Culture

The concept of **culture** is used to describe the beliefs, customs and ways of life of a society or group within society. Culture includes a shared set of norms and values in which individuals are socialised into. There are different types of culture which we will be looking at:

* **Dominant culture**
* **Subculture**
* **Folk culture**
* **Global culture**
* **High culture**
* **Mass/popular/low culture**

Dominant culture

* This is the main culture in a society, which is accepted without opposition, by the majority of people, e.g. British culture may be seen as white, patriarchal and unequal.

Subculture

* These are groups within society that have different ways of life to the dominant culture. They tend to be found in larger societies as smaller societies often have a common culture.
* Subcultures may not just be different to the dominant culture, but may oppose it. These are known as subcultures of resistance and can be found in schools (resistance to schools values and norms), amongst ethnic minorities (resistance to racism) and the working class (resistance to capitalism).

Folk culture

* This is the culture created by local communities and is rooted in the experiences, customs and beliefs of the everyday life of ordinary people. It is seen as authentic (MacDonald) rather than manufactured.
* It often involves active participation rather than simply passive consumption.
* Examples include traditional folk music, folk songs, storytelling and folk dances, e.g. Morris dancing, which are passed on from one generation to the next.

Global culture

* This refers to the way cultures in different countries have become more alike.
* In many countries cultural products, norms, values, attitudes and ways of life have become more similar.
* This is seen as the result of **globalisation**. This is the growing interconnectedness of societies around the world.
* International tourism and the internet have meant that people are able to absorb the cultures of communities from across the world.
* The **international division of labour** means that the world is economically interconnected, e.g. Apple products are manufactured from components produced all over the world and sold in global markets.
* Flew suggests that new media technologies, e.g. satellite TV and the internet, has played an important role in the development of a global popular culture. It means popular culture has been promoted around the world, selling the same cultural products around the globe.
* Globalisation has made the cultures of different countries become more alike and merge into one uniform culture. This is known as **cultural homogenization.**

High culture

* This is generally seen as being superior to other forms of culture, and refers to aspects of culture that are seen as of lasting artistic or literary value, aimed at small, intellectual elites, predominantly the **upper class.**
* Examples of high culture include serious news programmes and documentaries, classical music, the theatre, opera, ballet, jazz, foreign language films, established literature, e.g. Shakespeare, Dickens, and visual art, e.g. Monet, Picasso.

Mass/popular/low culture

* Mass or popular culture is culture produced on a wide scale, aimed at the mass of ordinary people and produced for profit.
* It is different to folk culture as it doesn’t reflect people’s everyday experiences and is not produced by the community itself.
* Popular culture implies it is culture liked and enjoyed by ordinary people.
* Low culture is an insulting term used for mass/popular culture to suggest it is of inferior quality to high culture.
* Strinati says mass culture involves cultural products mass produced for profit, for sale to the mass of ordinary people.
* He also argues that mass culture is often dismissed as inferior but the consumers of mass culture are often critical and reject many programmes they don’t find interesting or entertaining.
* These products are usually short lived, seen as dumbed down to appeal to as many people as possible and demand little critical thought, analysis or discussion.
* Examples include tabloid newspapers, e.g. the Mirror, television soaps.

The changing distinction between high culture and popular culture

* Strinati (a postmodernist) argues the distinction between high culture and popular culture is weakening.
* Mass communication technology, e.g. the internet and satellite TV, as well as globalisation make a huge range of cultural products available to everyone.
* This means people can consume cultural products in their own home. They don’t have to go to a concert or an art gallery to see or hear these cultural products.
* Examples of the blurring of boundaries between high culture and popular culture:
	+ Art galleries attract millions of visitors from a range of backgrounds.
	+ Live opera is available to the masses, e.g. concerts in the park, or operatic versions of pop songs.
* The postmodernists argue there is a wide diversity of cultural choices and products available to people and they can now pick and mix them. This is due to globalisation and technological developments.
* Marxists argue that high culture has become more popular because it needs to earn money as taxes tend to pay for high culture.
* Storey argues that the distinction is blurring because members of the upper and **middle classes** are now consuming mass culture as well as high culture. E.g, art by Banksy, a graffiti street artist, now sells for thousands of pounds to people in the upper classes.

Gender Identity and Agents of Socialisation

Family

Oakley

4 processes central to construction of gender identity:

1. Manipulation: ways in which parents encourage and discourage behaviour on basis of whether it is appropriate for the child’s sex.
2. Canalisation: way in which parents direct children’s interests into toys and activities which are normal for that sex.
3. Different activities: daughters may be encouraged to help with domestic tasks.
4. Verbal appellations: parents may enforce cultural expectations by referring to daughters and boys in different ways.

