

Cambridge AS & A Level · Sociology 9699 · Notes

Social identity and change

AS

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Last checked 5 October 2026

Read first: [The process of learning and socialisation](#)

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What you need to know

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

1. **Explain how social class, gender, ethnicity and age help to build a person's social identity:** what each one is, how it is learned through the agencies of socialisation (family, education, peer group, media, religion, workplace), and which of them, and which agency, matters most.
2. **Explain how class, gender, ethnicity and age identities may be changing,** because of **globalisation**, **increased choice** and the creation of **new and hybrid identities**, and weigh this against the evidence that traditional identities persist.

Understand it

What social identity is

Your **identity** is your sense of who you are and how others see you. Sociologists split it into two linked parts:

- **Personal identity:** what makes you a unique individual (your name, personality, life story).
- **Social identity:** the groups you belong to and are seen as belonging to, and the expectations that come with them. Being "a young working-class Muslim woman" tells others, and you, a lot about how you are expected to behave.

Social identity is **socially constructed**: it is learned through socialisation, not fixed by biology. That is why it differs between societies and changes over time. The four elements in the syllabus are **social class**, **gender**, **ethnicity** and **age**. Others (religion, nationality, sexuality, disability) often overlap with them.

Some identities are **ascribed** (given at birth: sex, ethnic background, the class you are born into); others are **achieved** (gained through your own actions: a qualification, an occupation). A central debate in this topic is whether identities are still mostly ascribed and **fixed**, or increasingly achieved and **chosen**.

Two big views run through every question:

- **Structural views** (functionalism, Marxism, feminism) say identities are shaped by society's structures. Class, gender, ethnicity and age are **centred** identities: stable, clear and strongly linked to life chances (your chances of a good education, job, health and income).
- **Postmodern views** say traditional identities are **fragmenting**. Hall called modern identities **decentred**: no single identity dominates, and people combine several. Identity is now a **pick and mix** of lifestyles, tastes and consumer choices; people can change it, "try on" new ones and shape it on social media.

Most strong answers end up between the two: people have more choice than before, but choices are still limited by class, gender, ethnicity and age (life chances, discrimination, poverty).

Intersectionality is a useful idea for evaluation: identities overlap. A working-class black girl's experience differs from that of a middle-class white boy in ways no single identity explains. So it is often too simple to call one identity, or one agency, "the main influence".

Social class identity

Social class is a group of people who share a similar economic position: occupation, income, wealth and education.

- **Objective class**: the class a person is in by measurable facts (job, income).
- **Subjective class**: the class a person **feels** they belong to. The two do not always match: a well-paid plumber may call himself working class; a poorly paid teacher may feel middle class.

Features of each class identity (useful for "describe two features" questions):

Class	Typical features of the identity
Upper class	Inherited wealth and status; social closure (marrying within the class, private schools, exclusive clubs: Scott); a sense of being born to lead; the "old boy network"
Middle class	Professional and managerial jobs; individualism (getting on through your own effort); deferred gratification (working now for rewards later); high value on education and cultural capital
Working class	Manual work; collectivism and solidarity (trade unions, close communities); immediate gratification ; fatalism (accepting your position); a "them and us" view of employers

Older studies (**Sugarman**, **Lockwood's** "traditional proletarian" in mining and dock communities) described these working-class values. They are generalisations: use them carefully and evaluate them.

How class identity is learned:

- **Family**: children learn the tastes, speech, ambitions and attitudes of their class. **Bourdieu**: middle-class families pass on **cultural capital** (knowledge, tastes and ways of speaking valued by schools), **economic capital** (money) and **social capital** (useful contacts). His idea of **habitus** describes the class-based tastes and outlook that feel natural to each class.
- **Education**: **Bowles and Gintis** (Marxist) argued the **hidden curriculum** prepares working-class pupils for obedient work (the **correspondence principle**). **Bernstein**: working-class pupils tend to use a **restricted speech code**, middle-class pupils an **elaborated code**, which schools value. Private schools

and elite universities give the upper class confidence and networks.

- **Peer group:** Willis's "lads" formed an **anti-school subculture** that celebrated manual labour and "having a laff", so they chose working-class jobs. Elite school peer groups become the **old boy network**.
- **Media:** Althusser saw the media as an **ideological state apparatus** that shapes class consciousness. The media often shows upper-class lifestyles as something to aspire to, the middle class as the "normal" audience, and the poorest as an "underclass" of welfare-dependent "chavs". **Bourdieu's** idea of **symbolic boundaries**: culture is sorted into "high" and "low" tastes, which draws "us and them" lines between classes.
- **Workplace:** class is grounded in occupation, pay and authority at work.

