

COURSE

Sociology Fundamentals

A fundamentals course

10 Chapters

Philip Osztromok

Generated with Claude

SOCIOLOGY FUNDAMENTALS

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Sociology Fundamentals

Course 1 · Chapter 1 · What Sociology Is: Studying Society Itself

Why do people in one country marry later than people in another, or take their own lives at different rates, when each person's choice feels entirely private? Asking that kind of question is what led Émile Durkheim, according to Wikipedia's Social fact article, to argue that sociology should be the empirical study of ways of acting that exist outside any one person and press on that person from outside. Sociology looks at the patterns that appear when many individual lives are added together, and at the forces that shape those lives. This chapter sets out what the subject is, where its name came from, two ideas that every later chapter uses (the social fact and the sociological imagination), and how sociologists gather evidence.

What Sociology Is

Wikipedia's Sociology article opens by calling sociology "the scientific study of human society", and says its focus is social behaviour, relationships and interaction. It says that social researchers "draw upon a variety of qualitative and quantitative techniques", and that newer approaches include analytical, mathematical and computational methods, with agent-based modelling and social network analysis as examples. The word "scientific" matters here, and the idea behind it is discussed under "How Sociologists Work" below.

Not psychology

Psychology usually asks about the individual mind. Sociology asks about groups, institutions and the patterns across many people (this contrast is my own summary; check against a textbook).

Not politics

Sociology studies how a society works, whoever governs it. Politics is a part of what it can study, not the whole of it (my own summary; check).

Not common sense

The aim is to test ideas against evidence, not just to repeat what feels obvious (my own summary; check).

Where the Word Came From

The Sociology article's History section says: "The term sociology was first coined in 1780 by the French essayist Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès," in an unpublished manuscript. Wikipedia's Auguste Comte article adds that Comte introduced the term "sociologie" as a neologism in 1838, and notes that Sieyès had used the word earlier with a different meaning. That makes the two dates 58 years apart (1838 minus 1780, computed in Python). Before settling on the new word, the Comte article says, he had used the phrase "social physics", which Adolphe Quetelet later took for his own work.

Person	What the article says	Source page
Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès	First coined the term in 1780, in an unpublished manuscript	Sociology
Auguste Comte (1798–1857)	Introduced "sociologie" in 1838; formulated positivism, set out in *The Course in Positive Philosophy* (volumes from 1830 to 1842)	Auguste Comte
Émile Durkheim (1858–1917)	Published *The Rules of Sociological Method* in 1895; set up the first European department of sociology, at Bordeaux, in 1895	Émile Durkheim; Social fact

Comte's "law of three stages" is also described in his article: society and knowledge pass through "the Theological, or fictitious; the Metaphysical, or abstract; and the Scientific, or positive" stages. It is a historical claim that later thinkers have criticised; this chapter reports it only as one of the early attempts to treat society scientifically (the criticism is my own general knowledge; check).

> **Both men died aged 59**
>
> Comte (19 January 1798 to 5 September 1857) and Durkheim (15 April 1858 to 15 November 1917) each died at 59, according to their articles. Comte died in 1857 and Durkheim was born the following year, so they never overlapped as adults, and Durkheim's sociology came after the word and the ambition were already there. The age check is my arithmetic, done in Python from the years given.

Durkheim and the Social Fact

The Social fact article quotes Durkheim's definition: "A social fact is any way of acting, whether fixed or not, capable of exerting over the individual an external constraint". Elsewhere he described such facts as "manners of acting, thinking and feeling external to the individual" that are "invested with a coercive power". The article lists his examples: social institutions such as kinship and marriage, together with currency, language, religion and political organisation.

The word "coercive" is easy to misread. Nobody is claiming that a policeman stands behind every rule. A speaker of English who says "I goed to the shop" is corrected by listeners without any law being involved, and the language was there before the speaker was born (this is my own illustration of the idea, not an example from the article).

> **Suicide as a social fact**
>
> The Social fact article says Durkheim analysed suicide rates as a social fact, attributing the difference between Catholic and Protestant communities to social rather than individual causes. His article on Durkheim names the book, *Le Suicide* (1897), and says he argued that stronger social control among Roman Catholics produced lower suicide rates; it gives no specific rate figures, so none are quoted here. His 1897 book followed The Rules of Sociological Method by two years (1897 minus 1895).

The Sociological Imagination

Wikipedia's Sociological imagination article credits the American sociologist C. Wright Mills, in his book *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), and defines the term as "the awareness of the relationship between personal experience and the wider society." The article as I read it does not set out the common distinction between "personal troubles" and "public issues", so what follows is from general knowledge (check): Mills is usually taken to mean that when one person loses a job it is a personal trouble, but when millions are out of work it is a public issue that needs a social explanation.

The gap between 1895 and 1959 is 64 years (computed in Python), so the sociological imagination is an idea about habits of thought, not a method that began with the founders. It takes Durkheim's insight (society presses on the person) and turns it into a question anyone can

ask about their own life: which parts of my situation are mine alone, and which are shared with many people in the same position?

> **Avoid the "just individuals" trap**
>
> A sentence such as "unemployment exists because some people do not try hard enough" explains a social pattern purely with individual traits. The sociological imagination asks whether the pattern changes with the economy, the region or the age group, which a purely individual explanation would not predict (my own example; check).

How Sociologists Work

The Scientific method article describes the method as "an empirical method for acquiring knowledge through careful observation", and lists its typical elements: characterising the subject by observing, defining and measuring it; hypotheses; predictions; and experiments as "tests of all of the above." Sociology applies this spirit to people, but human society rarely lets researchers run controlled experiments, so the Sociology article's mention of both qualitative and quantitative techniques matters.

- **Quantitative** work counts and compares, for example survey answers or rates such as Durkheim's suicide rates.
- **Qualitative** work looks closely at meaning, for example interviews or watching a community (my gloss on the two terms; check).
- **Computational** work, per the Sociology article, includes agent-based modelling and social network analysis.

The Sociology article also names Durkheim, Marx and Max Weber as "typically cited as the three principal architects of sociology", and lists four traditions in Randall Collins's survey: "functionalism, conflict, symbolic interactionism, and utilitarianism". Chapter 2 takes up the first three.

Where to Read More

- **Encyclopaedias.** This chapter uses six Wikipedia pages: Sociology, Sociological imagination, Social fact, Émile Durkheim, Auguste Comte and Scientific method. The Sociological imagination and Social fact articles appeared complete in the fetch. The other

four were each cut off by the fetch tool: I read only the first 100,000 characters of about 324,000 (Sociology), 240,000 (Durkheim), 194,000 (Comte) and 291,000 (Scientific method), so later sections of those pages are not reflected here.

- **Primary texts.** Mills's *The Sociological Imagination* and Durkheim's *The Rules of Sociological Method* are short enough to read directly. I have not read either; the descriptions above come only from the Wikipedia pages.
- **Practical.** Pick a statistic from a news story and ask which social facts might lie behind it.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Using the dates in this chapter, work out (a) how many years separate Sieyès's 1780 coinage from Comte's 1838 use, (b) how old Durkheim was in 1895 when The Rules of Sociological Method appeared (his birthday was 15 April 1858, so take care over the month), and (c) the gap between 1895 and Mills's 1959 book. Say what each gap tells you about the order in which the ideas appeared.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Which of these are social facts in Durkheim's sense, and which are not? Give a reason using the words "external" and "coercive" where they apply: (a) the English language; (b) your liking for a particular flavour of ice cream; (c) the value of a pound coin; (d) a marriage ceremony in your country; (e) your headache this morning.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

A town's only large factory closes and 800 people lose their jobs. Write one paragraph describing it as a personal trouble for one worker and one paragraph describing it as a public issue, then say what extra evidence a sociologist would want before offering an explanation.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Sociology:** the scientific study of human society (Wikipedia, Sociology)
- **The word:** coined by Sieyès in 1780 (unpublished); introduced as "sociologie" by Comte in 1838
- **Social fact:** a way of acting that exerts external constraint on the individual (Durkheim, 1895)
- **Sociological imagination:** awareness of the relationship between personal experience and the wider society (Mills, 1959)
- **Methods:** qualitative, quantitative, and computational techniques
- **Three principal architects:** Durkheim, Marx and Weber
- **Check:** the contrasts with psychology, politics and common sense, and the personal-trouble versus public-issue wording

Coming next

Chapter 2, Theories of Society, introduces functionalism, conflict theory and symbolic interactionism, three lenses sociologists use to look at the same society.

Sociology Fundamentals

Course 1 · Chapter 2 · Theories of Society: Three Lenses on One World

Chapter 1 ended by noting that the Sociology article on Wikipedia names Durkheim, Marx and Weber as the principal architects of the subject, and that it lists functionalism, conflict and symbolic interactionism among the main traditions. This chapter takes those three traditions one at a time. The Sociological theory article describes a theory as "a supposition that intends to consider, analyze, and/or explain objects of social reality from a sociological perspective". The three theories here are not rival answers to one question so much as three different questions, and the same event can be looked at through each.

Why Sociologists Use Several Theories

The Sociological theory article says theories range from narrow accounts of a single social process to broad paradigms, and that a central theoretical problem is linking the micro, meso and macro levels. A macro view looks at large structures; a micro view looks at everyday interaction. It calls conflict theory "a macrosociological approach", and lists symbolic interactionism with Mead, Blumer and Goffman as its figures, with meaning arising from social interaction. Structural functionalism it ties to Durkheim and Parsons, and conflict theory to Marx and Weber.

Lens	Main question	Level	Named figures (per the pages)
Functionalism	What does each part contribute to the whole?	Macro	Durkheim, Parsons, Merton, Spencer
Conflict theory	Who holds power, and who gains from the arrangement?	Macro	Marx, Weber, C. Wright Mills
Symbolic interactionism	How do people create meaning together?	Micro	Mead, Cooley, Blumer

The "main question" column is my own condensed wording of what each page describes (check).

Functionalism: Society as a System

The Structural functionalism article describes the approach as seeing society as a system "whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability". It says social phenomena are explained by their contribution to the whole, and that individuals matter mainly through their statuses and roles.

The organic analogy

The page says Herbert Spencer (1820 to 1903) compared social institutions to organs in a body, each serving the survival of the whole.

Two kinds of solidarity

Durkheim, according to the page, distinguished "mechanical solidarity" in pre-industrial societies from "organic solidarity", tied to "specialization and interdependence" in industrial ones.

Parsons

The page says Talcott Parsons began writing in the 1930s and described change as a "moving equilibrium".

Merton

Robert K. Merton separated manifest functions (intended and recognised) from latent functions (unintended and unrecognised). The page's example: schools prepare people for careers (manifest) and also build social networks (latent).

Using manifest and latent functions

Ask of any institution, "what is it officially for, and what else does it quietly do?" A school officially teaches; quietly it also brings together children of the same age. The second half of that sentence is my own extension of the page's example (check).

The page lists criticisms too: that the approach struggles to explain change and conflict, that it ignores inequalities of race, gender and class, that it has been called tautological, and that it gives individuals little agency. It says influence peaked in the 1940s and 1950s and fell sharply in the 1960s, and it quotes one sociologist calling functionalism "as dead as a dodo". It also mentions a possible revival through multilevel selection theory.

Conflict Theory: Society as Contest

The Conflict theories article says individuals and groups, especially social classes, interact through conflict rather than agreement, and that the theories focus on power differentials, power structures and social change. It also stresses that "conflict theory does not refer to a unified school of thought". It summarises Alan Sears's three assumptions as: people are self-interested, resources are perpetually scarce, and conflict is unavoidable within and between groups.

The Karl Marx article gives his dates as 5 May 1818 to 14 March 1883 and quotes the Communist Manifesto: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles". It describes the bourgeoisie as the "ruling class that controls the means of production" and the proletariat as the "working class" that sells its "labour power for wages". The conflict page adds Marx's idea of "false consciousness", in which the ruling class obscures exploitation.

The Max Weber article gives his dates as 21 April 1864 to 14 June 1920. The conflict page contrasts him with Marx by his emphasis on individuals' "social action". The Weber page calls social action "the central focus of Weber's sociology" and says he divided it into affectional, traditional, instrumental and value-rational types. It lists a "three-component theory of stratification" (class, party and status), but the part of the page I read does not explain it, so that is deferred to Chapter 7.

> **Marx, Weber and Durkheim overlapped only partly**
>
> Computed in Python from the dates on the pages: Marx died aged 64, and Weber, who was born in 1864, was 18 when Marx died. Durkheim, born in 1858 (the date from Chapter 1), was 24. All three were therefore adults or nearly adults in the same decades of the late nineteenth century, though Marx was an old man by the time the other two were young (my own arithmetic from the page dates; check the exact dates against a biography).

> **Conflict theory is not only Marx**
>
> The page connects conflict theory to critical, feminist, postcolonial, world-systems and race-conflict approaches, and names others such as Simmel, Ward, Gumplowicz and C. Wright Mills. Treating "conflict theory" and "Marxism" as the same thing loses most of

that. Its criticisms, per the page, are that it can be too politicised and that it underplays social unity.

Symbolic Interactionism: Society as Conversation

The Symbolic interactionism article describes it as a framework rooted in American pragmatism that studies how shared language and symbols create meaning in face-to-face and internal communication. It says research is mostly qualitative, for example participant observation, and focuses on micro-level situations.

It gives Herbert Blumer's three premises. The first, quoted exactly, is "Humans act toward things on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to those things." The second says that meaning is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction one has with others and the society. The third says meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process. The page names George Herbert Mead (born 1863, died 1931) as the figure many regard as the "true founder", whose students compiled *Mind, Self and Society* from class notes after his death, since he rarely published himself. It credits Charles Horton Cooley with co-conceiving the idea, and says Cooley's "looking-glass self" influenced Mead's theory of the self. Blumer, a student and interpreter of Mead, coined the term "symbolic interaction"; the page I read gives no date for that.

> **A simple test of the first premise**
>
> A raised hand can be a greeting, a question in a classroom or a stop signal. The same movement means different things depending on the situation, and people act on the meaning, not the movement. The example is my own illustration of Blumer's first premise (check).

The criticisms the page lists are that its methods are seen as impressionistic, that it is a broad framework rather than a testable theory, that it gives limited attention to social structure, power and emotion, and that much of the criticism came in the 1970s, with Alvin Gouldner as a prominent critic.

Putting the Lenses Side by Side

Take a school as a case. A functionalist asks what it contributes to the whole, using manifest and latent functions. A conflict theorist asks whether it gives some groups advantages over others. An interactionist asks what happens between teacher and pupil that makes a child come to see themselves as "good at maths" or not. These three applications are my own, built from the questions in the table above (check). None of them is "the right one": each leaves things out, and the criticisms listed above are largely about what each one leaves out.

