Sociology Bridging Work

**A-Level Sociology**

We study the AQA specification, and study the following topics:

1. Education
2. Families
3. The media
4. Crime and deviance
5. Theory and Methods

These are divided into three papers, which are each 2-hour exams and make up 100% of your final grades.

You can find the specification [here](https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/resources/sociology/specifications/AQA-7191-7192-SP-2015.PDF).

Previous students have said:

*‘Sociology is just a great subject as it picks apparent the flaws in our world and tries to give us solutions to try and solve these problems. I personally have really enjoyed learning it there hasn’t been a day that I didn’t enjoy coming to class and learning. Sociology has given me a range of skills such as breaking apart complex ideas, structuring my paragraphs in coherent ways, motivation to learn and discover more about the world and even general skills like to be more aware of my treatment of people to be more kind and patient with others.’*

*‘Through studying sociology it has changed my view on society significantly. Society for me can never be seen as black and white as external and internal factors affect all individuals differently, meaning all do not get the same opportunities or chances in life, some sociologists argue. The inequalities within society are highlighted’*

*‘In sociology I have learnt and understood that sociology is constantly involved in all of our lives. I was able to better understand how our lives change and how they are shaped by social constructs and social structure. I was able to understand the behaviour and struggle of different types of people in society.’*

**Introduction**

This work pack is designed to provide you with work to prepare you for studying A-level Sociology.

Sociology refers to the study of society – the way people interact together in society, and how society shapes us and our decisions. Studying sociology will help you to understand different perspectives, to write analytic essays and crucially, to understand the same issue can be seen from multiple perspectives. One of the main issues we study in sociology is equality – how and why society is unequal, and why different people have different chances of succeeding in life. This will be the focus of this work pack.

Sociologists believe society can be broken down into different parts: social institutions. These include: education, the family, the mass media (TV and newspapers), the criminal justice system, health and religion. These different parts work together and play an important role in shaping our lives. They also believe that every society has a culture, which means a way of life, and a set of norms (expected behaviours) and values (what we hold to be important).

How do we become part of society? Sociologists argue that children go through a process called socialisation, which means learning society’s norms and values. At home, children go through primary socialisation, where they learn how to speak, share and other basic behaviours and norms. Secondary socialisation comes later, at school and beyond, where individuals learn from their peers and others.

Our behaviour is influenced by those around us – we are encouraged to conform to society’s expectations and norms (obey the rules and do what is expected) and discouraged from deviating from this. These expectations are enforced by sanctions from others – positive sanctions when we do the right thing, eg a smile, a laugh, or a reward, and negative sanctions when we do the wrong thing, a disapproving frown, a shake of the head, or a detention. The way society encourages us to confirm and discourages us from deviating is known as social control.

**Quick check: find and write out the definitions of the following word in the text above, or online.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Sociology** |  |
| **Sociologist** |  |
| **Social institutions** |  |
| **Norms** |  |
| **Values** |  |
| **Sanctions** |  |
| **Primary socialisation** |  |
| **Secondary socialisation** |  |
| **Social control** |  |

In Sociology, there are three main different sociological perspectives, or ways of looking at society:

1. **Functionalists**: these sociologists believe society runs smoothly, and is made up of different parts which all work together to keep society stable. They believe people agree on what is important (there is a value consensus) and people generally conform to the norms of society. They tend to focus on the positive functions of different parts of society. Watch this video to find out more: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-83vVeSC2_g>
2. **Marxists**: based on the ideas of Karl Marx, they focus on inequalities based on social class (how much or little money someone has). They believe this is the main inequality in society. They argue there are two main classes: the working class (proletariat) and ruling class (bourgeoisie) and believe the ruling class own and exploit the workers, treating them badly and giving them low pay so they can make more money for themselves. Watch this video and find out more: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSQgCy_iIcc>
3. **Feminists**: see gender inequality, inequality between men and women, as the main inequality in society. They argue women are treated badly and exploited by men, and that society is patriarchal (male-dominated). Watch this video to find out more: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D6Dl-9pSW-4>

**Complete the table to summarise the different perspectives:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Summary | Image |
| Functionalism |  |  |
| Marxism |  |  |
| Feminism |  |  |

