

Basic Concepts and Institutions Unit -3

Sociology's foundational ideas and terms

Sociology's fundamental premise is that human behavior is primarily influenced by the groups to which people belong and the social interactions that occur within those groups. Sociology focuses primarily on the group, not the individual. Sociologists are primarily interested in human interaction - the ways in which individuals respond to and influence one another.

Sociology is distinguished by its approach to phenomena (the scientific method) and its focus (human interaction). It is defined appropriately as the scientific study of human interaction.

Sociology is concerned with society, its institutions, their interrelationships, and its actors.

Sociologists examine social interaction patterns.

Sociology, according to Bogardus, has a lengthy past but a brief history. Plato and Aristotle, two ancient Greek philosophers, are credited with initiating the earliest attempts at a systematic understanding of social life in the West. Plato's Republic is a comprehensive analysis of the city community, while Aristotle's Ethics and Politics is the first significant attempt to deal systematically with the law, society, and state. In the sixteenth century, authors such as Hobbes and Machiavelli drew clearer distinctions between the state and society. Based on historical data, Machiavelli's "The Prince" is an objective discussion of the state that he formulated. Sir Thomas Moore, whose book Utopia was published in 1515, attempted to address everyday social issues by depicting an ideal social order that was intended for emulation.

Both the Italian author Vico and the French author Montesquieu contributed to the scientific study of social phenomena. In his book The New Science, Vico argued that society is subject to objectively observable laws that can be determined through observation and analysis.

In his renowned book *The Spirit of Laws*, Montesquieu analyzed the role that external factors, particularly climate, play in the existence of human society.

Sociology arose in the context of the profound changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution in Europe. Two additional factors at the time also contributed to the development of sociology. If the methods of natural sciences could make such sense of the physical world, why couldn't they be effectively applied to the social world? The second factor was Europe's exposure to the profoundly dissimilar societies their colonial empires had conquered. The information about the dissimilar social practices of these societies prompted new inquiries about society in general. Auguste Comte (1798-1857) is known as the "Father of Sociology" because he formulated two specific problems for sociological research: social statics and social dynamics. Social statics is the study of order and stability, whereas social dynamics is the study of social change. He believed that a sociology science must be founded on systematic observation and classification. Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) devised a theory of social evolution by applying the theory of organic evolution to human society. Karl Marx (1818–1883) believed that social conflict and revolution were inherent to society. Durkheim underscored the fundamental requirements of society by comparing it to a living organism. Max Weber emphasized the discernible behavior patterns that result from particular beliefs. All of these men were reacting to the societal crisis brought on by the deluge of ideas that fueled the revolutions. In their search for the dynamics that would explain the underlying causes of social change, each also sought the foundation of social order.

Sociology theories

There are many different ideas used in sociology. Socialization, social order, and social division are the most important. Different theories have different ideas about what these three words mean, but they all have the same basic meaning.

Socialization is a word that everyone can understand. It is a way that the people in society teach the children. Through the socialization process, young people learn the rules and ideals of their society. These norms and ideals tell us how to act and what is expected of us in society. This can happen in two ways: through direct family or caretakers, which is called primary socialization, or through everything else we deal with, like the media or school. (Not Known. How do people get to know each other?)

Social order is the second idea. This is related to the socialization process because social order is kept when everyone agrees with the rules and ideals that are taught through socialization. Society can only keep going this way.

Social division is the last idea. This is because society is set up in a way that makes it hard for people to get the same things. It makes a difference between groups of people, like when a society is split into the top class and the lower class. (CliffsNotes.com (2012). What Splits Us Apart: Classification)

Sociology's main ideas about how these things fit into society are different.

