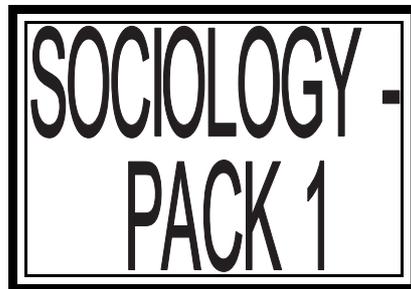


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By Harry Jivenmukta

WHAT IS SOCIOLOGY?

1

There are several very similar definitions of Sociology including:

- ⌘ The scientific study of human social life
- ⌘ The scientific study of human relationships and their consequences
- ⌘ The study of human society and social behaviour
- ⌘ The description and explanation of social structures, social behaviour, and social interaction

The key thing to remember is that the study has to be scientific if it is to have any value. Scientific, in this sense, means that the study has to be logical and objective, and any surveys have to follow given rules and procedures. There is no room for emotion or prejudice.

Human social life, or human society, means all the elements of relationships which people have with each other, from the smallest, (micro), to the largest interactions, (macro). A local Pool team is a social group and so is the Catholic Church.

Social structure means any formation of people into groups.

Social behaviour means any type of conduct or relationships which happen between people.

Social interaction means any exchange between people. This can be verbal, physical, emotional, etc., and can involve small numbers of people or large groups.

Sociologists are interested in looking at human society from the point of view of the social aspects of life, leaving other aspects to people in other areas of skill. A sociologist would view a football crowd from the point of view of the group dynamics, (how the group is formed, what its driving force is, and how it moves and responds), not the football match.

EXERCISE

1. Write your own definition of what you understand Sociology to be.
2. Write a paragraph each on the meaning of the following, giving examples to illustrate them:
 - Social structure
 - Social behaviour
 - Social interaction
3. What does 'scientific' mean in Sociology? Why is it important to be scientific in our study of people and society?

WHAT IS SOCIOLOGY?

2

There are three people who are generally accepted as being the earliest sociologists; Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx, all who worked in the 19th and/or early 20th centuries. They each had a different view of what sociology was and how it should be studied.

Emile Durkheim.

Durkheim believed that Sociology was a separate science from other subjects and should concern itself with the scientific study of social facts. He believed that there are certain facts which exist separate from individual people but which have an influence on people. For example, the position of a police officer is understood by everyone without having to point to one particular police officer. The idea and role of the police officer is understood and when someone becomes one, they begin to act in the way a police officer is expected to act. Durkheim's concern was to study such social facts.

Max Weber.

Weber was concerned with studying Sociology from the point of view of social actions. Weber wanted Sociology to be a study in trying to scientifically explain how people relate to one another and for this it is necessary to study the individual rather than the society, (as Durkheim believed). He wanted to study why individuals act, and how they act, and build up a scientific understanding of the relationship of the individual to society.

Karl Marx.

Marx believed that everything that happens in society is as a result of economic relationships between people. He believed that society could be divided into those people who owned the means of production, and the workers. Society changes from time to time when the workers find their conditions to be unacceptable and they overthrow the owning classes. Marx saw society as being in a constant flux and state of change and the role of the sociologist was to try both to understand but also change things for the better, (i.e. make things more equal).

EXERCISE

1. Find out more about the lives and theories of Durkheim, Weber, and Marx.
2. Find out about three other leading figures in Sociology and write a paragraph on each of them, highlighting their main beliefs.
3. Is Sociology a separate 'science'? Can it be seen as simply part of other subjects like Economics, Politics, or Anthropology?

Culture includes all capabilities and habits acquired by people as members of society.

Culture consists of:

| | |
|--------------|--------------|
| LANGUAGE | TOOLS |
| IDEAS | TECHNIQUES |
| BELIEFS | WORKS OF ART |
| CUSTOMS | RITUALS |
| CODES | CEREMONIES |
| INSTITUTIONS | ETC. |

The development of culture depends upon human capacity to learn and to transmit knowledge to succeeding generations. Every human society has its own particular culture, (or cultural system), which overlaps sometimes with other systems. Variation among cultural systems can be linked to physical habitats and available resources; to the range of possibilities available in various areas of activity, such as language, rituals and customs, and the manufacture and use of tools; and to the degree of social development. The attitudes, values, ideals, and beliefs of the individual are greatly influenced by the culture in which he or she lives, and an individual may, of course, live in or travel among several different cultures.