Is class identity declining?

- **Yes (postmodernists):** **Pakulski and Waters** argued class is dead as a source of identity; identity now comes from **consumption** and lifestyle. Decline of heavy industry and trade unions has weakened working-class communities. **Goldthorpe and Lockwood's** affluent workers in Luton were **privatised** and **instrumental**, focused on home and family rather than class solidarity. Many people now say "we're all middle class now".
- **No (structuralists):** **Savage's** research found that many people are **ambivalent** about calling themselves a class, yet still recognise that class shapes their lives; his Great British Class Survey still found clear class groups, from an "elite" to a "precariat". Life chances (health, education, income) are still strongly class-based. **Skeggs** showed working-class women working hard to be seen as "respectable", so class shapes identity even when people reject the label.

Gender identity

Sex is biological (male, female); **gender** is the social and cultural expectations of masculinity and femininity. Most sociologists see gender identity as socially constructed: what counts as "masculine" varies between societies and changes over time.

How children learn gender identity (Oakley's four processes, plus others):

- **Manipulation:** parents encourage behaviour seen as suitable for the child's sex (praising a girl's appearance, telling a boy not to cry).
- **Canalisation:** channelling children towards "gender-appropriate" toys and activities (dolls for girls, footballs for boys).
- **Verbal appellation:** the words used to describe children ("pretty girl", "brave boy").
- **Different activities:** girls asked to help in the kitchen, boys in the garage.
- **Imitation and role models:** children copy same-sex parents, teachers, peers and media figures.
- **Education:** gendered subject choice, teacher expectations, textbooks that show men and women in stereotyped roles, and the hidden curriculum.
- **Media:** stereotyped representations (women as carers or sex objects, men as strong and active).
- **Peer group:** ridicule of boys who seem "girly" or girls who seem "unfeminine" polices the boundaries.

Types of masculinity (Connell): masculinity is plural, and some forms dominate others.

Type	What it means
Hegemonic	The dominant, idealised form: heterosexual, tough, competitive, unemotional, the breadwinner
Complicit	Men who do not fully live up to the hegemonic ideal but benefit from it and do not challenge it
Subordinate	Forms looked down on by the hegemonic form, such as gay or "effeminate" men
Marginalised	Men excluded from the benefits of the hegemonic form, for example through unemployment or racism

Other terms used: **toxic masculinity** (an exaggerated, aggressive, controlling version of the hegemonic form); the **new man** (**Mort**: caring, emotionally open, sharing housework and childcare); the **metrosexual** (a man who takes a strong interest in grooming and fashion); the **new lad** (a reaction against the new man, celebrating drinking, sport and laddish humour).

Types of femininity: emphasised femininity (**Connell**: the form that fits in with men's dominance, stressing appearance, caring and accommodating men's interests); **normative or passive femininity** (domestic, nurturing, deferring to men); **assertive femininity** (confident, ambitious, career-focused); **ladettes** (**Jackson**: girls adopting "laddish" behaviour such as heavy drinking and loudness).

Is gender identity changing?

- **Yes: Sharpe** asked girls about their priorities in the 1970s and again in the 1990s; the earlier girls put love, marriage and children first, the later ones put jobs and careers first. **Wilkinson** called this shift in young women's values a **genderquake**. **Mac an Ghail** described a **crisis of masculinity**: as manual jobs disappeared and women entered paid work, working-class men lost their traditional breadwinner role. Fathers are more involved in childcare; gay, transgender and non-binary identities are more visible; **Butler** sees gender as a **performance** that can be changed, so gender is increasingly **fluid**.
- **No**: traditional identities persist. Women still do most housework and childcare (**Oakley**'s conventional housewife role, the **dual burden**); the gender pay gap and the **glass ceiling** remain; socialisation and toys are still heavily gendered; **Hakim**'s **preference theory** argues many women still choose home-centred lives. In many societies religion and law still enforce traditional roles, and some movements online (the "trad-wife" trend, some right-wing influencers) push back towards traditional gender roles. Biological explanations argue some differences are natural.

Ethnic identity

An **ethnic group** shares a culture: a sense of common descent, language, religion, customs, food, dress and history. **Ethnicity** is cultural, not biological (unlike the discredited idea of "race"). Ethnic identity matters most where a group is a **minority**, because its members are made aware of their difference.

How ethnic identity is learned and kept:

- **Family**: language, food, festivals, family values and **arranged marriage** traditions are passed on at home; extended families and grandparents keep traditions alive.

