

Norms and values



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The purpose of this document is to research, from a sociological perspective the norms, values and socialisation that is essential for family, society and culture. These key attributes provide the individual with key skills, behaviours and habits necessary to enable participation within their own society – observing the rules and boundaries established within their “ Norms and Values” and modifying and changing behaviours throughout their life time

“ The Culture of Society is the way of life of its members; the collection of ideas and of habits which the learn and transmit from generation to generation”

Ralph Linton

Norms are the social and cultural guidelines by which we live our lives, and both knowingly and unknowingly conform and comply too during our life time. Our norms are key attributes that define our behaviours and can determine the groups and individuals, social acceptance – Or non acceptance. We learn how to behave through a complex combination of stimulus – Visual, Oral and Sensory. As we grow in our mental maturity and awareness, the influence of family, environment and culture, combine to define our Norms. These key developmental elements combined, influence and determine, personal and social interactive abilities – developing social skills to recognise social boundaries, acceptable behaviours and responses. Therefore our Norms are intrinsic to our development, our personal behaviour, and social acceptance. Key aspects of our “ Norms” are:

Convention – Being a standard, non culturally specific element within the Norms of convention.

An example being that an individual is expected to follow the “ rules” which are an established expectation of behaviours, within the context of conventional social acts and responses.

An example of a culturally specific “ Injunctive Norm ” is when a Cultural belief, such as polygamy is accepted as a “ Norm”. This is defined as “ Culturally Specific” as this practise is not legally practised or recognised within the Western Society. An exception could be the Mormons, who have Sects that practise polygamy, based mainly in America. The main Mormon Church – The Latter Day Saints, no longer advocates such practise, although there are certain Mormon Fundamentalists Sects, whose religious fundamental belief systems adhere to the original writings of Brigham Young.

Within many Muslim cultures, a husband can legally take more than one wife. This practise is not recognised legally with Western cultures.

Sociological Values may be material or nonmaterial, internal or external. Values and beliefs are culturally specific – Given this the evaluation of their respective value is specific to the individual or group.

An example might be, when an individual uses their Core value system, they relate into either a cultural or belief system that is specific to the influences within their social “ Norms and Value” origin, group or society. Ultimately Social “ Norms and Values” cover a wide range of Sociological study.

Example of Cultural Values defined: Sociological “ Norms and Values” under stress from changes, can impact an individual, group, society or cultural perspective. Change or deviation when combined with poor or irrational

judgement – that sits outside the “ Norms and Values” of either, a specific Culture or Belief System, can have a mixed level of impacts. Therefore Norms and Values can and do change. What may be acceptable as an individual would not necessarily be acceptable at group level. Differentials on the range of what would be acceptable within their own personal attitude and value system is specific.

Change to an Individuals “ Norm and Values” can be challenged by the individual on the basis that the “ Worth or Value is not acceptable to them – because it fails to resonate within them as acceptable as a Social or belief Value. Alternatively it may present as an abstract Value and hold no specific desirability. Values are abstract in nature and general. A culture’s values are its ideals about what is good, right, fair, and just. Sociologists disagree, however, on how to conceptualise values. There is a conflict theory that focuses on how values differ between groups within a culture. The National Centre for social research annual report for 2009 indicates that the British values are changing – the full report is available at ([http://www. natcen. ac. uk/pzMedia/uploads/Downloadable/da9c4be7-da86-410a-9176-3b362fb4f1ba. pdf](http://www.natcen.ac.uk/pzMedia/uploads/Downloadable/da9c4be7-da86-410a-9176-3b362fb4f1ba.pdf)) the 2009 survey consisted of more than 4, 000 interviews with a representative, random sample of people in Britain. Its findings have shown that change in society’s values is generally slow and is impacted by the media and other external stimuli.