Culture can be viewed in terms of component patterns (cultural traits, cultural areas, and cultural types) and in terms of institutional structure and functions (social organization, economic systems, education, religion and belief, and custom and law). Culture may also be subdivided for study into non urban culture as compared with modern urban culture and into peasant or tribal societies as distinct from modern industrial society.

EXERCISE

1. Write a short definition of culture, as you understand it.
2. Why are cultural values important to communities?
3. Identify aspects of culture you have experienced. Use the list at the top of the page to help you.
4. How does the culture of a community or nation change? Which aspects of a culture remain largely unchanged, and which are very changeable?
5. Imagine you are part of another culture. Write about how it compares to your own.

I don't believe that there is such a thing as British culture any more. For that matter, I don't believe that any country has its own distinct culture any more. Let's look at what British culture includes:

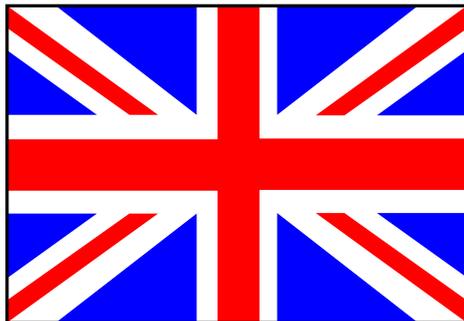
The Queen, House of Lords and Parliament. These days no one has any respect for our national institutions. In fact a newspaper poll in 1997, for the first time had over 50% of respondents in favour of abolishing the monarchy and the House of Lords.

The BBC. With all this Satellite and Cable rubbish people are watching cheap American programmes, cartoons, and documentaries which undermine good quality taste and morals.

Roast beef, and fish and chips. There still are lots of fish and chip shops but the country is flooded with Indian and Chinese takeaways, Kebab houses, Pizza shops and all manner of food which is not traditionally British.

The English language. Where has the great English language gone? You can't even watch the news without the presenter slipping in a slang word or an American version of a perfectly good English word. "Yo, man... howzit goin'... you're the man... cool...". Some people even say that there is more than one English language. Computer software asks you to say whether you want to type in UK English or American English.

I am not sure whether the change is inevitable or good. There are some things which stand the test of time and should be kept. It should not be the case that everything should change just because it has lasted for so long. There are questions of why the change is happening. Is it because of the pace of modern life, or because people no longer see the need for one national culture?



EXERCISE

1. Define British culture.
2. How has the British way of life changed in the last twenty or so years?
3. In the 'global market' which we have today, is it possible for individual countries to maintain their separate cultures? Is it desirable to keep individual cultures or is a merging of cultures more desirable? Why?
4. Write about what you think the culture of the UK will be like in twenty years time. Which aspects of today's culture will still be intact?

TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES

5

There still are some women, like me, who want to stay at home and bring up the children. You see, it's a question of responsibility. If a woman has a child I think she has a responsibility to the child to give it a good, loving upbringing. It is essential that every child has a good understanding of what is good and bad, right and wrong. The mother has traditionally been the person to give guidance to the child.

The husband should go out to work and fulfil his responsibility to bring home a wage so that the family can be balanced. You see, when both the husband and wife go out to work, it doesn't only mean that the child might not get a proper upbringing, but it also confuses the roles which the husband and wife have. In the past it was very clear about who should do what in the family. If the woman goes out to work, and the man, then it is unclear as to who should do the housework. I know a lot of women who now do two jobs. First, they go out and earn a wage. Second, they still do all the housework when they get home. Where's the equality in that?

People talk about the 'new man' but in reality I don't think he exists. In a recent survey I read in the newspaper, it said that the new man was nowhere to be found. The survey said that working women still did 80% of the housework. It also said that the man in the family where two partners work made 75% of the big purchase decisions. So, that means that the man mainly decides where the wife's money is spent.

It is absolutely clear to me that there is more freedom and equality for women who stay at home and look after the children because they know what their role is, they can give their children a better moral upbringing, and the man feels more fulfilled because he is discharging his traditional role as bread winner.

EXERCISE

1. What does 'gender' mean?
2. Write a paragraph each on what the traditional roles of men and women were in the UK about thirty years ago.
3. What are the traditional roles of men and women in other cultures? Select two different examples.
4. How are gender roles changing in the UK?