- **Religion:** often central. **Modood** found religion far more important to many ethnic minority groups than to white British people; **Bird** linked this to the stronger religiosity of their countries of origin. **Bruce** described **cultural transition** (religion helps migrants settle into a new society by giving them a community) and **cultural defence** (religion becomes a way to protect identity and pride in the face of racism). **Pryce** found Pentecostal churches gave black Caribbeans in Bristol pride and support against discrimination.
- **Community and peer group:** places of worship, community centres, shops and supplementary schools.
- **Media:** minority media (TV channels, films, music from the country of origin) keep links alive; mainstream media stereotypes can strengthen a defensive identity.
- **Racism and exclusion:** being treated as different can strengthen ethnic identity (**resistance identity**).

New and hybrid ethnic identities. A **hybrid identity** combines elements of two or more cultures into something new. It is not the same as having mixed-race parents.

- **Jahal:** young British Asians develop a **dual identity** ("Brasian"), switching between Asian and British culture depending on whom they are with (**code-switching**).
- **Back:** in south London, young people of different ethnic backgrounds mixed styles, slang and music, creating **neo-ethnicities** shared across groups.
- **Hall and Gilroy:** diaspora communities (people spread across several countries) create new mixed cultures, such as music genres that blend Caribbean, African, American and British influences.
- Examples: fusion food, Bhangra and Afrobeats mixing traditional and Western music, multilingual slang.

Is ethnic identity changing?

- **Yes:** hybridity and mixing, especially among the second and third generations born in the new country; globalisation, migration and global media spread cultures; intermarriage; declining religious practice among some young people.
- **No:** many minorities keep strong religious and family traditions (**Modood**); cultural defence against racism strengthens traditional identity; in traditional and less diverse societies ethnic identity changes little; racism and **ethnic penalties** in jobs keep ethnicity central to life chances.

Age identity

Age identity is the sense of belonging to an age group, with its expected behaviour. **Chronological age** is the number of years lived; **social age** is what a society expects at that age. Age groups are socially constructed: the same number means different things in different times and places.

Stages of the life course (approximate, and different between societies):

- **Childhood:** **Aries** argued that in medieval Europe children were seen as small adults who worked from about age 7; childhood as a separate, protected stage of innocence is a modern idea. **Pilcher** argues that today childhood is a clearly separate stage, with its own clothes, games, media and laws. **Postman** warned of the **disappearance of childhood**, because television (and now the internet) exposes children to the adult world.

- **Youth:** a transition between childhood and adulthood. **Eisenstadt** (functionalist) saw youth culture as a bridge that helps young people move from the family to adult roles. Youth identity is linked to **youth culture**, style, music, consumption and **subcultures**; **Thornton**: young clubbers gain status from **subcultural capital** (being "in the know"), largely shaped by the media. **Côté**: in modern societies youth has stretched out, with **delayed adulthood** as young people stay in education and the family home longer.
- **Adulthood:** work, independence, marriage and parenthood mark adult identity.
- **Old age:** **Laslett** split later life into the **third age** (active, healthy retirement with time for leisure) and the **fourth age** (dependence and decline). **Featherstone and Hepworth** describe the **mask of ageing**: people feel younger than their ageing bodies look, and use consumer products to stay "young". Older people can face **ageism** (prejudice and discrimination because of age; **Victor**), being seen as slow, dependent or a burden, but in many traditional societies elders have high status for their wisdom.



How age identity is learned:

- **Family:** parents teach age norms ("be a big boy", "don't act like a baby", "act your age"); grandparents model old age; families mark **rites of passage** (birthdays such as 18th and 21st, religious ceremonies such as a Bar or Bat Mitzvah or a confirmation); leaving home is a marker of adulthood; families may expect grandparents to care for grandchildren, or treat them as dependent; parents support adult children for longer (the "bank of mum and dad").
- **Education:** compulsory schooling groups children by age in year groups and keeps them out of work, which lengthens childhood and youth.
- **Peer group:** friends are mostly the same age; peer pressure over style, music and attitude shapes youth identity.
- **Media:** youth is shown as rebellious or as trend-setting; older people are often shown as frail or comic, or are invisible; advertising sells "anti-ageing" products.
- **The state and law:** ages for leaving school, voting, driving, marriage, drinking and retirement fix formal age boundaries.

Is age identity clear and fixed, or changing?

- **Fixed and clear:** age-based laws, schooling and retirement give clear **formal signposts**; most societies agree children are immature and need protection; ageism limits older people's choices; age still shapes life chances.