Functional sociologist Talcott Parsons noted that Americans share the common value of the “ American work ethic,” Whilst this is most certainly a cultural social observation which encourages hard work. Herbert Spencer one of the first British Sociologists stated that “ Society exists for the benefit

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of its members, not the members for the benefit of society.” Common values within western societies are based on materialism, and money, although reliance on science and technology, and the role of democracy and freedom are key norms and values that exist – although these can change during stressed and unexpected change. A culture may have conflicting values; an example would be that value of materialistic success may be in opposition to that of charitable acts. Equally the value of social equality may be in opposition to that of the value placed on the individual state. This can be explained as a contraction in what people say, what they really think, and what they do. Social pressure to conform can be a deciding factor, as individuals own norms and values system will be a sub conscious factor in that decision making.

So when does socialisation begin; its starts as soon as we are born and ultimately ends with our death. As soon as a child is born, primary socialisation begins. In every instance of social interaction, a child can uses this period as a learning experience – particularly in terms of cultural concepts of identity, social roles, and norms of behaviour. The very young child is totally reliant on its parents or carers. The baby will initially respond to the external stimuli provided by parents or carers. The main senses initially used by the child will be responsive, such as when they are hungry, in discomfit, or want human contact/ touch. They will respond to sound and vision – this is important time for child/parent/carer socialisation – this represents a very emotional time, and the close bonds of love and loyalty, which in theory will last a life time, are established.

As chronological development of the child takes place, by the age of two, a child will be in possession of a rudimentary set of primary skills and behaviours. The child will be able to copy its parents and siblings, and will be learning a wider set of social skills – these will be both culturally specific and socially generic. The socialisation of the child within its own society and culture will be established during an intense period of self development and awareness; children acquire a sense of their “ self”. This is an important developmental milestone that occurs between 18/24 months.

Psychologist Jean Piaget defined the fact that children progress through clear stages in their ability to think.

The Sensorimotor Stage, which is from birth to age two, is when the developing child’s reliance on “ touch” for information about its surrounding world is the most commonly used of the child’s developing skills. They will also experience the tactile warmth from parent/carers and will also gain stimulation and development from, copying, gestures and actions – taste is also a key action of the developing child , and they will put most objects to their mouth, toys, food and potentially anything they can get their hands on. This period represents a time of great discovery and learning socially, and is part of the set of primary socialisation skills, which are prerequisite key developmental milestones. The next stage as described by Piaget is the Pre-Operational Stage. This stage generally starts between ages’ Two to Seven. Children now have the ability to think symbolically, that being to relate in abstract or via simple symbols. However they cannot perceive the world from another person’s perspective. This period also differs from later ones, because it is a time when children learn through hands-on manipulation of

objects through copying, play and trial and error. When a child reaches the Operational Stage, ages of 7-12, Young children can now begin to think and reason rationally and logically. At approximately age seven or eight children enter “ the age of reason,” when they can manipulate their own ideas, and apply learnt concepts. A child will now possess the ability to independently interact and abide to a set of social rules and boundaries. They achieve this via the mediums of school, social, family, cultural settings. Children are able to rationalise, apply logic, use and interact with media, and participate in debate verbally. Children are able to recognise “ self”, which is an important milestone in self development: as is the ability to recognise their place socially and culturally. Finally a child moves to the fLogical Stage at ages 12 and on. The child and young adolescent, are capable of complex abstract, logical thought. They are able to have reasoned logical discussion, reach decisions based on fact, and are able to initiate and formulate argument and debate. They have a fully developed sense of self within their family, society and culture.

The family plays a significant and defining role in the primary socialisation of a child. The family acts as the primary socialising agent for the first few years of life; however Socialisation in the family varies greatly, and can be dependent on Social, cultural, ideological and ethnical differences. Within Britain, the structure of family has changed; there are more working class single parent’s families, who have no immediate family support available to provide child care – this has resulted in child care providers having a far greater role in childhood socialisation over the last 20 years. One of the most important primary functions of the family is to produce and reproduce

biologically, socially and culturally-however, producing children is not the only function of the family. A child's perspective is that the family is its core and primary socialising agent; however the family perspective is one of responsibility, to provide the growing child with the necessary skills and knowledge in their socialisation and acceptance in their common culture. From the parental/carer point of view the family is the central nucleus that provides the care, learning, development, social, cultural education: the goal of which is to socialise and incorporate cultural ideologies and values in their children. However there are many variants in societies and cultures, which place more emphasis on the sexual division of labour, marriage, and the resulting relationship between family groups and the economics.

