

The process of learning and socialisation

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Last checked 5 October 2026

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What you need to know

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

1. **Explain the building blocks of culture** and how together they make the social world feel "real" and normal to the people inside it: **culture, roles, norms, values, beliefs, customs, ideology, power** and **status**. This is the idea of the **social construction of reality**.
2. **Explain why socialisation matters** for how people behave, and argue both sides of the **nature versus nurture** debate: how far behaviour comes from biology and how far it is learned.
3. **Explain how the agencies of socialisation and social control work**: the **family, education, the peer group, the media** and **religion**, including which matters most for shaping identity and behaviour.

Understand it

Culture and the social construction of reality

Culture is the whole way of life of a group: what its members share and pass on, such as language, knowledge, food, dress, music and ideas of right and wrong. Culture is **learned**, not inherited in our genes, and it differs a great deal from one society to another.

Culture is built from smaller pieces. Learn each one with an example, because Question 1 often asks you to describe two of them.

- **Values** are general ideas about what is good, right and worth aiming for: honesty, respect for elders, education, fairness, individual freedom.
- **Norms** are the specific, expected ways of behaving in particular situations. They put values into practice: the value "respect for elders" becomes the norm of standing up when an older person enters. Examples: greeting customs (shaking hands, bowing), wearing a uniform to school, queuing, table manners.
- **Roles** are the sets of norms attached to a position in society. A **social role** is what people expect of someone who holds that position: a teacher is expected to prepare lessons and treat students fairly; a parent to feed, protect and guide a child; a student to attend, listen and complete work. Each person plays many roles at once (daughter, student, friend, employee).

- **Beliefs** are ideas people hold to be true about the world, for example religious beliefs about God or life after death, or the belief that hard work leads to success.
- **Customs** are long-standing traditional practices of a group, often tied to special occasions: wedding ceremonies, festivals, coming-of-age rituals, ways of mourning the dead.
- **Ideology** is a set of ideas that explains the world in a way that serves the interests of a particular group. Marxists argue that the ruling class spreads ideas (for example "anyone can get rich if they try") that make inequality look fair. Feminists use the term **patriarchal ideology** for ideas that make male dominance look natural.
- **Power** is the ability to get your way, even when others resist. Power can rest on force or on **authority**, power that people accept as legitimate (a judge, a parent, an elected leader).
- **Status** is a position in society and the social honour it carries. **Ascribed status** is fixed at birth (sex, ethnicity, a royal title, caste); **achieved status** is earned through your own actions (a doctor, an Olympic champion, a criminal record).

The social construction of reality pulls these together. The rules of social life are made by people, not given by nature, but because we learn them from birth they feel natural and obvious. Berger and Luckmann argued that society is a human product that comes to look like an objective fact. For example, what counts as childhood, or a "proper" role for women, differs between societies and periods, which shows it was created socially. Those with power and status have more say in which version of reality becomes accepted; this is where ideology comes in.

Upper-class culture is a useful illustration of culture belonging to a group: an appreciation of **high culture** (opera, classical music, fine art), exclusive leisure (polo, sailing, hunting, private members' clubs), private boarding-school education and the networks it creates (the **old boy network**), and formal etiquette.

Socialisation: how culture is learned

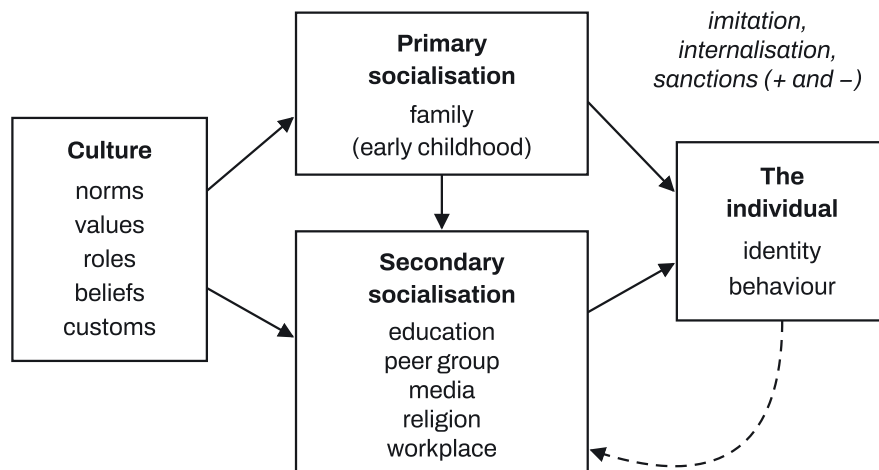
Socialisation is the lifelong process by which people learn the culture of their society and become social beings.

