

Basic sociological concepts

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1. Sociology: origin, scope and the founders (Comte, Spencer); society and community
2. Social groups: primary and secondary, in-group and out-group, reference groups; status and role
3. Culture: definitions, folkways and mores, ethnocentrism, cultural relativism and cultural lag
4. Socialisation, social control and theories of social change

1 Sociology: origin, scope and the founders (Comte, Spencer); society and community

Sociology is the scientific study of society and social relationships; Auguste Comte named it and Herbert Spencer gave it its evolutionary, "society as an organism" outlook.

Core facts

- The word **sociology** joins the Latin **socius** (companion, associate) and the Greek **logos** (study, reasoning).
- **Auguste Comte** (1798-1857), French thinker, coined the word "**sociology**" in **1838**, in his *Course of Positive Philosophy*. He is called the **father of sociology**.
- Before that, Comte called the new science "**social physics**".
- Comte's **Law of Three Stages**: human thought passes through the **theological**, the **metaphysical** and finally the **positive (scientific)** stage.
- Comte divided sociology into **social statics** (order, structure) and **social dynamics** (progress, change).
- In Comte's **hierarchy of sciences**, sociology is at the **top**, as the most complex science.
- **Herbert Spencer** (1820-1903), English thinker, coined "**survival of the fittest**" (1864), before Darwin used the phrase.
- Spencer gave the **organic analogy**: society is like a **living organism**.
- Spencer contrasted **militant** societies (held by force) with **industrial** societies (based on voluntary cooperation).
- **MacIver and Page**: society is "**a web of social relationships**".
- **F.H. Giddings**: the basis of society is "**consciousness of kind**".

Explained

Comte in more detail

- **Positivism**: society should be studied by observation, comparison and experiment, as the natural sciences are.
- **The three stages** also match forms of social organisation:

Stage	Explanation of the world	Social order
Theological	Gods and supernatural forces	Priests and military rulers
Metaphysical	Abstract forces, "nature", essences	Lawyers and philosophers
Positive	Observed laws, science	Scientists and industrialists

- **Hierarchy of sciences** (from simple to complex): mathematics → astronomy → physics → chemistry → biology → sociology.

- Late in life Comte proposed a **"Religion of Humanity"** with sociologists as its priests.

Spencer in more detail

- **Social evolution:** societies move from simple and uniform (homogeneous) to complex and specialised (heterogeneous).
- **Organic analogy:** like an organism, a society grows, its parts become specialised, and the parts depend on each other.
- **Social Darwinism:** Spencer opposed state help for the poor, holding that competition improves society. This view is now widely rejected.
- **Main works:** *Social Statics* (1851), *The Study of Sociology* (1873), *Principles of Sociology* (1876–1896). *The Social System* is **not** his; it is Talcott Parsons's (1951).

Other early evolutionary schemes

Thinker	Work	Scheme
Henry Maine	<i>Ancient Law</i> (1861)	From status to contract
L.H. Morgan	<i>Ancient Society</i> (1877)	Savagery → barbarism → civilisation
Ferdinand Tönnies	<i>Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft</i> (1887)	From community to association
Emile Durkheim	<i>The Division of Labour</i> (1893)	Mechanical to organic solidarity

Society, community and association

- **Society:** a system of social relationships. It is abstract; you cannot see society, only people and their interactions.
 - Features: likeness (shared ways), difference (division of labour), interdependence, cooperation and conflict, and continuity.
- **Community** (MacIver): a group living together in a common area and sharing a common life. Its two bases are **locality** and **community sentiment** (a "we-feeling").
 - Examples: a village, a tribe, a town.
- **Association:** a group organised deliberately to pursue a **specific interest**. Membership is voluntary.
 - Examples: a trade union, a cooperative society, a political party.

Point	Community	Association
Origin	Grows naturally	Created deliberately
Purpose	Whole common life	Specific interest
Membership	Usually by birth or residence	Voluntary
Locality	Essential	Not essential

- An **institution** is an established procedure or set of rules (e.g. marriage, property). An association is people; an institution is a way of doing things. MacIver: we belong to associations, not to institutions.

