

# SOCIOLOGY

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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## **Glossary of Sociology terms**

### **A**

**Achieved status:** Social status based on an individual's effort, rather than traits assigned by biological factors. Examples of achieved status include 'veteran', 'graduate' or 'doctor'.

**Affirmative action:** Action favouring those who tend to suffer from discrimination

**Ageing:** The combination of biological, psychological and social processes that affect people as they grow older.

**Ageism:** Discrimination or prejudice against a person on the grounds of age.

**Agencies of socialization:** Groups or social contexts within which processes of socialization take place. The family, peer groups, schools, the media and the workplace are all arenas in which cultural learning occurs.

**Agrarian societies:** Societies whose means of subsistence is based on agricultural production (crop-growing).

**Alienation:** The sense that our own abilities, as human beings, are taken over by other entities.

**Animism:** The belief that events in the world are mobilized by the activities of spirits.

**Anomie:** A lack of social norms. The concept was used by Durkheim to describe feelings of aimlessness and despair provoked by the rapid social change in the modern world which results in social norms losing their hold.

**Applied social research:** Research which aims not just to understand a social problem, but also to make a contribution to solving it. Much criminological research, for example, is applied research, aiming to reduce levels of crime. Applied social research is a feature of all social science disciplines and often demands the involvement of multi-disciplinary teams.

**Ascribed status:** Social status based on biological factors, such as race, sex or age.

**Assimilation:** The acceptance of a minority group by a majority population, in which the group takes on the values and norms of the dominant culture.

**Automation:** Production processes monitored and controlled by machines with only minimal supervision from people.

### **B**

**Back region:** An area away from 'front region' performances, characterized by Erving Goffman, where individuals are able to relax and behave in an informal way.

**Biodiversity** The diversity of species of life forms on planet Earth.

**Biographical research:** Research that takes individual lives or life histories as its main focus of interest.

**Biographical methods:** Involve oral histories, life stories, autobiographies, biographies and more.

**Bisexual:** An orientation of sexual activities or feelings towards other people of either sex.

**Black feminism:** A strand of feminist thought which highlights the multiple disadvantages of gender, class and race that shape the experiences of non-white women. Black feminists reject the idea of a single unified gender oppression that is experienced evenly by all women, and argue that early feminist analysis reflected the specific concerns of white, middle-class women.

**Bureaucracy:** An organization of a hierarchical sort, which takes the form of a pyramid of authority. The term 'bureaucracy' was popularized by Max Weber. According to Weber, bureaucracy is the most efficient type of large-scale human organization. As organizations grow in size, Weber argued, they inevitably tend to become more and more bureaucratized.

## C

**Capital punishment:** The state-sanctioned execution of a person who has been convicted of crime that is punishable by death. Capital punishment is commonly known as the 'death penalty'.

**Capitalism:** A system of economic enterprise based on market exchange. 'Capital' refers to any asset, including money, property and machines, which can be used to produce commodities for sale or invested in a market with the hope of achieving a profit.

**Capitalists:** Those who own companies, land or stocks and shares, using these to generate economic returns.

**Caste:** A form of stratification in which an individual's social position is fixed at birth and cannot be changed. There is virtually no intermarriage between the members of different caste groups. Causal relationship A relationship in which one state of affairs (the effect) is brought about by another (the cause).

**Causation:** The causal influence of one factor on another. Causal factors in sociology include the reasons individuals give for what they do, as well as external influences on their behaviour.

**Church:** A large body of people belonging to an established religious organization. Churches normally have a formal structure, with a hierarchy of religious officials, and the term is also used for the building where their religious ceremonials are held.

**Class consciousness:** Marx's term for the recognition by workers of their unity as a social class in opposition to capitalists and to capitalism itself

**Class system:** A system of social stratification based on individual achievement

**Collective behaviour:** Activities of people and social groups that normally emerge spontaneously (such as crowds, riots and so on) rather than arising from processes of socialisation leading to conformity to social rules and norms.

**Comparative research:** Research that compares one set of findings on one society with the same type of findings on other societies.

**Conflict theories:** A sociological perspective that focuses on the tensions, divisions and competing interests present in human societies. Conflict theorists believe that the scarcity and value of resources in society produces conflict as groups struggle to gain access to and control those resources. Many conflict theorists have been strongly influenced by the writings of Marx.

**Consumer society:** A type of society which promotes the consumption of mass-produced products. Consumer societies also generate an ideology of consumerism, which assumes that ever increasing mass consumption is beneficial.

**Convenience sample:** The arbitrary selection of respondents for a study, based on simple opportunity rather than a rigorous quest for representativeness. Used in much applied social research with practical applications.

**Conversation analysis:** The empirical study of conversations, employing techniques drawn from ethnomethodology. Conversation analysis examines details of naturally occurring conversations to reveal the organizational principles of talk and its role in the production and reproduction of social order.

**Core countries:** According to world-systems theory, the most advanced industrial countries, which take the lion's share of profits in the world economic system.

**Corporate crime:** Offences committed by large corporations in society. Examples of corporate crime include pollution, false advertising and violations of health and safety regulations.

**Corporate culture:** A branch of management theory that seeks to increase productivity and competitiveness through the creation of a unique organizational culture involving all members of a firm. A dynamic corporate culture - involving company events, rituals and traditions - is thought to enhance employee loyalty and promote group solidarity.

**Correlation:** A regular relationship between two dimensions or variables, often expressed in statistical terms. Correlations may be positive or negative. A positive correlation between two variables exists where a high rank on one variable is regularly associated with a high rank on the other. A negative correlation exists where a high rank on one variable is regularly associated with a low rank on the other.