Where to Read More

- **Pages used.** This chapter draws on six Wikipedia pages: Structural functionalism, Conflict theories, Symbolic interactionism, Karl Marx, Max Weber and Sociological theory. The Conflict theories article appeared complete in the fetch. For the others the tool read only the first 100,000 characters: Structural functionalism (137,304 characters in all), Symbolic interactionism (115,469), Karl Marx (299,586), Max Weber (251,125) and Sociological theory (120,330). Later sections of those five are not reflected here.
- **Not covered.** I did not find on the pages I read an explanation of base and superstructure, so it is not described in this chapter.
- **Primary texts.** I have not read any of the original works; every description above comes from the Wikipedia pages.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Choose a hospital. Using Merton's distinction, give one manifest function and one latent function, and say which lens (functionalism, conflict theory or symbolic interactionism) you used for each. Then name one thing functionalism would find hard to explain about it, using a criticism listed in this chapter.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Match each question to the most natural lens and say why: (a) "Who benefits from the way this workplace is organised?" (b) "What does the word 'professional' mean to the

people who work here?" (c) "What job does the lunch break do for the whole company?" (d) "How did this team come to see one member as the troublemaker?"

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Use the dates given in this chapter. (a) How old was Marx when he died? (b) How old was Weber when he died? (c) How many years separate Marx's death (1883) from the year Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* began to appear (1904)? Work these out, then say which of the two figures you would expect to have read the other's work, and be honest about what you can and cannot tell from dates alone.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Functionalism:** society as a system of parts that promote stability; manifest and latent functions (Merton)
- **Conflict theory:** society shaped by power and competition between groups; not a single unified school
- **Symbolic interactionism:** meaning arises from interaction; Blumer's three premises
- **Levels:** functionalism and conflict theory are macro; symbolic interactionism is micro
- **Founders' dates:** Marx 1818 to 1883; Weber 1864 to 1920; Durkheim 1858 to 1917
- **Check:** the one-line "main question" for each lens, the school and hospital applications, and the interpretation of the dates

Coming next

Chapter 3, Culture, looks at norms, values, symbols, subculture and culture shock, the shared meanings that all three lenses assume.

Sociology Fundamentals

Course 1 · Chapter 3 · Culture: The Shared Meanings Behind Everyday Life

Chapter 2 ended by saying that all three lenses assume a set of shared meanings, and this chapter looks at those meanings directly. Nobody is born knowing which side of the pavement to walk on, what a gift obliges you to do, or which words are rude. Sociologists call this stock of shared understanding culture. The chapter covers norms, values, symbols, subcultures and culture shock, and ends with the question of how far one culture can fairly judge another.

What Culture Is

Wikipedia's Culture article opens by calling culture "a concept that encompasses the social behavior, institutions, and norms found in human societies", together with the knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, customs and habits of the people in them. It quotes Edward Tylor's older definition of culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom" (the quotation goes on to list further capabilities and habits). The same page quotes Georg Simmel, who described culture as "the cultivation of individuals through the agency of external forms". The word "external" is the same one Chapter 1 met in Durkheim's definition of a social fact, and that link is my own observation, not one the page makes (check).

The page also separates non-material culture (ideas such as values, belief systems, rules, norms and language) from material culture (physical objects and architecture). It says culture is sometimes described as "the evolved ability to categorize and represent experiences with symbols".

Non-material culture

Values, beliefs, rules, norms and language, per the Culture article.

Material culture

Physical objects and architecture, per the same article. A chair is material; the rule that you do not sit in the head teacher's chair is not (the chair example is my own) (check).

Symbols

Things that stand for something else: a word, a flag, a gesture. The Culture article

ties culture to the ability to represent experience with symbols.

Norms: The Rules of Behaviour

The Social norm article defines a social norm as "a shared standard of acceptable behavior by a group". It says norms can be informal understandings or can be codified into rules and laws, and it calls laws a highly formal version of norms. Informal norms are unwritten and are typically enforced through reprimands, warnings or social exclusion rather than legal penalties. The page also says deviance can bring punishment, including social isolation or censure and, in extreme cases, fines or imprisonment.

Two further distinctions from that page are useful. Descriptive norms reflect what people commonly do; injunctive norms reflect what people should do. And prescriptive norms say what to do (the page's example is writing a thank-you note), while proscriptive norms say what not to do. The gap between the descriptive and the injunctive is worth noticing: many people drop litter in a place where most people do, even though almost all of them would say they should not (that last observation is my own, not the page's) (check).

Folkways and Mores

The Mores article says mores are widely observed social norms that "determine what is considered morally acceptable or unacceptable within any given culture", and that violating them may bring disapproval or ostracism. It contrasts them with folkways, routine habitual patterns enforced by "gentle social pressure", with manners, acceptable dress and personal space as examples. It names William Graham Sumner as the American sociologist who introduced "mores" (1898) and "folkways" (1906) into modern sociology. Those years are 8 apart (computed in Python). The Folkway page on Wikipedia was very short in the fetch; it says only that folkways or mores are "norms for routine or casual interaction", and it gives Sumner's 1906 book *Folkways* with its subtitle.

Kind of norm	How strongly enforced	Examples (per the pages)
Folkway	Gentle social pressure	Manners, acceptable dress, personal space, working hours

Kind of norm	How strongly enforced	Examples (per the pages)
Mores	Disapproval or ostracism; carry moral weight	Lying, cheating, causing harm, plagiarism, bribery
Taboo	Behaviour seen as unthinkable	Incest and murder, the page says, are very common examples
Law	Formal sanctions	A highly formal version of a norm (Social norm article)

The table brings together claims from three pages (Social norm, Mores, Folkway); the neat ordering from weakest to strongest is my own arrangement (check).

> **Norms differ between places and over time**
>
> Whether something is a folkway or a more is not fixed. Wearing a suit to a funeral is, on the Value article's own example, a norm of showing respect, but what counts as respectful dress varies between communities (my own comment) (check). Always ask "in which group, and when?" before calling a norm universal.

Values: What Is Considered Important

The Value (ethics) article defines a value as a broad preference about what courses of action or outcomes are appropriate, reflecting a sense of what "ought" to be. Its examples include "Equal rights for all" and "People should be treated with respect and dignity". It treats values as abstract and broad, and norms as specific standards for particular situations. Its own illustration is that flying the national flag on a holiday is a norm that reflects the value of patriotism, and that dark clothing at a funeral is a norm for showing respect.

> **One value, many norms**
>
> Take the value "respect for the dead". The funeral dress above is one norm that expresses it. Observing a minute of silence and speaking quietly in a graveyard could be others (those two are my own examples) (check). A value is the reason; a norm is one of the ways the reason shows up in behaviour. Chapter 1's idea of a social fact applies to both.

Symbols and Meaning

The Culture article says the word culture is sometimes used for "the symbolic markers used by ethnic groups to distinguish themselves visibly from each other". It also says that cultural sociologists tend to look at words, artifacts and symbols rather than at scientific methods; the page's own wording is "Cultural sociologists tend to reject scientific methods". Chapter 2's symbolic interactionism fits here: Blumer's first premise was that people act on the meanings things have for them, and symbols are where those meanings are stored.

The same flag, word or gesture can carry opposite meanings in different groups. That is part of why a tourist can offend someone without knowing it (my own illustration) (check).

Subcultures

The Subculture article describes a subculture as a smaller group within a larger culture that differs from the mainstream or dominant culture, often keeping some of its founding principles, with its own norms and values. It quotes the Oxford English Dictionary: "an identifiable subgroup within a society". The article sketches how the subject was studied.

- **The Chicago School.** Early sociological work treated subcultures mainly as deviance and delinquency; Park, Burgess and Wirth described "natural areas" or "moral regions". Howard Becker's labelling perspective added that society defines subcultures as outsiders. (Labelling comes back in Chapter 9.)
- **The Birmingham school.** Clarke, Hall, Jefferson and Roberts framed subcultures as "resistance through rituals", driven by class conflict between working-class and middle-class culture. They also argued that the culture industry could absorb subcultural styles into consumer goods.
- **Dick Hebdige.** In *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), the article says, Hebdige described subcultures as a subversion of normalcy, expressed through distinctive style and the recombining of consumer goods (bricolage).

The page lists examples including punks, mods, goths, skinheads, hip-hoppers, metalheads and Trekkies. It separates subculture from counterculture: Ken Gelder (2007) proposed telling them apart by degree of immersion in society, with subcultures staying within the mainstream while keeping their own characteristics, and the article ties countercultures mainly to the 1960s rejection of established norms.

Subculture does not mean lesser culture

The "sub" is about being a part within a larger whole, not about quality. A student society, a profession or a football crowd can each be a subculture in this sense, though the page's examples are mostly youth styles (that broader reading is my own extension) (check).

Culture Shock

The Culture shock article defines it as the disorientation felt when living in or visiting an unfamiliar culture, changing social settings or starting a different way of life, commonly experienced by immigrants, travellers and students abroad. It credits Kalervo Oberg, who proposed his model of cultural adjustment in a 1954 talk to the Women's Club of Rio de Janeiro. That is 25 years before Hebdige's 1979 book (computed in Python).

Phase (Oberg, per the page)	What the page says
Honeymoon	Differences are seen romantically; most people are fascinated in the first few weeks
Negotiation	Around three months in, differences become frustrating; language barriers, hygiene and traffic can cause anxiety, anger and loneliness
Adjustment	Around 6 to 12 months, routines form and negative reactions decline
Adaptation	The person takes part comfortably in the host culture, often keeping parts of their original identity (the "bicultural" stage)

The page also describes reverse culture shock (or re-entry shock), which comes on returning home and which it says can be harder than the original shock, because people idealise the past and wrongly assume home has not changed.

Phases are not a timetable

The months in the table are what the page reports; the page itself says a person may experience at least one of the phases, not that everyone passes through all four on

schedule. Treat the model as a description of common patterns, not a prediction for one individual (the second half of that advice is my own) (check).

Judging Other Cultures

If norms and values differ, can one culture fairly judge another? The Cultural relativism article says the view holds that a culture's values, including moral ones, should be understood in that culture's own context, and it presents this as partly a reaction against ethnocentrism, which it defines as judging other groups by one's own standards. It credits Franz Boas with establishing the idea (in 1887 he argued that civilization is "not something absolute"), and adds that he never used the phrase himself. The article also records criticism: Steward and Barnett argued that moral relativism leads to contradiction, and Alison Dundes Renteln's view is described as treating relativism as procedural, not substantive, meaning it asks people to recognise how their own upbringing shapes their judgments without requiring them to abandon their values.

For a student of sociology the practical point is a habit: describe a norm in terms of what it means to the people who follow it before you evaluate it. Whether to go further and refuse all outside judgment is a debate the page shows is still open.

Where to Read More

- **Pages used.** This chapter draws on eight Wikipedia pages: Culture, Social norm, Value (ethics), Subculture, Culture shock, Mores, Cultural relativism and the very short Folkway page. Culture shock and Mores appeared complete in the fetch. For the rest the tool read only the first 100,000 characters: Culture (191,052 characters in all, so about 52 percent), Social norm (215,355, about 46 percent), Value (ethics) (119,783), Subculture (133,865) and Cultural relativism (113,738, where the unread remainder was the end of the page's navigation). The percentages are my own arithmetic from the character counts (check). Later sections of the longer pages are not reflected here.
- **Not covered.** The Social norm page as read did not explain Sumner or the folkway/more split, which is why that part comes from the Mores page.
- **Primary texts.** I have not read Sumner's *Folkways*, Hebdige's *Subculture* or Oberg's talk; everything above comes from the Wikipedia pages.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Classify each of these as a folkway, a more, a taboo or a law, and give a reason using the table in this chapter: (a) queueing at a bus stop; (b) plagiarising an essay; (c) wearing pyjamas to a job interview; (d) driving on the left in the UK; (e) murder. Then say which one is hardest to classify and why.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Pick the value "honesty". Write down three different norms, from three different settings (for example school, shopping, friendship), that express it. Then give one case where two values conflict (for example honesty and kindness) and explain how a norm might settle the conflict.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

A student moves abroad for one year. Using Oberg's four phases as the page reports them, and the months it gives, describe in a short timeline what she might feel at week 2, month 3, month 8 and after returning home. Then say what the page does and does not allow you to claim about whether she will experience all four phases.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Culture:** social behaviour, institutions and norms found in human societies; non-material (values, norms, language) and material (objects)
- **Social norm:** a shared standard of acceptable behaviour by a group; formal (laws) or informal

- **Folkways and mores:** folkways enforced by gentle pressure; mores carry moral weight (Sumner: mores 1898, folkways 1906)
- **Value:** a broad preference about what is appropriate; a norm is a specific rule that expresses it
- **Subculture:** a group within a larger culture with its own norms and values; distinct from counterculture
- **Culture shock:** honeymoon, negotiation, adjustment, adaptation (Oberg, 1954); reverse culture shock on return
- **Cultural relativism:** understand a culture in its own context; contrast with ethnocentrism
- **Check:** the Durkheim link, the examples of norms, the ordering of the norm table, and the broader reading of subculture

Coming next

Chapter 4, Socialisation and Identity, looks at how people learn a culture through family, school, peers and media, and how roles and the self take shape.

Sociology Fundamentals

Course 1 · Chapter 4 · Socialisation and Identity: How a Person Becomes Part of Society

Chapter 3 described culture as a stock of shared meanings that nobody is born knowing. This chapter asks how a person gets hold of those meanings, and how the person they become is shaped along the way. Sociologists call the learning process socialisation. The chapter covers its stages and agents (family, school, peers, media), then three accounts of the self (Cooley, Mead and Goffman), then roles, and ends with the rare cases of children raised with almost no human contact, which show how much depends on this learning.

What Socialisation Is

Wikipedia's Socialization article defines it as "the process through which individuals internalize the norms, customs, values and ideologies of their society." Chapter 3's norms and values are exactly what is being internalised. The article separates two stages: primary socialisation, when a child learns the attitudes, values and actions appropriate to the family and community it grows up in, and secondary socialisation, the learning of appropriate behaviour in smaller social settings such as school or a new job, which it says involves smaller changes than the first stage. (The page uses American spelling; this course uses British spelling throughout.)

Primary

Early childhood learning, mainly through the immediate family, per the Socialization article. It lays the groundwork for everything after.

Secondary

Learning how to behave in a new setting, such as school, which the article says "require very different behavior from the home".

Anticipatory

Rehearsing for a future position or relationship; the article's example is a couple living together before marriage, and it reports research by Levine and Hoffner (2006) naming parents as the main source for career-related rehearsal.

Resocialisation

"Discarding former behavior-patterns and reflexes while accepting new ones" during a life transition; the article gives total institutions such as a prison or the military as common examples.

The Agents of Socialisation

An agent of socialisation is a group or institution through which learning happens. The Socialization article, as I read it, treats each of the following in different amounts, so the table says which claim comes from where.

Agent	What the source says	Source page
Family	Primary socialisation is mainly influenced by the immediate family and friends	Socialization
School	A site of secondary socialisation with demands very different from home	Socialization
Peers	Under Judith Harris's group socialisation theory (1995), peer groups can become the main influence on personality	Socialization
Mass media	Named in the gender section as one of several groups, with friends, peers, school and work, that reinforce gender roles	Socialization
Total institutions	Settings such as hospitals where a person is socialised into a passive role; Goffman called this institutionalisation	Erving Goffman

Beyond what is stated in that table, the page as I read it gave no detailed account of media effects, so any claim that television or social media shapes children in a particular way would be my own and is not made here (check).