- **Primary socialisation** happens in early childhood, mainly in the **family**. Children learn language, basic norms and values, and their first sense of identity, such as gender.
- **Secondary socialisation** continues through life through **education**, the **peer group**, the **media**, **religion** and the workplace. It builds on and sometimes challenges what the family taught.

The main ways socialisation works:

- **Imitation and role models**: children copy the people around them, especially parents.
- **Internalisation**: norms and values become part of the person, so they follow them without being told.
- **Sanctions**: rewards (**positive sanctions**: praise, a smile, a good grade) for following norms and punishments (**negative sanctions**: a telling-off, ridicule, being left out, detention) for breaking them. **Informal** sanctions come from family and friends; **formal** ones from institutions such as schools and courts.
- **Role-play and identification**: children try out adult roles in play.

Socialisation is also **social control**: by teaching people what is expected and rewarding conformity, agencies of socialisation keep behaviour within accepted limits.



Two-way view (interactionists): people interpret, negotiate and resist what they are taught

Two views of socialisation: one-way or two-way?

Sociologists disagree about how passive people are in socialisation.

Structural views (one-way). Socialisation is something done **to** the individual by society.

- **Functionalists** such as **Parsons** see the family as the place where personalities are formed: children internalise the shared values of society, which creates **value consensus** and order. Each new generation is fitted into existing roles.
- **Marxists** agree that socialisation moulds people, but argue it passes on **ruling-class ideology**: for example, **Bowles and Gintis** argue that school's **hidden curriculum** (obedience, punctuality, accepting hierarchy) trains working-class children to be compliant workers. This reproduces class inequality from one generation to the next.
- **Feminists** argue that gender socialisation passes on **patriarchal ideology**, preparing girls for domestic, caring roles.

Interactionist views (two-way). People are **active**: they interpret, negotiate and sometimes reject what they are taught.

- **G.H. Mead**: the **social self** develops through interaction. Children first copy particular people (play stage), then learn to see themselves through the eyes of society as a whole, the **generalised other** (game stage). The self has an active, creative side (the "I") as well as the socialised side (the "me").
- **Cooley**: the **looking-glass self**. We form our self-image from how we think others see us, and we can respond to that image in different ways.
- **Wrong** criticised the **over-socialised** view of people: sociologists who see behaviour as wholly shaped by socialisation make humans look like puppets with no free will.

- Media audiences are not passive either: the **active audience** view says people select and interpret media messages rather than absorbing them.
- **Postmodernists** add that today people can **pick and mix** identities from a wide range of sources ("a supermarket of style", Polhemus), so no single agency fixes who they are.

Nature versus nurture

The **nature** side says behaviour is mainly caused by biology: genes, hormones and instincts we are born with. The **nurture** side says behaviour is mainly learned through socialisation. Sociologists mostly stress nurture, but the debate is a favourite essay question. Don't mix the terms up: **nature = biology**, **nurture = socialisation** (both primary and secondary).