**Correlation coefficient:** A measure of the degree of correlation between two variables.

**Colonialism:** The process by which some nations enrich themselves through political and economic control of other countries

**Communism:** An economic and political system in which all members of a society are socially equal.

**Concept:** A mental construct that represents some part of the world, inevitably in a simplified form

**Crime:** Any action that contravenes the laws established by a political authority.

**Crowd:** A temporary gathering of people who share a common focus of attention and whose members influence one another

**Crude birth rate:** The number of live births in a given year for every thousand people in a population

**Crude death rate:** The number of deaths in a given year for every thousand people in a population

**Cultural capital:** Types of knowledge, skills and education which confer advantages on those who acquire them. Cultural capital can be embodied (in forms of speech or bodily comportment), objectified (in cultural products such as works of art) or institutionalized (in educational qualifications).

**Cultural pluralism:** The coexistence of several subcultures within a given society on equal terms.

**Culture:** The values, ceremonies and ways of life characteristic of a given group. Like the concept of society, the notion of culture is very widely used in sociology, as well as in the other social sciences (particularly anthropology). Culture is one of the most distinctive properties of human social association.

**Cybercrime:** Criminal activities by means of electronic networks, or involving the use of new information technologies. Electronic money laundering, personal identity theft, electronic vandalism and monitoring of electronic correspondence are all emergent forms of cybercrime.

**Cyberspace:** Electronic networks of interaction between individuals at different computer terminals, linking people at a level - in a dimension - that has no regard for territorial boundaries or physical presence.

**Cult:** A religious organisation that is substantially outside a society's cultural traditions

**Cultural integration:** The close relationship among various elements of a cultural system

**Cultural lag:** The fact that cultural elements change at different rates, which may disrupt a cultural system.

**Cultural relativism:** The practice of judging a culture by its own standards.

**Cultural reproduction:** The process by which a society transmits dominant knowledge from one generation to another.

**Cultural transmission:** The process by which one generation passes culture to the next.

**Cultural universals:** Traits that are part of every known culture.

**Culture:** The beliefs, values, behaviour and material objects that constitute a people's way of life.

**Culture shock:** Personal disorientation that comes from encountering an unfamiliar way of life.

## **D**

**Democracy:** A political system in which power is exercised by the people as a whole.

**Democratic socialism:** An economic and political system that combines significant government control of the economy with free elections.

**Demographic transition theory:** A thesis linking population patterns to a society's level of technological development.

**Demography:** The study of human population.

**Denomination:** A church, independent of the state that accepts religious pluralism.

**Dependency theory:** A model of economic and social development that explains global inequality in terms of the historical exploitation of poor societies by rich ones.

**Dependent variable:** A variable that is changed by another (independent) variable.

**Descent:** The system by which members of a society trace kinship over generations.

**Deforestation:** The destruction of forested land, often by commercial logging.

**Demographic transition:** An interpretation of population change, which holds that a stable ratio of births to deaths is achieved once a certain level of economic prosperity has been reached.

**Demography:** The study of the characteristics of human populations, including their size, composition and dynamics.

**Denomination:** A religious sect which has lost its revivalist dynamism, and has become an institutionalized body, commanding the adherence of significant numbers of people.

**Dependency theory:** Theory of economic development derived from Marxism arguing that the poverty of low-income countries stems directly from their exploitation by wealthy countries and the transnational corporations that are based in wealthy countries.

**Dependent variable:** A variable, or factor, causally influenced by another (the independent variable).

**Desertification:** Instances of intense land degradation resulting in desert-like conditions over large areas.

**Deskilling:** The process through which the skills of workers are downgraded or, over time, eliminated, and taken over by machines and/or managers.

**Deviant subculture:** A subculture whose members have values which differ substantially from those of the majority in a society.

**Diaspora:** The dispersal of an ethnic population from an original homeland into foreign areas, often in a forced manner or under traumatic circumstances.

**Disability studies:** A field of enquiry that investigates the position of disabled people in societies, including the experiences, history and campaigns of disabled people and their organizations.

**Discrimination:** Activities that deny to the members of a particular group resources or rewards which can be obtained by others.

**Displacement:** The transferring of ideas or emotions from their true source to another object.

**Documentary research:** The study of written texts including personal diaries, government policies, fictional works and mass media output.

**Dramaturgical analysis:** An approach to the study of social interaction based on the use of metaphors derived from the theatre.

**Dysfunction:** Features of social life that challenge or create tensions in a social system

## **E**

**Economic interdependence:** The outcome of specialization and the division of labour, when self-sufficiency is superseded and individuals depend on others to produce many or most of the goods they need to sustain their lives.

**Economy:** The system of production and exchange which provides for the material needs of individuals living in a given society.

**Education:** A social institution which promotes and enables the transmission of knowledge and skills across generations.

**Encounter:** A meeting between two or more individuals in a situation of face-to-face interaction.

**Endogamy:** The forbidding of marriage or sexual relations outside one's social group.

**Entrepreneur:** Someone who starts or owns a business venture and takes personal responsibility for the risks involved and the potential rewards gained.

**Ethnicity:** Cultural values and norms which distinguish the members of a given group from others. An ethnic group is one whose members share a distinct awareness of a common cultural identity, separating them from other groups around them.

**Ethnography:** The study of people at first hand using participant observation or interviewing.

**Ethnomethodology:** The study of how people make sense of what others say and do in the course of day-to-day social interaction. Ethnomethodology is concerned with the 'ethnomethods' by means of which human beings sustain meaningful interchanges with one another.

**Extended family:** A family group consisting of close relatives extending beyond a couple and their children living either within the same household or in a close and continuous relationship with one another.

## **F**

**False consciousness:** Marx's term for explanations of social problems grounded in the shortcomings of individuals rather than the flaws of society.

**Family of choice:** People with or without legal or blood ties who feel they belong together and wish to define themselves as a family.

**Family unit:** A social group of two or more people, related by blood, marriage or adoption, who usually live together.