The Functionalist theory is also called a majority theory, which means that most people in society agree with it. It is based on the idea that different parts of society work together to make a whole. According to the Functionalist theory, socialization is very important because order, stability, harmony, and cooperation come from accepted norms and values that everyone agrees on. Functionalism also puts a lot of weight on the idea of meritocracy, which says that people who work hard will be repaid in the end. It thinks that there can only be social order if everyone agrees on what they call a "value consensus." This is about basic values that everyone should agree on and that are worth working for. Functionalism says that social stratification is based on the idea of meritocracy, and that people learn the skills they need to play different parts in society that help it run. It admits that there are some disagreements between groups because they have different

goals, but it thinks that this is not as important as groups that have the same goals. M. Haralambos and M. Holborn (2008) A.

On the other hand, conflict theories look at these ideas in a different way. Marxism sees socialization as the process of teaching people that Capitalism is good and fair, even though this is not true. This makes the two groups in society fight with each other. In a capitalist society, the Bourgeoisie creates a false sense of reality that keeps the social order going. The Proletariat learns from this false picture of reality that society is fair and that they should follow the rules and ideals of the ruling class. Marxism has a different view of social division. They see it as "a way for some to take advantage of others instead of a way to get ahead."

group objectives." Marx thinks that society is divided into two main groups: the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat. But these two classes are always fighting over who owns and controls the means of production, which the ruling class uses to take advantage of and rule the subject class. M. Haralambos and M. Holborn (2008) B.

Symbolic Interactionism is another theory that looks at these ideas in a very different way. Since Symbolic Interactionism is a social action theory, it looks at how people interact with each other instead of how society works as a whole. The most important part of this theory is being able to describe why someone does what they do. Symbolic interactionism says that we learn how to get along with each other through the shared meanings and symbols that tell us how to act and how to communicate with others. By doing this, a person will get a sense of who they are. We learn about ourselves based on how other people react to us. This happens when we connect with other people. Social order is kept up when most people believe in the same shared meanings and symbols and see the world in the same way. Weber would say that putting ourselves in other people's shoes helps us figure out what they mean and how they see the world. As for social stratification, people who don't think the same way as the rest of

society are given labels, which other people use to rate them. People may act and talk differently with those who are labeled, causing them to adapt to the name and change how they see themselves. M. Haralambos and M. Holborn (2008), C.

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Social Structure

The term structure refers to some sort of ordered arrangement of parts or components. A musical composition has a structure; a sentence has a structure etc. In all these we find an ordered arrangement of different parts. A structure can be called a building only when these parts or components are arranged in relationship with the other. In the same manner society has

its own structure called social structure. The components or units of social structure are persons.

A person is a human being that occupies position in a social structure. Even though the persons are subject to change the structure as such maintains its continuity. A nation, tribe, a political party, a religious body can continue in existence as an arrangement of persons though the

personnel of each changes from time to time. There is continuity of structure just as a human

body maintains its structure. Sociologists speak of few kinds of structures or groups that will be

present in all societies. These structures will exist in any society regardless of its ethos, history or

any cultural variability. Because without the functions of these structures a human society

cannot survive. Thus a family may be monogamous or polygamous; a government may be

democratic or authoritarian; an economy may be socialist or capitalist. The nature of the specific

structure may vary from society to society but there always be a structure resulting in a function.

Social Structure Definition

The concept of social structure has been defined in different ways by different thinkers and

sociologists. Herbert Spencer was the first thinker who wrote about structure of a society. He

came up with biological analogies (organic structure and evolution) to define the social structure.

According to Radcliff-Brown social structure is a part of the social structure of all social relations

of person to person. In the study of social structure the concrete reality with which we are

concerned is the set of actually existing relations at a given moment of time that link together

certain human beings.

A more general definition of social structure is that social structure refers to the enduring orderly

and patterned relationships between the elements of a society. According to Raymond Firth it makes no distinction between the ephemeral and the most enduring elements in social activity and it makes it almost impossible to distinguish the idea of the structure of society from that of the totality of the society itself.

According to S.F. Nadal structure refers to a definable articulation and ordered arrangement of parts. It is related to the outer aspect or the framework of society and is totally unconcerned with the functional aspect of society. So he has emphasized that the social structure refers to the network of social relationship that is created among the human beings when they interact with each other according to their statuses in accordance with the patterns of society. He has emphasized that the social structure refers to the network of social relationship that is created among the human beings when they interact with each other according to their statuses in accordance with the patterns of society.