Evidence and arguments for nature:

- **Instincts**: claims that women have a **maternal instinct** to care for children and men are naturally more **aggressive** (linked to testosterone).
- **Sociobiology**: **Wilson** argued that much social behaviour evolved because it helped our genes survive. **Tiger and Fox** called the inherited programme of human behaviour a **biogrammar**: for example, they argued that men are biologically suited to hunting, competing and bonding in groups.
- Some argue there are **strong** biological traits (fixed at birth, like eye colour) and **weak** ones (potential we are born with that only develops given the right environment, like musical ability). Even the nature side accepts that the environment matters for weak traits.
- **Parsons** linked the **expressive** (caring) role of women and the **instrumental** (earning, decision-making) role of men to biology, especially women's role in childbirth.
- **Twin and adoption studies** (behavioural geneticists such as **Plomin**): identical twins share all their genes. Identical twins brought up apart who still turn out similar in personality and intelligence suggest genes matter.

Evidence and arguments for nurture:

- **Feral children**, raised with little or no human contact, lack the basic behaviour we think of as human. **Genie**, found in the USA in 1970 aged 13 after being shut alone in a room by her father, never fully learned grammar. **Oxana Malaya**, found in Ukraine in 1991 aged about 8, had lived among dogs and barked and moved on all fours. Language and "human" behaviour therefore have to be learned.
- **Cross-cultural variation**: if behaviour were biological, it would be the same everywhere. **Margaret Mead** found that in three New Guinea societies gender behaviour differed sharply: among the Arapesh both sexes were gentle and caring, among the Mundugumor both were aggressive, and among the Tchambuli women were dominant and practical while men were more concerned with appearance.
- **Durkheim on suicide**: even suicide, which seems the most personal act, has rates that differ between societies and groups (for example Protestants had higher rates than Catholics) and stay stable over time. This shows social forces, such as how well people are integrated into a group, shape behaviour.
- **Oakley** showed how gender is learned from birth: **manipulation** (encouraging "suitable" behaviour, such as fussing over a girl's hair), **canalisation** (channelling children towards gendered toys and activities), **verbal appellation** (calling them "pretty girl" or "brave boy") and different activities. She argued Parsons

mistook learned roles for biology.

- **G.H. Mead and Cooley:** the self is made in interaction, not present at birth.

Evaluation points both ways:

- Feral children may have had other problems (abuse, disability, malnutrition), so they are not a clean test.
- Twin studies are hard to interpret: separated twins are often placed in similar homes, and twins share the same womb.
- It is very hard to measure how much behaviour comes from a single factor; most sociologists now see **nature and nurture interacting** (biology gives potential; socialisation shapes how it is expressed).
- The nurture side can become **deterministic** (Wrong's over-socialised view), ignoring free will and **agency**: people do resist their socialisation.
- Postmodernists reject both biological determinism and structural sociology as **metanarratives**, over-ambitious "big stories".

Under-socialisation, no socialisation and deviance

These ideas come up when Paper 1 links socialisation to deviance.

- **Under-socialisation** (or **inadequate socialisation**) means a person **was** socialised, but poorly: they did not fully learn the norms and values of mainstream society. Functionalists and the New Right link it to deviance. **Murray** argued that a growing **underclass**, supported by generous welfare benefits, has many lone-parent families and boys growing up without working fathers as role models, so children are not taught self-discipline or the value of work, and crime follows. Failures can also be in **secondary** socialisation, for example **anti-school subcultures** and a lack of positive role models in the community.
- **No socialisation** is the feral child: a different thing. Examiners give **no credit** for feral children in an under-socialisation answer.

Arguments against under-socialisation as the main cause of deviance:

- **Subcultural theory:** **Cohen** argued that working-class boys who fail at school suffer **status frustration** and form delinquent subcultures with their own norms. They are socialised, just into **different** norms, not too few.
- Under-socialisation is **hard to define and measure**, so the claim is hard to test.
- **Well-socialised people deviate too:** middle-class **white-collar crime** (fraud, tax evasion) and students' deviance can't be explained this way.
- **Labelling theory** (being labelled deviant can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy), **marginalisation** of groups such as the young, **structural causes** such as poverty and blocked opportunities, and **biological or psychological** explanations all offer alternatives.

The agencies of socialisation and social control

For each agency, know **how** it socialises (the processes), **what** it shapes (gender, class, ethnic, age identity) and **why it may or may not matter most**.