- **Changing and blurred:** Aries shows childhood changed over time; Postman's disappearing childhood; delayed adulthood; the active third age; people "pay to look younger" (cosmetics, surgery), so for postmodernists age is "just a number" and "you are as old as you feel"; cross-cultural differences in what each age means; global media and consumer culture let people pick age-related styles.

Why identities may be changing

The syllabus names three forces.

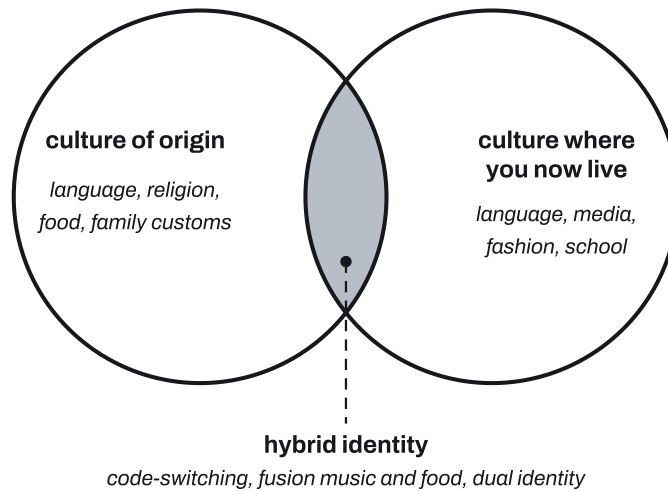
1. Globalisation. The growing interconnection of societies across the world. Its main features:

- **Global media and communication:** satellite TV, the internet and social media spread images, ideas and fashions across the world almost instantly. **Harvey** called this **time-space compression**: distance matters less.
- **Global economy and consumer culture:** transnational companies sell the same brands everywhere (**cultural homogenisation**, sometimes called Americanisation or McDonaldisation).
- **Migration:** more people move between countries for work, study or safety, creating diverse societies.
- **Glocalisation (Robertson):** global products and ideas are adapted to local cultures, producing new mixed forms.

Effects on identity: people meet many more lifestyles and role models, which can weaken traditional class, gender, ethnic and age identities; migration and media produce hybrid identities; but globalisation can also cause a backlash, with people holding more tightly to traditional, religious or national identities (**cultural defence**).

2. Increased choice. Postmodernists argue that in consumer societies identity is something you **build** from what you buy and do: clothes, music, food, leisure, online profiles. Choice is linked to the decline of traditional communities, jobs for life and the power of religion. **Evaluation:** choice depends on money; the poor cannot buy a lifestyle (**Bauman** described poor people as "flawed consumers" shut out of consumer identity), and racism, sexism and ageism still limit choices.

3. New and hybrid identities. New identities emerge as old ones blend: hybrid ethnic identities, new masculinities and femininities, fluid gender identities, the third age, online identities. Some are **global identities** shared across countries (fans, youth styles).



How the four elements compare

Element	Evidence it is still central and fixed	Evidence it is changing
Class	Class-based life chances; Savage's class groups; Bourdieu's capitals passed on in families	Pakulski and Waters: identity from consumption; decline of industry and unions; "all middle class now"
Gender	Housework, pay gap, glass ceiling; gendered socialisation (Oakley); religious and legal restrictions	Sharpe, Wilkinson's genderquake; crisis of masculinity; new man; gender fluidity (Butler)
Ethnicity	Religion and family keep traditions (Modood); cultural defence; ethnic penalties	Hybrid identities (Johal, Back); second and third generations; global media
Age	Age laws and schooling; ageism; universal immaturity of children	Aries, Postman; delayed adulthood; third age; "age is just a number"

Key facts and formulas

There is no formula list in Sociology. "Learn it" means you must remember it.

Key term	Status
Social identity: the groups a person belongs to and is seen to belong to; the four elements are class, gender, ethnicity and age	Learn it
Ascribed identity (given at birth) vs achieved identity (gained through your own actions)	Learn it
Centred identities (structural views) vs decentred, fragmented, pick-and-mix identities (Hall, postmodernism)	Learn it
Objective class (measurable position) vs subjective class (the class you feel you are in)	Learn it