**Key question: is Britain fair?**

**Two babies are born on the same place. Do they have an equal chance of…**

**… being healthy?**

**… going to university?**

**… getting a well-paid job?**

**… avoiding prison?**

**… succeeding in school?**

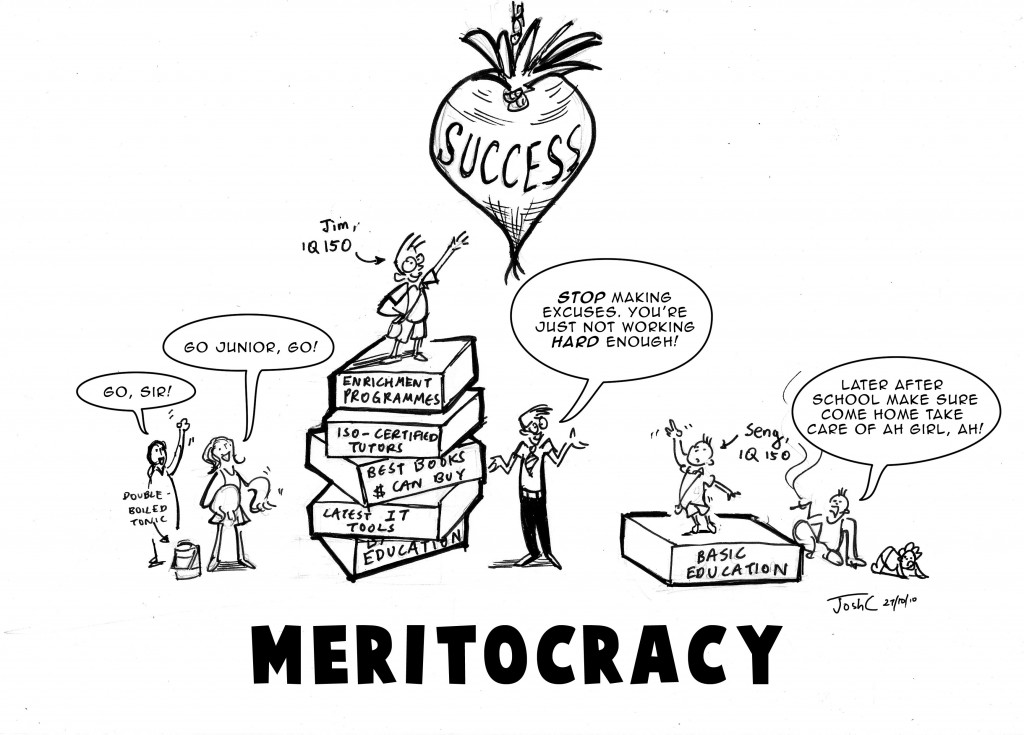
* One third (30%) of children in Britain live in poverty
* People born into the most deprived (poor) areas of the UK are likely to live, on average, 10 years less than those in affluent (well off) areas
* Only 30% of those receiving Free School Meals (FSM) (low family income) achieve a pass in English and Maths at GCSE compared to 60% of those who do not receive FSM
* Only 7% of the population go to fee-paying schools, but they make up 42% of students at Oxford and Cambridge and dominate top jobs in law, journalism, politics and health
* Last year, there was a 13% increase in food bank use

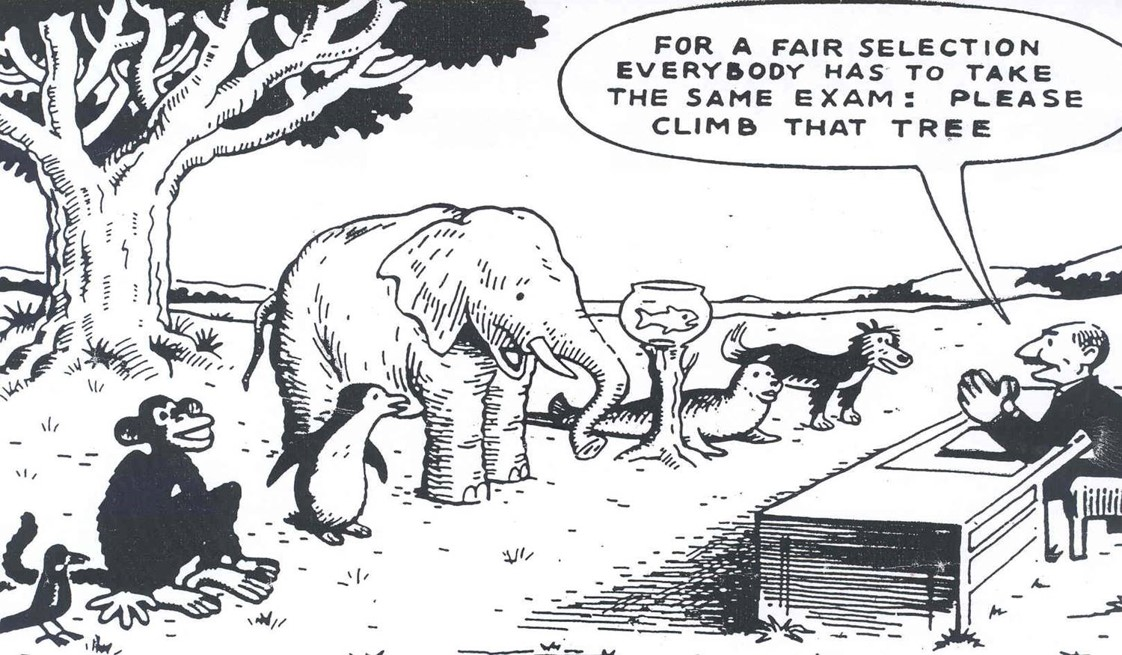
These statistics paint a bleak picture of whether or not Britain is a fair society. Before we engage in the debate of whether or not Britain is fair, we must define what we mean by this.