There are gendered relationshipsbetween mothers and daughters and between fathers and sons. Fathers and sons may learn to relate to each other more as they are socialised into their gender roles by taking part in activities with their father, this can be the same for mother and daughter. They may learn to define their father’s activities and roles as masculine and anything linked to their mother as feminine.

Mitchell and Green

The mother and daughter bond was strong for the working class women they interviewed, especially when the daughter had a baby. Young mothers wanted to be seen as respectable, good mothers and not rough. They wanted to be seen as coping and caring: ideas about this femininity and good motherhood was passed on by their mothers. This identity was also shaped by an awareness of their class identity and the knowledge that the relationship with their fathers was fragile

Mass Media

Exposure to media from an early age reinforces what has already been learned in the family, and constructs a deeper internalised layer of gender identity. Girls are usually portrayed as conforming to hegemonic feminine behaviours and boys as conforming to hegemonic masculine behaviours.

Gilmore

Argues that in the early days of cinema men were presented in three ways. These were:

1. Man the impregnator
2. Man the provider
3. Man the protector

Ferguson

Analysed three of the largest selling women’s magazines. She argued that women’s magazines instruct women on how to be feminine. They tell women what to do and how to think about themselves, about their men, colleagues, children, neighbours and bosses. Women are instructed what to wear, how to act and what to but to be a femme fatale, supercook or office boss.

Education

The Formal Curriculum

Girls and boys tend to do different subjects. This can often be encouraged by teachers and parents.

Girls tend to take subjects like Home Economics, Textiles and Food Technology, whilst boys take Electronics, Design Technology and Graphics. After school, girls tend to take arts subjects (English, History, Foreign Languages) while boys tend to take the sciences.

The Hidden Curriculum

Disruptive boys and girls are treated differently. Teachers have different expectations of and responses to boys and girls behaviour.

Structure of Schools

The majority of primary school teachers are female.

Whilst most teachers are female those that occupy the top positions are often men. In 2004 only 32% of head teachers were female.

Debby Epstein

Working class boys are likely to be harassed, labelled as sissies and subjected to homophobic verbal abuse if they appear to be swots. In working class culture masculinity is equated with being tough and doing manual work.

Becky Francis

Boys gained status by taking up laddish or class clown roles. Boys dominated classroom interaction by being louder than the girls, making greater use of classroom space, shouting out questions and answers and being disruptive.

Peer group

Language used amongst peers may be gendered.

Lees

Males are able to control females by their use of derogatory language.

Sexual double standards

Among males, sexual promiscuity is encouraged and admired, whereas women are condemned for this by being called derogatory names which gives them a stigmatised identity.

Workplace

The 1970s witnessed the start of the decline of manufacturing sector, which in turn has led to an increase in the service sector. There are now many part-time, temporary and casual jobs which have replaced traditional heavy industries which employed working class men.

Women have become more economically active and more financially independent.

Mac an Ghaill

Men are experiencing a crisis of masculinity. Socialised into seeing male identity and role in terms of being a breadwinner. New jobs in service sector are more suited to women, traditional masculine roles are under threat.

Adkins

Research conducted in hotels and pubs and at a leisure park. At “Fun Land” operatives of high speed-rides were exclusively young and male, whilst most catering assistants were female. Adkins found that the criteria for selecting female catering assistants included looking attractive. Two young women who looked ‘too butch’ to be catering assistants were given jobs as operatives on children’s rides, they had little contact with male customers.

It was made clear to the young women that they were expected to win the attentions of male customers and they were prohibited from responding to them aggressively. Making the male customers feel good by smiling and making light of their sexual innuendos was part of their job. Women who were not young or attractive enough to provide this kind of sexual servicing were not employed.

Divisions in the Workplace

Men typically occupy the higher positions at work and have higher status and higher paid jobs than women. Men comprise 2/3rds of managers and in 2004 90% of senior judges, 90% of senior police officers and 87% of national newspaper editors were men.

Glass Ceiling

Women can see the positions at the top, but find it hard to reach the top positions. They get so far in their career and then fail to get promotions.

Religion

Butler

Found the young Asian women she researched were keen to move beyond the expected role of Asian women and pursue further and higher education and careers. Although they made clear their religion was important to them, what they were challenging was their culture in terms of gender identities.

