when playing that role).

- These rules give us a sense of **routine**. Once we have learnt the rules associated with a particular role we can then play that role easily and successfully, whatever the actual situation we find ourselves in.

b. A sense of predictability.

- This is because we know, when playing a particular role in relation to other people, they will behave in roughly predictable ways. When we know what role someone is playing in relation to us, it gives us a set of guidelines for our own behaviour. A student, for example, knows roughly the kinds of things that a teacher expects because the student has learnt how to play their role.

Basic Definitions (2)

8. Order and predictability are important to us, since without them the social world would be a very dangerous and confusing place. For example, consider the idea that if we didn't play certain roles how impossible life would be. Imagine, for example, a situation in which you could not remember what your relationship to everyone around you was supposed to be.

- Each time the teacher came into the classroom they would have to patiently explain who they were and what they were going to do with you. As students, each time you came into the classroom you would have to learn exactly what a student was supposed to do. This would be extremely time-consuming - people would spend so much time learning who they were and how they were supposed to behave that nothing would ever get done.

- If you now think about all of the relationships you have with people - and the roles you play - the scale of the problem should be apparent. One great benefit of role play, therefore, is that once we have learnt what is expected of us in one role, we can use that knowledge whenever we have to play that role.

9. By playing roles, therefore, we organise our behaviour so that we can deal appropriately with other people.

- For example, when playing the role of lover, it is appropriate in our society to kiss them. It is not appropriate to kiss everyone you meet, therefore, our knowledge of role play helps us to avoid embarrassing or dangerous situations.

10. Role play helps us to regulate our behaviour and that of others. The adoption of roles is a way of controlling people's behaviour, mainly because the norms associated with each role give us boundary markers against which to judge acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

- When people play a certain role, therefore, their behaviour is being controlled because they are obeying the rules of that role. We will develop the idea of social control in more detail in a moment.

11. One of the great advantages of role play is that it helps us to accomplish certain tasks easily and effectively.

- For example, the teaching and learning process is made easier if both teacher and student are behaving towards each other in ways that are considered appropriate for their roles.

12. One final idea we have to note is that, for all the advantages they give us in the organisation of our lives, the wide number and variety of roles that we play occasionally causes us problems. One major problem is called *role conflict* and this occurs when the norms that are consistent with one role that we play prevent us from behaving in accordance with the norms consistent with another role. Imagine that you play two different roles in your life.

- One role is that of College student, where one of the norms is that you have to attend a class at 3pm on a Friday afternoon. The other role is that of a part-time employee. As a good and faithful employee, when a crisis occurs at work, your employer demands that you come into work 3 hours earlier than usual on a Friday. Instead of starting work at 5pm, they ask you to start work at 2pm.

- In terms of these two roles, this is a no-win situation for you. If you follow the norms associated with one role, you will break the norms associated with the other role. The fact that it's not your fault and that whatever you choose to do will mean getting into trouble with either your teacher or your employer is irrelevant here. You will be an innocent victim of *role conflict*...

D. Social Control.

1. All the ideas we've looked at so far have been implicitly concerned with the various ways that people attempt to create *order, stability* and *predictability* in their own and other people's behaviour. In this respect, we have been indirectly talking about the various ways that any society attempts to control the behaviour of its members. These controls affect not just the way people actually behave, but also the way they think about the nature of the social world.

2. In this section, therefore, we can start to bring all of these ideas together under the general heading of social control and look a little more closely at the various forms of social control that exist in any society.

3. At its most basic, *social control* involves all of the things that we do or have done to us that are designed to maintain or change people's behaviour.

- The *socialisation* process, for example, involves *social control* because it represents an attempt by people to shape the way in which a child develops. When we develop certain *values* and adopt particular *norms*, this too is a form of social control since we are placing limits on what we consider to be acceptable or normal behaviour. *Role play* is again a form of social control because we are trying to act in ways that are considered orderly and predictable in certain situations. Social life, in this respect, is a life-long process of learning rules. We may not always agree with those rules, nor do we always obey them, but the fact remains that they exist and we have to take note of their existence.