The family (primary agency)

- First and most intense influence; children depend on it for years.
- Parents are role models; children imitate them and internalise their values.
- Gender socialisation: Oakley's **manipulation** and **canalisation**; different chores for sons and daughters.
- Language: **Bernstein** found working-class families tended to use a **restricted code** and middle-class families an **elaborated code**, shaping class identity and later success at school.
- Social control: informal sanctions (praise, grounding, withdrawal of affection).
- Older family members pass on culture, religion, ethnic identity and even political views; children's lack of power makes them open to this.
- **Against it being most important**: secondary agencies may take over as children grow up; children are not passive (they rebel and negotiate); the media reach children without parental control; family influence on adults is weaker; diverse family types differ in what they pass on.

Education

- **Formal curriculum**: knowledge, national history and shared values (functionalists: **Durkheim** saw school as society in miniature, teaching social solidarity).
- **Hidden curriculum**: lessons learned from how school is organised (obedience, punctuality, competition, accepting hierarchy). Marxists (Bowles and Gintis) see this as preparing a compliant workforce.
- Gender and ethnic identity: subject choices, teacher expectations, textbooks.
- Social control: formal sanctions (detention, exclusion, grades) and rewards (prizes, praise).
- **Against**: students form anti-school subcultures and resist (**Willis**'s working-class "lads" who rejected school values); the family has already shaped attitudes to school.

The peer group (people of similar age and status)

- **Peer pressure**: approval or disapproval of style, taste, attitudes and behaviour.
- Informal sanctions: ridicule, gossip, **ostracism** (exclusion from the group).
- **Gender**: **Lees** found that girls' reputations were policed by peers through labels about their sexuality, and boys proved masculinity to friends; **McRobbie** described girls' **bedroom culture**, while boys used public spaces.
- **Ethnicity and education**: **Sewell** found some Black boys faced peer pressure to adopt an anti-school, hyper-masculine identity.
- **Age**: peer groups are usually the same age, so they reinforce age identities: youth subcultures (styles of music and dress), and young adults who live with friends may treat them as a second family.
- **Against**: much peer influence happens inside school (so education frames it); not everyone conforms; the family forms core values first; youth groups today are loose and short-lived (**neo-tribes**), not fixed groups; the law defines age identities (voting, driving, retirement ages) more firmly than peers do.

The media

- Role models and stereotypes (gender, ethnicity, age); advertising.
- **Hypodermic syringe** view: messages are injected into passive audiences.

- Children spend many hours on screens and social media, often unsupervised.
- **Against:** the **active audience** view, people select and interpret what they see; the effect is hard to separate from other influences.

Religion

- Teaches moral codes (what is right and wrong), sometimes with supernatural sanctions (heaven and hell).
- Marks life stages with **rites of passage** (baptism, bar mitzvah, marriage).
- Shapes ethnic identity, diet, dress and gender roles in many communities.
- **Against:** in many societies religious belief and attendance have declined (secularisation), though in others religion is still a central agency.

Key facts and formulas

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

Key term	Status
Culture: the shared, learned way of life of a group (language, knowledge, norms, values, customs)	Learn it
Values: general ideas of what is good and worth aiming for (honesty, respect); norms: specific expected behaviour in a situation (queuing, greetings)	Learn it
Role: the set of expected behaviours attached to a social position (parent, student, teacher)	Learn it
Ideology: a set of ideas that serves the interests of a powerful group (ruling-class or patriarchal ideology)	Learn it
Ascribed status: fixed at birth; achieved status: earned through your own actions	Learn it
Primary socialisation: early childhood, in the family; secondary socialisation: lifelong, through education, peers, media, religion and work	Learn it
Positive sanctions reward conformity; negative sanctions punish deviance; formal (institutions) or informal (family, friends)	Learn it
Nature: behaviour comes from biology (genes, instincts, hormones); nurture: behaviour is learned through socialisation	Learn it
Under-socialisation: inadequate socialisation into mainstream norms; not the same as feral children (no socialisation)	Learn it
Oakley's gender socialisation: manipulation, canalisation, verbal appellation	Learn it
Mead: social self, the "I" and the "me", the generalised other; Cooley: looking-glass self; Wrong: the over-socialised view	Learn it

How to do it

We have tagged 28 Paper 1 and Paper 2 questions for this topic (2021–2026). Every one of the 10 Question 3s has an (a) and a (b) part, which count as different types, so the counts add up to 38.