Common traps

✗ "Herbert Spencer coined the word 'sociology.'" ✓ **Auguste Comte** coined it (1838). Spencer coined "**survival of the fittest**".

✗ "Charles Darwin coined 'survival of the fittest.'" ✓ **Spencer** coined it (1864); Darwin adopted it later.

✗ "Comte placed sociology at the base of the hierarchy of sciences." ✓ He placed it at the **top**, as the most complex.

✗ "Comte's final stage is the metaphysical stage." ✓ The final stage is the **positive (scientific)** stage.

✗ "'Socius' is a Greek word." ✓ **Socius** is **Latin**; **logos** is Greek.

✗ "'From status to contract' is Tönnies's idea." ✓ It is **Henry Maine's** (*Ancient Law*, 1861).

Quick revision

- Sociology = socius (Latin) + logos (Greek).
- Comte coined "sociology" in 1838; earlier "social physics".
- Three stages: theological → metaphysical → positive.
- Social statics (order) and social dynamics (progress).
- Sociology at the top of Comte's hierarchy of sciences.
- Spencer: survival of the fittest, organic analogy, militant vs industrial societies.
- Maclver and Page: society is a web of social relationships.
- Giddings: consciousness of kind.
- Community = locality + community sentiment; association = organised for a specific interest.
- Maine: status to contract; Morgan: savagery, barbarism, civilisation.

2 Social groups: primary and secondary, in-group and out-group, reference groups; status and role

A social group is two or more people who interact, share a sense of belonging and follow common norms; within groups each person holds statuses (positions) and plays roles (the behaviour expected of those positions).

Core facts

- **Primary group:** concept of **C.H. Cooley**, in *Social Organization* (1909). Small, face-to-face, intimate and lasting. Examples: **family, play group, neighbourhood**.
- Cooley called primary groups the "**nursery of human nature**".
- **Secondary group:** large, formal, impersonal, goal-oriented. Examples: a company, a trade union, a political party. Cooley did not use this term; later writers built it as the opposite of his primary group.
- **In-group (we-group)** and **out-group (they-group)**: distinction made by **W.G. Sumner** in *Folkways* (1906).
- **Reference group:** a group whose standards a person uses to judge himself, often a group he hopes to join.
 - The term was first used by **Herbert H. Hyman** (1942).
 - **R.K. Merton** developed reference group theory.
- **Relative deprivation:** first used in *The American Soldier* (1949), a study led by **Samuel A. Stouffer**.
- **Status and role:** **Ralph Linton**, *The Study of Man* (1936).
 - **Ascribed status:** given by birth, e.g. caste, sex, age.
 - **Achieved status:** earned by effort, e.g. a District Collector who passed an examination.
- **Role** is the dynamic (behavioural) side of a status.

Explained

Primary and secondary groups compared

Point	Primary group	Secondary group
Size	Small	Large
Contact	Face-to-face, intimate	Indirect, formal
Relations	Ends in themselves	Means to an end
Control	Informal (approval, gossip)	Formal (rules, penalties)

Other group types

- **Peer group:** people of similar age and status; important in socialisation.

- **Quasi-group** (Morris Ginsberg): an aggregate with no organised structure, e.g. a social class or the audience in a cinema. It can turn into a group.
- **Formal and informal groups**: an office is formal; friendships inside the office are informal.
- **Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft** (Tönnies, 1887): community based on close ties vs association based on contract (see SOC-WT-05).
- **Voluntary and involuntary groups**: a club vs a caste or family.
- **Sociometry**, the measuring of likes and dislikes within a group, was developed by **J.L. Moreno**.

