

Instructions: Read the following material and complete the questions/tasks. Answers may be completed on a computer and printed out or handwritten on paper.

Bring this work with you to your first Sociology lesson. There is a glossary of key terms at the end of this booklet to help you.

Part 1: What is Sociology?

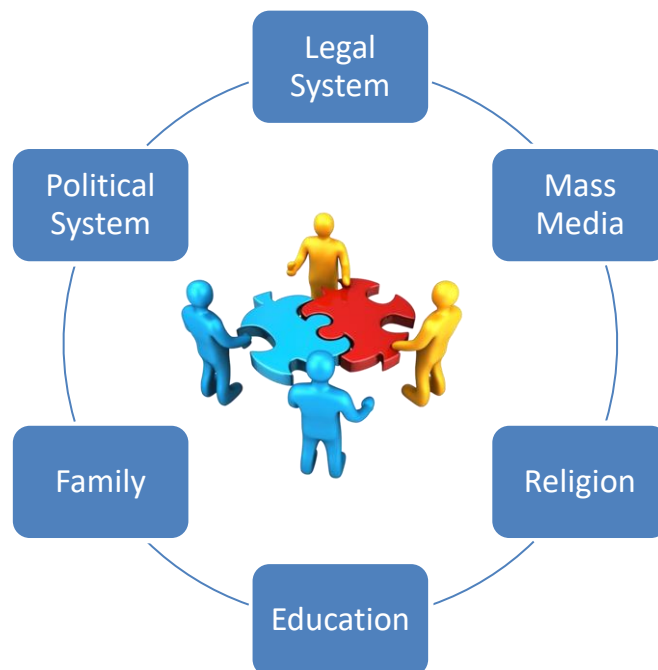
Many people coming to the subject of sociology for the first time have a vague idea that the subject is the study of people and society. This is a good start, as sociology looks at how influences from society shape and affect people and their behaviour, their experiences and how they interpret the world around them.



Sociology is the study of social institutions

Sociology is the study of human groups and social life in modern societies. Sociologists are interested in the various social institutions found in society and how they operate. For example, **the family** is an institution that exists in many forms and a version of the family is found in the majority of human societies. Many developed societies have **education systems**, which perform a number of functions such as providing children with skills for work. **Work and the economic system** are the way in which goods and services are produced and distributed. **The law** ensures social control and regulation of people’s behaviour and **politics** enables people’s views to be represented democratically. Many societies also follow a set of beliefs, which may include **religion**. Therefore, society is made up of many parts (or institutions) and they all contribute something to the operation of society.

The Parts of Society



Sociology is the study of social differences and inequalities

Sociologists are also interested in how society may be divided into social groups – or how they are **stratified**. For example, some sociologists would argue that **social class** is a significant form of stratification or inequality found in our society – wealth and incomes are distributed unevenly, which may result in some members of society having privileges and wealth, while others have low incomes and may live in poverty. For example, in the UK, the richest 10% of people own 44% of the nation's total wealth. The poorest half of the population share only 9% of the total wealth.

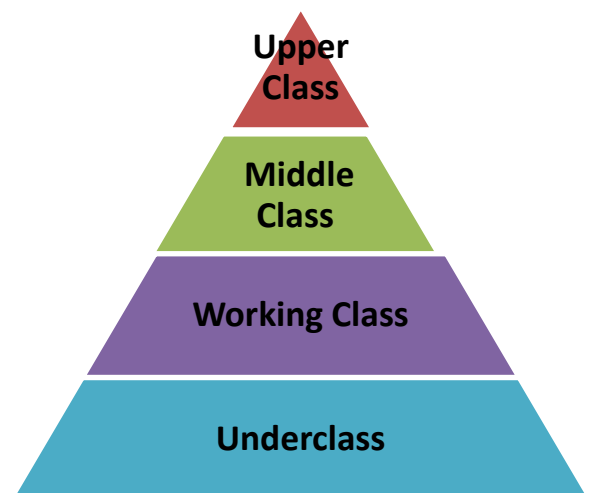
A person's income, occupation and ownership of wealth are related to other aspects of their lives such as how much power and influence they have, their level of education and their social status.