**Family violence:** Emotional, physical or sexual abuse of one family member by another.

**Fashion:** A social pattern favoured for a time by a large number of people.

**Feminisation of poverty:** The trend by which women represent an increasing proportion of the poor.

**Feminism:** The advocacy of social equality for the sexes, in opposition to patriarchy and sexism.

**Fertility:** The incidence of child-bearing in a country's population.

**Factual questions:** Questions that raise issues concerning matters of fact (rather than theoretical or moral issues).

**Family:** A group of individuals related to one another by blood ties, marriage or adoption who form an economic unit, the adult members of which are responsible for the upbringing of children. All known societies involve some form of family system, although the nature of family relationships is widely variable. While in modern societies the main family form is the nuclear family, a variety of extended family relationships are also often found.

**Folkways:** A society's customs for routine, casual interaction

**Fordism:** An economic system based on mass assembly-line production, mass consumption and standardised commodities

**Formal organisation:** A large, secondary group that is organised to achieve its goals efficiently

**Feminist theories:** A sociological perspective which emphasizes the centrality of gender in analysing the social world, and particularly the uniqueness of the experience of women. There are many strands of feminist theory, but they all share in common the desire to explain gender inequalities in society and to work to overcome them.

**First World:** The group of nation-states that possesses mature industrialized economies, based on capitalistic production.

**Flexible production:** Process in which computers design customized products for a mass market.

**Focused interaction:** Interaction between individuals engaged in a common activity or a direct conversation with one another.

**Front region:** A setting of social activity in which individuals seek to put on a definite 'performance' for others.

**Functionalism:** A theoretical perspective based on the notion that social events can best be explained in terms of the functions they perform - that is, the contributions they make to the continuity of a society - and on a view of society as a complex system whose various parts work in a relationship to each other in a way that needs to be understood.

**Fundamentalism:** A belief in returning to the literal meanings of scriptural texts. Fundamentalism may arise as a response to modernization and rationalization, insisting on faith-based answers, and defending tradition by using traditional grounds.

## G

**Gemeinschaft:** Tonnies' term for a type of social organisation by which people have strong social ties and weak self-interest.



**Gender identity:** The subjective state in which someone comes to say 'I am a man' or 'I am a woman'.

**Gender order:** The ways in which societies shape notions of masculinity and femininity through power relations.

**Gender performance:** Refers to ways of 'doing gender', the ways in which masculinities and femininities are acted out.

**Gender role:** Refers to learning and performing the socially accepted characteristics for a given sex.

**Gender stratification:** A society's unequal distribution of wealth, power and privilege between the two sexes.

**Generalised other:** George Herbert Mead's label for widespread cultural norms and values that we use as references in evaluating ourselves.

**Global economy:** Economic activity spanning many nations of the world with little regard for national borders.

**Governance:** The exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs at all levels

**Government:** Formal organisations that direct the political life of a society.

**Greenhouse effect:** A rise in the earth's average temperature (global warming) due to increasing concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

**Gender inequality:** The differences in the status, power and prestige women and men have in groups, collectivities and societies.

**Gender order:** A term associated with the writings of R. W. Connell, the gender order represents patterns of power relations between masculinities and femininities that are widespread throughout society.

**Gender relations:** The societally patterned interactions between men and women.

**Gender roles:** Social roles assigned to each sex and labelled as masculine or feminine.

**Gender:** Social expectations about behaviour regarded as appropriate for the members of each sex. Gender does not refer to the physical attributes in terms of which men and women differ, but to socially formed traits of masculinity and femininity.

**Gentrification:** A process of urban renewal in which older, decaying housing is refurbished by affluent people moving into the area.

**Global village:** A notion associated with the Canadian writer Marshall McLuhan, who saw the spread of electronic communication as binding the world into a small community.

**Global warming:** The gradual increase in temperature of planet Earth. Although the 'greenhouse effect' occurs naturally as carbon dioxide traps the sun's rays and heats up the earth, global warming implies an enhanced greenhouse effect as a result of human activity. The

effects of global warming are potentially devastating, including floods, droughts and other changes to the world's climate.

**Globalization:** Growing interdependence between different peoples, regions and countries in the world as social and economic relationships come to stretch worldwide.

**Government:** The regular enactment of policies, decisions and matters of state by officials within a political apparatus.

**Grand theories:** Theories which attempt to arrive at an overall explanation of social life and/or social development. Karl Marx's theory of successive class conflicts as the driving force of history is an example of grand theorizing.

**Greenhouse effect:** The build-up of heat trapping gases within the earth's atmosphere. While a 'natural' greenhouse effect keeps the earth's temperatures at a comfortable level, the build-up of high concentrations of greenhouse gases through human activities has been linked to more rapid global warming.

**Greying:** A term used to indicate that an increasing proportion of a society's population is becoming elderly.

**Gross domestic product (GDP):** All the goods and services on record as being produced by a country's economy in a particular year, regardless of who owns these factors.

## H

**Hate crime:** A criminal act against a person or a person's property by an offender motivated by racial or other bias.

**Hawthorne effect:** A change in a subject's behaviour caused simply by the awareness of being studied.

**Health:** A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being.

**Hegemonic masculinity:** The dominant or main ways of being a man in a society.

**Hegemony:** The means by which a ruling/dominant group wins over a subordinate group through ideas.

**Heterosexuality:** An orientation in sexual activity or feelings towards people of the opposite sex.

**Homophobia:** An irrational fear or disdain of homosexuals.

**Homosexuality:** An orientation of sexual activities or feelings towards others of the same sex.

**Human resource management (HRM):** A branch of management theory that regards employee enthusiasm and commitment as essential to economic competitiveness. The HRM approach seeks to develop in workers the sense that they have an investment in company products and in the work process itself.

**Hunting and gathering societies:** Societies whose mode of subsistence is gained from hunting animals, fishing and gathering edible plants.

**Hypothesis:** An idea, or an educated guess, about a given state of affairs, put forward in exact terms to provide the basis for empirical testing.