According to Ginsberg the study of social structure is concerned with the principal form of social organization that is types of groups, associations and institutions and the complex of these that constitute societies.

According to Karl Mannheim social structure refers to the web of interacting social forces from which have arisen the various modes of observing and thinking. Social structure is an abstract and intangible phenomenon. Individuals are the units of association and institutions are the units of social structure. These institutions and associations are inter-related in a particular arrangement and thus create the pattern of social structure. It refers to the external aspect of society that is

relatively stable as compared to the functional or internal aspect of society. Social structure is a living structure that is created, maintained for a time and changes. According to **Talcott Parsons**, the term social structure applies to the particular arrangement of the interrelated institutions, agencies and social patterns as well as the statuses and roles which each person assumes in the group. Parsons has tried to explain the concept of social structure in abstract form. All the units of social structure that is institutions, agencies, social patterns, statuses and roles are invisible and intangible and hence are abstract. According to **Maclver and Page** the various modes of grouping together comprise the complex pattern of the social structure. They have also regarded that social structure is abstract which is composed of several groups like family, church, class, caste, state or community etc. According to **Johnson**, the structure of anything consists of the relatively stable interrelationships among its parts; the term part itself implies a certain degree of stability. Since a social system is composed of the inter-related acts of people, its structure must be sought in some degree of regularity or recurrence in these acts.

Social Structure in Sociology

On the basis of the **definitions social structure** can be understood in the following points

Perspectives

Perspectives on Social Structure

Levi Strauss

Levi-Strauss conceived of social structure as logic behind reality. He insisted that the term social structure has nothing to do with empirical reality but with models which are built up after it.

While social relations constitute the raw materials out of which the models making up the social structure are built, the structure itself cannot be reduced to an ensemble of social relations rather such relations themselves result from such re-existing structures. The structures exhibit the characteristics of a system and are made up of several elements none of which can undergo change without effecting changes in all other elements.

Nadel

Nadel views social structure as reality itself. He regards the role system of any society with its given coherence as the matrix of the social structure. He outlines two specific advantages of structural analysis. These are lending a higher degree of comparability to social data and rendering such data more readily quantifiable. Nadel contends that a particular social structure as described at a given moment is accurate only for a particular period of time. Structure and variance are not inherently contradictory rather the former is defined or built up through taking account of the latter. If variance is unlimited there would be absolute chaos and no order in social life.

Murdock

In defining social structure Murdock's principle concern are the ethnographic facts and the taxonomic classification of societies on the basis of manifest readily discernible characteristics. The taxonomy established by Murdock depends primarily on varieties of kinship organization. The taxonomy is based on statistical correlation rather than the functional analysis.

Elements of Social Structure

Normative system presents the society with the ideals and values. The people attach emotional importance to these norms. The institutions and associations are inter-related according to these norms. The individuals perform their roles in accordance with the accepted norms of society.

Position system refers to the statuses and roles of the individuals. The desires, aspirations and expectations of the individuals are varied, multiple and unlimited. So these can be fulfilled only if the members of the society are assigned different roles according to their capacities and capabilities. Actually the proper functioning of social structure depends upon proper assignments of roles and statuses.

For the proper enforcement of norms, every society has a sanction system. The integration and coordination of the different parts of social structure depend upon conformity of social norms.

The stability of a social structure depends upon the effectiveness of its sanction system.

The anticipated response system calls upon the individuals to participate in the social system. His preparation sets the social structure in motion. The successful working of social structure depends upon the realisation of his duties by the individuals and his efforts to fulfil these duties.

It is object of the goal to be arrived at by the social structure. The whole social structure revolves around it. The action is the root cause which weaves the web of social relationships and sets the social structure in motion.

Social structure is an abstract entity. Its parts are dynamic and constantly changing. They are spatially widespread and therefore difficult to see as wholes. Social structure denotes patterns

which change more slowly than the particular personnel who constitute them.