There is a lot of disagreement about how we should define different social classes, however we can usually separate them into these distinct groups:

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Upper class | A small class that refers to the main owners of society's wealth. This may include business owners, landowners and the aristocracy. |
| Middle class | A large class, and often refers to those in non-manual work. This includes people who don't carry out physical labour in their work, and may involve working in offices. At the top of the middle classes, highly paid and highly skilled occupations may feature, such as doctors and lawyers. At the bottom, there may be people carrying out routine office work who are paid much less. Some may argue that those in the low paid jobs should be included in the working class as their pay may be very similar. |
| Working class | A large class, including those who work in manual jobs which involve physical labour. This may include skilled work such as electricians or plumbers, or unskilled work such as working in packing in a factory. |
| Underclass | Some sociologists have identified this small class at the bottom, whose poverty may exclude them from full participation in society. This class may be characterised as having long term welfare benefit dependency and unemployment. |

Some people have suggested there are now more than the 4 main categories of social class shown in the table above, such as the 'working poor' and the 'lower middle class'. Sociologists study the relationship between social class and other factors, such as educational achievement and crime.

Sociologists are also interested in are **gender** and **ethnicity**. An individual's social class, gender and/or ethnicity can affect their life chances – whether or not they do well at school, whether they can get a good job or their chances of committing crime or being imprisoned. For example on average, women earn about 15% less than men. Unemployment is almost twice as high for ethnic minorities as for whites.

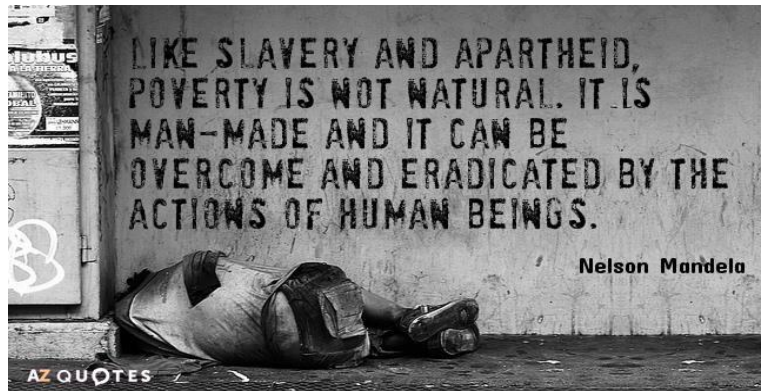


Sociology is the study of social problems and issues

As well as studying how society works, sociologists are interested in why societies sometimes don't work well, or why certain features of social life may be harmful. For example, **poverty** may be found in many societies, and this can lead to other forms of disadvantage. Many would argue that **crime** in society is harmful, especially to victims. **Family breakdown** and divorce may also occur which may lead to other social problems.

Sociologists often research these issues to uncover useful information which could be used by governments and policy makers to try to improve society.

So, sociology is the study of human society, social institutions, social differences, social problems and human behaviour....



TASK A: Introduction to Sociology

1. Identify two social institutions found in society.
2. Outline one function that education systems may perform in society.
3. Identify one characteristic of the upper class.
4. Identify two jobs that may be regarded as middle class.
5. Identify one key characteristic of the working class.
6. Welfare benefit dependency is regarded as a feature of the underclass. Briefly explain what this means (you may need to research this term online).
7. Identify one social problem that sociologists might be interested in studying. Explain your answer.

The Study of Human Behaviour: Nature or Nurture?

People disagree about whether our behaviour is something natural that we are born with (nature) or whether it is the result of our upbringing in society and our environment (nurture).