An example being; that child labour is still practised illegally and openly in Asia, and parts of Africa. Many of these countries have poor economies and the communities and families require a child to work to contribute to the household or village – this can be the difference between life and death. Equally the value of a male child may be greater than that of a female child, as in many cultures, males are preferred for financial and social reasons. In time of hardship cultures such as the Eskimo's would practise infanticide, if they were lacking enough food or provisions, this was a decision made on the basis that males contribute more, as they grow in to hunters and support the community, whereas a female's contribution was seen as less valuable to the community.

As in family, education is an important agent of socialisation and the school environment is a formal agent of socialisation. The purpose of education is to socialise children in selected skills and knowledge, preparing them with so

that they can build on the skills and knowledge acquired, as they grow and mature. The formal education system in England starts at Playschool for ages 2-4 – this is now a socially acceptable form of early socialisation. The child then progresses to a more formalised, yet still free play, Reception Class- these are mainly attached to a primary school, which the child then transition into – thereby keeping the social group intact. Primary education provides a child with a formalised approach to learning. The child will learn new social rules and boundaries; these will build on the norms and values that they have been taught by their parents/carers. The family influence is still very strong, as these age groups are heavily dependent upon their family. The child continues its primary socialisation via classroom activities, playing, and school social interaction, within its peer group. The peer group becomes important, as it is based on a child's ability to interact, make friends and socialise – the pressure to conform and be accepted, increases with age. There are many reasons for this: such as social standing IE: family wealth, material possession, ethnicity, extrovert /introverts behaviors' and the pecking order of favorability within the peer group.

Exclusion from a peer group is a highly stressful and can be initiated by the school due to behavioral or attendance issues – these issues would require remedial agreement and action between the school, child and parent. Wider involvement of care agencies, such as educational psychologists and family welfare social workers, would be required if the family were found to be unable to function or cope, due to a verity of social or financial reasons.

An example being: a male child of 4 with undiagnosed ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) who in reception class could not settle,

presenting as disruptive, Impulsive, restlessness with a high level of hyperactivity – and an inability to concentrate or focus for any period of time. ADHD will often present as inattentiveness, and will prevent a child from learning and will stunt their socialisation if not addressed. This child was excluded from school at 5 years old. At this point a wider most specialised group of social, education workers – worked with the parents, and school, after ADHD was diagnosed. Once the appropriate level of medication (Ritalin- commonly used for ADHD) was prescribed, an immediate change in behaviour was evident. A plan of resocialisation and integration was applied, and an educational statement was issued by the local educational authority. This ensured the funding necessary for one to one support, and additional help required to enable the child to be educated and resocialised. One of the key learning aids for this child reintegration was the use of media – the use of media in the home and school, leisure environments have become an integrated part of contemporary life. Such is the impact of Media, that it has become a dominant agent of socialisation. Children are exposed from a very early age to media; examples being a music DVD, Television or Computer games – which can be interactive, educational and agility based. Multimedia is used in a variety of ways within the family, and is seen a key aspect of socialisation and development. Equally Multi Media is used within the formal setting of school and is used regularly as part of an Educational programme. There have been negative aspects in attributed to media and the violence seen in games, music, TV and film.