Question type	Questions
Evaluate a view in an extended essay (26 marks)	10
Explain a view, with two developed points (10 marks)	10
Give one developed argument against a view (6 marks)	10
Describe two examples of a cultural element or socialisation process (4 marks)	7
Define a key term (2 marks)	1

1. Evaluate a view in an extended essay (10 questions)

These are Section B essays: **AO1** knowledge 8, **AO2** application 8, **AO3** evaluation 10, so $8 + 8 + 10 = 26$ marks. Evaluation carries the most marks, so a one-sided essay is capped low, however good. Eight of the ten have been the **nature versus nurture** debate in different wordings ("nature rather than nurture", "nurture rather than nature", "shaped entirely by socialisation", "socialisation is the most significant factor", "sociologists exaggerate socialisation"). The other two asked whether one **agency** (the family, peers) is the most important in shaping identity.

- 1. Work out which side the view takes.** "Nature rather than nurture" means the view is the biological side; "sociologists exaggerate socialisation" is also the biological side; "nurture rather than nature" and "shaped entirely by socialisation" are the sociological side. Getting this backwards wrecks the essay.
- 2. Introduction (short):** define the key terms (nature, nurture, socialisation, or the agency and identity) and say there are two sides.
- 3. For the view: 3–4 developed paragraphs.** Each: a point → named evidence or theory → explain how it supports the view → link back to the question's wording.
- 4. Against the view: 3–4 developed paragraphs,** built the same way. Start each with a linking phrase that makes the evaluation explicit: "However, this view ignores...", "A stronger case can be made that..."
- 5. Evaluate inside paragraphs, not just side by side.** Say why one piece of evidence is weak (feral children may have been abused; twin studies are often of twins raised in similar homes) or why one argument is stronger. Examiners keep saying evaluation by mere **juxtaposition** (putting both sides next to each other) stays in the middle levels.
- 6. Conclusion:** a justified judgement that answers the question, often that nature and nurture interact, or that the agency's importance depends on age, identity and society.

Nature–nurture essays. Use the evidence lists in "Understand it": for nature, instincts, sociobiology (Wilson, biogrammar), strong and weak traits, Parsons, twin studies (Plomin); for nurture, feral children, Margaret Mead, Durkheim, Oakley, G.H. Mead and Cooley, and the functionalist view of socialisation. Add Wrong's over-socialised critique, interactionist agency and the difficulty of separating the two.

"Agency X is most important in shaping identity" essays. For the view: how that agency socialises (its processes and sanctions), which identities it shapes (gender, class, ethnicity, age), with named studies. Against: for each rival agency, explain **why** it matters more than the named one (for example "the family comes first, so it forms the core values peers later work on"); simply describing another agency doesn't count. Add interactionist agency (people choose), postmodern pick-and-mix identities, and the point that agencies work together, so isolating one is too simple.

2. Explain a view, with two developed points (10 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 the view; one developed point plus one weaker point is Level 2 (4–7).

1. **Underline the exact view**, such as "inadequate socialisation is the main cause of deviant behaviour". Both points must support **that** view.
2. **Point 1**: state it in one sentence → explain the process → support it with a named sociologist, theory or concept → link back with the question's own words.
3. **Point 2**: a different reason, built the same way.
4. **No introduction, no criticism.** Arguments against belong in (b).