Biologists would examine how our behaviour is shaped by natural instincts. However sociologists question this and argue that much of our behaviour is learned. Instead of looking at biological reasons for our behaviour, sociologists look towards **culture and socialisation** instead.

Culture: Without human contact we are reduced to basic and instinctive behaviour. But when humans work together they create cultures that are complex and different. We become human through this interaction with others, creating our culture. If human behaviour were really directed by just our genes or instincts, we would expect to find people behaving in much the same way all over the world. But what is regarded as normal behaviour varies from one culture to another. If we lived in Victorian Britain or in modern China, we would follow different customs and have different lifestyles. So human behaviour is flexible and diverse. It varies according to the culture we live in.



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

There may be some cultural variation within one society. For example, in Britain there are many different groups that may have their own subcultures that vary from the mainstream. Cultures may also change over time. Attitudes to different behaviours may change, such as attitudes to smoking or sex before marriage.

Values: are things we regard as important, the most significant standards or principles in our lives. The value of human life is an obvious example. Other examples are religious convictions and political loyalties. In everyday life, most people subscribe to the values of honesty, consideration towards others, justice and fairness.



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 join the back of a queue. There are different rules for different situations and contexts – 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 provide irritation in others.

Socialisation

The process of learning our culture is called socialisation. When living in a human society, we learn our social norms and values from being children. Many of the social institutions described earlier in this resource – family, education – are involved in the process of socialisation. One of the key functions of the family, according to some sociologists, is to socialise children into the norms and values of society. Sociologists make the distinction between:

- Primary socialisation: this takes place in the family, where we are taught by our parents. These are often the norms that are expected of us within our family.
- Secondary socialisation: this takes place later, in education, the workplace or by the media. These are norms which are from the wider society and the adult world.

Social Control

The methods society uses to ensure people comply with the rules and regulations are known as social control. Social control may involve punishments or rewards to help reinforce what acceptable norms of behaviour are within society. Social control can also take place in an informal way, such as through peers, neighbours and our families.



TASK B: Culture and Socialisation

1. Briefly explain how sociologists define culture.
2. Give one example of how culture can vary within a society.
3. Using examples explain the difference between high culture and popular culture
4. Briefly explain the difference between primary and secondary socialisation.
5. Give one example of formal social control.
6. Briefly explain the process of informal social control.
7. Using examples explain how a person learns the norms and values of society.

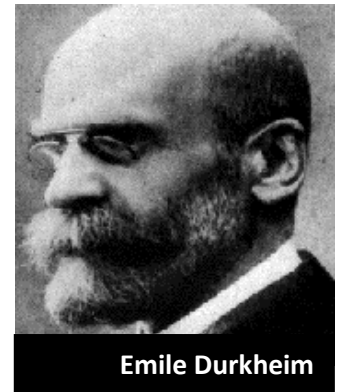
Part 2: An Introduction to Sociological Perspectives



A perspective is a way of looking at something, or an opinion about something. A sociological perspective is a way of looking at society. There are many different perspectives in sociology as there are many different viewpoints from which sociologists study society.

Functionalism

The theory of functionalism is associated with the French sociologists, Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) and the American sociologist Talcott Parsons (1902-79). This theory is sometimes known as a “consensus theory” as it believes that society is based on agreement amongst its members about basic norms and values (culture). The theory tries to explain what makes societies ordered and stable.



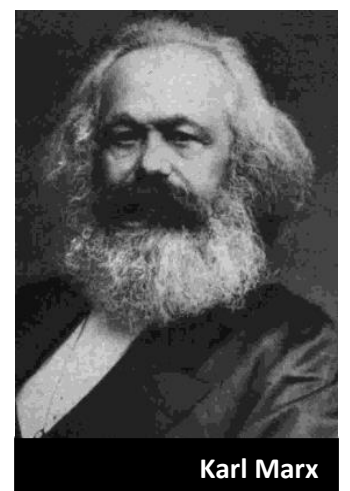
The functionalist sociologists believed that societies are made up of inter-related parts that are essential for the smooth running of society. They say that society is similar to a biological organism such as the human body. As the human body is made up of parts – cells, organs etc - that fit together and depend on each other, society is also a system of interdependent parts. This idea is known as the “organic analogy”. For example, the family is a part of society that reproduces the next generation and socialises them into the norms and values. The education system is a part of society that socialises children and teaches them skills and knowledge they will need for the workplace.