Watson

Found that women wearing the veil found it liberating.

Ethnic Identity and Agents of Socialisation

Family

Francis and Archer

Educational achievement is valued by Chinese families. The family plays an important role in the education of children and families make sacrifices to ensure success, often going without consumer goods so that they can afford to pay school fees.

Ghuman

Suggested the first generation of Asian parents to arrive in the UK in the 1950s/60s were concerned to transmit key values to their children, including children should be obedient, loyal to and respectful of their elders and their community; also parents were considered to know best the interests of their children regardless of age.

Education

An individual’s ethnic identity is shaped by the informal curriculum and formal curriculum.

Mason

The formal curriculum is also ethnocentric. It focuses on British history, white literature and certain religions more than others.

Sewell

Argues that the national curriculum requirements allow for African Caribbean culture and other cultures to be studied. However the focus on historical examples such as the Holocaust and the negative experience of slavery only reinforce stereotypes. There are other major black achievements (not just in music and sport) that could be studied.

Peer Group

Alexander

Studied the formation of identity amongst black British youth. The peer group was important in what she described as the ‘art of being black’. Being black was about being stylish, caring about appearance and listening to music. These behaviours are reinforced by the peer group. This is an example of a cultural comfort zone.

Sewell

He argues African Caribbean male identity is focused on being hypermasculine and ‘gangsta’ in the eyes of their peers. This often compensates for the lack of a father figure.

This street identity is also shaped by the media, such as by advertising and music videos which encourage young African Caribbean males to take part in a consumer culture focused on clothing and jewellery, rather than focusing on education.

Mass Media

Hybrid ethnic identities have come about with some words associated with ethnic minority groups finding their way into popular usage.

In areas where there are few minority ethnic groups people rely on media representations to help them form an understanding of ethnic group.

Jhally

Being ignored and unrepresented or being stereotyped and misrepresented was a feature of ethnic representation in the media throughout the 70s to the late 90s. There has been a change as a new group of ethnic minority stars write material and star in programmes.

*Sewell’s study on African Caribbean males and the influence of the media can be included here too.*

Religion

There are clear links between ethnicity and religion and for some groups religion forms the dominant factor in shaping their identity. Many people often associate Muslims as being one ethnic group rather than seeing Islam as being a religion which is followed by a number of different ethnic groups. Jewish people are seen as being both an ethnic group and a religious group and these identities overlap. The distinction between ethnicity and religion is often blurred because there are many cultural aspects which are linked to religion. For example food, dress codes, languages and beliefs may be based on a religion but are also important features in the creation of an ethnic identity.

Modood

Found 82% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi individuals aged 50+ saw religion as very important to how they lived their lives. 67% of 16-34 year olds also saw Islam as important in their lives.

The centrality of religion in Asian communities can be illustrated by the fact that very few Asians marry across religious or caste lines and most of their children will be socialised into a religious value system.

Islamophobia

There is a clear fear and perhaps even a dislike of Muslims in Britain today. This has largely been a reaction to the above.

Workplace

Song

Many Chinese individuals living in the UK are employed in the food and catering sector. This shows the influence of the family on employment opportunities and how important family is in creating and influencing occupation. Also over a third of doctors in the NHS are described as Asian. For many Indian families a career brings high status and income which will influence their social class and ethnic identities.

Age Identity and Agents of Socialisation

Family

The stereotypes of old people as a social problem often comes from the family. A common theme within different sociological studies is that the family’s members assume the older relative will need and want more care than they actually do.

Younger members of the family learn that they lack status in the family due to their age; they learn that they must respect older family members. This reinforces their age identity and they begin to learn that with age comes status.

Education

The **hidden curriculum** will contribute to age identity. Age as a social category is reinforced through references to old age by teachers and also due to the fact that we learn our position and status in the hierarchy is due to age. We learn that as children we must follow the orders and respect people who are older than us

Peer Group

Peer group is particularly influential during the period of youth. Studies show how peer group pressure is a key factor influencing the norms, values and culture of young people.

People often associate with others from a similar age group because they share the same norms and values; this supports the concept of **cultural comfort zones.**

Religion

Evidence suggests that religion is declining and this is the case for all age groups. However, evidence shows that the elderly are more religious than younger groups. This is because religion may have been more important in the years when they grew up and also many elderly may turn to religion as a way of coping with loss.

Media

The media represent age categories in stereotypical ways.

Muncieargues that youths are represented as troublesome and deviant. Middle age is represented as a time of crisis and old age is seen as a time of dependency and loneliness.