Views you will meet and points that work:

- **Under- or inadequate socialisation causes deviance**: failures in primary socialisation (no consistent norms or sanctions at home) → deviance; Murray's underclass and welfare dependency, with absent father figures; failures in secondary socialisation (anti-school subcultures, lack of role models). **Not** feral children.
- **Subcultural norms and values cause deviance**: Cohen's status frustration; youth subcultures with norms that differ from the mainstream; anti-school subcultures (Willis).
- **Socialisation is one-way / controls behaviour**: internalisation, imitation of parents, positive and negative sanctions; Parsons and value consensus; Marxist and feminist views that ideology is imposed; secondary agencies reinforce primary socialisation.
- **An agency is most important** (peers for gender or age identity, education for identity, the family): two developed processes of that agency, each with a study, linked to the named identity.

3. Give one developed argument against a view (10 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, so write one well.

1. **Pick the strongest single argument.**
2. State it → explain it → support it with a study, theory or concept → say explicitly why it shows the view is wrong or too simple.

Arguments that work:

- Against **one-way socialisation** or **socialisation controls behaviour**: interactionists (Mead's social self, Cooley's looking-glass self) show people are active; Wrong's over-socialised critique; agencies give conflicting messages (religion versus media); people resist and deviate.
- Against **under-socialisation**: Cohen's subcultures (socialised into different norms); white-collar crime by the well-socialised; hard to measure; labelling or structural causes.
- Against **subcultures cause deviance**: subcultures mainly explain youth deviance and are short-lived; many are more conformist than assumed; other explanations fit better.
- Against **"agency X is most important"**: name another agency and explain **why it matters more for that identity** (the family shapes gender first; the law sets age identities), or argue that agencies work together, or that individuals choose.

4. Describe two examples of a cultural element or socialisation process (7 questions)

Question 1, 4 marks: for each of two examples, **1 mark** for identifying it and **1 mark** for describing it. Only the first two count.

1. **Identify** the example in a few words: "The role of a parent."
2. **Describe** it in one or two sentences that show you know what the term means: "Parents are expected to provide food, shelter and care for their children and to teach them right from wrong."
3. Repeat for a second, clearly different example. Keep it short.

What has been asked and good examples:

- **Social roles** (or roles of young people): student, son or daughter, friend, employee, breadwinner; describe the **expectations** attached.
- **Social values**: honesty, respect, fairness, education, helping others; describe why people hold it good.
- **Social norms**: greetings, dress codes, queuing, table manners; describe the expected behaviour.
- **Characteristics of upper-class culture**: high culture, exclusive leisure, private schooling and the old boy network, etiquette. Describing wealth alone doesn't count; it must be **culture**.
- **Ways children learn gender identity**: canalisation (toys), manipulation, verbal appellation, imitation of same-sex parents, the hidden curriculum, media stereotypes.
- **Ways the peer group influences behaviour**: approval or disapproval of style and taste, ostracism, gendered play, shared slang.

5. Define a key term (1 question)

A 2-mark definition (this one, "social problems", came from a Paper 2 source question): give an accurate definition in your own words (1) plus an example or a contrast that shows you understand it (1). Social problems are behaviours or conditions that cause harm and that the public or policymakers see as needing action (poverty, crime, drug addiction); a **sociological problem** is any pattern of social behaviour sociologists want to explain, including ordinary ones.

Worked examples

Example 1

Describe two ways in which status can be gained in society. [4]

Way 1. Status can be **ascribed (1)**: it is given to a person at birth and can't normally be changed, for example being born into a royal family or a high caste brings honour without the person doing anything **(1)**.

Way 2. Status can be **achieved (1)**: it is earned through a person's own effort and talent, for example qualifying as a surgeon or winning an Olympic medal brings respect from others **(1)**.

Each way is identified, then described so the meaning of the term is clear. Four separate, different points: **4 marks**.

Example 2

‘Religion remains an important agent of socialisation.’