Marxism

Another key sociological theory, Marxism, comes from the writings of Karl Marx (1818-1883). Marx was an economist and philosopher who was critical of the economic system of capitalism which had developed in Western societies around that time. He felt that this system benefited the few at the expense of the many.

He argued that society was made up of two main social groups:

- A ruling (capitalist) class – this small group own the means of production. This means they own the things that are needed to produce goods to be sold e.g. land, raw materials, factories.
- A subject class – workers who sell their labour to the ruling class in exchange for wages.



There is a basic conflict of interests between the ruling class and the subject class, according to Marx. Workers produce wealth in the form of goods yet a large part of that wealth is taken in the form of profits by the ruling class. Thus one group gains at the expense of another.

Marx believed therefore that modern capitalist societies were based on **conflict**, rather than **consensus** like the functionalists. Marx thought that the workers would eventually realise the extent of the inequality and exploitation, and would rise up and overthrow the capitalist system, resulting in a fairer and more equal society.



Feminism

Feminism is also known as a conflict theory. Whereas Marxism focuses on the conflict between social classes, Feminism looks at the conflict between the sexes.

Feminists argue that society is divided along gender lines, and that men have more dominance and power than women. They are critical of the traditional role of women in the family and believe that women have fewer opportunities in the workplace.

Patriarchy is a term often used by feminists to describe this process. It simply means **male dominance**. Feminists believe society is patriarchal. They argue that male dominance is present in people's working and family lives, and is reflected in social norms and values, roles and institutions.



"...her wings are cut and then she is blamed for not knowing how to fly".
Simone de Beauvoir

TASK C: Sociological Theories

1. Why is functionalism known as a "consensus theory"?
2. Briefly explain the functionalist idea of the "organic analogy"
3. Briefly describe the two social groups that Marx said society was made up of.
4. Feminism is regarded as a conflict theory, like Marxism. What is the main difference between Feminism and Marxism?
5. Using examples explain the meaning of the term patriarchy.

Part 3: An Introduction to Sociological Research Methods

Although many of the sociologists and theorists we have looked at so far are from a long time ago, sociologists continue to study society in the present day. They are often based in universities all over the world, carrying out research into a range of social problems and social change and publishing their findings in articles and books.



When sociologists carry out their research, they have a range of methods to choose from. These can be seen in the table below:

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Primary methods | These are methods that sociologists use where they are gathering data first-hand themselves. |
| Questionnaires | These can be given out on paper, or sent via email or on the internet. They contain questions that respondents answer. |
| Interviews | <i>Structured interviews</i> - where the researcher designs a set of fixed response questions, and asks them verbally. <i>Unstructured interviews</i> – more like an informal conversation, where the researcher may have a broad list of topics to cover, but no pre-set questions. The researcher will encourage the respondent to speak at length about their experiences. <i>Group interviews</i> – researchers may decide to interview small groups of respondents together. |
| Observation | This is where sociologists observe the behaviour of a group in their natural setting and everyday lives. <i>Participant observation</i> – is where the sociologist joins in the activities of a group. <i>Non-participant observation</i> – is where the researcher observes behaviour without participating in the activities of the group. Observation can be done <i>overtly</i> (where the researcher tells the group they are studying who they are and what the research is about) or <i>covertly</i> (where the researcher hides their real identity from the group). |
| Experiments | This method involves observation but is different. In experiments, researchers manipulate the environment they are studying in some way and then measure the impact on the participants' behaviour. |
| Secondary methods | These involve the researcher using data that has already been produced or collected elsewhere. |
| Official statistics | These are collected and published by governments. Examples include crime statistics, birth rates and educational achievement. |

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Documents | Personal – such as diaries, letters or emails. Public – such as government reports, the media or published documents |
|------------------|---|

Examples of Sociological Research

Read the information about the following studies and follow the links for further material.