## I

**Independent variable:** A variable that causes change in another (dependent) variable

**Indigenous peoples:** Peoples with ties to the land, water and wildlife of their ancestral domain.

**Inductive logical thought:** Reasoning that transforms specific observations into general theory.

**Industrialism:** Technology that powers sophisticated machinery with advanced sources of energy.

**Industrial reserve army:** A disadvantaged section of labour that can be supplied cheaply when there is a sudden extra demand.

**Infant mortality rate:** The number of deaths among infants under one year of age for each thousand live births in a given year.

**In-group:** A social group commanding a member's esteem and loyalty.

**Interview:** A series of questions a researcher administers personally to respondents.

**Intragenerational social mobility:** A change in social position occurring during a person's lifetime.

**Identity:** The distinctive characteristics of a person's character or the character of a group which relate to who they are and what is meaningful to them. Some of the main sources of identity include gender, sexual orientation, nationality or ethnicity, and social class.

**Ideology:** Shared ideas or beliefs which serve to justify the interests of dominant groups. Ideologies are found in all societies in which there are systematic and ingrained inequalities between groups. The concept of ideology has a close connection with that of power, since ideological systems serve to legitimize the differential power held by groups.

**Immigration:** The movement of people into one country from another for the purpose of settlement.

**Impression management:** An idea associated with the American sociologist Erving Goffman. People 'manage' or control the impressions others have of them by choosing what to conceal and what to reveal when they meet other people. Incest Sexual activity between close family members.

**Independent variable:** A variable, or factor, that causally influences another (the dependent variable).

**Industrial Revolution:** The broad spectrum of social and economic transformations that surrounded the development of modern forms of industry.

**Infant mortality rate:** The number of infants who die during the first year of life, per 1,000 live births. Informal economy Economic transactions carried on outside the sphere of orthodox paid employment.

**Informal relations:** Relations which exist in groups and organizations developed on the basis of personal connections; ways of doing things that depart from formally recognized modes of procedure.

**Information technology:** Forms of technology based on information processing and requiring microelectronic circuitry.

**Internet:** A global system of connections between computers allowing people to communicate with one another and find information on the Worldwide Web by visuals, sounds and text in a way that escapes the time and space, and the cost, limitations of distance and also the control of territorial governments.

**Interpretative sociology:** Several approaches to the study of society, including symbolic interactionism and phenomenology which investigate the meaningful character of social life for its participants.

**Interviews:** One-to-one conversations aimed at eliciting information about some aspect of social life. Interviews usually involve a predetermined schedule of questions and can be structured, semi-structured or open-ended depending on the kind of information required.

**Intragenerational mobility:** Movement up or down a social stratification hierarchy within the course of a personal career.

**Interview:** A series of questions a researcher administers personally to respondents

**Intragenerational social mobility:** A change in social position occurring during a person's lifetime

## **J**

**Job insecurity:** A sense of apprehension experienced by employees about both the stability of their work position and their role within the workplace.

## **K**

**Kinship:** A relation which links individuals through blood ties, marriage or adoption.

**Knowledge economy:** A society no longer based primarily on the production of material goods but on the production of knowledge.

## **L**

**Labelling theory:** An approach to the study of deviance which suggests that people become 'deviant' because certain labels are attached to their behaviour by political authorities and others.

**Latent functions:** Functional consequences that are not intended or recognized by the members of a social system in which they occur.

**Legitimacy:** A particular political order gains legitimacy if most of those governed by it recognize it as just and valid.

**Lesbianism:** Homosexual activities or attachment between women.

**Liberal democracy:** A system of democracy based on parliamentary institutions, coupled to the free market system in the area of economic production.

**Liberal feminism:** A form of feminist theory that believes that gender inequality is produced by reduced access for women and girls to civil rights and certain social resources, such as education and employment. Liberal feminists tend to seek solutions through changes in legislation that ensure the rights of individuals are protected.

**Life expectancy:** The length of time people can on average expect to live when born.

**Life histories:** Studies of the overall lives of individuals, often based both on self-reporting and on documents such as letters.

**Lifelong learning:** The idea that learning and the acquisition of skills should occur at all stages of an individual's life, not simply in the formal educational system early in life.

**Life-span:** The maximum length of life that is biologically possible for a member of a given species.

**Labelling theory:** Deviance and conformity result not so much from what people do as from how others respond to those actions; it highlights social responses to crime and deviance.

**Labour unions: Organisations** of workers seeking to improve wages and working conditions through various strategies, including negotiations and strikes.

**Language:** A system of symbols that allows members of a society to communicate with one another.

**Latent functions:** Consequences of any social pattern that are unrecognised and unintended.

**Looking-glass self:** Cooley's term for the image people have of themselves based on how they believe others perceive them.

**Low-income countries:** Nations with little industrialisation in which severe poverty is the rule.

## **M**

**Macro-sociology:** The study of large-scale society.

**Manifest functions:** The recognised and intended consequences of any social pattern.

**Marriage:** A legally sanctioned relationship, involving economic cooperation as well as normative sexual activity and child-bearing, which people expect to be enduring.

**Mass media:** Any social or technological devices used for the selection, transmission or reception of information.

**Mass society:** A society in which industry and expanding bureaucracy have eroded traditional social ties.

**Malthusianism:** The idea, first advanced by Thomas Malthus two centuries ago, that population growth tends to outstrip the resources available to support it. Malthus argued that people must limit their frequency of sexual intercourse in order to avoid excessive population growth and a future of misery and starvation.

**Manufactured risk:** Dangers that are created by the impact of human knowledge and technology upon the natural world. Examples of manufactured risk include global warming and genetically modified foods.

**Mass media:** Forms of communication, such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television, designed to reach mass audiences.

**Mass production:** The production of long runs of goods using machine power. Mass production was one outcome of the Industrial Revolution.

**Materialist conception of history:** The view developed by Marx according to which 'material' or economic factors have a prime role in determining historical change.