Key term	Status
Bourdieu: cultural, economic and social capital; habitus; symbolic boundaries	Learn it
Class and identity studies: Willis (the lads), Bowles and Gintis (correspondence), Bernstein (speech codes), Savage (ambivalence, class survey), Skeggs (respectability), Pakulski and Waters (death of class)	Learn it
Oakley's gender socialisation: manipulation, canalisation, verbal appellation, different activities	Learn it
Connell's masculinities: hegemonic, complicit, subordinate, marginalised; emphasised femininity	Learn it
Changing gender: Sharpe (changed priorities), Wilkinson (genderquake), Mac an Ghaill (crisis of masculinity), Mort (new man), Jackson (ladettes), Butler (performance)	Learn it
Hybrid identity: a new identity that combines two or more cultures (Johal: BrAsian, code-switching; Back: neo-ethnicities)	Learn it
Religion and ethnicity: Modood, Bird, Pryce; Bruce's cultural transition and cultural defence	Learn it
Age: Aries (childhood is modern), Postman (disappearance of childhood), Pilcher, Laslett (third and fourth age), Featherstone and Hepworth (mask of ageing), Côté (delayed adulthood), Thornton (subcultural capital)	Learn it
Globalisation: global media, global economy, migration; time-space compression (Harvey); glocalisation (Robertson)	Learn it

How to do it

We have tagged 54 Paper 1 questions for this topic (2021–2026). Each of the 22 Question 3s has an (a) and a (b) part, which count as different types, so the counts add up to 76.

Question type	Questions
Explain the view that one agent is the most important influence on an identity (10 marks)	22
Give one developed argument against that view (6 marks)	22
Evaluate whether identities are changing or fixed (26-mark essay)	14
Evaluate whether one factor or agent is the main influence on identity (26-mark essay)	10
Describe two features, types or ways (4 marks)	8

1. Explain the view that one agent is the most important influence on an identity (22 questions)

Question 3(a), marked in levels: Level 3 (8–10) needs **two** clear, developed points, each supported by sociological material (a concept, theory or study) and tied to **both** the named agent **and** the named identity. One developed point plus one weaker point is Level 2 (4–7). Pairs asked so far include education and class, family and age, peers and age, media and class, media and youth, religion and identity, family and ethnicity, family and gender, education and gender.

1. **No introduction or definitions.** Examiners report candidates spending time defining "media" or "class" for no credit.
2. **Point 1:** name the process → explain how **this agent** shapes **this identity** → support it with a study or concept → link back with the question's words ("...so the family is the main influence on age identity").
3. **Point 2:** a **different** process built the same way.
4. **No criticism and no rival agents.** A detailed point about peers in an answer on education belongs in (b).

Points that work for each agent:

- **Family:** primary socialisation comes first and shapes core values; class: cultural capital and habitus (Bourdieu), speech codes (Bernstein), immediate or deferred gratification; gender: Oakley's manipulation and canalisation, role models; age: "be a big boy", rites of passage and birthdays, leaving home, grandparents' roles; ethnicity: language, food, festivals, religion, arranged marriage.
- **Education:** hidden curriculum and correspondence principle (Bowles and Gintis); cultural capital rewarded (Bourdieu); speech codes; private schools and the old boy network; gendered subject choice and teacher expectations; age-graded year groups and compulsory schooling lengthening childhood.
- **Peer group:** peer pressure and informal sanctions (ridicule, exclusion) over style and attitude; Willis's lads (class); youth subcultures and Thornton's subcultural capital (age); policing of masculinity and femininity (gender); most friends are the same age.
- **Media:** Althusser's ideological state apparatus and false consciousness (class); stereotyped representations of classes, genders, ages and ethnic groups; Bourdieu's symbolic boundaries; advertising and consumer lifestyles; youth culture largely made and spread by the media (Thornton); Postman's disappearing childhood; social media as a youth-made space.
- **Religion:** cultural transition and cultural defence (Bruce); higher religiosity among minorities (Modood, Bird); Pryce's Pentecostal churches; global faiths shaping socialisation; rites of passage; rules about gender roles.

Rarer variant: a claim with no agent ("religion has little influence on identity", "male identity is changing", "ethnic identity is changing, with new hybrid identities"). Give two developed points **for the claim** from the matching "changing" section above. For hybridity, write about **hybrid ethnic identities** (Johal, Back), not mixed-race families.

2. Give one developed argument against that view (22 questions)

Question 3(b), marked in levels: Level 3 (5–6) needs **one** clear, developed argument backed by sociological material. Only one argument is credited.

1. **Pick one argument.**
2. State it → explain it → support it with a study, theory or concept → **say why it shows the named agent is not the most important.**
3. **If you choose another agent, compare it directly.** Mark schemes and examiner reports repeat this every year. Start with a sentence such as "The family is a more important influence on class identity than the media because..." and give the reason: for example, primary socialisation comes first, so the media is consumed through a class identity already formed in the family.