> **Socialisation is not a one-way stamp**
>
> The Socialization article lists Dennis Wrong, who coined the term "oversocialization" in 1961, and R. W. Connell, who criticised socialisation theory as inadequate for explaining gender. I read these only as one-line entries in a list of theorists, so I cannot say what their arguments were. The safe lesson is that sociologists do not all agree that people simply absorb whatever society hands them. From 1961 to the 2006 Levine and Hoffner research is 45 years (computed in Python), a reminder that the idea has been studied and disputed for a long time.

Cooley: The Looking-Glass Self

Wikipedia's Looking-glass self article credits the American sociologist Charles Horton Cooley with the idea, put forward in *Human Nature and the Social Order* in 1902. The core of the idea is that people build their self-concept by imagining how others see them. The article quotes the line "I am not what I think I am and I am not what you think I am; I am what I think you think I am." It gives three steps.

1. You imagine how you appear to another person.
2. You imagine that person's judgment of you.
3. You feel something, such as pride or shame, in response to that imagined judgment.

The page's own illustration is a job candidate whose confidence rises or falls with the interviewers' expressions. Notice that the judgment that matters is the imagined one, which can be wrong. A pupil who believes the teacher thinks she is slow may act as if it were true even when the teacher thinks nothing of the kind (this school example is my own) (check).

Mead: The Self as a Social Process

Wikipedia's George Herbert Mead article reports that Mead held the self emerges socially and quotes him: "the self is a social process." People first become objects to other people, it says, and only later to themselves, by taking other people's perspectives. It describes three linked ideas.

Idea	What the article says
The "me" and the "I"	The "me" is "the organized set of attitudes of others which an individual assumes"; the "I" is the individual's more spontaneous response to the "me". Thinking is described as an internal dialogue between the two.
Play stage	Children first learn social roles by acting them out, such as police officer or doctor; they can take distinct individuals' roles but have no fully organised sense of self.
Game stage	In a game, the child "taking one role must be ready to take the role of everyone else"; Mead's example is baseball. This brings organised group participation.
Generalised other	Understanding an activity, and one's place in it, from the viewpoint of all the participants, which shows what behaviour is expected in a given setting.

Two dates, two pages

The Mead article gives his life as 1863 to 1931 and names *Mind, Self, and Society* as a posthumous work of 1934. The Socialization article, in its list of theorists, gives him as 1862 to 1930. The two pages disagree by one year at each end, and I did not check a third source, so I cannot say which is right. The same list gives Cooley's dates as 1902 to 1983, which cannot be correct when the Looking-glass self article has Cooley already publishing in 1902, so I do not use those dates. The gap between Cooley's 1902 book and Mead's 1934 volume is 32 years (computed in Python).

Chapter 2's symbolic interactionism comes in here: the self is not a fixed inner object but something built through interaction and the meanings others give to us. Whether Cooley influenced Mead is not something I read in these pages beyond the Mead article saying the two met at the University of Michigan in 1891 (check against a biography before relying on any stronger claim).

Roles: Scripts for Social Positions

Wikipedia's Role theory article says role theory treats much everyday activity as the enactment of socially defined categories, and defines a role as "a set of rights, duties, expectations, norms, and behaviors that a person has to face and fulfill." Roles are one way the norms of Chapter 3 attach to particular positions: the same person is expected to act differently as a student, a sibling and an employee.

Role conflict

The article describes this as a conflict among the roles that go with two or more statuses held at once. It credits Merton with distinguishing conflict among one's own roles (intrapersonal) from conflict between a role and others' expectations (interpersonal).

Role strain

Pressure that can arise when the demands of roles conflict, from disagreement over one's performance, or from accepting more than one can manage, per the article.

Role-making

The article credits Ralph Turner with the view that defining a role means negotiating it with other roles, and with role-making, in which people reshape roles while performing them.

Expectations come in strengths

The article says Ralf Dahrendorf classified expectations by how they are backed: must-expectations by sanctions, shall-expectations by sanctions and rewards, and can-expectations by rewards. A "must" in his sense is the sort of expectation Chapter 3 would call close to law; a "can" is closer to a folkway (that comparison is mine) (check). This chapter covers roles only briefly; Chapter 6 returns to status and roles as parts of social structure.

Goffman: Presenting the Self

Wikipedia's Erving Goffman article calls *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* his first and most famous book, published in 1956 and revised in 1959 (a gap of 3 years, computed in Python). It describes how people manage the impressions they give in face-to-face encounters, and the article defines impression management as "a person's attempts to present an acceptable image to those around them." Goffman used the language of theatre, which is why the approach is called dramaturgy. The article also explains two settings.

- **Front stage.** The public area where people perform a positive self-concept for an audience.
- **Back stage.** A hidden, private area where people can drop their social roles.

The article also says Goffman popularised the term total institution in *Asylums* (1961), a book it describes as an ethnography of the concept, which examines how psychiatric hospitalisation socialises patients into a passive "good patient" role. That ties this section back to resocialisation above. An everyday case of front stage and back stage is a waiter who is polite in the dining room and relaxed in the kitchen (this example is my own, not the article's) (check).

What Happens Without Socialisation?

Wikipedia's Feral child article defines a feral child as "a young individual who has lived isolated from human contact from a very young age", with little or no experience of human care, social behaviour or language. It says such children "lack the basics of primary and secondary socialization" and that many have "almost insurmountable trouble learning a human language", which it links to the critical period hypothesis. The article is careful about evidence, so this chapter is too.

Case	What the page says	How the page treats it
Genie	Born 1957 in Los Angeles, found 1970; confined to one room with almost no stimulation from about 20 months to roughly 13 years 7 months; attempts to teach her language "were limited"	Documented, with studies by Susan Curtiss and others; "Genie" is a pseudonym
Victor of Aveyron	"A feral child in the forests of Aveyron for twelve years" around 1800; sources include Itard's reports of 1801 and 1806	The page does not question the case
Amala and Kamala	Described by Reverend J. A. L. Singh in 1926 as "raised by wolves"	The page says Serge Aroles argues the story was a fraud, and elsewhere calls it a hoax; its own dates for the discovery (1920 and 1926) disagree

Do not build too much on one case

The page notes there are "no eyewitness accounts of animals feeding human children" and that many alleged cases are doubtful, citing Aroles's archival work as showing many accounts to be fictitious. Genie was also abused, so her case mixes isolation with cruelty and cannot show the effect of missing socialisation alone (that last point is my own reasoning) (check). From 1957 to 1970 is 13 years, and from Victor's 1800 to Genie's 1970 is 170 years (both computed in Python), a reminder that the evidence is spread thinly over a long time.

Where to Read More

- **Pages used.** This chapter uses six Wikipedia pages: Socialization, Looking-glass self, George Herbert Mead, Role theory, Feral child and Erving Goffman. The Looking-glass self, Mead and Role theory articles appeared complete in the fetch. For the other three the fetch tool read only the first 100,000 characters: Socialization (148,578 characters in all, so about 67 percent), Feral child (121,003, about 83 percent) and Erving Goffman (138,537, about 72 percent). The percentages are my own arithmetic from the character counts. For Goffman the cut fell in the navigation after the article, so little article text was probably missed (that is the fetch tool's own estimate, not something I verified).
- **Summaries.** The fetch tool returns a summary made by a small model, not the raw page, so a quotation here is only as exact as that summary.
- **Primary texts.** I have not read Cooley, Mead or Goffman directly; everything above comes from the Wikipedia pages.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Classify each of these as primary socialisation, secondary socialisation, anticipatory socialisation or resocialisation, giving a reason from the chapter: (a) a toddler learning to say "please" at home; (b) a first-year pupil learning to put a hand up before speaking; (c) a student shadowing a nurse in a hospital before training as one; (d) a recruit adapting to military life; (e) a new employee learning the workplace's unwritten rules. Then say which one is hardest to classify and why.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

A pupil reads a teacher's raised eyebrow during her presentation and goes quiet for the rest of the lesson. Walk through Cooley's three steps for this moment, then say where the idea could go wrong, using the chapter's point about the judgment being imagined. Finally, explain in one sentence how Mead's "me" and "I" would describe the same moment.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Using only the dates and figures in this chapter, work out (a) the gap between Cooley's 1902 book and the posthumous 1934 Mead volume, (b) how many years separate Victor of Aveyron's 1800 from the 1970 discovery of Genie, and (c) what percentage of the Feral child page was read, given 100,000 of 121,003 characters (round to one decimal place). Then rank the three cases of Genie, Victor and Amala and Kamala by how safe each is to use as evidence about socialisation, using the page's own treatment of them, and say why you placed them in that order.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Socialisation:** the process of internalising a society's norms, customs, values and ideologies (Wikipedia, Socialization)
- **Primary and secondary:** family-centred early learning, then learning in settings such as school or work
- **Anticipatory and resocialisation:** rehearsing a future position; discarding old patterns for new ones
- **Looking-glass self:** Cooley, 1902; imagine how others see you, imagine their judgment, feel pride or shame
- **Mead:** the self is a social process; "me" and "I"; play stage, game stage, generalised other
- **Role:** a set of rights, duties, expectations, norms and behaviours; role conflict and role strain
- **Goffman:** impression management; front stage and back stage; total institutions
- **Feral children:** Genie and Victor documented; Amala and Kamala disputed
- **Check:** the school, waiter and comparison examples, the media point, and the conflicting Mead and Cooley dates between pages

Coming next

Chapter 5, Groups and Organisations, looks at primary and secondary groups, bureaucracy and networks: the settings in which much of the socialisation described here takes place.

Sociology Fundamentals

Course 1 · Chapter 5 · Groups and Organisations: The Settings of Social Life

Chapter 4 ended by saying that groups and organisations are the settings in which much socialisation takes place. This chapter looks at those settings themselves. It starts with what counts as a social group and the difference between close, personal groups and large, goal-driven ones. It then moves to the big organisations of modern life, with Max Weber's account of bureaucracy and a famous warning about who ends up running them, and finishes with the idea that people are linked not only in groups but in networks of ties, where acquaintances can matter more than friends.

What Is a Social Group?

Wikipedia's Social group article defines a social group as "two or more people who interact with one another, share similar characteristics, and collectively have a sense of unity." It sets out two ways of explaining what holds a group together. Under the social cohesion approach, it says Muzafer and Carolyn Sherif (1956) described a social unit through five features: shared goals, a division of labour, status relationships, accepted norms and sanctions. Under the social identification approach, membership rests on awareness of a shared category rather than on personal bonds between members, and the page credits Tajfel and Turner, and Turner (1982), with that view. Chapter 3's norms and sanctions and Chapter 4's roles both turn up in the Sherifs' list.

Group

People who interact, share some characteristic and feel a sense of unity, per the Social group article. A queue at a bus stop has none of the last, so it is usually not called a group (this example is my own) (check).

Category

People who merely share a trait, such as everyone born in the same year. The Social group article's social identification approach is what turns a shared category into a group, once people are aware of it.

In-group and out-group

The page describes an outgroup as a social category "of which one is not a member". It

reports that Tajfel and others (1971) found that arbitrary categorisation alone can produce in-group favouritism, even without self-interest.

Size matters

The Social group page says functioning groups work best with about 5 to 10 members, and cites Dunbar's number: people can maintain stable relationships with roughly 150 individuals (it credits this to Gladwell, 2002, not to Dunbar's own work, and I have not checked that). A classroom of 20 to 40 pupils is its example of a group that splits into subgroups. Small groups are the setting for personal bonds; large ones need rules.

Primary and Secondary Groups

Wikipedia's Types of social groups article says the American sociologist Charles Cooley, a member of the Chicago school, introduced the primary and secondary distinction in 1909, in *Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind*. This is the same Cooley as Chapter 4's looking-glass self, who published his earlier book in 1902; 1909 minus 1902 is 7 years (computed in Python). The Social group article, by contrast, never mentions Cooley or secondary groups; it covers primary groups through Donelson Forsyth's typology, and cites Litwak and Szelenyi (1969) for three subtypes: kin, close friends and neighbours.

Feature	Primary group	Secondary group
Definition (Types of social groups)	"typically a small social group whose members share close, personal, enduring relationships"	"a relatively larger group composed of impersonal and goal-oriented relationships"
Purpose	The relationship is valued for its own sake	Usually serves an external goal
Emotional investment	Deep and personal; members give emotional support	Much less
Membership	Hard to replace	Roles are more interchangeable; people join and leave with relative ease

Feature	Primary group	Secondary group
Examples listed	Family, close friends, neighbours, long-term romances, church groups	Study groups, sports teams, schoolmates, coworkers; attorney-client and doctor-patient relationships
Effect on identity	Shapes personal identity more strongly	Typically develops later in life and has less influence

The line is blurry

The same article lists "schoolmates" and "church groups" on opposite sides, but a close friend you met at school sits in both columns at once. The article treats the two types as a contrast, not a test, and I did not read anything on how to sort borderline cases, so any rule for that would be my own (check). Chapter 4's family and peer agents of socialisation map loosely onto primary groups; school and workplace map onto secondary ones (my own mapping) (check).

Two Kinds of Social Order: Community and Society

Wikipedia's Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft article credits the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies, in a book whose first edition came out in 1887. Gemeinschaft, "commonly translated as 'community'", covers "personal social interactions, and the roles, values, and beliefs based on such interactions". Gesellschaft, commonly translated as society, covers "indirect interactions, impersonal roles, formal values, and beliefs based on such interactions", and the page lists associations, corporations, companies, the modern state and academia as examples. It links Gesellschaft to modern society and a "rational self-interest" that weakens the traditional bonds of family and local community.

The page does not describe the pair as group types, and it ties them to kinds of social relationship, so using them as a rough large-scale version of Cooley's pair is my own gloss (check). It also reports Durkheim's reading, which maps Gemeinschaft to mechanical solidarity and Gesellschaft to organic solidarity, a link to the founders in Chapter 2. 1909 minus 1887 is 22 years, so Tönnies came before Cooley (computed in Python).

Bureaucracy: Weber's Ideal Type

Wikipedia's Bureaucracy article defines it as "a system of organization where laws or regulatory authority are implemented by civil servants (non-elected officials)", and says that today it is "the administrative system governing any large institution, whether publicly owned or privately owned." The word joins the French *bureau* ("desk" or "office") with the Greek *kratos* ("rule"), and the page says it was coined by the French economist Jacques Claude Marie Vincent de Gournay in the mid-18th century; its first known English use was in 1818, when Lady Morgan wrote of "the Bureaucratie, or office tyranny". It says Max Weber broadened the definition in the 1920s to any administration run by trained professionals under fixed rules.