Status and role terms

Term	Meaning	Associated with
Status set	All statuses a person holds at once	Merton
Role set	All roles attached to one status	Merton (1957)
Master status	The status that dominates others in how people see you	Everett Hughes
Role conflict	Clash between roles of different statuses	—
Role strain	Tension within the demands of one role	William J. Goode (1960)

- **Example of a role set**: a teacher has roles towards students, colleagues, the principal and parents.
- **Example of role conflict**: a working mother whose job and childcare clash.
- **Status inconsistency**: ranks that do not match, e.g. a highly educated person in a low-paid job.

Reference groups

- A clerk copies the dress, speech and habits of senior officers he admires. The senior officers are his **reference group**.
- Merton linked reference groups to **anticipatory socialisation**: learning the norms of a group before joining it.
- **Relative deprivation**: people feel deprived not by absolute standards but by comparison with their reference group. In *The American Soldier*, men in units with faster promotions were *less* satisfied with promotion chances.

Common traps

✗ "G.H. Mead introduced the concept of primary group." ✓ **C.H. Cooley** did, in *Social Organization* (1909).

✗ "Cooley coined the term 'secondary group'." ✓ Cooley wrote of **primary** groups; "secondary group" was developed by later writers.

✗ "The in-group and out-group distinction was made by Cooley." ✓ It was **W.G. Sumner** (*Folkways*, 1906).

✗ "Merton first used the term 'reference group.'" ✓ **Herbert Hyman** first used it (1942); Merton developed the theory.

✗ "Ascribed and achieved status were distinguished by Merton." ✓ **Ralph Linton** (1936). Merton gave **role set** and **status set**.

✗ "Role set means all the roles a person plays across all statuses." ✓ Role set is the roles of **one** status; all statuses together are the **status set**.

Quick revision

- Primary group: Cooley, 1909; family, play group, neighbourhood.
- "Nursery of human nature" = primary group.
- In-group / out-group: Sumner, *Folkways* 1906.
- Reference group: term by Hyman 1942; theory by Merton.
- Relative deprivation: Stouffer, *The American Soldier* 1949.
- Ascribed vs achieved status: Linton, *The Study of Man* 1936.
- Role = dynamic side of status.
- Role set and status set: Merton.
- Quasi-group: Ginsberg; sociometry: Moreno.
- Anticipatory socialisation: learning a group's norms before joining.

3 Culture: definitions, folkways and mores, ethnocentrism, cultural relativism and cultural lag

Culture is the learned, shared and transmitted way of life of a group, made of material things and non-material ideas, values and norms; norms range from mild folkways to strongly enforced mores and laws.

Core facts

- **E.B. Tylor**, *Primitive Culture* (1871): culture is "that **complex whole** which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom" and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.
- **Robert Bierstedt**: culture is what we **think, do** and **have**.
- **Material culture**: tools, buildings, machines. **Non-material culture**: ideas, beliefs, values, norms.
- **W.G. Sumner**, *Folkways* (1906), analysed **folkways** and **mores**, and popularised the term **ethnocentrism** (he is usually credited with it).
 - **Folkways**: everyday customs; breaking them brings mild disapproval (e.g. table manners).
 - **Mores**: norms with **moral** weight; breaking them brings strong disapproval (e.g. the ban on incest).
- **Taboo**: a strong prohibition, often backed by religion or magic.
- **Ethnocentrism**: judging other cultures by the standards of one's own, assumed superior.
- **Cultural relativism**: each culture should be understood in its own terms. Most closely linked to the anthropologist **Franz Boas**.
- **Cultural lag**: given by **W.F. Ogburn** in *Social Change* (1922). Non-material culture fails to keep pace with change in material culture.

Explained

Features of culture

- **Learned**, not inherited biologically.
- **Shared** by members of a group.
- **Transmitted** across generations, mainly through language and symbols.
- **Cumulative** and **changing**.
- **Varies** from society to society.
- **Gives meaning** and guides behaviour.