**Matrilineal:** Relating to, based on, or tracing ancestral descent through the maternal line.

**Matrilocal:** Family systems in which the husband is expected to live near the wife's parents.

**Material culture:** The tangible things created by members of a society.

**Matriarchy:** A form of social organisation in which females dominate males.

**Matrilineal descent:** A system tracing kinship through women.

**Matrilocality:** A residential pattern in which a married couple lives with or near the wife's family.

**McDonaldisation of society:** A process by which the principles of the fast-food industry come to be applied to more and more features of social life.

**Mean:** The arithmetic average of a series of numbers.

**Mechanical solidarity:** Durkheim's designation of social bonds, based on shared morality that unite members of pre-industrial societies.

**Media texts:** All media products, such as television programmes, films, CDs, books, newspapers, website pages, etc.

**Median:** The value that occurs midway in a series of numbers arranged in order of magnitude or, simply, the middle case.

**Megalopolis:** A vast urban region containing a number of cities and their surrounding suburbs.

**Meritocracy:** A system of social stratification based on personal merit.

**Metropolis:** A large city that socially and economically dominates an urban area.

**Micro-sociology:** The study of everyday life in social interactions.

**Migration:** The movement of people into and out of a particular territory

**Minority:** A category of people, distinguished by physical or cultural traits, who are socially disadvantaged

**Miscegenation:** Biological reproduction by partners of different racial categories

**Mean:** A statistical measure of central tendency, or average, based on dividing a total by the number of individual cases.

**Means of production:** The means whereby the production of material goods is carried on in a society, including not just technology but the social relations between producers.

**Measures of central tendency:** These are ways of calculating averages, the three most common being the mean, the median and the mode.

**Median:** The number that falls halfway in a range of numbers - a way of calculating central tendency that is sometimes more useful than calculating a mean.

**Melting pot:** The idea that ethnic differences can be combined to create new patterns of behaviour drawing on diverse cultural sources.

**Meritocracy:** A system in which social positions are filled on the basis of individual merit and achievement, rather than ascribed criteria such as inherited wealth, sex or social background.

**Metanarratives;** Broad, overarching theories or beliefs about the operation of society and the nature of social change. Marxism and functionalism are examples of metanarratives that have been employed by sociologists to explain how the world works

**Minority group:** A group of people in a minority in a given society who, because of their distinct physical or cultural characteristics, find themselves in situations of inequality within that society. Such groups include ethnic minorities.

**Mixed methods:** The use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods as part of a single research study.

**Mode:** The number that appears most often in a given set of data. This can sometimes be a helpful way of portraying central tendency.

**Modernization theory:** A version of market oriented development theory that argues that low income societies develop economically only if they give up their traditional ways and adopt modern economic institutions, technologies, and cultural values that emphasize savings and productive investment.

**Monarchies:** Those political systems headed by a single person whose power is passed down through their family across generations.

**Monogamy:** A form of marriage in which each married partner is allowed only one spouse at any given time.

**Monotheism:** Belief in one single God.

**Multiculturalism:** Ethnic groups exist separately and share equally in economic and political life.

**Multimedia:** The combination of what used to be different media requiring different technologies (for instance, visuals and sound) on a single medium, such as a CD-ROM, which can be played on a computer.

**Nation:** A group of people bound together by a strong sense of shared values, cultural characteristics such as language and religion and a perceived common history.

**Nationalism:** A set of beliefs, political ideas and movements expressing identification with a given national community and pursuing the interests of that community.

**Nation state:** A political apparatus over a specific territory with its own citizens backed up by military force and a nationalistic, sovereign creed.

**Natural environment:** The earth's surface and atmosphere, including all living organisms as well as the air, water, soil and other resources necessary to sustain life.

**Neo-colonialism:** A new form of global power relationship that involves not direct political control but economic exploitation by multinational corporations.

**Neo-locality:** A residential pattern in which a married couple lives apart from the parents of both spouses.

**Newly industrialising countries (NICs):** Lower-income countries that are fast becoming higher-income countries.

**Neoliberalism:** The economic belief that free market forces, achieved by minimizing government restrictions on business, provide the only route to economic growth.

**Network:** A set of informal and formal social ties that links people to each other.

**Non-material culture:** The intangible world of ideas created by members of a society.

**Non-verbal communication:** Communication using body movements, gestures and facial expressions rather than speech.

**Norms:** Rules and expectations by which a society guides the behaviour of its members.

**Nuclear family:** A family group consisting of mother, father (or one of these) and dependent children.

## O

**Objectivity:** A state of personal neutrality in conducting research.

**Occupation:** Any form of paid employment in which an individual works in a regular way.

**Oral history:** Interviews with people about events they witnessed or experienced earlier in their lives.

**Organic solidarity:** According to Emile Durkheim, the social cohesion that results from the various parts of a society functioning as an integrated whole.

**Organization:** A large group of individuals, involving a definite set of authority relations.

**Outsourcing:** The contracting out of a company's work tasks which were previously carried out internally.

## P



**Participant observation:** A research method in which researchers systematically observe people while joining in their routine activities.

**Pastoralism:** Technology based on the domestication of animals.

**Patrilineal descent:** A system tracing kinship through men.

**Patrilocality:** A residential pattern in which a married couple lives with or near the husband's family.

**Peer group:** A social group whose members have interests, social position and age in common.

**Participant observation:** A method of research widely used in sociology and anthropology in which the researcher takes part in the activities of a group or community being studied.

**Participatory democracy:** A system of democracy in which all members of a group or community participate collectively in the taking of major decisions.

**Pastoral societies:** Societies whose subsistence derives from the rearing of domesticated animals; there is often a need to migrate between different areas according to seasonal changes or to seek fresh grazing.

**Patriarchy:** A form of social organisation in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women

**Peripheral countries:** Countries that have a marginal role in the world economy and are thus dependent on the core-producing societies for their trading relationships.