Secondary Socialisation is the wider process of learning; a child learns what is expected of them, and what is acceptable/appropriate behaviour, for

them; within a small group that is part of a larger society and culture. Secondary socialisation represents a new developmental stage, and is generally associated with teenagers and adults. The social changes we experience are different to those of primary socialisation. An example would be, starting a new level of education at college or university, relocating to a new environment or a change in social status or society. Some students may be transferring from a rural community to a more urban environment, whilst others may be international students being socialised to the British way of life. Others may be mature students without any prior higher educational experience. Moreover, any social structure can act as a socialising agent. For example, the work environment socialises the employees to conform to their way of business and their culture. In most organisations employees have clear responsibilities to respect authority, adhere to corporate policies, and work hard in exchange for financial compensation in the form of income and status promotions. Also, the wider public venues we all go to; such as shopping centres, libraries, hospitals, football matches, act as social interaction and educate us about new boundaries and constraints – thereby influencing our behaviour. When considering the norms of behaviour, of passengers on airplanes; those of a diner at a Michelin Star restaurant; or the fans at a Rugby or Tennis game. We all conform and adapt without conscious thought a large percentage of our lives – this conditioning allows us to move in a complex structure of Culture and Society. The secondary socialisation process is crucial particularly in times of stress and change. Transition from infancy to childhood to adolescence and adulthood are all accompanied by a socialisation process that is designed socially and culturally to give the individual, all the

skills necessary to grow and co-exist. If the process of secondary socialisation fails, due to internal or external factors, the individual may not be in possession of the necessary social or cultural skills to cope logically and rationally. This situation could lead to a change in their values and social group. As an adult we experience the socialisation process through changes in careers, family structure, personal relationships, interests, such as politics. As our lives continue, we move to retirement age, the changes in family and career are now viewed differently; our priorities change, as situations such as being, unwell, or alone take precedence. The extended older family highlight the changing cultural values in the socialisation process.

With the introduction of media, older generations, are now learning and experiencing new experiences of information and communication, which is a new form of socialisation for them. This is a new agent of socialisation and is a powerful teacher and influencing agent within the context of socialisation, second only to Family. The media plays a significant role in shaping the social attitudes and social behaviours of our children and adolescents... Parents do exert the most influence on children; however the mass media can be considered secondary agents of socialisation.

For example, viewing of advertisements is related to lower self-esteem and depression among children who come from low-income families. It is likely that children feel bad about themselves because they cannot have the products that are advertised on television.

Media and Marketing work hand in hand to influence our views – We are targeted as either specific social groups, age groups and economic groups –

specifically to sell Products and Services. What we buy, where we buy, how we spend, and who we vote for, is heavily influenced by a range of Multi – Media. Such as The TV, internet, Radio, advertising in magazines.

Gender identity is one of the most important elements of our sense of self. Some aspects of gender identity are rooted in our biology, such as our physical strength. However most of our gender identity is culturally defined. As we grow and age we develop our self awareness, and how we should relate to others, and the role we play in a larger society. The lessons children learn and the processes through which cultural norms are passed from one generation to the next is known as socialisation. Gender socialisation shows that there are roles, or cultural expectations and norms, which are associated with each sexual classification – Sociologists make distinctions between sex and gender. Whilst sex is based on biological factors, gender is the based on cultural factors that stereotypically construct different social roles for men and women. Therefore Gender socialisation is the process through which males and females learn gender specific appropriate behaviour, dress, personality characteristics, and demeanour. While gender socialisation is an ongoing and lifelong – the majority of the sociological theories tend to focus on early childhood socialisation, as the key factor in Gender determination – Four such perspectives are the psychoanalytical, cognitive development, social learning, and social interaction perspectives.

In all societies there is a need for resocialisation of an individual.

Resocialisation is a sociological concept dealing with the process of mentally and emotionally “ re-training” an individual so that they can exist in an environment other than that which he or she is used to.

Examples of a need for Resocialisation such as the release from prison, mental health institutions and the Army ; New recruits into the army are encouraged to bond, so that they can operate as a cohesive unit – and then the process is reversed for those who may have become institutionalised by their experiences in the socialisation process. Without appropriate support and counselling, mental health problems could present. Equally if an individual have been institutionalised due to lengthy incarceration because of illness or a criminal offence – such as Murder: a staged plan of integration would be required, to allow assimilation and resocialisation to take place in society.

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