Arguments that work:

- **Another agent matters more, with the reason why** (family is first and closest; peers matter more for teenagers, Côté, Willis; education lengthens childhood; the workplace matters more for adults' class identity).
- **The view is over-deterministic:** people are active, not passive; they resist, reject or reinterpret messages (an interactionist point; postmodern audiences are critical of media content).
- **The identity itself has fragmented** (Pakulski and Waters, Hall's decentred identities): if class identity has declined, no agent can be its main influence.
- **The agent matters more for some groups than others:** the media for youth more than adults; religion for minorities and older people more than young white people.
- **Identities intersect:** the agent's effect differs by class, gender, ethnicity and age.
- **Too simple to isolate one agent:** agents work together (peer groups form inside schools; parents control children's media).
- **Biological arguments** (age as physical maturity and decline; sex differences), as long as you say why they challenge the named agent.

3. Evaluate whether identities are changing or fixed (14 questions)

Section B essays: "age identities are clear and fixed", "female identity is very different from fifty years ago", "traditional male identity has little influence on male behaviour today", "the extent to which ethnic identities are changing has been exaggerated", "social identities are changing due to increased choice". Marked as **AO1** knowledge 8, **AO2** application 8, **AO3** analysis and evaluation 10, so $8 + 8 + 10 = 26$ marks.

1. **Read which side the view takes.** "Clear and fixed" and "change has been exaggerated" are the **traditional** side; "changing" and "very different" are the **change** side. Examiners report many unbalanced answers that only argue one side; the opposite side is half the essay.
2. **Short introduction:** identity is socially constructed; say which identity and what the debate is (structural persistence vs postmodern change).
3. **4–5 developed paragraphs for the view**, each with a named study or concept, applied to the question's words.

4. **4–5 developed paragraphs against**, using the "Is it changing?" lists above and the comparison table.
5. **Evaluate explicitly in each paragraph**: "However, this evidence is mostly from Western societies...", "This suggests change is limited to the middle class...". Good lines of evaluation: change differs by class, ethnicity, region and country (intersectionality); change in **attitudes** may not mean change in **behaviour** (men say they share housework but women still do more); globalisation causes both change and backlash; postmodernists overstate choice.
6. **Conclusion**: a justified judgement on **how far** the identity has changed, and for whom.

4. Evaluate whether one factor or agent is the main influence on identity (10 questions)

Section B essays: "class is the main influence on social identity" (most often asked, sometimes as "class is no longer important" or "has little influence"), "age is the most important influence on a person's identity", "ethnicity has little influence on identity today", "the media is the most important influence on identity", "peers are the most important agent shaping identity". Same AO1/AO2/AO3 marking.

1. **For a factor (class, age, ethnicity)**: argue it shapes attitudes, lifestyle and life chances (objective differences, survey evidence such as Savage, socialisation studies); then evaluate with (a) postmodern fragmentation and consumption, and (b) the case that **another element** (gender, ethnicity, age) shapes identity more, with evidence, and (c) intersectionality. Examiners rewarded both lines of evaluation in recent reports.
2. **For an agent (media, peers)**: build the case for the agent across several identities, then weigh it against the other agents, each time saying **why** they matter more or less, and against agency (people choose).
3. **Watch the direction**: "class has little influence" means the postmodern side is **for** the view.
4. Conclude with a judgement: for example, class still shapes life chances strongly even where people no longer use it as their main identity.

5. Describe two features, types or ways (8 questions)

Question 1, 4 marks: for each of two items, **1 mark** for identifying it and **1 mark** for describing it. Only two are credited. Asked so far: types of masculinity, types of femininity, social characteristics of the elderly, characteristics of youth identity, features of working-class identity, features of globalisation, examples of social identities, ways children learn gender identity.

1. **Identify** each in a few words: "Hegemonic masculinity."
2. **Describe** it in one sentence: what it is or what it involves, with an example.
3. Choose two **clearly different** items. Male and female are one identity (gender), not two; youth is not childhood.
4. Keep it short: no need to explain or evaluate.

Worked examples

Example 1

Describe two features of middle-class identity. [4]

Feature 1. Deferred gratification (1): middle-class people tend to put off rewards now for bigger rewards later, for example staying in education for a degree instead of earning a wage at 16 (1).

Feature 2. A high value on education and cultural capital (1): middle-class parents pass on knowledge, tastes and confident language that schools reward (Bourdieu), and they expect their children to go to university (1).