The media has three main images of women:

- ⌘ The out of date old fashioned stay at home and bring up the children type
- ⌘ The sexy bimbo, knows nothing and spends all her money on make up
- ⌘ The career woman who is sharply dressed, aggressive and ambitious

The problem with any 'image' is that it does not set out to portray the truth but to present a stereotype impression. The media is often seen as being shallow because it is difficult to get a good story without simplifying the situation:

Women set to take top jobs!

Girl power here to stay!

"Get out of my way!" The violent truth about career women.

Some feminists also see a political message behind the media impression of women. They think it is an attempt to put women down by emphasising the aggressive qualities of women who want a career, whilst exploiting the sexual and feminine attributes of 'real' women. The media often attribute male qualities of aggression, competition and drive to career women in an attempt to send a message which says that women are not suited to this type of life.

There is evidence, however, that women are suffering greater stress levels than ever before, smoking and drinking more, having more heart and stress related health problems. Also, American studies have shown that some women have a mid 30s crisis when they realise they may not achieve their career goals, (only a few will ever reach the top be they women or men), and they begin to realise they have missed out on having children and a more stable home life.

Sometimes the media reports on these types of stories but people who are hostile to the media because of their generally stereotypical coverage do not know whether to believe them or not.

EXERCISE

1. What is the 'media'?
2. Define:
 - stereotype
 - media image
 - feminism
3. How does the media portray women who want to break out of traditional gender roles?
4. How much influence does the media have on the way people see themselves?

In many societies, mainly less developed countries, adolescence is narrowly equated with puberty and the cycle of physical changes ending with adulthood. Western societies understand adolescence in terms of a broader sense of development including;

- ⌘ Psychological
- ⌘ Social
- ⌘ Moral
- ⌘ Physical aspects of maturation

Adolescence is the period during which the individual experiences an upsurge of sexual feelings following the less active period of childhood. During this time the individual learns to control and direct his or her sex urges. Another matter that sometimes arises in adolescence is that of emotional and possibly physical separation from parents as a necessary step in the establishment of personal values. This new responsibility and understanding makes it necessary for teenagers to make changes which sometimes upset the family or social culture. Teenagers traditionally have had no defined role of their own in society but are caught in between childhood and adulthood. In many countries today there are many indicators that a sub-culture or even a separate culture for teenagers exists. Examples of this include:

- ⌘ Teenage magazines and books
- ⌘ Teenage specific music trends
- ⌘ Other products which are specifically targeted at teenagers
- ⌘ Language and slang words which are used mainly by teenagers

Some specialists consider adolescence to be an intense and often stressful period of development that is characterized by a variety of special types of behaviour. Others find that the difficulties of adolescence have been exaggerated and that for many adolescents the process of maturation is usually peaceful and untroubled.

EXERCISE

1. What does 'adolescence' mean? Is it different from 'teenage'?
2. Can all adolescent behaviour be explained by physical and emotional changes caused by puberty?
3. What does a teenage sub-culture mean?
4. Is there such a thing as a teenage sub-culture? Give examples for and against.

THE FAMILY - TYPES

Families are one of the most important aspects of human society. They play a central part in the social organization of peoples throughout the world. Both the organization of the family unit and the structure of kinship, (the state of being related or interrelated, the relation connecting or binding participants in a relationship), vary from society to society and through time. Sociological studies tend to concentrate on the form and organization of the modern family and on the social problems that surround family life.

The nuclear family is the basic unit of family organization in the UK and most industrialised countries. It is generally defined as a married couple and their children living in a house or flat separate from other members of the family.

A common variant of the nuclear family is the one-parent family. This consists of one parent and his or her children. One-parent families may be formed through widowhood, divorce, or separation. They may also be formed when an unmarried person, usually a woman, raises children on her own. In many Western industrialized societies, the one-parent (especially the single-mother) family is becoming more common.

The extended family is a common form of family organization, typical in parts of Asia and Africa. In this type, the parents and a group of sons and their wives and children all live together in the same household. In India the extended family may have property held in common by male members and this economic factor also helps to keep them together.

As traditional forms of families disperse and government agencies take over economic responsibilities formerly held by them, families become kin networks. This has happened in most modern societies. Kin networks for many people stretch around the world.