Thornton argues that the media is responsible for the creation of youth culture and the range of youth identities in the UK. Youths are often targeted by advertisers and are more likely to become **conspicuous consumers** where they try to gain status through style and designer items.

Media representations of the elderly show that the elderly are largely invisible (**the invisible elderly**) and when they do appear they are often negatively stereotyped. In 2000 21% of the population was over 65, yet only 7% of representations on television were of that age group. The majority of these were elderly men despite the elderly population being mainly female.

Landis shows that when the elderly do appear in the media, they tend to be portrayed in one-dimensional ways, e.g. grumpy, dependent.

Age is devalued by the media; this is shown throughout the advertising industry. Woodward argues that the media offer advice on how to combat age through beauty products which are aimed at slowing down the ageing process and magazine articles which give advice on diets, fitness and cosmetic surgery.

Workplace

Most young workers earn relatively little and are given less status and responsibility. Young workers often experience the worse pay and conditions and are required to be the most flexible in terms of working hours for example.

The age of retirement largely defines old age. With this comes the assumption that the elderly are incapable of doing paid work because they are incompetent.

Vincent (a Marxist) argues that in a capitalist society your status is determined by how far you can participate in the workplace. This means the elderly and the young have a distinct identity which is based around having a lower status because they are less likely to be working.

Identity

Identity refers to the way we see ourselves in relation to other people. It involves what makes us similar to some people and different from others.

Sameness and Difference

Lawler argues that identity rests on the idea of marking out similarities with and differences from others. We share identities which make us similar to others, e.g. being human, men or women.

Choice and Identity

Your identity has a big influence on the life you live in society, for example, the friends you have. However, individuals are not free to adopt any identity they like, and factors like class, ethnicity and gender are likely to influence how others see them.

Also the identity an individual wants to adopt, may not be the identity that others see them as having. Some identities can take on the form of what Becker called a **master status**. This is a dominant status or identity that overrides all other aspects of that person’s identity. An individual may be seen as this before anything else.

For example, an Asian woman may not wish to be primarily identified as Asian or a woman, but as a senior manager. However, if others still continue to see her in terms of a master status based on her ethnicity or gender she may find it difficult to assert her chosen identity.

The Social Construction of Identity

Many sociologists see our identities as being as a result of socialisation in society and therefore identity is socially constructed.

*Primary and Secondary Identities*

* 1. Primary identities are formed early in life during primary socialisation. They include gender and ethnic identities.
	2. Secondary identities are linked to secondary socialisation. These build on those established by primary socialisation but also establish new identities linked to people’s experiences in agents of secondary socialisation, e.g. education. These are more fluid and changeable and people alter these as they move through life.

However, Bauman, a postmodernist, notes there is now growing insecurity around identities, and formerly fixed and stable identities due to things like class etc, have become more fluid and changeable. This is because some of these sources of identity are changing or there are now numerous types of them, e.g. different social classes.

Types of Identity

Passive and Active Identities

1. **Passive identity**: one which you were born or socialised into.
2. **Active identity**: those which people actively try to pursue.

Individual or Personal Identity

**Individual identity** is concerned with the question, ‘Who am I?’ This includes how individuals define themselves, what’s important to them, how they see themselves as different to other people and the things that give them their own individual characteristics.

Examples of these include, name, passport, National Insurance number, fingerprints, DNA, birth certificate and signature.

Social Identity

This defines individuals in relation to the social groups to which they belong and how they differ from other social groups. There is little choice involved.

These social groups might include men and women, ethnic groups, or national groups like the English, Scots or Welsh.

**Social identity** may also be linked to roles, e.g. mothers, fathers.

Collective Identity

This is an identity shared by a social group but it involves choice as an individual has chosen to identify with a group and adopt the identity associated with it.

Social identities are largely defined by others, whilst collective identities require choice.

An example includes being a football fan.

Multiple Identities

This means that people have several identities, rather than just one. This may include class, ethnic, gender and age identities.

Individuals may portray different identities in different circumstances. For example at home they may portray themselves as having the identity of a good daughter, whilst at school they may portray themselves as having the identity of a good student.

Stigmatized Identities

Goffman said a **stigmatized identity** is an identity that is in some way demeaning and excludes people from full acceptance in society.

A stigma might be a physical impairment/illness or a social characteristic, e.g. mental illness.

Those with stigmatized identities can face serious social consequences, such as others treating them with contempt, being refused employment etc.

Having a stigmatized identity nearly always means that any attempts to present an alternative identity will fail.