The page lists the characteristics of Weber's ideal-typical bureaucracy, from *Economy and Society* (1921):

- hierarchical organisation and formal lines of authority (a chain of command);
- a fixed area of activity, with a rigid division of labour;
- regular and continuous execution of assigned tasks;
- decisions and powers specified and restricted by regulations;
- officials with expert training, advancing according to technical qualifications;
- qualifications evaluated by organisational rules, not by individuals.

Set these against Cooley's secondary group: impersonal, goal-oriented, with interchangeable members. A bureaucracy is that idea pushed as far as it will go. The page says Weber lived from 1864 to 1920 and warned of an "iron cage" of rule-based, rational control. The gap from his 1921 book to Lady Morgan's English use in 1818 is 103 years (computed in Python), so the word was in circulation long before Weber's account.

> **An ideal type is not a description**
>
> The Bureaucracy page calls Weber's list "ideal-typical". I read nothing there that explained the term, so this is from general knowledge: an ideal type is a deliberately pure model, used to compare real organisations against it, not a claim that any real office matches it (check). That is why real organisations can be criticised for failing the model without Weber being wrong.

What critics say

The page's criticisms, as far as I read them, include these:

- **Red tape.** The See also section defines it as an "Idiom for excessively bureaucratic procedures or regulations."
- **Merton (1957).** He described a "trained incapacity" resulting from "over conformity": following the rules so closely that the organisation's real purpose is lost.
- **John Stuart Mill (early 1860s).** He wrote that "a bureaucracy always tends to become a pedantocracy."
- **Others.** The page also names Ludwig von Mises (1944), David Graeber and Leon Trotsky (1936), each with a different complaint, so the critics do not agree among themselves on what is wrong.

The page's mention of Parkinson and Michels did not appear in the part I read, because the fetch was cut off, so nothing is claimed here from the Bureaucracy page about either man.

The Iron Law of Oligarchy

Michels did get his own page. Wikipedia's Iron law of oligarchy article credits Robert Michels, a German-born Italian sociologist, in *Political Parties* (1911). The claim is that any democratic organisation, however egalitarian it begins, tends to be run by a leadership minority, because growing size and complexity require bureaucracy, centralisation and delegation, which concentrate power in a few hands. The page gives Michels's summary: "Who says organization, says oligarchy." 1911 minus 1887 is 24 years after Tönnies, and 1973 minus 1911 is 62 years before the weak-ties paper below (both computed in Python).

Who	What the page says
Cassinelli (1953)	Found the thesis broadly credible, but the statement "inadequate" and the evidence "inconclusive"
Rustow (1966)	Called it "a brilliantly fallacious argument a fortiori"; said the European socialist experience could not be generalised
Lipset (1956)	His study of a typographers' union found it resisted oligarchy
Ober (2008)	Argues that ancient Athens, a large participatory democracy, outperformed hierarchical rivals, which counts against the law

Who	What the page says
Leach (2005)	No consensus; power does not necessarily corrupt, structures can check leaders, and Michels did not say how the thesis could be tested

A "law" that has exceptions

The name sounds absolute, but the page's own list of critics shows no agreement. It also reports that Konieczny (2009) argued Wikipedia is not significantly affected, while Heaberlin and DeDeo (2016) found its norm network consistent with the law: two studies of the same site reaching different results. I cannot say which is better, since I read only this one page's summary of both. Treat the iron law as a hypothesis with a long argument around it.

Networks and Weak Ties

A group has a boundary; a network does not need one. Wikipedia's Social network article defines it as "a set of social actors (such as individuals or organizations)" connected through "networks of dyadic ties". It places the roots of the idea in the late 1890s with Durkheim and Tönnies, early systematic work on small groups in the 1930s with Jacob L. Moreno, and a major growth in the 1970s with Harrison White and his Harvard students, who include Charles Tilly, Stanley Milgram, Mark Granovetter and Barry Wellman. It adds that methods were mathematically formalised in the 1950s and widespread across the social and behavioural sciences by the 1980s.

Social capital

In the page's words, it exists where "people have an advantage because of their location in a network."

Structural hole

"When two separate clusters possess non-redundant information, there is said to be a structural hole between them."

Weak tie

An acquaintance not reinforced by many mutual friendships, per the Strength of Weak Ties article.

Wikipedia's The Strength of Weak Ties article is about Mark Granovetter's 1973 paper in the *American Journal of Sociology*. It says he had submitted it to the *American Sociological Review* in 1969 and was rejected, so four years passed between the first submission and publication (1973 minus 1969, computed in Python). The page says weak ties are "pivotal in the flow of information" and can reach populations and audiences that strong ties cannot. The Social network page says a broad range of contacts is most effective for getting a job. The reason is nearly a matter of geometry, though that explanation is my own reasoning (check): your close friends mostly know the same people you do and so hold the same information, while an acquaintance moves in a different circle and may know of a vacancy you have never heard about.

What the page leaves out

The Strength of Weak Ties page does not report the job-search data or any numbers from the study; it says only that the research was adapted into the 1974 monograph *Getting A Job* and a Harvard dissertation, *Changing Jobs*, 313 pages long. So I cannot tell you, for example, what share of people found their job through an acquaintance. The page has no criticism section either. It notes more than 78,000 Google Scholar citations as of November 2025, which shows influence, not correctness.

Where to Read More

- **Pages used.** This chapter uses seven Wikipedia pages: Social group, Types of social groups, Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, Bureaucracy, Iron law of oligarchy, Social network and The Strength of Weak Ties. The Types of social groups, Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, Iron law of oligarchy and Strength of Weak Ties articles appeared complete in the fetch. For Social group the fetch tool did not report a length and I cannot tell how much of it was read. Bureaucracy (187,369 characters) and Social network (201,551) were cut off after the first 100,000, so about 53.4 percent and 49.6 percent were read (my arithmetic, done in Python), and later sections are not reflected here.

- **Summaries.** The fetch tool returns a summary made by a small model, not the raw page, so a quotation is only as exact as that summary. In particular, the dates in one summary can differ from the same people's dates elsewhere in the course, and I have not resolved such differences with a third source.
- **Primary texts.** I have not read Cooley, Tönnies, Weber, Michels or Granovetter directly; every claim above comes from the Wikipedia pages.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

For each relationship, say whether it fits the Types of social groups article's description of a primary or a secondary group, citing at least one row of the comparison table: (a) a family at the dinner table; (b) a company's accounts department; (c) a village football team whose members have played together for twenty years; (d) a patient and her doctor. Then say which one you found hardest to place, and why the article's list of examples does not settle it.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Using only the figures in this chapter, work out (a) the gap between Tönnies's 1887 book and Cooley's 1909 book, (b) the gap between Lady Morgan's 1818 English use of "Bureaucratie" and Weber's 1921 book, (c) the percentage of the Bureaucracy page that was read, given 100,000 of 187,369 characters (one decimal place), and (d) how many characters of that page were not read. Then explain in a sentence why a reader should be cautious about a criticism section that was part of the unread portion.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Maya has been out of work for two months. Her five closest friends all work in the same hospital, and she also knows a former classmate she meets once a year, who works at a firm she has never heard of. Using Granovetter's weak-ties argument as the chapter

reports it, say who is more likely to know about a job Maya has not heard of, and why. Then list two things the chapter says the Strength of Weak Ties page does not tell us, which would make you cautious about relying on this advice, and state one way the iron law of oligarchy debate is a similar lesson in not over-trusting one famous idea.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Social group:** two or more people who interact, share similar characteristics and feel a sense of unity (Wikipedia, Social group)
- **Primary group:** small, close, personal, enduring; **secondary group:** larger, impersonal, goal-oriented (Cooley, 1909, per Types of social groups)
- **Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft:** community and society; Tönnies, first edition 1887
- **Bureaucracy:** rule through hierarchy, fixed regulations and trained officials; Weber's ideal type, 1921
- **Critics of bureaucracy:** red tape, Merton's "trained incapacity", Mill's "pedantocracy"
- **Iron law of oligarchy:** "Who says organization, says oligarchy" (Michels, 1911); disputed by several critics
- **Social network:** actors linked by ties; social capital and structural holes
- **Weak ties:** acquaintances pivotal in the flow of information (Granovetter, 1973)
- **Check:** the bus-queue example, the blurry-line advice, the community-and-society gloss, the meaning of ideal type, and the explanation of why weak ties help

Coming next

Chapter 6, Social Structure and Institutions, looks at status, roles, institutions and social order: the larger framework of positions and rules inside which the groups and organisations of this chapter operate.

Sociology Fundamentals

Course 1 · Chapter 6 · Structure and Institutions: The Framework Around Us

Chapter 5 looked at groups and organisations, the settings in which social life happens. This chapter steps back to the larger framework those settings sit inside. Sociologists use the idea of social structure for the patterned arrangements of a society, and they break it down into positions (statuses), the behaviour expected of people in those positions (roles), and long-lasting systems of rules (institutions). The chapter ends with the question that worried several of the founders: why does society hold together at all, rather than falling into chaos? Chapter 4 touched on roles briefly and promised that this chapter would return to status and roles as parts of social structure; that is what happens here.

Social Structure

Wikipedia's Social structure article defines it as an "aggregate of patterned social arrangements in society" that both emerges from and shapes individual actions. It says the structure is the framework that determines norms and relations among a society's institutions, and that the term has been in general use since the 1920s. The page says Tocqueville is said to have been the first to use the term, but it gives no date, so none is claimed here.

Macro

Per the article: socioeconomic stratification (especially class), social institutions, and relations between large groups.

Meso

The structure of social networks among individuals or organisations, which links back to Chapter 5's networks.

Micro

How norms shape individual behaviour within a social system. The article notes that these levels often overlap.

Different thinkers locate the "structure" in different places, according to the same page. Marx related political, cultural and religious life to the mode of production, arguing that the economic base largely determines the superstructure; Althusser later gave cultural and political institutions

more autonomy, with economics determining them only "in the last instance". Tönnies argued in 1905 that a multitude becomes a social structure only when it is constituted as a unity. Durkheim contrasted mechanical solidarity (similar parts united by shared culture) with organic solidarity (differentiated parts united by interdependence). Anthony Giddens, in structuration, treats structure and agency as inseparable, so that structures are sets of rules and resources that actors draw on and reproduce. Pierre Bourdieu, in practice theory, sees structure as embedded in individual behaviour rather than determining it. The gap between Durkheim's 1895 call to study institutions (from the Institution page below) and Tönnies's 1905 essay is 10 years (computed in Python).

> **Structure is not a cage**
>
> It is easy to picture structure as a fixed set of walls. The Social structure page itself shows the thinkers disagreeing: Marx's base determines, Giddens's rules are reproduced by the people who use them, and Bourdieu places structure inside behaviour. The page also reports a long-running argument over whether structures are natural products of systemic needs or group conflict, or are socially constructed by elites or economic systems. Treat "structure" as a name for a puzzle, not as a settled answer.

Status: Positions in the Structure

Wikipedia's Social status article defines status as "the relative level of social value a person is considered to possess." It credits Ralph Linton's *The Study of Man* (1936) as the source of two terms. Ascribed status is fixed at birth, with caste, race and beauty as the page's examples. Achieved status comes from effort and ability, such as education or occupation, and the page links it to social mobility, which Chapter 7 takes up (that chapter pointer is my own course plan) (check). Wasserman and Faust are quoted on the same page as saying that Linton "uses the term 'status' in a way that is identical to our use of the term 'position'". So in this chapter "status" has two senses: honour or standing, as above, and a place in the structure. The page itself uses both.

Term	What the Social status page says
Ascribed status	Fixed at birth (examples: caste, race, beauty)
Achieved status	Comes from effort and ability (examples: education, occupation)

Term	What the Social status page says
Master status	"the status most important for determining a person's position in a given context"
Status inconsistency	A situation where "an individual's social positions have both positive and negative influences" on status; example: a teacher with high prestige but low income
Weber's scheme	"class, status, and power" as three aspects of stratification; status is honour that comes from belonging to groups with distinct lifestyles and privileges

A concept the page itself questions

The page calls master status "contested". It reports status characteristics research (Berger et al., 1992; Lucas and Phelan, 2012) finding that known ability weakens the effect of supposed master statuses, with mental illness as the example. It also says the stress hypothesis about status inconsistency (Stryker and Macke, 1978) produced inconsistent evidence. So two of the textbook concepts in the table come with evidence that they are less clear-cut than the definitions suggest.

Roles: What Is Expected of a Position

Wikipedia's Social role article defines a role as "a set of connected behaviors, rights, obligations, beliefs, and norms as conceptualized by people in a social situation." It can be achieved or ascribed, and semi-permanent or transitory. A status is the position; the role is what goes with it (this one-line summary is my own wording, joining the two pages) (check). The article credits George Herbert Mead (1934, *Mind, Self, and Society*) with exploring how children learn through "imaginative role-taking, observing and mimicking others", the same Mead as in Chapter 4. It credits Robert K. Merton (1957) as the source of the role set, and Talcott Parsons (late 1940s) with the "sick role", in which a person is "exempted from their usual roles" and expected to follow transitory standards such as doctors' orders. Linton's 1936 book came 21 years before Merton's 1957 and 2 years after Mead's 1934 (computed in Python).

Role set

"that complement of role-relationships in which persons are involved by virtue of occupying a particular social status" (Merton,

Role strain

"the incompatibility among roles corresponding to a single status". The page's

1957, as cited on the page). One status, several relationships: a teacher relates to pupils, parents, colleagues and a head teacher (this example is my own) (check).

example is a student pulled between school, parents and a job.

Role conflict

A person must hold two different, incompatible roles at once. The page's example is a father who coaches a baseball team and must choose between his son and a more experienced pitcher.

Two words, two situations

Reading the two definitions side by side, strain concerns clashing demands inside one status, while conflict concerns clashes between separate roles. The student's school, parents and job example is listed under strain on the page, though a job and being a pupil sound like different roles, so the line between the two terms is not as sharp as the definitions imply. That observation is my own (check). The page I read did not cover role exit, so this chapter says nothing about it.

Institutions

Wikipedia's Institution article defines an institution as a socially constructed structure of rules and norms that shapes and constrains behaviour. Definitions range from informal practices to highly formal systems, and persistence and continuity are common to all of them. The page's examples include the family, religion, peer groups, economic systems, legal systems, schools, universities, medicine, the military, language and mass media, and in a broader sense art, culture and the nation-state. Notice that several are things earlier chapters treated as groups or agents of socialisation: the same family appears as a primary group (Chapter 5), an agent of socialisation (Chapter 4) and an institution (here). The group is the people; the institution is the lasting pattern of rules around them (this contrast is my own summary) (check).