4. People, therefore, create rules of behaviour that are the basis for social organisation and since we always have a choice as to whether or not we obey these rules, they are supported by social sanctions. These are the things we do in order to try to make people conform to our expectations. Sanctions can be one of two types:

a. Positive sanctions (or rewards) are pleasant things we can do to try to make people conform and behave in a routine, predictable, fashion.

- Examples here might be things like buying a child an ice cream to make it stop crying (an odd example of the way breaking a social norm can actually bring a reward), offering someone an incentive to do something (buying someone a present if they fix your car, for example), or giving them a valuable qualification if they pass an exam.

b. Negative sanctions (or punishments) are basically the not very nice things we can do to try to make people conform and behave in a routine, predictable, fashion.

- There are a vast range of negative sanctions we can use in our society, ranging from not talking to people if they annoy us, through beating them up to putting them in prison. The ultimate negative sanction, perhaps, is to kill someone.

5. As I've suggested, social controls are closely related to norms of behaviour and just as there are two basic types of norm (informal and formal), there are two basic types of social control (informal and formal).

a. Formal social controls.

- Control here is based around the idea of formal, legal, norms (or laws) of behaviour. That is, rules of behaviour that are written down and, in societies such as our own, that apply equally to everyone (not all societies apply formal rules equally). Where laws are involved, it is usual to find a group of people, normally employed by the government, whose job it is to enforce the law. In our society, for example, the main *agency* of formal social control is the police and the judiciary (courts), although the armed forces can, on occasions, be used to perform this role.

    - Not all formal norms are laws, however. When you are accepted into College, for example, you agree to abide by the formal rules governing behaviour in this institution. For example, if you do not attend classes then you will be punished in some way.

- In general terms, formal rules and social controls exist to tell everyone within a society or social group what is and is not acceptable in terms of behaviour. Such formal controls usually exist where a group is very large and its members are not in day-to-day contact with each other.

b. Informal Social Controls.

- Like their formal counterpart, informal controls exist to reward or punish people for unacceptable behaviour (what sociologists call *deviance*). Informal controls cover a vast array of possible sanctions and tend to differ from individual to individual, group to group and society to society. Informal controls apply to informal norms of behaviour and they include things like ridicule, sarcasm, disapproving looks, punching people in the face and so forth.

    - For example, at a Women's Institute gathering a disapproving look may be enough to tell you that people think it is not appropriate to flirt with the vicar. Amongst members of a criminal gang, however, it is unlikely that a disapproving look would be used as a means of informal social control should you tell them you intend to inform on their activities to the police.

Social controls, therefore, are attempts - sometimes successful, sometimes unsuccessful - to ensure that the values and norms that operate within both cultures and sub-cultures are kept by the members of such groups.

E. Sociological Perspectives.

1. So far we've looked at some of the basic ideas underpinning sociological analyses of social organisation and behaviour. These will be developed and applied in much greater depth as the course develops. At this point, however, I want to introduce the idea that although sociologists generally agree about a number of basic aspects of human behaviour (in particular, the idea that it is learned), there are numerous differences between sociologists over the interpretation and significance of this basic idea.

2. It is important, therefore, the understand that not all sociologists agree about how society is defined or how it can be studied. The link between the work we've done and the idea of sociological perspectives is that of values; the arguments that exist within Sociology are largely based on the values that sociologists use to help them in their work. These values are usually clearly stated so that the reader knows exactly what a particular sociologist thinks about the basic nature of social life.

3. Generally, we can identify three very broad categories of sociological values (sometimes called "sociological perspectives" or "ways of seeing the social world").

You should keep in mind the fact that this is only a very brief and simplified introduction to the idea of different perspectives.

a. Functionalism:

1. This group of sociologists sees society as being like a living person. Just as all the different organs in a human body (heart, brain, lungs, etc.) work together in harmony, so all the different parts of society (work, government, education, religion etc.) are seen to work together in harmony.

2. As in a human body, each part of society depends on the other parts of society, on the basis of:

- *Social needs* and
- *Social purposes* that fulfil those needs.

- For example, work *needs* people who are socialised into the values and norms of society and the family exists for the *purpose* of fulfilling that need. Just like in a human body, if one part of society stops working in the way that it should, problems are created in that society.