In Sociology, a ‘fair’ society is a society where everyone has equality of opportunity – everyone has an equal chance of achieving success and their background does not determine this. Sociologists call this a ‘meritocracy’ – a society where status is based on merit (hard work and talent) rather than the position you are born into. In a meritocracy, effort should be the only factor determining the position someone gains in life.

Functionalists believe contemporary (modern) Britain is a meritocracy and that success is determined only by hard work.

**Quick check: look at the following cartoons and reflect on the statistics above. In your opinion, does everyone have an equal chance to succeed? Why or why not? Write your response in the box provided.**





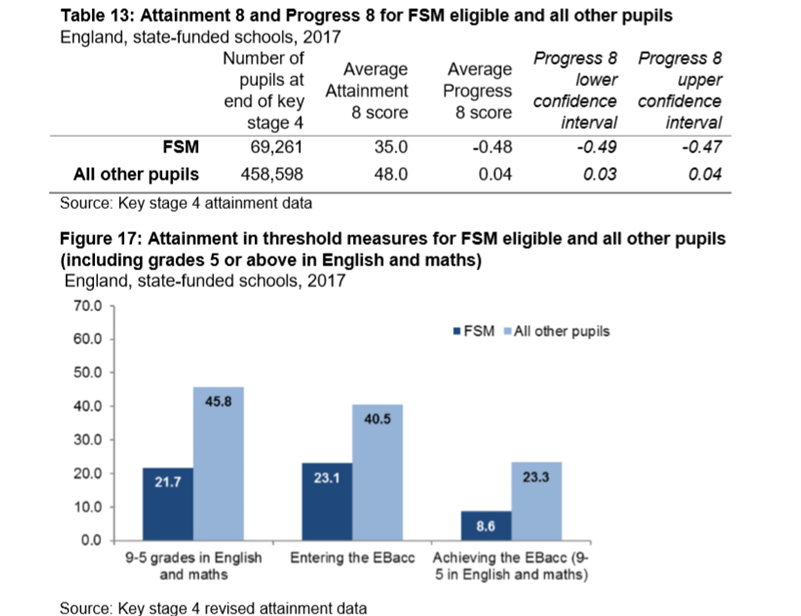
**Marxists** disagree with functionalists, arguing society is not a meritocracy. They believe those born into the working class (poorer members of society) have less chance of succeeding in life. They believe the upper class (the rich) have a much higher chance of succeeding and dominate the top positions in society.

**Feminists** also disagree, arguing women have less chance of succeeding than men. They argue society is patriarchal, meaning that men have an inbuilt advantage compared to women, and that women are disadvantaged and oppressed.

Other sociologists believe people from ethnic minority backgrounds are disadvantaged, due to individual and institutional (embedded) racism.

**Is the education system fair?**

* Education policy institute found disadvantages children were 18 months behind their peers by the time they took their GCSEs
* More affluent (advantaged) students have heard 30 million more words than disadvantaged students by the time they are 5



Pupils can claim Free School Meals if their household income is less than £16,000, so it is used as a measure of social class or poverty.

1. What percentage more students not on FSM achieve a grade 5 in English and Maths compared to students on FSM?
2. What does this show about which students do better in education?
3. Can you think of any reasons for this?

At school, children from different backgrounds receive very different outcomes in education. Here are some of the main reasons:

1. Material deprivation – students may lack the physical resources they need to study, like books and internet access. How might this impact their exam results?
2. Labelling – students may be labelled as lower achieving by teachers. This is when teachers attach a label to students and treat them differently. They may see working class students as less motivated, less able and less hard working. How might this impact their results?
3. Parental attitudes – parents from working class backgrounds may be less involved and less engaged in their children’s education, possibly because they had a bad experience of school themselves.

Many wealthy parents can afford to send their children to independent schools too.

Some sociologists also argue ethnic minorities have a worse experience of education, because they experience racism and institutional racism. Some also argue these inequalities are due to differences in the family structures of different ethnicities.