Theorist (date, per the page)	How they describe institutions
Durkheim (1895)	Sociology as the "science of institutions, their genesis and their functioning"
Huntington (1996)	"stable, valued, recurring patterns of behavior"
Knight (1992)	"a set of rules that structure social interactions"
Keohane (1988)	"persistent and connected sets of rules"
Levitsky and Murillo (2009)	Weak institutions "are frequently violated or changed"

Where institutions come from, and how they change

The page reports that scholars do not agree about how institutions form. Some say they emerge spontaneously as actors converge on arrangements (Sugden, 1989); others point to evolutionary or learning processes, to social contracts (Hechter, 1990) or to rational design (Koremenos, Lipson and Snidal, 2001). The "credibility thesis" holds that institutions arise from deliberate building but rarely take their intended form. On change, Meyer and Rowan (1977) introduced institutional theory, and DiMaggio and Powell (1983) described institutional isomorphism through coercive, mimetic and normative pressures, which means that organisations come to resemble each other. Six years separate those two papers (1983 minus 1977, computed in Python). The page also says North describes change as incremental and driven by "political entrepreneurs", and that Mahoney studies path dependence through critical junctures. Many of the names listed (Acemoglu, North, Keohane) are, from my general knowledge, economists or political scientists rather than sociologists (check), so this page is wider than sociology.

> **Read the Institution page's limits**
>
> The fetch of this page was cut off: the tool reported that the text was 130,101 characters long and that only the first 100,000 were read. That is 76.9 percent read and 23.1 percent unread (30,101 characters), my arithmetic from Python. The summary I received stopped partway through the page's reference list, but I cannot say what the unread characters contained, so nothing here claims that the page lacks a criticism section.

Social Order

Wikipedia's Social order article says the phrase has two meanings. It can mean a particular system of social structures and institutions, such as the feudal or capitalist order, or a stable state of society as opposed to chaos. The "problem of order" asks "the question of how and why it is that social orders exist at all." The page credits Hobbes as the first to state the problem clearly, answering with the social contract, and gives no date for his work.

Thinker	Where order comes from, per the Social order page
Hobbes	A social contract
Marx	The economic base: "the relations of production"
Durkheim	"a set of shared social norms"
Parsons	"a set of social institutions regulating the pattern of action-orientation", resting in turn on cultural values
Habermas	All of the above, plus communicative action
Weber	Domination and symbolic systems; Bourdieu kept this emphasis

The page sorts these into contrasts. One is material versus normative versus institutional (Marx, Durkheim, Parsons). Another, citing Hechter and Horne (2003), sets control by an external coercive state against values the individual has internalised. A third is planned versus spontaneous order: the page says predictability can arise without central control, and gives Schelling's segregation study, which it quotes as finding that "when all individuals pursue their own preferences, the outcome is segregation rather than integration". That passage is tagged "[citation needed]" on the page, so it is a claim to treat with care, and I did not check Schelling's own work (check).

No single answer

Putting the pages together, the chapter's thread is that structure, status, role, institution and order are not one theory's vocabulary. The Social order page presents Marx, Durkheim, Parsons and Weber as giving different answers to the same question, and the Social structure page does the same for structure. Chapter 2's three lenses (functionalism,

conflict theory and symbolic interactionism) each tend to stress a different one of these answers (that mapping is my own, from general knowledge) (check).

Where to Read More

- **Pages used.** This chapter uses five Wikipedia pages: Social structure, Institution, Social status, Social role and Social order. The Social structure, Social status, Social role and Social order fetches each reported no length and appeared complete, but I cannot tell exactly how much of each was read. The Institution page was cut off after 100,000 of 130,101 characters.
- **Summaries.** The fetch tool returns a summary made by a small model, not the raw page, so quotations are only as exact as that summary. Where the tool said a page gave no date (Tocqueville, Hobbes, Weber on the Social order page), none is given here.
- **Primary texts.** I have not read Linton, Merton, Mead, Parsons, Giddens, Bourdieu or any other thinker named above directly; every claim comes from the Wikipedia pages.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Using the Social status and Social role tables and cards, classify each of these as ascribed or achieved status, and say whether the situation described is a role set, role strain or role conflict, or none of these: (a) a person born into a caste; (b) a nurse with a degree who reports to a ward manager, a doctor and patients; (c) a student whose job hours clash with exam revision; (d) a woman who is both a school governor and the parent of a pupil whose case the governors must discuss. Where the pages do not settle it, say so.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Do the arithmetic from this chapter: (a) the gap between Linton's 1936 book and Merton's 1957 role-set paper, (b) the gap between Mead's 1934 book and Linton's 1936

book, (c) the percentage of the Institution page that was read, given 100,000 of 130,101 characters, to one decimal place, and (d) how many characters were not read. Then explain in a sentence why the page's quotations about institutions may still be reliable even though almost a quarter of the page was not read, and in another why you should not conclude that the page has no criticisms.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

A town has a school, a hospital, a football club and a small court. Choose two of the thinkers in the Social order table and write a short paragraph for each saying what that thinker would point to as the source of the town's order. Then say which explanation seems to fit the football club best and which fits the court best, and finish with one sentence on what extra evidence would settle the matter.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Social structure:** "aggregate of patterned social arrangements in society" (Wikipedia, Social structure); macro, meso, micro levels
- **Status:** relative level of social value; ascribed (at birth) or achieved (by effort), terms from Linton (1936)
- **Master status:** the status most important in a given context; described on the page as contested
- **Role:** connected behaviours, rights, obligations, beliefs and norms; role set (Merton, 1957), role strain, role conflict
- **Institution:** socially constructed structure of rules and norms that shapes behaviour; examples include family, schools, law and mass media
- **Social order:** either a particular system, or stability as opposed to chaos; explained differently by Hobbes, Marx, Durkheim, Parsons, Habermas and Weber
- **Reading limits:** the Institution page was read to 76.9 percent

- **Check:** the status-and-role summary, the group-versus-institution contrast, the teacher example, the role strain versus conflict observation, the mapping to Chapter 2's lenses, and the Schelling claim

Coming next

Chapter 7, Inequality and Class, turns to stratification: how structure ranks people, what class means, how people move between ranks, and what the evidence says about poverty.

Chapter 6 described the structure of a society as a set of positions, roles and institutions. This chapter asks the question that structure raises next: are those positions equal? In every society studied, resources such as money, power and prestige are spread unevenly, and sociologists want to know how the unevenness is arranged, who gets which share, whether people can move between shares, and how it can be measured. Chapter 6 also promised a look at how structure ranks people, what class means, how people move between ranks, and what the evidence says about poverty; the sections below follow that order. Two terms from Chapter 6 return here: ascribed and achieved status.

Inequality and Stratification

Wikipedia's Social inequality article says it "occurs when resources within a society are unevenly distributed". It names religion, kinship, race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation and class as possible bases, and says it is closely tied to economic inequality in income and wealth. The same article defines social stratification as "the hierarchical arrangement of society about social class, wealth, political influence". The article does not set the two terms against each other, so the following contrast is my own reading: inequality is about how unevenly resources are spread, and stratification is about the layered, ranked structure that results (check).

Wikipedia's Social stratification article describes it as "a society's hierarchical categorization of its people into groups based on socioeconomic factors", with wealth, income, occupation and power among the factors. Western societies, it says, are usually divided into upper, middle and working classes, and each of these can be subdivided further.

System	What the Social stratification page says	Link to Chapter 6
Caste	A closed system: "all aspects of social status are ascribed, such that one's social position at birth persists throughout one's lifetime"	Pure ascribed status
Class	An open system in which mobility is possible, typically based on achieved status; societies with high intragenerational mobility are considered the most open	Mostly achieved status

System	What the Social stratification page says	Link to Chapter 6
Slavery	Described in the article's discussion of race as a form of oppression in which "the majority refuses to grant basic rights to a minority"	Not covered further here

Open does not mean equal

An "open" class system is one in which moving between classes is possible. That does not say how easy it is, or how unequal the classes are. The mobility figures later in this chapter show how far real class systems can be from the ideal of open competition. Also, the Social stratification page lists estates only in passing: the part of it that I read mentions feudal societies, based on relations between nobility and peasants, but does not treat estates as a system, so this chapter does not either.

Class: Three Ways to Define It

Wikipedia's Social class article defines a class as "a set of hierarchical social categories", most commonly working, middle and upper class. It separates social class, described as a relatively stable cultural background, from socioeconomic status, which describes a person's current situation and can change more easily. The three founders from Chapter 1 gave different accounts of what makes a class.

Marx

Class is determined by one's relationship to the means of production. Under capitalism, per the Social class page, the proletariat work but do not own the means of production, and the bourgeoisie live off the surplus workers generate. The Social stratification page adds that Marx saw conflict between owners and workers as central.

Weber

Three separate sources of hierarchy: class (economic position), status (prestige and honour) and power (the ability to get one's way despite resistance). The Social stratification page says Weber rejected the view that economic ownership is the only basis of stratification, and describes four classes: upper class, white-collar workers, petite bourgeoisie and manual working class.

Bourdieu

The Social class page lists his kinds of capital: economic capital (assets convertible to money), and three cultural forms: personal (formal education and knowledge), objective (physical goods such as books and art) and institutionalised (formal recognition such as "honours and titles").

Two pages, two phrasings of Weber

The Social class page, as the fetch summary gave it, quotes Weber's class position as "determined by a person's relationship to the means of production", which is the same wording used for Marx. The Social stratification page says Weber rejected Marx's view that ownership is the only basis. The two pages therefore seem to disagree, or the summary of one of them is imprecise. I cannot tell which from what I read. Weber's three-part scheme of class, status and power is stated consistently by both pages, so that is the part used above.

Modern attempts to measure class

The Social class page describes the Great British Class Survey, published by BBC Lab UK on 2 April 2013 and developed with academic experts. It covered 160,000 UK residents, mostly in England, who described themselves as white. It measured class through three kinds of resource: economic capital (income and assets), cultural capital (interests and activities) and social capital (the status of one's contacts). The sample was therefore a self-selected group, not a random one; that reading of "who described themselves as white" and a volunteer survey is my own inference (check).

Two functionalist and conflict-style readings

The Social stratification page presents the Davis-Moore hypothesis as a structural-functionalist argument: high income reflects functional importance and scarce talent, and inequality serves a motivating role in society. Against this it sets C. Wright Mills's argument (the same Mills as in Chapter 1) that a "power elite" in politics, the military and corporations holds power, with elite education and social networks reinforcing its position.

> The pairing echoes Chapter 2's functionalist and conflict lenses, though the pages do not use those labels in this passage (my own mapping) (check).

Social Mobility

Wikipedia's Social mobility article opens: "Social mobility is the movement of people within or between social strata in a society." It is a change in social status relative to one's starting point and can be upward or downward. It separates two kinds: intragenerational mobility, within one generation, and intergenerational mobility, between generations, such as children's status compared with their parents'. The page calls intergenerational mobility central to the "American Dream". The page I read does not define absolute and relative mobility, so this chapter does not use those terms for mobility.

Figure on the Social mobility page	What it says
Quintile odds	A child of parents in the lowest income quintile is more than 10 times as likely to end up in the lowest quintile as an adult as a child of parents in the highest quintile; a child of the highest quintile is five times more likely to stay there than to fall to the lowest
Brookings (2013)	The gap in school test scores between high- and low-income students grew by almost 40% over thirty years; college graduation among the poorest rose about 4 percentage points for those born in the early 1960s versus the early 1980s, compared with almost 20 points for the wealthiest
Top-tier US colleges	75% of entering freshmen come from the uppermost socioeconomic quartile
Education spending (2013)	High-income families spent seven times as much on education as low-income families
Cross-country (2006)	Denmark, Norway, Finland and Canada had the highest mobility, with under 20% of a high-income parent's advantage passed to children; the Spirit Level (2009) comparison of eight countries found the US had the highest economic inequality and the lowest economic mobility

The percentages in the Brookings row are easy to misread. A rise of about 4 percentage points for the poorest against almost 20 for the wealthiest gives a gap of roughly 16 points between the groups (20 minus 4, my arithmetic). The 40% growth in the test-score gap is a relative growth of a gap, not a 40-point change (the interpretation is mine) (check). The 2013 Brookings date and the 2012 study of Chile and Brazil (low mobility) are the page's own dates, and I did not check the underlying studies.

> **Belief versus evidence**
>
> The same page reports that in 2008 Americans had the highest belief in meritocracy among middle- and high-income countries. Michael Young, the Social inequality page says, coined "meritocracy" in 1958 as a critique, arguing that it could entrench elites and injustice. The gap from 1958 to the 2013 Brookings report is 55 years (computed in Python). The page's mobility figures sit awkwardly beside the belief, which is exactly the kind of gap between what people think and what the data show that the sociological imagination from Chapter 1 invites you to question.

Poverty: Absolute and Relative

Wikipedia's Poverty article separates two ideas. Absolute poverty, also called extreme or abject poverty, uses a fixed standard that stays the same over time and across countries; the page describes it as "severe deprivation of basic human needs", covering food, water, sanitation, health, shelter and education. Relative poverty is "socially defined and dependent on social context", usually measured as income below a fixed share of the median. The OECD and the EU use "a level of income set at 60% of the median household income".

World Bank international poverty line, per day (PPP)	Value
1993 to 2005	$1.08
2009	$1.25
2015	$1.90

The page notes that the $1.90 line is controversial, and cites the UN rapporteur Philip Alston as arguing that nearly half the global population, about 3.4 billion people, lives on less than $5.50 a

day. From 2009 to 2015 the line rose by $0.65 (1.90 minus 1.25, computed in Python), about 1.52 times the 2009 value. The Social stratification page adds World Bank data for 2012: 21% of people worldwide, around 1.5 billion, lived in extreme poverty at or below $1.25 a day. Dividing 1.5 billion by 0.21 implies a world population of about 7.14 billion (my arithmetic, rounded) (check).

Why both measures are needed

A fixed line tracks whether people can afford basic needs. A relative line tracks whether people fall far behind their neighbours. If a country's median income doubled, a fixed line would show no change while a 60%-of-median line would move with it. Hypothetical example, mine: with a median of 30,000, 60% is 18,000; if the median rises to 36,000, the line becomes 21,600 (computed in Python), so a person on 20,000 whose income did not change is now below the relative line (check). The Poverty page also mentions "secondary poverty", where spending on alcohol, tobacco, gambling or drugs can push people below the line even if they earn enough to avoid it. It also says social forces such as gender, disability and race "can exacerbate issues of poverty". The page's own Causes section was not in the text I read.

Measuring Inequality: the Gini Coefficient

Wikipedia's Gini coefficient article calls it a measure of statistical dispersion "intended to represent the income inequality" (or wealth or consumption inequality) within a nation or social group. "A Gini coefficient of 0 reflects perfect equality", and 1 (or 100%) reflects maximal inequality. It is usually defined from the Lorenz curve, which plots the cumulative share of total income against the cumulative share of the population; the Gini equals the area between the line of perfect equality and the Lorenz curve, divided by the total area under that line.

A small worked example, using a formula I applied myself (the sum of absolute differences between every ordered pair, divided by two times the number of people squared times the mean; I did not take this formula from the page) (check). For five incomes of 10, 20, 30, 40 and 100, the total is 200, the mean is 40, and the result is 0.4 (computed in Python). For five identical incomes of 40 the sum of differences is 0, so the Gini is 0, matching the page's description of perfect equality.

Relative, not absolute

The page says it measures relative dispersion, so it can rise even as absolute poverty falls.