(a) Explain this view. [10]

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

(a) One reason religion is important is that it teaches moral values and norms backed by powerful sanctions. Sacred texts and religious leaders set out what is right and wrong, such as honesty and caring for others, and believers may fear supernatural punishment or hope for reward after death. Functionalists such as Durkheim argued that shared religious rituals bind people together around common values, creating social solidarity, so religion socialises people into the value consensus society needs. **(Point 1: clear, developed and supported by theory.)**

A second reason is that religion shapes identity across the whole life course. Through rites of passage such as baptism, a bar mitzvah or a religious wedding, people learn the roles expected of them at each stage of life. In many communities religion also shapes ethnic identity, diet, dress and gender roles: girls and boys may be taught different duties within the family and the place of worship. Because this begins in the family and is reinforced by religious schools and festivals, religion is both a primary and a secondary influence. **(Point 2: clear, developed, with concepts and examples.)**

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

(b) Against the view, many sociologists argue that **secularisation** has weakened religion as an agent of socialisation in many societies. Fewer people attend places of worship, and the media and the peer group now have far more contact with young people than religious institutions do. Interactionists add that young people actively choose what to believe: postmodernists describe people picking and mixing beliefs and lifestyles rather than accepting one tradition. So in many societies religion is now one influence among many, and less important than the media in shaping young people's values. **(One clear, developed argument with sociological material, applied to the view: Level 3, 5–6 marks.)**

Example 3

Evaluate the view that differences in the behaviour of men and women are caused by biology. [26]

Plan. The view is the **nature** side. For: instincts and hormones, sociobiology, Parsons. Against: Oakley, Margaret Mead, social change, interactionist agency. Judgement: biology may set limits, but socialisation explains most differences.

Introduction. The view is that biological differences, such as hormones and instincts, explain why men and women behave differently (nature). Most sociologists argue instead that gender behaviour is learned through socialisation (nurture).

For the view (AO1/AO2).

- Supporters point to **instincts**: a maternal instinct makes women more caring, and higher testosterone makes men more aggressive and competitive. Men commit far more violent crime than women in almost every society, which suggests a common biological cause.
- **Sociobiologists** such as Wilson argue that behaviour evolved to pass on genes; Tiger and Fox claim men inherited a **biogrammar** suited to hunting and group bonding, which they say explains male dominance in politics and work.
- **Parsons** argued that women's role in childbirth and feeding babies makes them suited to the **expressive** role in the family, and men to the **instrumental** role.

Against the view (AO3).

- **However**, Oakley shows that gender is taught from birth through manipulation, canalisation and verbal appellation. Boys given toy guns and girls given dolls are being channelled into roles; the difference is produced, not natural. This directly weakens Parsons, who mistook a learned division of labour for biology.
- **Cross-cultural evidence** is a strong challenge: Margaret Mead found gentle, caring men and women among the Arapesh and aggressive men and women among the Mundugumor. If biology fixed gender behaviour, it would not vary so much between societies.
- **Rapid social change**: in many societies women now outperform men in education and many work full time. Biology has not changed in a few decades, so socialisation and opportunity must explain the change.
- **Evaluation of the evidence**: the crime statistics may reflect how boys are socialised into toughness and how police treat males, not hormones. Sociobiology is hard to test and has been accused of justifying existing inequality.
- **But** sociologists should not ignore biology completely: some differences (such as average physical strength) are biological. Wrong warns against an over-socialised view, and interactionists show people don't simply accept the gender roles they are taught.

Conclusion. Biology may give some average differences, but the wide variation between societies and over time shows that most differences in behaviour are learned. The view is therefore largely unconvincing.

How it would be marked. A range of detailed points with named concepts and studies (AO1 Level 4, 7–8); each applied to men's and women's behaviour (AO2 Level 4, 7–8); evaluation that is explicit ("However", "This directly weakens"), weighs evidence and reaches a justified conclusion (AO3 Level 5, 9–10). In the exam,

develop each bullet into a full paragraph.