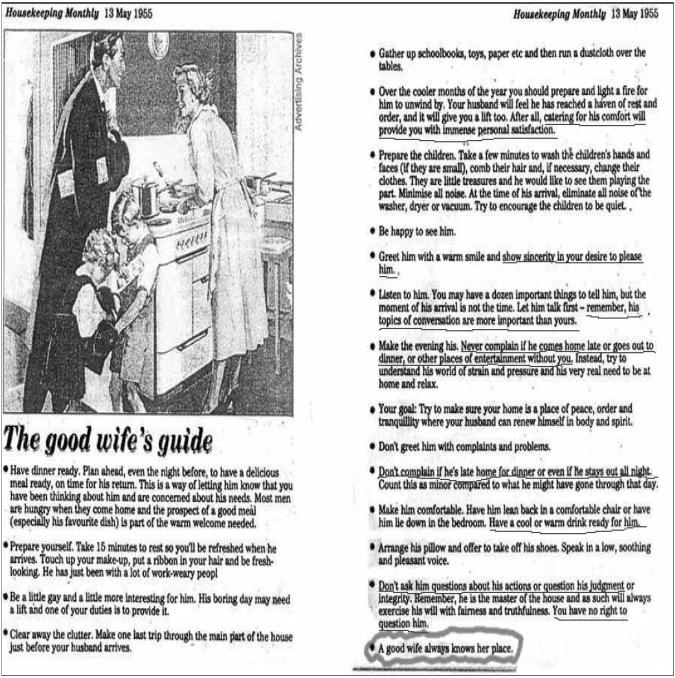
**Research task: read the articles and watch the documentaries and listen to the podcast to get a better understanding of the inequalities in education. Use the information to write 500 words explaining why education in contemporary Britain may not be fair, including which groups may be more disadvantaged.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Source** | **Key points** |
| Podcast: Professor Cecil Wright [discussing the ethnic inequalities in education](https://www.spreaker.com/user/thesociologyshow/prof-cecile-wright), including her experiences at school |  |
| Article: Diane Reay [explaining the unequal treatment](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/nov/21/english-class-system-shaped-in-schools) of working class children in education |  |
| Report (just read the executive summary): [The impact of attitudes and expectations on educational attainment](https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/education-young-people-parents-full.pdf) |  |
| Documentary: [Too Poor for Posh School?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWYaoWPdUOI) |  |
| Clip: [Should we abolish private schools?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN36jVSp1x0&t=7s) |  |
| Documentary: Professor Green, [Living in Poverty](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PopPlAXcWDE) |  |

**Write your response here:**

**Is family life fair?**

If we were to rewind to the 1950s, we would see that family life used to be very unequal. Women were expected not to have a paid job, but to complete all the housework and childcare, whilst men would go out and work. Look at this page from a home economics textbook in the 1950s:



1. What does this show about the role of women in the family?
2. What would feminists think about this?
3. How has this changed?

Today, men and women are more equal. Women are likely to have a paid job as well as men, and men and women are both likely to contribute to family life and tasks. However, there are still inequalities between men and women in the family. Men are usually paid more than women, and so have more power, and women often still complete up to 60% more housework and childcare than men.

Many women must perform the ‘double shift’ – which means doing two shifts of work, one in their paid role, and one at home. Some sociologists also argue that women perform more emotional labour – remembering birthdays, comforting people when they are upset, scheduling appointments and so on.

**In your opinion, should women do more housework and childcare than men? Why/ Why not?**

**Research task: read/ watch/ listen to the sources below and record the key points. Then write 500 words explaining whether or not family life in the UK is fair in your opinion. Try to use evidence and examples where possible.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Source** | **Key points** |
| Article: [Why is there still a housework inequality gap?](https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2018/feb/17/dirty-secret-why-housework-gender-gap) |  |
| Article: [What is emotional labour?](https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcthree/article/5ea9f140-f722-4214-bb57-8b84f9418a7e) |  |
| Clip: Sociologist Arlie Hoschild [discussing the second shift](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mvzE6zYkEQY) |  |
| Documentary: [What stands in the way of women becoming equal to men?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ayj9EVc2ZLI) |  |
| Article: [The ‘tradwife’ movement, encouraging young women to revert to 1950s expectations](https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2020/jan/27/tradwives-new-trend-submissive-women-dark-heart-history) |  |

**Write your response here:**

**Conclusion: How can we make society fairer?**

Analysing the negative aspects of society can paint a bleak picture of both society and Sociology, but an important part of sociology is considering society’s problems in order to think about how we can improve society.

Making society better and more equal starts with individuals – how we treat other people, interact with others and what we expect and ask of others.

Use this space to record what you will do differently to try to improve society. I have written some examples to help you.

Examples:

* Be kind to everyone, regardless of their background and my differences
* Make sure housework is divided equally between myself and my siblings

There are also bigger changes we can encourage and lobby for, for example, by writing to your local Member of Parliament. These could be: reforming the criminal justice system, abolishing private schools or introducing a higher minimum wage. Use the space below to write some ideas of what bigger issues you would like to change to make society fairer.