Not additive

"It is not additive and different sets of people cannot be averaged" to get the overall coefficient.

Hides levels

It "does not contain information about absolute national or personal incomes", and income measures can hide large wealth inequality.

Wealth at the top

The Social stratification page reports a January 2014 Oxfam finding that the 85 wealthiest individuals held wealth equal to that of the bottom 50% of the world's population, about 3.5 billion people. Dividing 3.5 billion by 85 gives about 41.2 million (my arithmetic), so each of those people had on average as much wealth as 41 million of the poorest group put together, if the figures are accurate (check). I did not look at the Oxfam report itself.

Where to Read More

- **Pages used.** Six Wikipedia pages: Social stratification, Social class, Social mobility, Poverty, Gini coefficient and Social inequality. All six were cut off by the fetch tool at 100,000 characters.
- **How much was read.** Social stratification 100,000 of 139,818 (71.5 percent); Social class 100,000 of 162,319 (61.6 percent); Social mobility 100,000 of 105,871 (94.5 percent); Poverty 100,000 of 265,432 (37.7 percent); Gini coefficient 100,000 of 221,475 (45.2 percent); Social inequality 100,000 of 172,114 (58.1 percent). All percentages were computed in Python. The Poverty page was read least, so its missing 62.3 percent, including its Causes and poverty reduction sections, could contain material that qualifies what is said here.
- **Summaries.** The fetch tool returns a summary by a small model, not raw page text, so quotations are only as exact as that summary.

- **Primary sources.** I have not read Marx, Weber, Bourdieu, Mills, Davis and Moore, Oxfam or Brookings directly.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Using the stratification table and the mobility definitions, say for each case whether it describes a caste-like or class-like system, and whether any movement is intragenerational or intergenerational: (a) a shop assistant becomes a manager after ten years; (b) the daughter of a miner becomes a surgeon; (c) a person whose position is fixed at birth for life; (d) a surgeon's son becomes a surgeon. Then say which two of (a) to (d) show the least evidence of mobility and why.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Two villages each have five households. Village A has incomes 10, 20, 30, 40 and 100; Village B has incomes 0, 0, 0, 0 and 100. Using the formula given in the chapter, work out the Gini coefficient for each in Python or by hand, then say which village is more unequal, what a Gini of 0 would mean, and one thing the Gini cannot tell you about either village.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

A country has a median household income of 24,000. (a) Work out the 60%-of-median relative poverty line. (b) Suppose the median rises to 30,000 and a household stays on 16,000: is it below the line before and after? (c) Explain why this household could be described as poorer in relative terms yet no worse off in absolute terms, and use the chapter's reading figures to say how much of the Poverty page was read.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Social inequality:** resources unevenly distributed in a society (Wikipedia, Social inequality)
- **Stratification:** hierarchical categorisation of people into groups based on socioeconomic factors; caste (closed, ascribed) and class (open, mostly achieved)
- **Class:** Marx (relationship to the means of production); Weber (class, status and power); Bourdieu (economic and cultural capital)
- **Social mobility:** movement within or between strata; intragenerational or intergenerational
- **Poverty:** absolute (fixed standard) or relative (e.g. 60% of median income, OECD and EU)
- **Gini coefficient:** 0 is perfect equality, 1 is maximal inequality; relative, not additive
- **Reading limits:** all six pages cut at 100,000 characters; the Poverty page was read least (37.7 percent)
- **Check:** the inequality-versus-stratification contrast, the survey-sample inference, the mapping to Chapter 2's lenses, the percentage-point interpretation, the implied population, the median-line example, the Gini formula and the Oxfam ratio

Coming next

Chapter 8, Race, Ethnicity and Gender, looks at social construction, discrimination and how these categories intersect with each other and with the class divisions seen here.

Sociology Fundamentals

Course 1 · Chapter 8 · Race, Ethnicity and Gender: Categories That Society Builds

Chapter 7 ended by saying that this chapter would look at social construction, discrimination and how categories intersect with each other and with class. The categories of race, ethnicity and gender are used to sort people and, as Chapter 6 showed with ascribed status, they are often treated as fixed at birth. Sociologists ask a different question: how did these categories come to mean what they mean, what effects do they have in everyday life, and what happens when a person belongs to several of them at once? The sections below follow that order. "Constructed" does not mean "unreal" here, and the chapter tries to keep that point visible throughout.

What "Social Construction" Claims

Wikipedia's Race (human categorization) article says that modern science treats race as a "social construct", an identity assigned by society's rules, and that race has no inherent biological meaning. The same article says that most scholars agree race has real material effects through institutional preference and discrimination, and that scholars still debate how far racial categories are biologically warranted. So the claim has two halves that must be kept together: the categories are made by societies, and the consequences of using them are real.

Made, not found

Definitions vary by culture and change over time, and dominant groups often created the categories, per the Race article.

Real in effect

A category can be invented and still decide who is hired, stopped, paid or believed. This echoes the idea of a social fact from Chapter 1: it is external to the individual and presses on them.

Not the same as "fake"

Money, language and marriage are also built by societies (Chapter 1) and nobody calls them imaginary (my own comparison) (check).

Race: A Short History and What Genetics Says

The Race article says the term was used in 16th-century Europe for various geographic and kinship groups, often ranked in a hierarchy, and that by the 17th century it began to refer to physical traits. It dates François Bernier's classification to 1684, Linnaeus's division of *Homo sapiens* into continental varieties to 1735, and Blumenbach's five divisions, with no hierarchy among them, to 1775. From Bernier to Linnaeus is 51 years and from Linnaeus to Blumenbach is 40 (computed in Python). The article reports Bancel and colleagues placing the invention of the modern concept between 1730 and 1790. It also says Franz Boas and Ashley Montagu challenged the concept on empirical grounds, and that in 2023 the US National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine formally renounced its use in genetics.

Where genetic variation is found	Share (Lewontin figures as cited on the Race page)
Within local populations	about 85%
Between populations on the same continent	about 7%
Between continents	about 8%

The three shares add up to 100 (computed in Python), so about 15% of the variation lies between groups of any kind in this breakdown. The page also quotes Witherspoon and colleagues (2007): "most human genetic variation is found within populations, not between them." It quotes Craig Venter (2000): "Race is a social concept. It's not a scientific one." Disagreement is also reported on the same page: David Reich is paraphrased as saying that differences in genetic ancestry which happen to correlate with racial constructs are real. The page presents both views, and I cannot tell from the part I read how the full article resolves them.

> **Do not stretch the numbers**
>
> The 85/7/8 split describes how variation is distributed across a whole species. It does not say that groups never differ on any trait, and it says nothing about whether racial categories shape life chances, which the Race article says they do. Reading a statistic about genes as an answer to a question about society, or the reverse, is a mistake of level (my own framing) (check).

Ethnicity: Identity and Boundaries

Wikipedia's Ethnic group article defines the term as "a group of humans who identify with each other on the basis of perceived shared attributes", which may include language, culture, ancestry and religion. It notes that ethnicity is sometimes used interchangeably with race, but that "not all ethnicities identify as racial groups". It reports that before Max Weber race and ethnicity were largely treated as two aspects of one thing, and that Weber's view of ethnicity as a social construct helped separate them. It credits Robert E. Park, in the 1920s, with an ethnicity theory that treats race as one of several factors in ethnicity alongside religion, language, customs, nationality and political identification. Michael Omi and Howard Winant are named as critics of that theory in *Racial Formation in the United States*; I do not know their argument beyond the title.

Idea	What the Ethnic group page says
Barth (1969)	*Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* is credited with spreading the term in social studies; ethnicity is constructed and continually negotiated through external ascription and self-identification, shifting attention to the interface between groups
Cohen (1978)	Outsiders' ethnic labels often misrepresent local realities
UNESCO (1950)	"The Race Question" proposed using "ethnic groups" instead of "race" for humans
Scale	Over 3,000 ethnic groups in Africa; more than 2,000 in India; over 600 in Indonesia

Identity changes on the census

The Ethnic group page says that in 2021, 13.5 million non-Hispanic Americans identified as more than one race, and that non-Hispanic multiracial identification rose 127% over the 2010s. A rise of 127% means the 2020 figure was about 2.27 times the 2010 one (100 plus 127 is 227, my arithmetic). The page gives these as identification counts, which fits Barth's point that membership is partly a matter of how people and others label them. Whether the change reflects new people or new willingness to tick a box is not something the page settles.

Gender as a Social Construction

Wikipedia's Social construction of gender article calls it a theory in the humanities and social sciences that examines how gender perception and expression arise from cultural origins, mechanisms and social interaction. It says gender is distinct from biological sex, that it is learned through socialisation from early childhood (Chapter 4) and reinforced through education, family and media, and that gender roles vary across time, culture and context. It describes the view that gender roles are "an achieved status" in a social environment. That is the status vocabulary from Chapter 6, and it is worth noticing that Chapter 6 listed race as an ascribed status while this page treats gender as achieved through interaction, so the two chapters' pages do not use one simple rule.

- **West and Zimmerman (1987):** gender as an accomplishment, "doing gender", which is situational and interactional.
- **Goffman (1956) and Garfinkel (1967):** early interactionist work treating gender as performance and ongoing achievement. This links to the symbolic interactionism of Chapter 2 (my own link) (check).
- **Judith Butler (1990):** in *Gender Trouble*, introduced gender performativity, the claim that gender is produced through repeated acts rather than expressing a pre-existing self.
- **Disagreement:** the page also lists critics. Steven Pinker accepts some socially constructed categories but rejects social constructionism as the sole explanation; Elizabeth Grosz argues the sex-gender distinction is itself essentialist; and several trans studies writers object that social construction oversimplifies embodiment. I read these only as short summaries.

> **A dating note**
>
> The page says John Money introduced the concept of gender roles in the 1950s and Robert Stoller coined "gender identity" in 1964. The gap between Goffman's 1956 work and West and Zimmerman's 1987 paper is 31 years (computed in Python), so the interactional view of gender developed over decades before the "doing gender" phrase.

Discrimination: Definition and Examples

Wikipedia's Discrimination article opens with "making unjustified distinctions between people based on the groups, classes, or other categories", which it says usually deprives people of legal or human rights. It adds that moral philosophers use a moralised definition, in which discrimination involves acts that "wrongfully impose a relative disadvantage or deprivation on persons based on their membership in a salient social group". Under that view, the page says, a person can be discriminated against without being harmed. The part of the page I read did not discuss direct versus indirect discrimination or statistical discrimination, so this chapter does not define them, and the same part gave institutional discrimination only as a link and a remark that discriminatory traditions, policies and laws exist in institutions worldwide.

Example on the Discrimination page	Figure given
Age	A Texas A&M study: firms more than 40% more likely to interview young applicants than older ones
Caste	UNICEF and Human Rights Watch estimate about 250 million affected worldwide
Names	Recruiters reportedly spend about six seconds on an initial résumé review; France bans viewing names when screening initial lists
Law	Ontario Human Rights Code (1962), Canadian Human Rights Act (1977), UK Equality Act 2010

These are figures as the page reports them. I did not follow them to the underlying studies, and a single study of one country does not tell us the rate everywhere (my own caution) (check).

The Gender Pay Gap

Wikipedia's Gender pay gap article defines it as "the average difference between the remuneration for men and women who are employed". It separates the **unadjusted** gap, the average difference in yearly earnings between male and female workers, from the **adjusted** gap, the difference in pay for the same work after accounting for hours, occupation, education and experience. The article says the adjusted gap is much smaller, which means most of the overall gap comes from differences in jobs and hours rather than from pay for the same work. That does not make the difference harmless: the page lists occupational segregation, the

"motherhood penalty", gender norms, glass ceilings and discrimination among the explanations, and says studies disagree about how large the discrimination part is.

United States

Women earned 85% of men's earnings in 2024 (Pew), up from 81% in 2003; the median was 56% in 1963 and 79% in 2016.

Spread across countries

In 2022 the gap ran from 9.9% in Hungary to 40.6% in South Korea; Luxembourg was -0.9% in 2023, meaning women were paid slightly more per hour.

Method matters

The page gives a global unadjusted gap of 68.5% from the World Economic Forum, which is a different kind of measure from the hourly figures above (my reading) (check).

Arithmetic on the US figures: 85 minus 81 is 4 points over 21 years (2003 to 2024), and 79 minus 56 is 23 points over 53 years (1963 to 2016), all computed in Python. If women earn 85 for each 100 earned by men, the gap is 15% of men's earnings, but men earn about 17.6% more than women (100 divided by 85, minus 1). The two statements are both correct and they are easy to mix up, which is a good habit to check for in any news report that quotes a "gap" (check).

Two different cautions

A gap in average pay is not by itself proof of unequal pay for the same job, and a small adjusted gap is not proof that nothing unfair is happening. The page says some of the explanatory factors, such as hours and occupation, are themselves shaped by gender norms. Which weight to give each factor is where the page reports disagreement.

Intersectionality

Wikipedia's Intersectionality article says Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term in 1989, in the essay *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex*, and developed it in 1991. It describes intersectionality as "an analytical framework for understanding how groups' and individuals' social and political identities" produce combined effects of discrimination and privilege. The

article names earlier writers who described overlapping oppressions, including Sojourner Truth (1851), Anna J. Cooper (1892) and Pauli Murray (1947). From Truth to Crenshaw's coinage is 138 years (computed in Python), so the idea is much older than the word.

> **The court case behind the idea**
>
> The article describes *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors* (1976), in which five Black women alleged compound discrimination in layoffs. According to the page, the court considered race and gender separately, declined to consider compound discrimination, and dismissed the case. That is 13 years before Crenshaw's 1989 essay (computed in Python). The lesson drawn on the page is that a law looking at one category at a time can miss harm that appears only where two categories meet. Whether the facts of the case support that reading in full is not something I could judge from the page's short account.

The page also lists criticisms: that the concept is too broad or complex, that it can reduce people to demographic categories, that it is hard to apply in research, and that postcolonial and transnational feminists see it as reflecting WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialised, rich, democratic) societies. A notice on the page, dated February 2025, says it focuses primarily on the United States. This chapter's other pages also lean towards the United States in their figures, which is a limit on how far the examples carry to other countries (my own observation) (check).

Linking back: Chapter 7 treated class as one way of ranking people. Intersectionality asks what happens when class, race and gender operate together, and it can be read as a challenge to treating each one as a separate row in a table. Whether it is a theory, a method or a framework for thinking is debated; the page calls it an analytical framework.

Where to Read More

- **Pages used.** Six Wikipedia pages: Social construction of gender, Intersectionality, Race (human categorization), Ethnic group, Discrimination and Gender pay gap. All six were cut off by the fetch tool at 100,000 characters.
- **How much was read.** Social construction of gender 100,000 of 195,413 (51.2 percent); Intersectionality 100,000 of 278,591 (35.9 percent); Race 100,000 of 285,922 (35.0 percent); Ethnic group 100,000 of 191,715 (52.2 percent); Discrimination 100,000 of 265,855 (37.6 percent); Gender pay gap 100,000 of 299,366 (33.4 percent). All percentages were

computed in Python. The Gender pay gap page was read least, and the Race page nearly as little, so later sections that may qualify what is said here were not seen.

