Which is more important in shaping individual identity: social structure or socia...

[Sociology](#), [Identity](#)

Social structure and social interaction are the building blocks of present life. The need for people to interact with each other is crucial and has always been the key action to survive and sustain existence. Sociologists now refer to this as socialisation, to establish the important components of living and a person's social identity.

Social structure is more important than social interaction in shaping individual social identity, the reason for this to have more importance in shaping someone's social identity, is because without social structure there would be no social interaction both are important in discussing macrosociology (social structure) and microsociology (social interaction). Within social structure is class, status and institutions they will be expanded upon later in detail on the way they influence one social identity more then social interaction.

Social identity is defined as a person's acknowledgement of belonging to a certain social category or group where its members possess the same social identification and observe the surroundings with an individual perspective (Hogg & Abrams 1988, p. 7). To better understand social identity, Social structure needs to be explained, it is defined as the framework of society that was already laid out before we were born. Social structure refers to the typical patterns of a group, such as its usual relationships between men and women or students and teachers.

The sociological significance of social structure is that it gives us direction to and sets limits on behaviour (Henslin, J. 2010, pp. 76 – 77). Social interaction is a significant part of life in society also a part of an individual's social

identity, it is the different ways that people interact with one another. Culturelays the broadest framework, while social class divides people according to income, educationand occupational prestige. Each of us receives ascribed statuses at birth, that are involuntary that are inherited and later achieved statuses are added.

Our behaviours and orientations are further influenced by the roles we play, the groups to which we belong and our experiences with social institutions. These components of society work together to help maintain social order (Henslin, J. 2010, p. 76). To achieve social order all members of a society accept its moral values and their roles within it, complying to these norms is a way to maintain social order. Emile Durkhiem's views were that rather than individual activities such as crime and religion causing certain behaviours, it was society as a whole Bessant & Watts, 2007 pp. 72 – 73). Showing that structure has more influence on a persons identity rather than their interactions within their class and statuses. Social Class is based on income, education and occupational prestige. Large numbers of people who have similar amounts of income and education and who work at jobs that are roughly comparable in prestige make up a social class. It is hard to overemphasise this aspect of social structure, for our social class influences not only our behaviours but even our ideas and attitudes (Henslin, J. 010, p. 78). There is four different structures that we can inherit at birth; wealthy upper class, middle class, working class and under class (Macionis & Plummer 1997). Karl Marx was the first to study class and it's relationship to the functions of society and identity. Marx focused on how one class controlled and directed production, while the other classes were service

providers or producers, whose efforts benefited the ruling or dominating class.

Marx saw that human relationships and identity were a product of labour, and therefore shaped by it (Cox, 1998). An example of this is Virgin boss Sir Richard Branson being the controlling class and all his employees below him represent the other classes which all in turn benefits him. Social Status insociologyhas been given two meanings. One refers to the position that a person occupies in the social structure, such asteacheror priest.

The other more specific meaning refers to the form of social stratification in which social positions are ranked and organised by legal, political and cultural criteria into status groups. These social positions may carry a great deal of prestige, as in the case of a judge or an astronaut, or it may bring little prestige as in the case as a grocery store worker or a waitress at the local pub. The status can also be looked down on as in the case of a homeless person, an ex-convict or a thief.

Social status is a major shaping component of social identity status set all the statuses or positions that an individual occupies are generally all ascribed statuses that are inherited such as your race/ethnicity, sex and the social class of your parents as well yours statuses as female or male, daughter or son, niece or nephew. Our identity as ' male' or ' female' is one of the most basic aspects of our being. As Sigmund Freud observed a century ago, when you meet a person for the first time, the very first thing you notice about them is whether they are a man or woman (Bessant & Watts, 2007 p. 09). Social Institutions are the organised, usual or standard

ways by which society meets its basic needs. Social institutions are thefamily, religion, education, economic, medicine, politics, law, science, the military and the mass media (Henslin, J. 2010, p. 81). They establish the context in which we live, shaping our behaviour and colouring our thoughts. Social institutions are so significant in shaping individual identity that is they were to change we would be different people, as they influence our orientations to the social world and the wider world itself.

Much of the influence lies beyond our ordinary awareness. For example, because of our economic institution, it is common to work eight hours a day for five days every week. There is nothing normal or natural about this pattern, however. This rhythm is only an arbitrary arrangement for dividing work and leisure. Yet this one aspect of a single social institution has far-reaching effects. Not only does it also lays out a structure for their interaction with family and friends and for how they meet their personal needs (Henslin, J. 2010, p. 1). From this you can see that social identity is formed primarily by structure rather than interaction with individuals fitting into their institutions through their class and status showing the greater importance of social structure on shaping the social identity. Social identity is shaped through an individual's journey in life within their social structure and social interaction, but this is not solely through inherited ascribed statuses, class and institutions also by the way a person socialises within the givenenvironment.

The inequalities of the worlds classes is shapes a person's identity by the way they have had to behave due to their social structure limitations and

well as the interactions with others of the same class and status, without this structure there would be no social interaction. This is why social structure is of a higher importance when it comes to shaping the identity of an individual. REFERENCE LIST Back, L. , Bennett, A. , Edles, L. , Gibson, M. , Inglis, D. , Jacobs, R. , Woodward, I 2012, Cultural Sociology: An Introduction, Wiley, ebook Bessant, J. amp; Watts, R. 2007, Sociology Australia, 3rd ed. , Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest Henslin, JM, Possamai, A, and Possamai-Indesedy, A 2011, Sociology: A Down to Earth Approach, Pearson Australia, Frenchs Forest Hogg, M. A. & Abrams, D. 1988, Social Identifications A SocialPsychologyof Intergroup Relations and Group, Routledge, London Macionis, J. J. & Plummer, K. 2012, Sociology: A Global Introduction, 5th ed. , Pearson, Prentice Hall, New York Plummer, K 2010, Sociology: The Basics, Taylor and Francis, ebook