Common mistakes

- **Mixing up nature and nurture.** Some candidates say nature means the family and nurture means secondary socialisation. Nature is biology; nurture is all socialisation.
- **Feral children in an under-socialisation answer.** Feral children had **no** socialisation; under-socialisation means poor or incomplete socialisation. Examiners give this no credit.
- **Describing agencies instead of answering.** Long descriptions of every agency of socialisation, with no link to the view, earn little. Apply each point to the question's wording.
- **Only one point in Question 3(a).** Two developed points are needed for Level 3. Don't waste time on a long introduction.
- **More than one argument in Question 3(b).** Only one is credited. One well-developed argument beats three thin ones.
- **Not explaining why another agency matters more.** For "peers are most important", saying "the family is also important" is not an argument; say why the family has a stronger effect on that identity.
- **One-sided essays.** An essay that only explains the view (or only attacks it) is capped low, because evaluation carries 10 of the 26 marks.
- **Evaluation by juxtaposition.** Writing "On the other hand, functionalists say..." and describing another theory is weak evaluation. Say which argument is stronger and why.
- **Using feral children descriptively.** Retelling Genie's story earns little; say what it shows (language must be learned through interaction) and its limits (abuse may explain her problems).
- **Vague Question 1 answers.** "Upper-class people are rich" is not culture; "children are young" is not a role. Show what the term means in your description.
- **Confusing gender identity with sexual identity,** or writing general identity answers when the question names one identity (gender, age, class).

How to get the marks

- **"Describe"** (Question 1, 4 marks): identify each example in a few words (1), then describe it so the term's meaning is clear (1). Brief answers are fine; only two examples count.
- **"Explain this view"** (Question 3(a), 10 marks): two points, each developed with a concept, theory or study and linked back to the view's exact words. A useful habit: end each point with "...which supports the view that...".
- **"Using sociological material, give one argument against"** (Question 3(b), 6 marks): one argument, developed, with named material, applied to the view: "This shows the view is too simple because...".
- **"Evaluate"** (26 marks): both sides, a range of named evidence, explicit evaluation throughout, and a conclusion that answers the question. AO3 (10 marks) is the largest share, so aim for evaluation that is **clear, explicit and sustained**.

- **Sociological material** means concepts (canalisation, looking-glass self, value consensus), theories (functionalism, Marxism, feminism, interactionism, postmodernism) and studies (Oakley, Margaret Mead, Durkheim, Willis, Lees). Theories are not required for full marks, but named evidence is.
- **Keep to the identity named.** If the question says age identity or gender identity, every point must be about it; other identities can illustrate a point but not replace it.
- **Use time by marks:** keep Question 1 brief and leave the essay the most time, because it carries the most marks.

Quick check

1. Explain the difference between a norm and a value, with an example of each.
2. Describe two ways the media may socialise young people.
3. Why do examiners not credit feral children in an answer about under-socialisation?
4. 'Socialisation is a one-way process.' Give one argument against this view in two or three sentences, naming sociological material.
5. Name one piece of evidence for nature and one for nurture, and give one weakness of each.

Answers

1. A **value** is a general idea of what is good, such as respect for elders. A **norm** is a specific expected behaviour that puts a value into practice in a situation, such as standing up when an older person enters the room.
2. **Role models** (1): celebrities and influencers present images of how to look and behave, which young people copy (1). **Stereotypes** (1): repeated portrayals of men as strong and women as caring or decorative teach young people what is "normal" for their gender (1).
3. Feral children had **no** socialisation at all, while under-socialisation means a person was socialised but inadequately, for example by inconsistent parenting. So feral children are not an example of the concept.
4. Interactionists argue people are active in socialisation. G.H. Mead's social self has an "I" that responds creatively to what society expects, and Cooley's looking-glass self shows people interpret others' reactions; so individuals negotiate and may reject the norms they are taught, which means socialisation is two-way, not imposed.
5. **Nature**: identical twins raised apart who are still similar suggest genes matter; but separated twins are often placed in similar homes, so the environment may explain the similarity. **Nurture**: Margaret Mead found gender behaviour varied greatly between three New Guinea societies; but it was short fieldwork in small societies long ago, and critics argued she may have seen what she expected to see.

Past questions to try

- 9699/12/M/J/23 Q3: explain and argue against the view that socialisation is a one-way process.
- 9699/12/O/N/24 Q5: the essay on whether sociologists exaggerate socialisation.
- 9699/11/M/J/22 Q1: two social norms.
- 9699/12/O/N/22 Q3: the peer group and gender identity.