- **Summaries.** The fetch tool returns a summary by a small model, not raw page text, so quotations are only as exact as that summary.
- **Primary sources.** I have not read Crenshaw, Butler, Barth, Weber or any of the studies the pages cite.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Using only figures in this chapter: (a) add the three Lewontin shares and say what share lies between groups, within or across continents; (b) work out the change in the US pay ratio from 2003 (81%) to 2024 (85%) in percentage points and per year; (c) if women earn 85 for every 100 men earn, state the gap as a share of men's earnings and then state how much more men earn than women, as a percentage to one decimal place; (d) explain in a sentence why (c) gives two different numbers for one fact.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Classify each case below as mainly about race, ethnicity or gender, and say which sentence of the chapter supports your choice. Then say whether the point is about the category being constructed, about its effects, or both: (a) a family identifies with a shared language, ancestry and religion and is seen that way by its neighbours; (b) a census form lets people tick more than one box and the count of people who do so rises sharply; (c) a girl is told in school which sports are "for girls"; (d) a hiring manager who spends six seconds on each résumé is influenced by the applicant's name.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

A firm only hired Black workers for its factory floor (all men) and only hired women for its office (all white). A Black woman applies for a job and is turned down for both. (a)

Explain why a court that checks "race" alone and "gender" alone might find no discrimination. (b) Say which case in the chapter describes the same pattern and what the court did there. (c) Give one limit on how far this chapter's evidence can be generalised, using the chapter's own reading figures for the Intersectionality page.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Social construction:** categories are made and changed by societies, yet have real effects (Race page)
- **Race:** modern science treats it as a social construct; about 85% of variation is within local populations (Lewontin, as cited)
- **Ethnicity:** a group identifying on the basis of perceived shared attributes; Barth: negotiated at boundaries
- **Gender:** distinct from sex; learned and reinforced; "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman, 1987)
- **Discrimination:** unjustified distinctions between people based on groups or categories
- **Pay gap:** unadjusted (all earnings) versus adjusted (same work); US 85% in 2024 (Pew)
- **Intersectionality:** Crenshaw, 1989; combined effects of overlapping identities
- **Reading limits:** all six pages cut at 100,000 characters; the Gender pay gap page was read least (33.4 percent)

Coming next

Chapter 9, Deviance and Social Control, looks at norms and how breaking them is defined, labelling, crime and the ways societies try to control behaviour.

Sociology Fundamentals

Course 1 · Chapter 9 · Deviance and Control: Who Breaks the Rules, and Who Decides

Chapter 3 introduced norms and said that breaking them can bring reprimands, exclusion or, in the extreme, legal penalties. It also promised that labelling would come back in this chapter, and Chapter 8 ended by saying that this one would cover how norm-breaking is defined, labelling, crime and the ways societies control behaviour. The chapter follows that order. It starts with what "deviance" means, moves through four explanations (strain, learning, labelling and moral panic), then looks at crime as a category made by law and at the formal and informal means of control. One warning applies throughout: in sociology "deviant" is a description of breaking a norm, not a verdict that someone is bad.

What Counts as Deviance

Wikipedia's Deviance (sociology) article describes deviance as behaviour that breaks social norms, covering both formal rules such as crime and informal violations of unwritten norms. It separates the two: formal deviance "can be described as a crime which violates the laws of a society", while informal deviance means "minor violations that break unwritten rules of social life". It says that deviance "is relative to the place where it was committed or to the time the act took place", so the same act can be deviant in one society and ordinary in another. It also says that positive deviation exists in some situations, which is a reminder that the word is not automatically an insult.

Formal deviance

Breaks a written law. Example in the article's terms: a crime.

Informal deviance

Breaks an unwritten rule, such as a social convention. Chapter 3 gave the matching idea of norms enforced by reprimand or exclusion.

Relative, not absolute

Depends on place and time. The Crime article makes the same point about law:

actions once condemned as crimes may later be considered justifiable.

The article connects this to Chapter 1. It says Durkheim held that deviance was "a normal and necessary part of social organization", and that he listed four functions, among them affirming cultural values and pushing moral boundaries, which can lead to social change. That is the Chapter 2 functionalist idea applied to rule-breaking. The article also reports that conflict theory "explains white-collar crime less well" (it ties conflict theory to Marx, Foucault and others), and it attributes a biological theory to Lombroso that it describes as largely disproved by later work. The page I read did not give a single agreed answer to which theory is best, and neither does this chapter.

> **The page was read in part**
>
> The Deviance article is 156,035 characters long by the fetch tool's report. I read the first 100,000 (64.1 percent, computed in Python), so the last 56,035 characters, which fell in the Further reading and External links sections, are not reflected here.

Strain: Merton on Goals and Means

Wikipedia's Strain theory (sociology) article says the theory "was originally introduced by Robert King Merton (1938)". It says Merton argued that a society's cultural goals and its institutional means can conflict, which pushes some people toward deviance, and that he borrowed Durkheim's idea of anomie. His main example was monetary success in the United States. Durkheim's suicide study dates to 1897 on the Deviance page, so Merton's article came 41 years later (1938 minus 1897, computed in Python). Chapter 6 already used Merton for the role set, so the same name appears in a different role here.

Adaptation	Accepts the goal?	Accepts the approved means?	What the page says
Conformity	Yes	Yes	"the most common response"
Innovation	Yes	No	Unapproved methods instead, such as theft or drug sales

Adaptation	Accepts the goal?	Accepts the approved means?	What the page says
Ritualism	No	Yes	Means followed so rigidly that they become a ritual
Retreatism	No	No	Withdrawal, for example substance abuse or isolation; "the least common response"
Rebellion	No	No	Rejects both and seeks to replace them with new ones

Retreatism and rebellion share the same two answers in the table, so the page tells them apart only by what the person does next: withdraw, or try to replace the goals and means. The article lists criticisms: that the theory best fits the lower class, that it does not explain white-collar crime, that it ignores people who feel strain without offending, and that it has weak empirical support. It dates Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory to 1992, 54 years after Merton (computed in Python). Agnew, it says, thought Merton's version too vague and moved the focus to individual, emotional strain, naming three sources: loss of positive stimuli, presentation of negative stimuli, and inability to reach a desired goal.

> **Deviance is not only poverty**
>
> The strain article reports that critics say the theory fits the lower class best and misses white-collar crime. Treating strain as the whole explanation of rule-breaking would go further than the page does (my own caution) (check).

Learning It: Differential Association

Wikipedia's Differential association article names Edwin Sutherland as the developer but, as I read it, gives no year for the theory, so none is stated here. It says individuals learn "the values, attitudes, techniques, and motives for criminal behavior", mostly within close personal groups, and that a person becomes delinquent through "an excess of definitions favorable to violation of law". The nine propositions it lists include that associations differ in frequency, duration, priority and intensity. It calls the theory "the most talked about of the learning theories of deviance", and it adds that the theory "does not concern itself with why they become criminals".

Compare with strain

Strain asks what pressure pushes people from the rules. Differential association asks what they have learned from the people around them. The two answer different questions (my own contrast) (check).

Echo of Chapter 4

Socialisation is learning from family, peers and media. This theory says criminal behaviour is learned through the same kind of contact (my own link) (check).

Criticism on the page

It does not take personality traits into account, and its view of people as shaped by their surroundings sits awkwardly with the idea of independent, rational actors.

Labelling: Deviance as a Reaction

Wikipedia's Labeling theory article says self-identity and behaviour may be shaped by the terms used to describe people, and treats deviance as produced by society's reactions rather than as a property of the act. It quotes Howard Becker's *Outsiders* (1963): "The deviant is one to whom that label has been successfully applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label." This is the idea Chapter 3 mentioned when it said Becker added that society defines subcultures as outsiders. The Chapter 4 self (Cooley, Mead, Goffman) is the background: how others see you feeds into how you see yourself.

- **Primary deviance** (Lemert): minor, early rule-breaking that does not change how the person sees themselves.
- **Secondary deviance**: what follows once a person has taken on the deviant label and organises behaviour around it. Lemert's book on this is listed in 1951, which is 12 years before Becker (computed in Python).
- **Stigma**: the page defines it as "a powerfully negative label that changes a person's self-concept and social identity" and describes Goffman's *Stigma* (1963) as the theory's most important contribution. That is the same year as Becker's book.
- **Self-fulfilling prophecy**: the page links negative labels such as "criminal" or "felon" to a prophecy that promotes deviant behaviour.

Study on the Labeling theory page	Finding as reported
Brand and Claiborn (1976)	Many people see a mental illness label as as stigmatizing as, or more than, labels such as drug addict or ex-convict
Page (1977)	Self-declared ex-mental patients were much less likely to be offered apartment leases or hired
Wright et al. (2000)	A two-year study of patients discharged from a mental hospital found stigma to be a persistent force

The page gives no figures for any of these studies, so none are given here. It lists criticisms too: that Becker neglected biological and genetic influences and personal responsibility, that the theory has been accused of promoting impractical policy, and that it fails to explain the most serious offences. It also reports a disagreement: Gove argued against Scheff's view and held that society has essentially no influence on mental illness. I only read a short summary of this exchange and cannot say how it was settled. The page appeared complete in the fetch, but it carried no length figure, so I cannot tell how it compares with the others (it is also flagged on the page as needing more citations).

Moral Panics

Wikipedia's Moral panic article defines it as a widespread fear that some evil person or thing threatens a community's values, interests or well-being. It credits Stanley Cohen with the phrase, from a thesis that became his 1972 book *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, based on British reaction to the rivalry between Mods and Rockers in the 1960s. His group names appear on the page: those who start panics are "moral entrepreneurs" and those seen as threats are "folk devils". Cohen wrote that "the untypical is made typical". Cohen's book came nine years after Becker's (1972 minus 1963, computed in Python), which fits the sense of both being about reactions to behaviour.

Cohen's stage (as the page lists them)	What happens
1	An event, person or group is defined as a threat to societal values, safety or interests

Cohen's stage (as the page lists them)	What happens
2	The mass media amplifies the threat, creating a folk devil and victims
3	Social anxiety rises among the public
4	Gatekeepers such as editors, religious leaders and politicians respond, often with new laws or policies
5	The condition fades, submerges or deteriorates

The page adds Goode and Ben-Yehuda's 1994 model with five elements: heightened concern, hostility, consensus that the threat is real, disproportionality and volatility. It gives a list of historical cases, among them the Red Scare and the 1950s comic book scare, and it says that fears of rising crime persist despite declines of 50 percent or more since the late 1980s and early 1990s. I did not follow that figure to a source, and 50 percent or more is a range, not a precise number. The page also reports criticisms: that there is no clear way to measure a "proportionate" reaction (the idea of disproportionality), and that Paul Joosse argues classic moral panic theory resembles Durkheim's collective conscience, which it claimed to critique. Other critics on the page argue that the concept accepts "morality" uncritically or reflects middle-class fear of a working-class "mob".

> **Reading level of the page**
>
> The Moral panic article is 217,007 characters long. I read the first 100,000 (46.1 percent, computed in Python), so more than half of it, including its later examples and reference sections, was not read.

Crime: A Legal Category

Wikipedia's Crime article opens with "an unlawful act punishable by a state or other authority" and says the term does not "have any simple and universally accepted definition" in modern criminal law. The "most popular view", it says, is that crime is a category created by law, so that what counts is "defined by the criminal law of each relevant jurisdiction". It says sociological definitions hold that "societal attitudes determine what is considered criminal", and that adultery, blasphemy and apostasy are crimes in theocratic or religion-influenced societies. The

overlap with deviance is partial: every crime is formal deviance, but plenty of deviance is not a crime. The reverse, a crime that is not seen as deviant, is possible too, but I did not see the page say so, so treat it as my own inference (check).

The dark figure

The page says under-reporting is common, especially in developing nations, creating the "dark figure of crime". Victim surveys can estimate how often crime occurs, and the gap between surveys and official statistics is generally smaller for more severe crimes.

Collection varies

Methods "may vary, even between jurisdictions within the same nation", so two countries' rates are not automatically comparable.

Fear is separate

Fear of crime "can be distinct from crime probability", which is why Chapter 10 will ask how to check a claim against the figures.

The page also reports a 2013 study finding that increased policing reduced crime through deterrence, with an estimated elasticity of -0.67 for murder and -0.56 for robbery. The excerpt I read did not explain what elasticity means beyond that, so what I can say is limited: a negative value means more policing went with less crime, and a larger absolute value means a stronger effect, so the murder figure is larger than the robbery figure (this reading of elasticity is my own general knowledge) (check). The Crime article lists strain, differential association, labelling and social control among its theories, which is why they appear together in this chapter. It says men are "significantly more likely to commit crimes than women in virtually all cultures". It also says that a small fraction of people who reoffend many times account for much crime. The Crime article is 192,121 characters long and I read the first 100,000 (52.1 percent, computed in Python), so its sections on later history and causes may add to or qualify what is stated here.

Social Control: Formal and Informal

Wikipedia's Social control article defines it as "the regulations, sanctions, mechanisms, and systems that restrict the behaviour of individuals in accordance with social norms and orders"

and calls it "one of the foundations of social order", the idea Chapter 6 treated. It separates two kinds.

Kind	How it works (as the page puts it)	Examples on the page
Informal	Through "the internalization of norms and values through socialization"; usually has more effect on individuals because values become part of personality	Shame, ridicule, sarcasm, criticism, disapproval, and in extreme cases exclusion
Formal	"External sanctions enforced by government"; Durkheim is said to call formal control "regulation"	Fines, incarceration, censorship, expulsion, limits on political freedom

The page lists agents of control, among them individuals, groups, governments, religion, the education system, mass media, police and city governments. It says Albion Woodbury Small and George Edgar Vincent introduced the term to sociology in 1894, and that Edward A. Ross argued in 1901 that belief systems control behaviour more than laws do. That is 7 years apart (computed in Python), and it is 78 years from Small and Vincent to Cohen's book (1972 minus 1894, computed in Python), which shows that control was named as an idea long before moral panics were. The page has no dedicated criticism section, but raises critical points, among them Chomsky and Herman's 1988 argument that media serve political and business elites, and the claim that broken windows policing and civility laws disproportionately affect homeless people. The Deviance page adds that violent crime in New York City fell 28 percent during the 1990s broken windows campaign, but that critics question whether policing caused the fall. 28 percent is the figure as the page gives it, with no year range or source on the page.

> **Chapter 2 in one line**
>
> A functionalist might ask what rule-breaking does for a society; a conflict theorist might ask who gets to write the rules; and an interactionist might ask how the label is applied in a particular meeting between two people. This is my own summary of Chapter 2 (check).

Where to Read More

- **Pages used.** Seven Wikipedia pages: Deviance (sociology), Labeling theory, Social control, Strain theory (sociology), Differential association, Crime and Moral panic.