**Pilot studies:** Trial runs in survey research.

**Polyandry:** A form of marriage in which a woman may simultaneously have two or more husbands

**Polygamy:** A form of marriage in which a person may have two or more spouses simultaneously.

**Polygyny:** A form of marriage in which a man may have more than one wife at the same time.

**Polytheism:** Belief in two or more gods.

**Population:** In the context of social research, the people who are the focus of a study or survey.

**Positivism:** In sociology, the view that the study of the social world should be conducted according to the principles of natural science. A positivist approach to sociology holds that objective knowledge can be produced through careful observation, comparison and experimentation.

**Post-Fordism:** A general term used to describe the transition from mass industrial production, characterized by Fordist methods, to more flexible forms of production favouring innovation and aimed at meeting market demands for customized products.

**Post-industrial society:** A post-industrial society is based on the production of information rather than material goods.

**Postmodernism:** The belief that society is no longer governed by history or progress. Postmodern society is highly pluralistic and diverse, with no 'grand narrative' guiding its development.

**Poststructuralism:** An approach to social science derived from the field of linguistics and popularized in sociology in the work of Michel Foucault. Poststructuralists reject the idea that absolute truths about the world can be discovered, arguing instead that plural interpretations of reality are inevitable.

**Prejudice:** The holding of preconceived ideas about an individual or group, ideas that are resistant to change even in the face of new information. Prejudice may be either positive or negative.

**Primary socialization:** The process by which children learn the cultural norms of the society into which they are born.

**Profane:** That which belongs to the mundane, everyday world.

**Proletariat:** To Karl Marx, the working class under capitalism.

**Public sphere:** An idea associated with the German sociologist Jürgen Habermas. The public sphere is the arena of public debate and discussion in modern societies

**Push and pull factors:** In the early study of global migration, these were the internal and external forces believed to influence patterns of migration. 'Push factors' refer to dynamics within the country of origin, such as unemployment, war, famine or political persecution. 'Pull factors' describe features of destination countries, such as a buoyant labour market, lower population density and a high standard of living.

## Q

**Qualitative research:** Investigation by which a researcher gathers impressionistic not numerical data.

**Quantitative research:** Investigation by which a researcher collects numerical data.

**Questionnaire:** A series of written questions a researcher supplies to subjects, requesting their responses.

**Qualitative research methods:** Those methods which gather detailed, rich data with the aim of gaining a better understanding of the social phenomena being studied.

**Quality circle (QC):** Types of industrialized group production, where workers use their expertise to actively participate in decision-making.

**Quantitative research methods:** Those sociological methods which allow social phenomena to be measured and analysed using mathematical models and statistical techniques.

**Queer theory:** Queer theory argues that sociology and other disciplines are prejudiced towards heterosexuals, and that non-heterosexual voices must be brought to the fore in order to challenge the heterosexual assumptions that underlie much contemporary thinking.

## R

**Rationalisation of society:** Weber's term for the historical change from tradition to rationality as the dominant mode of human thought.

**Rationality:** Deliberate, matter-of-fact calculation of the most efficient means to accomplish a particular goal.

**Rationalization:** A concept used by Max Weber to refer to the process by which modes of precise calculation and organization, involving abstract rules and procedures, increasingly come to dominate the social world.

**Rational-legal authority (bureaucratic authority):** Power legitimised by legally enacted rules and regulations.

**Race:** A set of social relationships which allow individuals and groups to be located, and various attributes or competencies assigned, on the basis of biologically grounded features.

**Racism:** The attributing of characteristics of superiority or inferiority to a population sharing certain physically inherited characteristics.

**Radical feminism:** Form of feminist theory that believes that gender inequality is the result of male domination in all aspects of social and economic life.

**Random sampling:** A sampling method in which a sample is chosen so that every member of the population has the same probability of being included.

**Real culture (as opposed to ideal culture):** Actual social patterns that only approximate cultural expectations.

**Reference group:** A social group that serves as a point of reference in making evaluations or decisions.

**Refugees:** People who flee their own country for political or economic reasons, or to avoid war and oppression.

**Rehabilitation:** A programme for reforming an offender to preclude subsequent offences.

**Relative deprivation:** A perceived disadvantage arising from a specific comparison.

**Relative poverty:** The deprivation of some people in relation to those who have more.

**Reliability:** The quality of consistent measurement.

**Religion:** A social institution involving beliefs and practices based upon a conception of the sacred.

**Replication:** Repetition of research by others.

**Research method:** A systematic plan for conducting research.

**Research tool:** A systematic technique for conducting research.

**Resocialisation:** Radically altering an inmate's personality through deliberate manipulation of the environment.

**Reflexivity:** This describes the connections between knowledge and social life. The knowledge we gain about society can affect the way in which we act in it. For instance, reading a survey

about the high level of support for a political party might lead an individual to express support for that party too.

**Reincarnation:** Rebirth of the soul in another body or form. This belief is most often associated with Hindus and Buddhists.

**Relative deprivation:** The thesis that people's subjective feelings of deprivation are not absolute, but related to their assessment of themselves in comparison with others.

**Relative poverty:** Poverty defined by reference to the overall standard of living in any given society.

**Religion:** A set of beliefs adhered to by the members of a community, involving symbols regarded with a sense of awe or wonder, together with ritual practices in which members of the community engage.

**Representative democracy:** A political system in which decisions affecting a community are taken, not by its members as a whole, but by people they have elected for this purpose.

**Representative sample:** A sample from a larger population that is statistically typical of that population.

**Reproductive technology:** Techniques of influencing the human reproductive process.

**Research methods:** The diverse methods of investigation used to gather empirical (factual) material.

**Risk society:** A notion associated with the German sociologist Ulrich Beck. Beck argues that industrial society has created many new dangers of risks unknown in previous ages. The risks associated with global warming are one example.