Norms, from mild to strict

Norm	Sanction for breaking it	Example
Folkways	Mild (ridicule, gossip)	Greeting elders, dress at a function

Norm	Sanction for breaking it	Example
Mores	Strong moral disapproval	Respect for parents, ban on incest
Taboo	Severe, sacred	Food taboos in some castes
Law	Formal penalty by the State	Punishment under the BNS

- **Fashion and fad:** short-lived norms. A fad is shorter and more trivial than a fashion.
- **Custom:** a long-established practice. When accepted by society over time, custom can have the force of law.

Terms students mix up

Term	Meaning
Ethnocentrism	One's own culture is the standard and superior
Xenocentrism	A foreign culture is seen as superior to one's own
Cultural relativism	Each culture judged by its own context
Culture shock	Disorientation on meeting an unfamiliar culture

Processes of cultural contact

- **Diffusion:** spread of a cultural trait from one society to another (tea, cricket).
- **Acculturation:** change in a culture through continued contact with another.
- **Assimilation:** a group absorbs the culture of the dominant group and loses its distinct identity.
- **Enculturation:** learning one's own culture (a term of Melville Herskovits).
- **Subculture:** a group's distinct ways within the wider culture (a tribal community, a profession).
- **Counterculture:** a subculture that rejects the main values of society (the 1960s hippie movement).

Cultural lag (Ogburn)

- Material culture (technology) changes fast; non-material culture (law, values, institutions) adjusts slowly.
- **Examples:** smartphones spread faster than laws on data privacy; medical technology for sex determination spread faster than social values on the girl child, which led to the **PCPNDT Act, 1994**.
- Ogburn named four processes of change: **invention, accumulation, diffusion, adjustment**.

Common traps

✗ "Malinowski gave the 'complex whole' definition of culture." ✓ It was **E.B. Tylor** (*Primitive Culture*, 1871).

✗ "Mores are mild norms whose violation brings little reaction." ✓ That describes **folkways**. Mores carry **moral** weight and strong sanctions.

✗ "Cultural lag was given by Sumner." ✓ **W.F. Ogburn** (1922). Sumner gave folkways, mores and ethnocentrism.

✗ "Ethnocentrism means preferring a foreign culture." ✓ That is **xenocentrism**. Ethnocentrism judges others by one's own culture.

✗ "Cultural relativism is most associated with Herbert Spencer." ✓ It is linked to **Franz Boas** and his students.

✗ "Article 13 covers only laws made by legislatures." ✓ Under **Article 13(3)(a)**, "law" includes **custom or usage** having the force of law.

Quick revision

- Tylor 1871: culture is "that complex whole".
- Bierstedt: what we think, do and have.
- Sumner, *Folkways* 1906: folkways, mores, ethnocentrism.
- Folkways mild; mores moral; taboo sacred; law formal.
- Ogburn 1922: cultural lag (material ahead of non-material).
- Boas: cultural relativism.
- Xenocentrism = foreign culture seen as superior.
- Kroeber: culture is superorganic.
- Article 13(3)(a): custom with force of law is "law".
- Article 29(1): conserve language, script, culture; Article 51A(f): composite culture.

4 Socialisation, social control and theories of social change

Socialisation turns a newborn into a member of society; social control keeps members within the norms; and theories of social change explain how and why societies transform.

Core facts

- **Socialisation:** the lifelong process by which a person learns the culture, norms and roles of society.
- **Types:**
 - **Primary:** in early childhood, mainly in the family.
 - **Secondary:** later, through school, peers, workplace and media.
 - **Anticipatory:** learning the values of a group one hopes to join, before joining it (**Merton**).
 - **Re-socialisation:** unlearning old ways and learning new ones, e.g. in the army, prison or a monastery.
- **C.H. Cooley: looking-glass self** (1902): we see ourselves as we imagine others see us.
- **G.H. Mead:** self has two parts, the **"I"** and the **"me"**; the child learns the **generalised other**.
- **Social control:** the term was introduced through **E.A. Ross's** book *Social Control* (1901).
- **Formal control:** law, police, courts. **Informal control:** customs, gossip, ridicule, religion, family.
- **Merton's modes of adaptation** (1938): conformity, **innovation, ritualism, retreatism, rebellion**.
- **Cyclical theories of change:**
 - **Oswald Spengler**, *The Decline of the West*: civilisations are born, mature and die.
 - **Arnold Toynbee:** civilisations grow by **"challenge and response"**.
 - **Pitirim Sorokin**, *Social and Cultural Dynamics*: swing between **ideational** and **sensate** cultures.