Two different features, each identified and described: **4 marks.**

Example 2

‘The peer group is the most important influence on ethnic identity.’

(a) Explain this view. [10]

(b) Using sociological material, give one argument against this view. [6]

(a) One reason is that young people from ethnic minorities create **new hybrid identities** mainly with their peers. Johal found that young British Asians switch between Asian and British culture (code-switching), and it is among friends, at school and online, that the "British" side of their identity is tried out and approved. Back's study of south London showed young people of different backgrounds sharing slang, music and style, creating neo-ethnicities. Because these new ethnic identities are built and policed in the peer group rather than at home, this supports the view that peers are the most important influence on ethnic identity today. **(Point 1: clear, developed and supported by studies.)**

A second reason is that peer groups apply **informal sanctions** that push members towards or away from an ethnic identity. Minority young people may play down their language, dress or religion to fit in with a mixed peer group, or, where they face racism, form peer groups that celebrate their ethnic identity as a form of resistance and pride. Either way it is the approval or ridicule of peers, especially in adolescence, that decides how openly ethnic identity is shown, which supports the view in the question. **(Point 2: clear, developed, with concepts and evidence.)**

Two clear, developed points, each with sociological material and linked to the view: **Level 3 (8–10 marks).**

(b) Against the view, **religion is a more important influence on ethnic identity than the peer group** because it shapes the core values, rules and community that the peer group works within. Modood found that religion was far more central to the identity of many ethnic minority groups than to the white majority, and Bruce's idea of **cultural defence** shows how mosques, temples and churches give minorities a shared identity and pride against racism. Peer groups often form inside these religious communities, so peers pass on an identity that religion has already shaped, rather than creating it. **(One clear, developed argument with sociological material, compared directly with the peer group: Level 3, 5–6 marks.)**

Example 3

Evaluate the view that globalisation has weakened traditional social identities. [26]

Plan. For: global media and consumer culture (pick and mix, Hall's decentred identities), migration and hybridity (Johal, Back), changing gender roles spread globally, the stretching of age stages. Against: class life chances (Savage), cultural defence and religious revival (Bruce, Modood), traditional gender roles in many societies and online backlash, glocalisation, choice limited by money (Bauman's flawed consumers). Judgement: globalisation has added new identities more than it has replaced old ones, and its effects differ by group.

Introduction. Traditional social identities are the centred class, gender, ethnic and age identities passed on through socialisation. Globalisation, the growing interconnection of the world through media, trade and migration, is said by postmodernists to have weakened them.

For the view (AO1/AO2).

- **Global media and consumer culture** give people access to many lifestyles. Postmodernists argue identity is now a **pick and mix** of styles and tastes; Hall described identities as **decentred**, so no single traditional identity dominates.
- **Migration and hybridity**: second-generation migrants build **hybrid identities**, such as Johal's Brasiangs who code-switch between cultures, and Back's neo-ethnicities. Traditional ethnic identities are blended into new forms.
- **Gender**: global media spread ideas of equality and new masculinities and femininities; Sharpe and Wilkinson found young women's priorities moving from marriage to careers.
- **Age**: global consumer culture sells "youthful" lifestyles to older people (Featherstone and Hepworth), blurring age boundaries.

Against the view (AO3).

- **However**, **class** life chances remain strongly unequal; Savage found people still recognise class shaping their lives even if they avoid class labels. Globalisation may have changed what people buy more than who they are.
- **Cultural defence**: Bruce shows that when groups feel threatened by global change, religion and ethnicity become **stronger**, not weaker. Modood found religion central to many minority identities. This directly challenges the view: globalisation can **strengthen** traditional identities.
- **Glocalisation** (Robertson): global culture is adapted to local traditions, so traditional identities absorb global influences rather than disappear.
- **Choice depends on money and place**: Bauman's "flawed consumers" cannot buy new identities; in many rural and religious societies traditional gender and age roles change little.
- **Feminists** argue changes in attitudes have outpaced changes in behaviour: women still carry the dual burden, and online movements promote traditional roles.

Conclusion. Globalisation has created new and hybrid identities and given some groups, especially the young, affluent and urban, more choice. But traditional identities have often adapted or hardened rather than weakened, and life chances remain structured by class, gender, ethnicity and age. The view is only partly convincing.

How it would be marked. A range of detailed points with named concepts and studies (AO1 Level 4, 7–8); each applied to globalisation and identity (AO2 Level 4, 7–8); evaluation that is explicit ("However", "this directly challenges"), sustained through the essay and leads to a justified conclusion (AO3 Level 5, 9–10). In the exam, develop each bullet into a full paragraph.