TASK D: Sociological Research

Choose at least **three** of the sociological studies on the following pages and produce a table with the following headings:

1. Author and Title of Study.
2. What the study is about.
3. What are some of the findings?
4. What method/s did the researcher use?
5. Can you identify any problems with the way the research was carried out?

Additional work (strongly recommended) - Include in your table all 7 of the sociological studies.

1. Sudhir Venkatesh “Gang Leader for a Day” 2008

Venkatesh spent six years studying a criminal gang in Chicago. He used the method of participant observation, spending time with the gang members and observing their activities. He spent time with the gang's families and wrote about their lives, publishing a book about gang life.

More information can be found here....

[Short YouTube clip outlining the study](#)

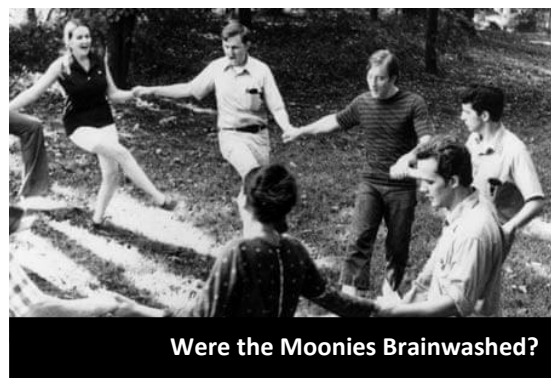
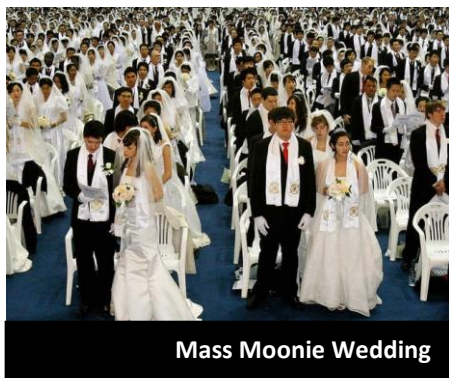
[Independent News – Book Review](#)

[Wikipedia Page](#)



2. Eileen Barker “Making of a Moonie” 1984

A study of the religious cult “The Moonies”. Barker was interested in how people came to join this cult and what their lives were like. She carried out participant observation, but also used unstructured interviews and questionnaires. She was given permission to interview and spend time with the members of the religious organisation, and so did not have to take an undercover role. She joined in with prayer meetings and spent social time with the individual Moonies.



More information can be found here....

[Youtube Clip about Moonie Mass Weddings](#)

[An article in the Guardian newspaper about the Moonies, written by Eileen Barker \(PDF Version\)](#)

[Wikipedia: Brief overview of the study](#)

3. Crime Survey for England and Wales

The first Crime Survey for England and Wales was carried out in 1982, collecting information about people’s experiences of crime in 1981. It is a victimisation survey and measures the amount of crime in England and Wales by asking people about crimes they have experienced in the previous year. It is also an important source of information about other topics, such as attitudes towards the criminal justice system and perceptions of anti-social behaviour. The Survey is carried out by the government every year.

More information can be found here....

[An overview of the Crime Survey](#)

[Some detail on the findings of the most recent survey](#)

4. Paul Willis “Learning to Labour – How working class kids get working class jobs” 1977

Paul Willis was a sociologist who studied working class boys and their experience of education. He used the method of participant observation, alongside interviewing the boys about how they felt about and experienced school and what they expected from their futures. Willis found that these boys prioritised “having a laff” at school rather than their schoolwork and were negatively viewed by their teachers as a consequence. Willis also argued that the school system is set up so that some pupils fail, as the economy needs workers to do low paid and low skilled work.