Explained

Agencies of socialisation

- **Family:** language, basic values, gender roles, caste and religious identity.
- **Peer group:** equality, cooperation, youth subculture.
- **School:** discipline, achievement, citizenship.
- **Mass and social media:** role models, consumer values.
- **Religion and community:** rituals, moral codes.
- **State and law:** rights, duties, civic rules.

Theories of the self

Thinker	Key idea
C.H. Cooley	Looking-glass self: imagine how we appear, imagine the judgement, feel pride or shame
G.H. Mead	"Me" = organised attitudes of others taken over; "I" = spontaneous, creative response
Sigmund Freud	Id, ego, superego
Jean Piaget	Stages of cognitive development

- **Mead's stages:** imitation (preparatory) → **play** (taking the role of one other, e.g. playing "mother") → **game** (taking the roles of many at once, as in team sport). From the game the child forms the **generalised other**.

Social control and deviance

- **Positive sanctions** (praise, awards) and **negative sanctions** (fines, exclusion).
- **Merton's typology** (goals vs means):

Mode	Accepts goals?	Accepts means?
Conformity	Yes	Yes
Innovation	Yes	No
Ritualism	No	Yes
Retreatism	No	No
Rebellion	Replaces	Replaces

- **Example of innovation:** a student who wants high marks (a valued goal) but copies in the exam (illegitimate means).
- **Example of ritualism:** an official who follows rules mechanically, having given up the goal.
- **Labelling theory:** deviance is a label applied by others. **Howard Becker**, *Outsiders* (1963). **Edwin Lemert** separated **primary deviance** (the first act) from **secondary deviance** (behaviour after a person accepts the label).

Theories of social change

Type	Idea	Thinkers
Evolutionary (linear)	Simple to complex, in stages	Comte, Spencer, Morgan
Cyclical	Rise, decline, recurrence	Spengler, Toynbee, Sorokin, Pareto
Conflict	Change through class struggle	Marx
Functional	Change as adjustment to restore equilibrium	Parsons

- **Technological view:** technology drives change; culture lags behind (**Ogburn**).
- **Pareto:** change through the **circulation of elites** (see SOC-WT-05).

Common traps

✗ "The looking-glass self was given by G.H. Mead." ✓ It was **C.H. Cooley** (1902). Mead gave the **"I" and "me"** and the **generalised other**.

✗ "The term 'social control' came from Sumner's *Folkways*." ✓ It came through **E.A. Ross's** *Social Control* (**1901**).

✗ "Copying in an exam to get high marks is ritualism." ✓ It is **innovation**: the goal is accepted, the means are not.

✗ "Challenge and response is Spengler's theory." ✓ It is **Toynbee's**. Spengler wrote *The Decline of the West*.

✗ "Sorokin's two main types are mechanical and organic." ✓ They are **ideational** and **sensate** (mechanical/organic is Durkheim).

✗ "Anticipatory socialisation is learning after joining a group." ✓ It is learning a group's norms **before** joining it.

Quick revision

- Socialisation: primary (family), secondary (school, peers), anticipatory, re-socialisation.
- Cooley: looking-glass self; Mead: I, me, generalised other.
- Mead's stages: imitation → play → game.
- E.A. Ross, 1901: *Social Control*.
- Merton: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, rebellion.
- Becker: labelling; Lemert: primary vs secondary deviance.
- Goffman: total institutions, *Asylums* 1961.
- Spengler: decline; Toynbee: challenge and response; Sorokin: ideational vs sensate.
- Ogburn: technology and cultural lag.
- BNS section 4(f): community service as a punishment.