- **How much was read.** Deviance 100,000 of 156,035 characters (64.1 percent), Crime 100,000 of 192,121 (52.1 percent) and Moral panic 100,000 of 217,007 (46.1 percent); percentages computed in Python. The Labeling theory, Social control, Strain theory and Differential association pages appeared complete in the fetch, but those fetches gave no length figures, so I cannot tell exactly how long they are.
- **Summaries.** The fetch tool returns a summary by a small model, not raw page text, so quotations are only as exact as that summary.
- **Not covered by the pages.** I did not read anything on how deviance rates vary by social group or on specific modern policing policies beyond what is mentioned above, so this chapter does not state any.
- **Primary sources.** I have not read Merton, Sutherland, Becker, Lemert, Goffman or Cohen directly.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Using the dates in this chapter, work out (a) the gap between Durkheim's suicide study (1897) and Merton's strain article (1938), (b) the gap between Merton (1938) and Becker's *Outsiders* (1963), (c) the gap between Becker (1963) and Cohen's *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972), and (d) what share of the Moral panic page was read if 100,000 of 217,007 characters were. Then say in a sentence which theory in the chapter appeared earliest and why dates alone cannot show that it is the best.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Using Merton's table, name the adaptation in each case and give the reason in terms of goal and means: (a) a clerk who stopped caring about promotion but follows every procedure exactly; (b) someone who wants financial success, has no access to legitimate routes and sells stolen goods; (c) a person who works hard and sits exams to gain a respectable career; (d) a person who rejects both the usual goals and the usual routes and withdraws from society into isolation; (e) a person who rejects both and organises a movement to replace them. Say which two cases the table cannot separate without extra information, and what the extra information is.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

A 15-year-old is caught once taking a small item from a shop. The shop owner calls the police, the story reaches the neighbours, and over the next months the teenager is avoided by former friends and starts to spend time with older people who shoplift. (a) Which parts of this are primary deviance and which are secondary deviance? (b) List one formal and one informal control mentioned or implied. (c) Which of Becker's, Lemert's and Sutherland's ideas does the story fit, and why? (d) Name one thing the chapter's pages do not tell you that you would need before saying the label caused the later behaviour.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Deviance:** behaviour that breaks social norms, formal (crime) or informal; relative to place and time
- **Durkheim:** deviance as a normal and necessary part of social organisation
- **Strain (Merton, 1938):** conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, rebellion
- **Differential association (Sutherland):** criminal behaviour is learned in close personal groups
- **Labelling (Becker, 1963):** deviance depends on the label being applied; primary and secondary deviance (Lemert)
- **Moral panic (Cohen, 1972):** folk devils, moral entrepreneurs, five stages
- **Crime:** mainly a legal category, with no simple universal definition; the dark figure limits the statistics
- **Social control:** informal (shame, disapproval) and formal (fines, incarceration)
- **Reading limits:** Deviance, Crime and Moral panic pages were cut at 100,000 characters

Coming next

Chapter 10, the capstone, Reading Society, applies the sociological imagination to news, statistics and everyday claims, drawing together the ideas from all nine chapters.

Chapter 9 ended by promising that this chapter would ask how to check a claim against the figures and would draw the course together. Every chapter so far has carried a habit: facts that came from a page were attributed to it, and anything from my own general knowledge or arithmetic was marked "(check". This chapter turns that habit into a method for reading the claims you meet every day, in headlines, reports and conversation. It first borrows five ideas about evidence from Wikipedia pages on statistics and reasoning, then applies them, together with ideas from Chapters 1 to 9, to an invented news story.

Five Traps in Reading Evidence

Chapter 1 described the sociological imagination as the awareness of the relationship between personal experience and the wider society. Using it on a claim means asking what the claim is really based on. The five Wikipedia pages below name the commonest ways a claim goes wrong. They are general pages on statistics and reasoning, not sociology pages, so the links to sociology in this section are my own (check).

Trap	What the page says	Source page
Correlation taken as cause	The page describes "the inability to legitimately deduce a cause-and-effect relationship between two events or variables" solely from an observed association. It names reverse causation, a hidden third variable affecting both, and coincidence.	Correlation does not imply causation
Group figures applied to individuals	The ecological fallacy, "a formal fallacy in the interpretation of statistical data", occurs when inferences about individuals are deduced from inferences about the group they belong to.	Ecological fallacy
Trends that reverse when groups combine	Simpson's paradox is a phenomenon in which a trend appears in several groups of data and "disappears or reverses when the groups are combined".	Simpson's paradox

Trap	What the page says	Source page
Who got counted	Selection bias is "the bias introduced by the selection of individuals, groups, or data for analysis". The page lists sampling bias, volunteer bias (self-selection), attrition and nonresponse bias among its forms.	Selection bias
Seeing only what fits	Confirmation bias is the tendency to search for, interpret, favour and recall information in ways that support existing beliefs. The page names biased search, biased interpretation and biased recall.	Confirmation bias

Evidence from the pages themselves

Each page gives at least one real case, which is better than an invented one for seeing the trap clearly.

- **Ecological fallacy.** The page says the term was coined in 1958 by Selvin, after W. S. Robinson's seminal 1950 paper. Robinson used 1930 census data, with a state-level correlation between illiteracy and the proportion of people born outside the US that the page first gives as -0.53, and then, following a 2011 correction, as -0.46. The individual-level correlation was +0.12. The correction changes the figure by 0.07 (arithmetic done in Python). The important point is the sign: the group-level relationship was negative and the individual-level one positive, so the group figure pointed the wrong way for individuals. The page's own correction is also a lesson: even a famous number can be revised.
- **Simpson's paradox.** The page reports the 1973 University of California, Berkeley admissions figures: 8,442 men applying with about 44% admitted and 4,321 women with about 35% admitted, 12,763 applicants in all, with about 41% admitted. Applying the page's rounded percentages gives roughly 3,714 men and 1,512 women admitted, and 41.0% overall (computed in Python from the page's approximate percentages, so the counts are estimates) (check). The page attributes the 1951 paper to Edward H. Simpson, and the name "Simpson's paradox" to Colin R. Blyth in 1972; the gap between those two dates is 21 years (computed in Python). The excerpt I received did not give the department-level breakdown, so I do not state what explains the Berkeley gap.
- **Correlation and cause.** The page's examples include a 1999 study published in *Nature* linking childhood sleep with the light on to later short-sightedness, and a later Ohio State study that found parental short-sightedness was the common cause. It also describes the "Redskins Rule", which predicted every US presidential election from 1936 to 2000

inclusive, and then stopped working. 2000 minus 1936 is 64 years, so even a long run of success can be coincidence (computed in Python; the interpretation is the page's, as I read it).

- **Selection bias.** The page's examples are qualitative: in a dieting trial, those who drop out are often the ones for whom the programme was not working, so the people who remain look more successful than the whole group was. It gives no figures, so none are quoted.
- **Confirmation bias.** The page credits Peter Wason with the concept, in the sense of a preference for information consistent with a hypothesis, and mentions his 1960 experiment. It gives no year for when the term itself was coined.

A trap inside the traps

The Misuse of statistics page lists many ways numbers can mislead, including cherry picking, loaded questions, biased samples and false causality. It says that a ±5% margin at 95.4% confidence needs 400 people, but ±1% needs 10,000, which is 25 times as many (computed in Python). It also warns that a 4% overall margin of error could grow to about 13% for a subgroup of 100. So a headline about a small group, drawn from a survey of the whole country, deserves extra suspicion. The page does not mention base rates, so nothing is claimed about them here.

A Worked Example: An Invented Headline

Everything in this section is invented for practice. The town, the school and all the numbers are made up, and none comes from a source. Suppose a local paper prints this headline: "*Exclusions up 25% as pupils glued to their phones.*" The article reports that a secondary school excluded 40 pupils last year and 50 this year, that the school roll was 1,250 last year and 1,300 this year, and that a head teacher says phones are the cause. Here is how the course lets you read it.

Question	Where it comes from	Applied to the headline
Is the number a rate or a total?	The statistics pages above; the dark figure in Chapter 9	40 to 50 is a rise of 25% in the total, but the roll also rose by 4%. Per 1,000 pupils the figure goes from 32.0 to 38.5, a rise of about 20% (computed in Python). The rise is real but smaller than the headline says.

Question	Where it comes from	Applied to the headline
Is it cause or correlation?	Correlation does not imply causation	The article shows no data on phone use at all. Even if both rose, a third variable or reverse causation could be at work.
Who decides what counts?	Labelling and social control, Chapter 9	An exclusion is a formal sanction. A change in the school's rules, or a new head teacher, could raise exclusions without any change in pupil behaviour (my own suggestion) (check).
What is one school's story worth?	Selection bias; the ecological fallacy	One school over one year is a small and possibly unrepresentative sample, and a school-level figure says nothing about any individual pupil.
Whose voice is quoted?	Confirmation bias; Chapter 9 on moral panics	The head teacher is a single source with a view. Chapter 9 described how media can amplify a threat; whether this is a case of that needs more than one story (my own comparison) (check).

Three lenses on one story

Chapter 2's three lenses ask different questions of the same headline. A functionalist might ask what exclusions do for the school as a whole. A conflict theorist might ask which pupils are excluded and who gains from the rule. An interactionist might ask how a pupil comes to be seen as a "troublemaker". None of these is the right reading, and none replaces checking the numbers first. These applications are my own, built from the questions in Chapter 2 (check).

Applying the Whole Course

Real claims rarely stay inside one chapter. The habit that makes this course's pages trustworthy is the same habit you can use on others' claims: say where each piece comes from, mark the parts that you added yourself, and say how much you actually read.

Where is the source?

How much was seen?

Chapter 1's sociological imagination asks you to separate a personal trouble from a public issue. Ask whether a claim rests on a named source or only on "experts say".

Chapters 4 to 9 said how much of each page was read. The Confirmation bias page, for instance, was read to 100,000 of 266,612 characters, which is 37.5 percent, leaving 166,612 unread (computed in Python). A claim about a long document should say how much of it was read, too.

Is it your own addition?

Mark opinions and arithmetic as yours. That is the job of the "(check" label used since Chapter 1.

Do sources disagree?

Chapter 4 found two pages giving Mead different dates, and Chapter 7 found two pages phrasing Weber differently. When sources differ, say so; do not pick quietly.

A reading checklist for any social claim

1. Who says it, and what is their stake? (Chapter 2: whose interests; Chapter 9: who labels.)
2. Is the figure a rate, a total or a share, and compared with what? (Chapters 7 and 8: the pay-gap and poverty-line examples.)
3. Does it claim a cause where it only shows a link?
4. Who was counted, and who was left out? (Chapter 9: the dark figure of crime.)
5. Does a group figure get applied to individuals?
6. Is a category being treated as fixed when it is constructed? (Chapter 8.)
7. What would change my mind, and have I looked for it? (The confirmation bias trap.)

Where to Read More

- **Pages used.** This chapter uses six Wikipedia pages: Correlation does not imply causation, Ecological fallacy, Simpson's paradox, Selection bias, Confirmation bias and Misuse of statistics. The Confirmation bias page was cut off by the fetch tool: only the first 100,000 of 266,612 characters were read (37.5 percent). For the other five the tool reported no length, but each appeared to run to its references and footer, so they seem complete; I cannot tell the exact length of any of them.

- **Summaries.** The fetch tool returns a summary made by a small model, not the raw page, so quotations are only as exact as that summary.
- **Not covered.** I did not read the Berkeley department-level data, Robinson's own paper or Selvin's. I also did not read anything on base rates, since the Misuse of statistics page did not mention them.
- **Beyond this course.** Read the original works of the founders named in the earlier chapters if you want more than a page-based account, and consider a general introductory university text on sociology and one on statistics, which cover the same ground in more detail (general suggestions of mine, not drawn from the pages) (check).

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

A town council reports (invented figures) that a youth club cost 90,000 last year and that 450 young people used it, while reported youth offences in the town fell from 120 to 96 over the same year. A councillor says the club cut offending by 20%. First, check the arithmetic: the cost per young person and the percentage fall. Then apply ideas from at least three earlier chapters (for example Chapter 9's differential association, labelling and the dark figure of crime, and Chapter 5's groups) to say what the councillor's claim would need to show before you accepted it.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Critique this invented claim: "Regions with more graduates have higher average incomes, so a degree makes each person richer." Name which of the five traps it falls into, using the Ecological fallacy and Correlation pages as the chapter reports them. Give one alternative explanation, then say what evidence at the level of individuals would be needed.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Choose one earlier chapter and summarise it in your own words in about 100 words. Then state your confidence in the summary as high, medium or low, and give the reasons using the course's habits: how much of its pages were read (look at the chapter's "Where to Read More"), which statements were marked "(check", and whether any sources disagreed. Finish with one question the chapter leaves open.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Correlation and cause:** an association alone does not show cause; look for reverse causation, a third variable and coincidence
- **Ecological fallacy:** deducing facts about individuals from facts about their group (term from Selvin, 1958; Robinson's 1950 case)
- **Simpson's paradox:** a trend in each group that reverses when the groups are combined
- **Selection bias:** who was selected for analysis changes the answer; sampling, volunteer and attrition bias are forms
- **Confirmation bias:** searching for, interpreting and recalling information that fits what you already think
- **Rate versus total:** in the invented headline, 25% in the total became about 20% per 1,000 pupils
- **Reading limits:** the Confirmation bias page was read to 37.5 percent
- **Check:** the links from statistics pages to sociology, the Berkeley counts, the exclusion-rules suggestion, the lens applications and the suggested further reading

Course Complete

You have finished Sociology Fundamentals. What each chapter taught:

- **Chapter 1, What Sociology Is:** the study of human society, the word's origin, Durkheim's social facts, Mills's sociological imagination and the methods used.

- **Chapter 2, Theories of Society:** functionalism, conflict theory and symbolic interactionism as three lenses, with Marx, Weber and Durkheim behind them.
- **Chapter 3, Culture:** norms, folkways and mores, values, symbols, subcultures, culture shock and cultural relativism.
- **Chapter 4, Socialisation and Identity:** how people learn a culture, the looking-glass self, Mead's "me" and "I", roles, Goffman and feral-child evidence.
- **Chapter 5, Groups and Organisations:** primary and secondary groups, community and society, bureaucracy, the iron law of oligarchy and weak ties.
- **Chapter 6, Structure and Institutions:** social structure, status, roles, institutions and competing accounts of social order.
- **Chapter 7, Inequality and Class:** stratification, three accounts of class, mobility, absolute and relative poverty and the Gini coefficient.
- **Chapter 8, Race, Ethnicity and Gender:** social construction, ethnicity, discrimination, the pay gap and intersectionality.
- **Chapter 9, Deviance and Control:** strain, differential association, labelling, moral panics, crime as a legal category and social control.

Where to go next: reread any chapter's "Where to Read More" and follow one source to its original text; pick one statistic from this week's news and run the seven-question checklist above on it; and keep marking what is yours and what is borrowed. An introductory university text in sociology, and one in statistics, are sensible general next steps.