More information can be found here....

[Revise Sociology: Overview of the study](#)

[Willis's Wikipedia page.](#)

[More info on the study](#)

5. Rosenthal and Jacobson “Pygmalion in the Classroom” 1968



In this research project, Rosenthal and Jacobson visited a San Francisco primary school; they claimed to have developed a new IQ test which could predict which children were likely to become “high attainers” in the very near future.

Teachers were told by the researchers that about 20% of a particular age group would come into this category of “very able children” In fact, the names of the high achievers had been selected at random.

Over a period of 18 months, the researchers visited the school regularly and found that the “named” children had, in fact, improved significantly in their school work – more than could be explained purely by chance. Rosenthal and Jacobson explained this dramatic improvement in performance in terms of increase or raised teacher expectations of the children in question.

So this experiment identified a central cause of pupil achievement is teacher expectations of them.

The method used in this study is an experiment. This involves the researchers manipulating the environment in some way and then measuring the effect. In this case, the manipulation was the inaccurate information given to teachers about pupil ability. This study features in the subject of psychology, as well as sociology.

More information can be found here....

[Wikipedia page on The Pygmalion Effect \(includes a discussion of Rosenthal & Jacobson\)](#)

[Short Youtube video explaining the study](#)

6. Sue Sharpe – “Just like a girl” 1976/1994

Sue Sharpe compared the attitudes of working-class girls in London schools in the early 1970's and 1990's, using unstructured interviews. She found that the 1990's girls were more confident, more assertive, more ambitious and more committed to gender equality. Sharpe found that the main priorities of the 1970's girls were 'love, marriage, husbands and children'.

By the 1990's this had changed to 'job, career and being able to support themselves' with education being the main route to a good job. In 1994, Sue Sharpe found that girls were increasingly wary of marriage. They had seen adult relationships break up around them, and had seen women coping alone, in a 'man's world'. Girls were more concerned with standing on their own two feet and were more likely to see education as a means to financial independence.



More information can be found here....

[Sue Sharpe: Revise Sociology](#)

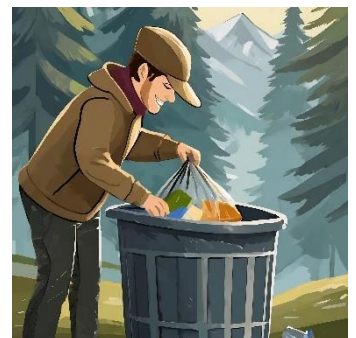
[Feminist Views on the Role of Education](#)

7. Jeff Ferrell: Empire of the Scrounge (2006)

In Empire of Scrounge, Jeff Ferrell describes how he spent eight months living in Fort Worth, Texas, making a living by collecting and selling articles he found in the 'rubbish' that people left outside their houses to be collected. Ferrell entered a subculture of people who permanently lived off this work, who he describes as 'dumpster divers' or 'trash pickers'.

What were the main findings?

The research demonstrated the extent of inequality in the USA, with people desperate to live off the discarded objects of others. It also demonstrated the development of a 'dumpster diver' subculture where there were, for instance, unwritten rules of etiquette concerning who had the right to collect articles from certain places and who had priority over others when two people



were exploring the same batch of discarded 'rubbish'.

More information can be found here... [Overview of book](#)

Additional Reading (not tested in the Initial Assessment)

Sociology is a contemporary subject. This means that we use real up to date examples, like events we read about in the media. Here are some examples of articles about some of the topics we study. Have a go at reading them. What did you learn?

1. [Parents more important than school factors in how well primary-aged children do in maths](#)

Parents' academic ability and their relationship with their child are stronger indicators of success with maths than a child's feelings towards their school or teachers

2. [Oxbridge 'over-recruits from eight schools' BBC](#)



Oxford and Cambridge are being accused of being so socially exclusive that they recruit more students from eight top schools than almost 3,000 other English state schools put together.

