

Transition work part 3

Nature vs Nurture – The Big Debate

There are many ways of explaining why certain people do things in certain ways. For example, biologists think that people behave as they do because they are controlled by nature. This is known as **Nature theory**. Humans are compared to animals and seen to act on **instinct**.

Sociologists believe that people behave as they do because they are taught how to behave. For example, the sociologist Michael Haralambos states, 'Human beings learn their behavior and use their intelligence whereas animals simply act on instinct.' This is known as **Nurture theory**. Nurture means the way you are brought up. It is also a reference to **socialization**, the lifelong process by which we learn our culture, values, norms and how to behave.



Task 1

Write down a list of things that you were taught by other people about how to behave eg. how to speak etc.

Sociologists reject nature theories for two particular reasons. If people behaved as they do because of nature, they would all act the same as each other. The following reasons show why people do not all act the same:

1. **History:** people acted differently in the past from the way that they do today. They had different ideas and different beliefs.
2. **Anthropology:** this is the study of different human societies. Wherever you go in the world, people act differently from the way they do in Britain.



Social behaviour and culture

Sociology is the study of human groups and social life in modern societies. Sociology recognises that as members of society we have to learn social behaviour and this is done through a variety of social institutions and social groups right throughout our lives.



It should have become clear that humans, more than most other animals, are dependent upon other humans for the most basic needs such as food and shelter.

We do not arrive in this world equipped with a collection of instincts inherited from our parents that will enable us to survive in a potentially hostile environment.

What is Culture?

Virtually all the things that we do have to be learned from others, for example walking, speaking, knowing what to eat, defending ourselves etc. A desert island baby is unlikely to survive, therefore we need other people.

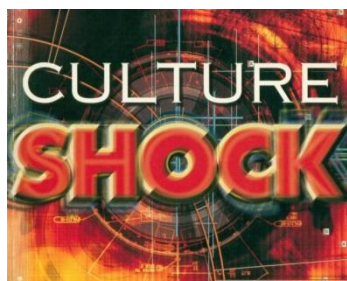
We have now established an important principle. Human behaviour is largely learned through a process called **socialisation**. Therefore what is termed as **culture**, which is our way of life, including the ways in which we behave relates to:

- the language we speak
- the clothes we wear
- the food we eat and whether we eat it with knives, forks and spoons
- the homes we live in
- to the things we believe about the origins of life
- what is good or bad
- or the ways in which we should be governed.

The above are all acquired from other people (this involves the process of **socialisation** into the **culture** of our society)

Task 2

Using the above list, describe the British culture.



It is through our membership of social groups that we acquire an understanding of the ways in which behaviour is patterned and organised and of the **values**, customs, **norms** and **roles** of our society. Sociologists refer to this as **culture** — the learned, shared behaviour of members of society. Culture is a social blueprint, a guide for living. It refers to all the aspects of human behaviour that are learnt rather than genetically transmitted. The following activity shows you the importance of culture.

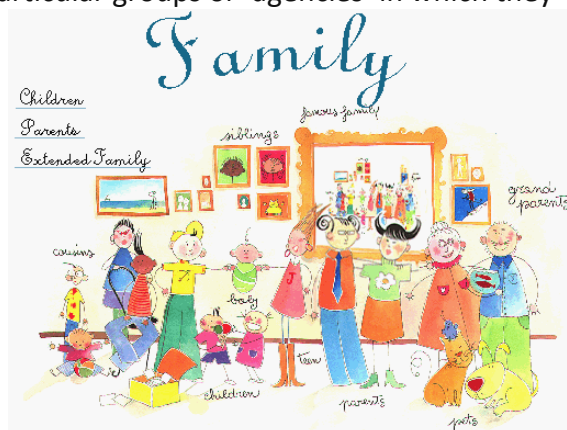
A **subculture** is a culture within a broader mainstream culture, with its own separate values, practices, and beliefs eg. Bikers, goths, skateboarders, scousers, yuppies, hippies etc.

Socialisation

Socialisation is the term that sociologists use to describe the life-long process of learning the culture of any society. Culture is socially transmitted from one generation to the next through the process of socialisation. The American sociologist Charles Cooley (1864–1929) distinguished two types of socialisation: **primary** and **secondary**. These two forms of socialisation are defined partly in terms of the particular groups or 'agencies' in which they occur:

Primary socialisation

The family is the main agency where an individual learns many of the basic lessons for life such as language, how to act as a boy or a girl, how to share and how to love.





Secondary socialisation

Associated with the later stages of identity formation, from later childhood and continuing through adulthood. The school is an important example of an agency of secondary socialisation, but all formal organisations, including religion and work, are influential.

Task 3

List 2 ways in which your family teach you something. Similarly, list two ways in which school teaches you something (**something other than subjects!**).

Socialisation is not only the process by which we learn the culture of our society; it is also a mechanism of **social control**.

This refers to methods used to persuade or force individuals to conform to those values, norms and patterns of behaviour which the culture of their society requires. Social control involves the use of rewards and punishments. Sociologists refer to these as sanctions. These may be either positive sanctions (rewards) or negative sanctions (various types of punishment):

Positive sanctions may range from gifts of sweets from parents to children, to merits and prizes at school, to promotion at work or to knighthoods and medals.





Negative sanctions may range from expressions of disapproval, physical punishment, being ridiculed or gossiped about, dismissal from work to being fined or imprisoned.

Task 4

List and briefly explain three positive and three negative sanctions which affect the way you behave in your daily life:

POSITIVE

1.

2.

3.

NEGATIVE

1.

2.

3.

Key Concepts in Socialisation and Culture

Norms

Norms are social rules which define correct and acceptable behaviour in a society or social group to which people are expected to conform. They are essential to human society. They guide and direct our behaviour and allow us both to understand and predict the behaviour of others.

Norms exist in all areas of social life. In Britain, being late for work or an appointment; jumping queues in supermarkets; laughing during funerals; walking through the streets naked or never saying hello to friends are likely to be seen as rude, annoying or odd because they are not following the norms of accepted behaviour.

Norms are usually enforced informally—by the disapproval of other people, embarrassment, or a ‘telling off’ from parents.

Task 5

Think of some norms for each of these situations.

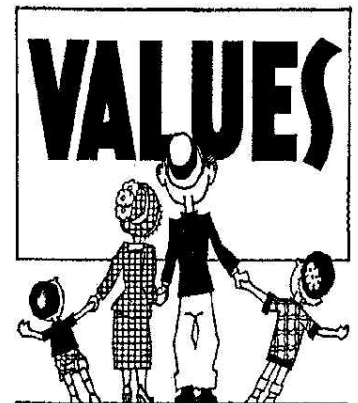
School:

Home:

Friend’s house:

Values

Values are less specific than norms. They are general guides for behaviour. Values are ideas and beliefs about what is ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ and about standards which are worth maintaining and achieving in any society. In Britain, values include beliefs about respect for human life, privacy and private property, about the importance of marriage and the importance of money and success.



There are official legal rules concerning values which are formally enforced by the police, courts and prison and involve legal punishment if they are broken. For example, laws against murder enforce the value attached to human life in our society.

Task 6

Think of **two values** that are really important to you as a person. You may have strong views about animals or children.