3. From this perspective, everything in society has a *purpose* or *function* (which is where the term Functionalism comes from). The basic values of this perspective emphasise the idea of harmony and *social consensus* based around *shared values*.

Basic Definitions (2)

b. Conflict Theory:

1. This group of sociologists sees society as being made-up of very large social groups (called *social classes*) who each have different experiences and interests. These classes are defined in terms of the different types of work that they do. Usually, three great classes are defined in this way:

    a. An *upper* or *ruling class* - this consists of people with great wealth who own factories, companies and so forth.

    b. A *middle class* - this consists of professional workers such as lawyers, doctors and accountants. These people do not own the businesses they work for and they achieve their position through the gaining of educational qualifications.

    c. A *working* or *lower class* - this consists of people who do not own businesses and have few, if any educational qualifications. This group are mainly *manual workers* in society.

2. From this perspective, people are seen to be encouraged, through the socialisation process, to be competitive. This is because everyone is trying to either get the most that they can out of life or they are trying to prevent others taking away the things they have. In this respect, Conflict sociologists emphasise *conflicts* in society (between *social classes*, between *men and women*, between different *ethnic groups*).

4. Although there are shared values in society, Conflict Theorists argue that this is because the very powerful (members of the *ruling class*) are able to impose their values on the rest of society (through institutions such as the media, religion and so forth).

5. Like the Functionalist perspective, Conflict Theorists argue that society is a *force* that pressurises the individual to do things - like go to work, attend school, compete with and try to exploit others.

c. Interactionism:

1. This group of sociologists see the social world in a different way to sociologists in the first two groups. They tend to focus on the individual, rather than "society", looking in particular at the way we create the social world through our behaviour (rather than looking at how society creates the individual).

2. From this perspective, society is not a living thing, but a *fiction* we create to try to make our lives orderly and predictable. Society, therefore, cannot force us to do anything, since it is only real for as long as we care to pretend that it is real. This pretence is helped by the fact that we lock ourselves into various social relationships (roles that involve rules and routines).

3. Social life is much less predictable from this point of view and the focus on individual lives and relationships places the emphasis upon investigating the way people live their daily lives as individuals and as part of wider social groups. The focus on what is called "*small-scale social interaction*" can be seen by comparing the way the different perspectives would look at the education system in our society.

Basic Definitions (2)

- **Functionalist** sociologists would be interested in the **functions** of education as a **sub-system** in society. It would ask questions like "How does education benefit society as a whole?".

- **Conflict** sociologists would also study the education system as a whole, but the kind of questions they would ask would be a little different. They would want to know things like "How is the education system biased towards the interests of a ruling class" and "How does a ruling class use the education system to socialise people into accepting their position in life?".

- **Interactionists**, on the other hand, would be much more interested in what goes on in the classroom at an individual level; the forms of **interaction** between teacher and pupil, teacher and teacher, pupil and pupil. The kinds of questions they would ask might be things like "How do people cope with and make sense of life in a classroom?" and "How do teachers and pupils recognise and cope with deviant behaviour?".

4. Finally, therefore, like all ways of seeing the social world that are based upon our values, it should be evident that the kind of values you bring into your study of Sociology and the social world will affect both the way you see that world and, most importantly, the way that you think it is right to study that world.

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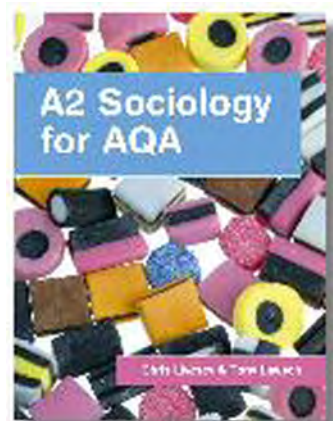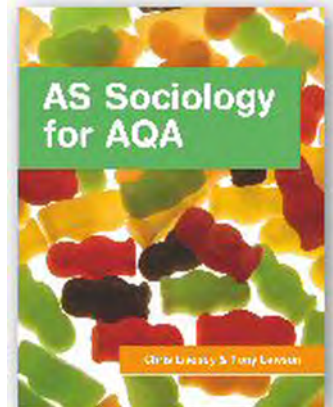- ✓ Crime and Deviance
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