

Introductory Unit

Topic 1 – Basic Terms in Sociology

Name:



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

What Sociology is

Culture, Norms & Values

Culture:

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

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



Socialisation:

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

Activity 2: Discuss in groups how we learn this and who from. Jot some ideas down:

Norms:

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

Activity 3: What norms apply when using the tube?

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

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

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

Values:

A value is a belief that something is good and desirable, important and worthwhile. Every society has its own value system, and these values are the general beliefs which underpin our (more specific) norms, e.g. we value human life, so we have norms that say taking a life is wrong (murder etc).

Activity 4: What other values do we have in our society?



Status:

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

Activity 5: Give an example of a) an ascribed status and b) an achieved status:

Roles:

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

Activity 6: List the various roles you play:

What Happens Without Primary Socialisation? 'Feral' Children.

Isabel Quaresma, the Chicken Girl of Portugal



Confined to a hen coop

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

Isabel Quaresma: rescued but returned

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

Unable to speak

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

Isabel makes very little progress

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



Summer Homework

Research feral children on the internet and make detailed notes on two cases that were not mentioned in the lesson. You may use the following website to help you.

<http://listverse.com/2008/03/07/10-modern-cases-of-feral-children/>

Gender Socialisation

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

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

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

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

1. Parents' attitudes/treatment/nicknames

2. Toys

3. Books/comics

4. TV/Media (adverts, images etc)

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



How Adults Influence Play

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

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