EXERCISE

1. Why is the family an important aspect of society and social relations?
2. Write a paragraph each on the features of the following family types:
 - nuclear family
 - one-parent family
 - extended family
3. What does 'kinship' mean?
4. How has the responsibility of the State increased as the effectiveness of family structures have decreased in recent years?

THE FAMILY - SIX ASPECTS

9

Many people find it difficult to define the word family because it means different things to different people. One way to understand what the family is all about is to look at it from six aspects. These are considered below:

The procreative aspect of family involves having children. Families are units in which the next generation is produced, or adopted, or where the children of both parents from previous relationships are brought up.

The socialization aspect of the family involves the family being a unit in which the children are given guidance and direction. This guidance is often directed by the parents, although in some societies other members of the family, (grandparents, female members, etc.) play a greater or lesser role.

The sexual aspect of the family means that within the agreed family unit sexual relations are socially acceptable. Sexual relations are often seen as unacceptable unless the people involved are part of an acceptable system or structure. This is usually the family.

The residential aspect relates to way families live together in units and are linked to other relatives. In some societies families live together in large units whilst in others they live in separate small units. They are, however, usually linked together and communicate effectively with one another.

The economic aspect relates to the way in which family members are tied together because of economic necessity. Family members support one another and the young, and in some societies children are expected to support elderly relatives later in life. In the UK today it is often the case that both parents contribute to the economic well being of the family.

The emotional aspect refers to the emotional, (usually supportive), bond between members of a family unit. The family may sometimes become negative and then this bond can break the family apart. The family is generally a useful centre for mutual support and help in emotional matters.

EXERCISE

1. Is it possible to re-arrange the list above in order of importance?
2. Are there some aspects of the family unit which are damaging? When and how might these occur?
3. Select a family type and write about how the six aspects relate to it. Select from:
 - Nuclear family
 - One-parent family
 - Extended family

These days, it is vital for mothers to go out to work, for many reasons including:

- ⌘ Earning enough money to be able to buy everything the child needs or expects*
- ⌘ Remaining independent and having their own financial independence*
- ⌘ Developing their lives through effective use of their abilities*
- ⌘ Living a free and interesting life*

I don't think that it makes much difference to the upbringing of the child if a mother decides to return to work after the birth. After all, there is childcare. If a child grows up being looked after by other people it will be better adjusted to live in society rather than if it had been brought up just by the mother alone.

If the mother works, she can have her own financial independence so that if the father left or was selfish, the mother would be able to provide for all the needs of the child from her own earnings.

It is also a matter of the expectations which people have in a developed and advanced country like this. Women no longer want to just play 'second fiddle' to the man in their life. Women want, and have the right, to live their lives in a more fulfilled way. Girls leave school and college with higher average grades than boys. Why shouldn't they use their abilities?

Some people say that if women want to pursue a career, or go out to work in any job, they should not have children. I think that in this day and age it is quite possible and even desirable to do both. It is the responsibility of the parents to find suitable child care, and then get on with their careers.

EXERCISE

1. Why is economic independence such an important priority for some women?
2. How is the upbringing and socialization of the child affected if it is brought up by people other than its parents? Does it matter who brings up the child?
3. What pressures do working mothers put on the structure of the family?
4. Is change in family structures inevitable and/or desirable?

The elderly now constitute the largest single client group using personal social services worldwide. In all advanced industrial societies the proportion of infirm elderly is on the increase, and, although they constitute only a small minority of the retired population, their claim on social services is disproportionately heavy. Services include:

- ⌘ transportation to hospital or treatment centres
- ⌘ visiting by volunteers, or specialists
- ⌘ home delivery of hot meals
- ⌘ nurse visits
- ⌘ reduced-cost or free medical supplies

The cost of an increasingly elderly population is made more serious by the smaller number of working adults caused by the reduction in childbirth in most developed countries. The ageing population has implications for the family structure, health provision, housing design, community and leisure facilities, etc.

Politically, elderly people are seen as the 'grey vote' and are canvassed by all political parties. In economic terms the elderly are targeted by specialist holiday companies, hotels, and leisure goods manufacturers.



EXERCISE

1. How serious are the implications of an ageing population in any society?
2. What effect does an ageing population have on:
 - the family
 - resources of a nation
 - national wealth?
3. To what extent do the elderly have their own culture and services?
4. As a social group how have the elderly developed as their number increases?