3. [The "Mental Load" The gender wars of household chores](#) - The French comic artist Emma illustrates the concept of the 'mental load'. When a man expects his partner to ask him to do things, he is viewing her as the manager of their household.

4. [Women do more multitasking at home while men do solo chores](#)

5. [Meet the Teens who refuse to use Social Media](#)

Generation Z has grown up online – so why are a surprising number suddenly turning their backs on Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat?

6. [How the social sciences can be useful in a post-covid society](#)

7. [BBC teen survey: Social media ban and knife crime fears](#)

8. [The Conversation has lots of good articles related to sociology](#)

Key concepts glossary

Capitalism: an economic and political system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by the state.

Class conflict: The conflict that arises between different social classes. It is generally used to describe the conflict between the bourgeoisie and proletariat in Marxist views of society

Communism: An equal society, without social classes or class conflict, in which the means of production are the common property of all.

Culture: the things that are learnt and shared by a society or group of people, passed on through generations. It includes shared norms, values, knowledge, beliefs and skills.

Conflict: disagreement

Consensus: agreement

Ethnicity: a person's heritage, culture and identity, often including the same language, religion and geographical region.

Exploitation: Paying workers less than the value of their labour. According to Marxists, it is the process whereby the bourgeoisie extract surplus value or profit from the labour of the proletariat. Feminists see men as exploiting the domestic labour of women. See also Marxism; feminism.

Feminism: a sociological perspective and political movement that focuses on women's oppression and the struggle to end it and gain equality.

Function: the contribution that a part of society makes to the stability of society as a whole. For example, the education system produces a skilled and intelligent workforce and socialises people into the norms and values of society.

Functionalism: a consensus perspective in sociology that see society as based on shared norms and values acquired through socialisation. Functionalists see society as like an organism, with each individual part of society performing functions to benefit society as a whole.

Gender: the social and cultural characteristics of men and women. These differ from sex differences, which are biological. Gender differences in behaviour differ between cultures and are learned through gender role socialisation.

High culture: Cultural products (see **culture**), mainly media based, seen as of lasting artistic or literary value, aimed at small, intellectual, predominantly upper-class and middle-class audiences.

Identity: a person's sense of self, influenced by the socialisation process and interactions with others.

Ideology: a set of beliefs.

Marxism: a conflict theory based on the ideas of Karl Marx. It sees society as divided into two classes, the bourgeoisie (ruling class) and the proletariat (working class). Marx argued the bourgeoisie exploit the proletariat and one day the proletariat would rise up in the form of a revolution.

Mass culture (popular or low culture): Cultural products (see **culture**), mainly media based, produced as entertainment for sale to the mass of ordinary people. These involve mass-produced, standardized, short-lived products of no lasting value, which are seen to demand little critical thought, analysis or discussion.

Norms: Social rules, expectations or standards that govern the behaviour expected in particular situations. (For example, joining the back of a queue rather than pushing to the front)

Patriarchy: Feminists use this term to describe a male dominated society.

Racism: a system of beliefs that defines people as superior or inferior, and justifies their unequal treatment, on the basis of biological differences such as skin colour.

Role: How someone who occupies a particular status is expected to act.

Sexuality: a person's sexual preference e.g. heterosexual, homosexual

Socialisation: the process by which an individual learns the culture of society. The process begins within the family and is built on by education and other agencies such as religion

and the media.

Stratification: the division of society into a hierarchy of unequal groups. The stratification may be based on differences such as age, gender, social class etc.

Subculture: a group of people in society who share the same norms, values and attitudes and beliefs which in some way differ from the norms, values and attitudes of the majority. E.g Punks.

Underclass: those at the lowest level of the class structure. Including high rates of lone parents, unemployed people and criminals.

Values: ideas or beliefs about general principles or goals. Things which we deem to be important e.g. the value of 'honesty', 'fairness', 'equality' etc.