**Rituals:** Formalized modes of behaviour in which the members of a group or community regularly engage. Religion represents one of the main contexts in which rituals are practised, but the scope of ritual behaviour extends well beyond this particular sphere. Most groups have ritual practices of some kind or another.

## S

**Sacred:** That which inspires attitudes of awe or reverence among believers in a given set of religious ideas.

**Sampling:** Studying a proportion of individuals or cases from a larger population as representative of that population as a whole.

**Sanction:** A mode of reward or punishment that reinforces socially expected forms of behaviour.

**Science:** A logical system that bases knowledge on direct, systematic observation.

**Secondary source:** All those sources which discuss, interpret or re-present material that originated at an earlier time (contrast with primary source).

**Sect:** A religious movement which breaks away from orthodoxy.

**Secularization:** A process of decline in the influence of religion. Although modern societies have become increasingly secular, tracing the extent of secularization is a complex matter. Secularization can refer to levels of involvement with religious organizations (such as rates of church attendance), the social and material influence wielded by religious organizations, and the degree to which people hold religious beliefs.

**Self-identity:** The ongoing process of self-development and definition of our personal identity through which we formulate a unique sense of ourselves and our relationship to the world around us.

**Semi-peripheral countries:** Countries that supply sources of labour and raw materials to the core industrial countries and the world economy but are not themselves fully industrialized.

**Sexual harassment:** Unwanted sexual advances, remarks or behaviour by one person towards another, persisted in even though it is made clear that the other person is resistant.

**Sexual orientation:** The direction of one's sexual or romantic attraction.

**Sexuality:** A broad term which refers to the sexual characteristics, and sexual behaviour, of human beings.

**Secondary analysis:** A research method in which a researcher utilises data collected by others.

**Secondary group:** A large and impersonal social group whose members pursue a specific interest or activity.

**Secondary labour market:** Jobs that provide minimal benefits to workers.

**Secondary sector:** The part of the economy that transforms raw materials into manufactured goods.

**Sect:** A type of religious organisation that stands apart from the larger society.

**Secularisation:** The historical decline in the importance of the supernatural and the sacred.

**Segregation:** The physical and social separation of categories of people.

**Self:** George Herbert Mead's term for the human capacity to be reflexive and take the role of others.

**Self-employment:** Earning a living without working for a large organisation.

**Semiotics:** Study of symbols and signs

**Sex:** The biological distinction between females and males.

**Sex ratio:** The number of males for every hundred females in a given population.

**Sexism:** The belief that one sex is innately superior to the other.

**Sexual harassment:** Comments, gestures or physical contact of a sexual nature that are deliberate, repeated and unwelcome.

**Sexual orientation:** An individual's preference in terms of sexual partners: same sex, other sex, either sex, neither sex.

**Slavery:** A form of social stratification in which some individuals are literally owned by others as their property.

**Snowball sampling:** A method of gathering a sample for research studies based on research participants recruiting acquaintances and friends for the study.

**Social function:** The consequences of any social pattern for the operation of society.

**Social group:** Two or more people who identify and interact with one another.

**Social identity:** Our understanding of who we are and who other people are, and, reciprocally, other people's understanding of themselves and others.

**Social institution:** A major sphere of social life, or societal subsystem, organised to meet a basic human need.

**Social interaction:** The process by which people act and react in relation to others.

**Social mobility:** Change in people's position in a social hierarchy.

**Social movement:** Organised activity that encourages or discourages social change.

**Social network:** A web of social ties that links people who identify with one another.

**Social capital:** The social knowledge and connections that enable people to accomplish their goals and extend their influence.

**Social change:** Alteration in the basic structures of a social group or society.

**Social evolution:** A theory originally used by nineteenth-century scholars who sought to use evolutionary theory from biology to study the long-term development of societies.

**Social exclusion:** The outcome of multiple deprivations which prevent individuals or groups from participating fully in the economic, social and political life of the society in which they are located.

**Social facts:** According to Emile Durkheim, the aspects of social life that shape our actions as individuals. Durkheim believed that social facts could be studied scientifically.

**Social group:** Collection of individuals who interact in systematic ways with one another. Groups may range from very small associations to large-scale organizations or societies.

**Social interaction:** Any form of social encounter between individuals.

**Social mobility:** Movement of individuals or groups between different socio-economic positions.

**Social movement:** Collective attempts to further a common interest or secure a common goal through action outside the sphere of established political institutions. Social movements seek to bring about or block social change and normally exist in relations of conflict with organizations whose objectives and outlook they frequently oppose. However, movements that successfully challenge for power, once they become institutionalized, can develop into formal organizations.

**Social role:** The expected behaviour of an individual occupying a particular social position.

**Social self:** The basis of self-consciousness in human individuals, according to the theory of G. H. Mead. The social self is the identity conferred upon an individual by the reactions of others. A person achieves self-consciousness by becoming aware of this social identity.

**Social stratification:** The existence of structured inequalities between groups in society, in terms of their access to material or symbolic rewards. While all societies involve some forms of stratification, only with the development of state-based systems do wide differences in wealth and power arise. The most distinctive form of stratification in modern societies involves class divisions.

**Socialist feminism:** The beliefs that women are treated as second-class citizens in patriarchal capitalist societies and that both the ownership of the means of production and women's social experience need to be transformed because the roots of women's oppression lie in the total economic system of capitalism. Socialist feminists have criticized some socialists' gender-blind understanding of class.

**Socialization:** The social processes through which children develop an awareness of social norms and values and achieve a distinct sense of self.

**Society:** A system of structured social relationships connecting people together according to a shared culture. Some societies, like those of hunters and gatherers, are very small, numbering no more than a few dozen people. Others are very large, involving many millions - modern Chinese society, for instance, has a population of more than a billion individuals.

**Sociological imagination:** The application of imaginative thought to the asking and answering of sociological questions. The sociological imagination involves one in 'thinking oneself away' from the familiar routines of day-to-day life.