The media includes:

- ⌘ Newspapers, magazines and the printed word
- ⌘ Television and other visual media
- ⌘ Radio
- ⌘ Billboards, leaflets, and information packages

The media focuses the attention on certain personalities and issues, and many people then form opinions about these issues. Whatever is featured by the media at a particular moment is likely to be the subject that most people write or talk about. The mass media can also activate and reinforce attitudes.

The mass media play another extremely important role in letting individuals know what other people think and in giving leaders large audiences. In this way they make it possible for public opinion to include a large number of individuals and to spread over wider geographic areas.

Even when the mass media are thinly spread, as in developing countries or in nations where the media are strictly controlled, word of mouth can sometimes perform the same functions as the press and broadcasting, although on a more limited scale. In developing countries, it is common for those who are literate to read from newspapers to those who are not, or for large numbers of people to gather around the village radio. Word of mouth in the marketplace or neighbourhood then carries the information further. In countries where important news is suppressed by the government, a great deal of information is transmitted by rumour.



EXERCISE

1. Make a list of the types of media used in the UK.
2. How important is the media in:
 - Informing people
 - Contributing to the formation of opinion
 - Influencing the way society behaves and changes?
3. How do people communicate and relate to each other in societies where the media is thinly spread or absent?

MASS MEDIA - PROPAGANDA AND INFORMATION

17

Any individual or organisation with money and imagination can use a very wide range of signs, symbols, and media to convey his or her message.

They can employ elaborate social-scientific research facilities, unknown in the past, to conduct opinion surveys and psychological interviews in efforts to find out what people are thinking or their opinion on a particular issue.

The larger the media enterprise, the more important are such mass media as television and the press and also the organizational media, that is, pressure groups set up by people skilled in using many sorts of signs and media to convey messages to particular reactors. Vast systems can be established in the hope of reaching leaders and followers of all groups in a given area, such as a city, region, nation or coalition of nations, or the entire world.

The mass media can be effectively used to highlight many types of events. Many people argue that were it not for the media many events would be seen differently or would not be seen to be so important, or be less emotional, etc. The main concern of many people concerns the amount of power the media has in forming opinion and if this is good or bad for society. Recent mass media events in the UK included:

- ⌘ The 1997 General Election
- ⌘ The death of Princess Diana
- ⌘ The BSE (mad cow) scare
- ⌘ British relations with the European Union

EXERCISE

1. Define 'propaganda'.
2. What is the difference between information and propaganda?
3. What is the difference between 'media' and the 'mass media'?
4. Select a major news event and find examples of how the story was told by the various news and media sources.
5. Find an example of propaganda in the news recently. Write a paragraph on how the item was expressed in the media.

DEMOCRACY - AND OTHER DEFINITIONS

Democracy literally means rule by the people (from the Greek demos, “people,” and kratos, “rule”). The term has three basic senses in contemporary usage:

- ⌘ A form of government in which the right to make political decisions is exercised directly by the whole body of citizens, acting under procedures of majority rule, usually known as direct democracy
- ⌘ A form of government in which the citizens exercise the same right not in person but through representatives chosen by and responsible to them, known as representative democracy
- ⌘ A form of government, usually a representative democracy, in which the powers of the majority are exercised within a framework of constitutional restraints designed to guarantee all citizens the enjoyment of certain individual or collective rights, such as freedom of speech and religion, known as liberal, or constitutional, democracy

It is important to understand what certain words and terms mean in order to be able to apply them effectively. In recent years there has been a mushrooming of new terms and expressions and often the original meaning may be lost or distorted. In the example above we can see how the word Democracy has changed in its practical application. Originally democracy was literally a 'hands up and be counted' exercise. Compare that form of democracy to the democracy we have today.

EXERCISE

Below you will see a list of words which need to be defined and understood. Find out how their original meanings have changed, if at all.

| | | |
|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| CLASS | ATOMISTIC | LIBERAL |
| MIDDLE CLASS | MASSES | CONSERVATIVE |
| IDEOLOGY | COMMERCIALISM | SCIENTIST |
| INTELLECTUAL | PROLETARIAT | UTILITARIAN |
| RATIONALISM | COLLECTIVISM | BUREAUCRACY |
| HUMANITARIAN | EQUALITARIAN | CAPITALISM |