Common mistakes

- **Writing about the agent or the identity, not the link.** Examiners report many answers describing education (or the media) in general, or gender identity in general, without explaining how **this agent** shapes **this identity**. Every point must connect both.
- **Naming a rival agent in (b) without comparing it.** "The family influences class identity..." with no reference back to the media gets low marks. Say why it matters **more** than the named agent.
- **More than one argument in (b).** Only one is credited.
- **Using (b) material in (a).** A detailed point about peers in an "education" answer is not credited in (a).
- **Long introductions and definitions** in Question 3. Go straight to two developed points.
- **Common-sense answers.** Answers based on personal experience with no concept, theory or study stay in the low levels; name the sociology.
- **Hybrid identity confused with mixed race.** Hybridity is cultural blending (Johal, Back); writing only about mixed-race children, or about gender, misses the question.
- **Unbalanced essays.** In "age identities are clear and fixed" and "changing" essays, many candidates argue one side well and the other weakly; the essay is weighted to evaluation (AO3 10 marks).
- **Evaluation by juxtaposition.** Listing arguments for, then arguments against, is weak; evaluate inside each paragraph and reach a judgement.
- **Simplistic "new man" accounts and long histories** of gender roles. Use concepts (hegemonic masculinity, crisis of masculinity) and stay on the identity named.
- **In Question 1, repeating one item** (male and female as two "identities") or confusing childhood with youth.

How to get the marks

- **"Describe"** (Question 1, 4 marks): identify each item (1) and describe it in one sentence (1). Two only.
- **"Explain this view"** (Question 3(a), 10 marks): two developed points, each with a concept, theory or study, each linked back to the view's exact words ("...which shows that the family is the main influence on age identity"). Two good points are enough for full marks.

- **"Using sociological material, give one argument against"** (Question 3(b), 6 marks): one argument, developed, with named material, ending with **why** the view is wrong; if you use another agent, make the comparison explicit.
- **"Evaluate"** (26 marks): AO1 8, AO2 8, AO3 10. A range of detailed points with studies and concepts on **both** sides; evaluation that is clear, explicit and **sustained**; a conclusion that answers "how far".
- **Sociological material** means concepts (hegemonic masculinity, cultural capital, hybrid identity, third age, decentred identity), theories (Marxism, functionalism, feminism, interactionism, postmodernism) and studies (Willis, Oakley, Connell, Sharpe, Johal, Modood, Aries, Postman, Savage). Named theories are not required for full marks, but supporting evidence is.
- **Keep to the identity named.** Other identities can illustrate a point, but the focus must stay on the one in the question (all age groups count in an age question).

Quick check

1. What is the difference between objective and subjective class? Give an example where they do not match.
2. What is a hybrid identity? Give one example and the sociologist linked to it.
3. Describe two features of the "third age".
4. Explain what Aries meant by saying childhood is socially constructed.
5. 'Education is the most important influence on age identity.' Give one argument against this view in two or three sentences, naming sociological material.

Answers

1. **Objective class** is a person's class measured by facts such as occupation and income; **subjective class** is the class they feel they belong to. A well-paid electrician may earn more than many professionals yet still see himself as working class.
2. A **hybrid identity** combines elements of two or more cultures into something new. Example: young British Asians who switch between Asian and British language, dress and music depending on the setting (Johal's "Brasian" dual identity).
3. **Active retirement** (1): people in their 60s and 70s are healthier than in the past and use their free time for travel, study and leisure (1). **Consumer lifestyle** (1): many have pensions and savings and buy products and holidays aimed at "young" older people, so they do not see themselves as old (Featherstone and Hepworth) (1).
4. Aries argued that in medieval Europe children were treated as small adults, working and dressing like adults from a young age. The idea of childhood as a separate, protected and innocent stage appeared only in modern times, so childhood is shaped by society, not fixed by biology.
5. The **family** is more important than education for age identity because it starts much earlier: from infancy parents teach age norms ("act your age"), and families mark the rites of passage, such as key birthdays and religious ceremonies, that move people between age groups. Education only begins after these expectations are formed, and it has no role at all in the age identity of adults and older people.

Past questions to try

- [9699/12/M/J/25 Q3](#): explain and argue against peers as the most important influence on age identity.
- [9699/13/O/N/23 Q4](#): essay on whether changes in ethnic identities have been exaggerated.
- [9699/12/M/J/23 Q4](#): essay on whether social class is still an important influence on identity.
- [9699/11/M/J/23 Q1](#): two characteristics of youth identity.