**Sociology:** The study of human groups and societies, giving particular emphasis to the analysis of the industrialized world. Sociology is one of a group of social sciences, which also includes anthropology, economics, political science and human geography. The divisions between the various social sciences are not clear-cut, and all share a certain range of common interests, concepts and methods.

**Sociology of the body:** The branch of sociology that focuses on how our bodies are affected by social influences. Health and illness, for instance, are determined by social and cultural influences.

**Sociology of deviance:** The branch of sociology concerned with the study of deviant behaviour and with understanding why some behaviour is identified as deviant.

**Solidarity:** For Durkheim, the internal forces of social cohesion. More generally, a term often used by the left to describe the political consciousness of an emerging class struggling against oppression - e.g. working-class solidarity.

**State:** A political apparatus (government institutions, plus civil service officials) ruling over a given territory, with an authority backed by law and the ability to use force.

**Status set:** An individual's group of social statuses.

**Status:** The social honour or prestige accorded to a person or a particular group by other members of a society.

**Stereotype:** A fixed and inflexible characterization of a group of people.

**Stigma:** Any physical or social characteristic believed to be demeaning.

**Strike:** A stoppage of work/withdrawal of labour by a group of workers for specific ends.

**Structural functionalism:** A theoretical perspective in sociology rooted in the work of Talcott Parsons. Structural functionalism analyses societies as social systems in which various social institutions perform specific functions ensuring the smooth operation of the system as a whole.

**Structuration:** The two-way process by which we shape our social world through our individual actions but are ourselves reshaped by society.

**Subculture:** Any segment of the population which is distinguishable from the wider society by its cultural pattern.

**Surplus value** In Marxist theory, the value of an individual's labour power which is 'left over' when an employer has repaid the cost involved in hiring a worker.

**Survey:** A method of sociological research usually involving the administration of questionnaires to a population being studied, and the statistical analysis of their replies to find patterns or regularities.

**Sustainable development:** The notion that economic growth should proceed only insofar as natural resources are recycled rather than depleted, biodiversity is maintained, and clean air, water and land are protected.

**Sweatshop:** A derogatory term for a factory or shop in which employees work long hours for low pay under poor conditions.

**Symbolic interactionism:** A theoretical approach in sociology developed by G. H. Mead, which places strong emphasis on the role of symbols and language as core elements of all human interaction.

## **T**

**Taylorism:** A set of ideas, also referred to as 'scientific management', developed by Frederick Winslow Taylor, according to which productivity could be immensely increased by breaking down industrial tasks into a series of simple operations that could be precisely timed and optimally coordinated.

**Technology:** The application of knowledge to production from the material world. Technology involves the creation of material instruments (such as machines) used in human interaction with nature.

**Telecommunications:** The communication of information, sounds or images at a distance through a technological medium.

**Theism:** A belief in a god or gods.

**Theory:** An attempt to identify general properties that explain regularly observed events.



**Third World:** The less developed societies, in which industrial production is either virtually non-existent or only developed to a limited degree. The majority of the world's population live in Third World countries.

**Total institutions:** A term popularized by Erving Goffman to refer to facilities such as asylums, prisons and monasteries that impose on their residents a forcibly regulated system of existence in complete isolation from the outside world.

**Totemism:** A system of religious belief which attributes divine properties to a particular type of animal or plant.

## U

**Underdevelopment:** A concept used in social science to describe the economic state of societies that were exploited and/or previously colonized by Western countries. Underdevelopment suggests a process through which powerful, wealthy states actively exploit the poor and less powerful.

**Unemployment:** Rates of unemployment measure the proportion of people who are 'economically active' and available for work but cannot get a paid job. A person who is 'out of work' is not necessarily unemployed in the sense of having nothing to do. Housewives, for instance, don't receive any pay, but they usually work very hard.

**Upper class:** A social class broadly composed of the more affluent members of society, especially those who have inherited wealth, own large businesses or hold large numbers of stocks and shares.

**Urban renewal:** Reviving deteriorating neighbourhoods by such processes as recycling land and existing buildings, improving the urban environment, managing local areas better and with the participation of local citizens, and using public funds both to regenerate the area and to attract further private investment.

**Urbanism:** A term used by Louis Wirth to denote distinctive characteristics of urban social life, such as its impersonality.

**Urbanization:** The development of towns and cities.

**Unconscious:** Experiences which become too difficult to confront and so become hidden from the surface workings of life.

**Underclass:** A group 'under the class structure' which is economically, politically and socially marginalised and excluded.

**Underground economy:** Economic activity generating income that is unreported to the government as required by law.

**Urban ecology:** The study of the link between the physical and social dimensions of cities.

**Urbanisation:** The concentration of humanity into cities.

## V

**Validity:** The quality of measuring precisely what one intends to measure.

**Values:** Culturally defined standards by which people assess desirability, goodness and beauty, and which serve as broad guidelines for social living.

**Variable:** A concept whose value changes from case to case.

**Variable:** A dimension along which an object, individual or group may be categorized, such as income or height, allowing specific comparisons with others or over time.

**Vertical mobility:** Movement up or down a hierarchy of positions in a social stratification system.

**Virtual community:** Internet based groups, rooted in public discussions which are long-lasting and contain sufficient human feeling to constitute personal relationships in cyberspace.

## W

**Welfare state:** A political system that provides a wide range of welfare benefits for citizens.

**White-collar crime:** Criminal activities carried out by those in white-collar or professional jobs.

**Working class:** A social class broadly composed of people involved in blue-collar or manual occupations

**World-systems:** Theory Pioneered by Immanuel Wallerstein, this theory emphasizes the interconnections among countries based on the expansion of a capitalist world economy. This economy is made up of core countries, semi-peripheral countries and peripheral countries.

## Y

### **Youth culture:**

The specific cultural attributes exhibited by many young people in any given period. Youth culture involves behavioural norms, dress codes, language use and other aspects, many of which tend to differ from the adult culture of the time.

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