Structuralism

Structuralism as a school of thought emphasizes the view that society is prior to individuals. It

employs the nature of social interaction as patterned behaviour and uses it as a tool in all

sociological analysis. Claude Levi-Strauss in his analysis of myth used this method by providing

necessary analysis. The elements which are basic to human mind and universally applicable

determine the possible varieties of social structure.

Marxist sociologist Louis Althusser has adopted a structuralist framework in explaining social

phenomena by referring to the structure of mode of production. He criticised Berger and

Luckman in their view that the dialectical processes of human interaction in which meaning given

by individuals when institutionalized becomes social structure.

Instead he argued that the human

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agency is only the agents of the structure of social relation. It is the social relations which should

form the basis of analysing the social structure.

Anthony Giddens used the term struration to express mutual dependency of human agency

and social structure. Social structure should be viewed as associated with social action. Social

institutions as organized patterns of social behaviour are proposed as the elements of social

structure by the functionalists.

Karl Marx analysed how social relations are structured to sustain inequalities in the society. Marx

used the concept of structure to denote the distribution of resources.

Thus structure is the

symbolic, material and political resources that the actors employ in their interactions and produce the structure of their social relations. Marx used the concept of dialectics in the interaction process which in turn tend to change and transform the nature of social relations thereby changing the social structure.

Formal and Informal Structure

Social structure can be both formal and informal. In the words of Maclver and Page the factors that give rise to primary groups in industrial organization are present in all formalized social structures. Thus in govt agencies, political parties, schools, labour unions the complete organisational picture includes the formal blue-print arrangements on the one hand and informal spontaneous grouping on the other.

Types of Social Structure

Talcott Parsons has described 4 principal types of social structure. His classifications is based on four social values – universalistic social values, particularistic social values, achieved social values and ascribed social values. Universalistic social values are those which are found almost in every society and are applicable to everybody. Particularistic social values are the features of particular societies and these differ from society to society. When the statuses are achieved on the basis of efforts it means that such societies attach importance to achieved social values. When the statuses are hereditary even the society gives importance to ascribed social statuses.

Universalistic –achievement pattern-This is the combination of the value patterns which sometimes opposed to the values of a social structure built mostly around

kinship, community, class and race. Under this type of social structure, the choice of goal by the individual must be in accord with the universalistic values. His pursuits are defined by universalistic moral norms. Such a system is dynamically developing norms. Such a system is dynamically developing system with an encouragement for initiative. Universalistic ascriptions pattern-under this type of social structure the elements of value orientation are dominated by the elements of ascription. Therefore in such a social structure strong emphasis is laid on the status of the individual rather than on his specific achievements.

The emphasis is on what an individual is rather than on what he has done. Status is ascribed to the group rather than to the individuals. The individual derives his status from his group. In this type of social structure all resources are mobilized in the interest of the collective ideal.

Particularistic-Achievement Pattern-This type combines achievement values with particularism. The primary criterion of valued achievement is found not in universalistic terms such as conformity to a generalized ideal or efficiency but these are focussed on certain points of reference within the relational system itself or are inherent in the situation. The emphasis on

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achievement leads to the conception of a proper pattern of adaptation which is a product of human achievement and which are maintained by continuous efforts. Particularistic-ascriptive pattern- In this type also the social structure is organized around the relational reference points notably those of kinship and local community but it differs from the

particularistic achievement type in as much as the relational values are taken as given and passively adapted to rather than make for an actively organized system. The structure tends to be traditionalistic and emphasis is laid on its stability.

Social Structure and Social Organization

According to Raymond Firth social structure is concerned with the ordered relation of parts to the whole with the arrangement in which the elements of social life are linked together. The abstract social relationships which are displayed in the social reality as a patterned manner and in a regular fashion are concerned about institutional arrangements and relation between social groups. Thus the term social structure means a more permanent and continuous pattern of social reality.

Firth has proposed the concept of social organization in this context which as opposed to social structure is concerned about temporary and changing nature of social reality. Social organization as he explains refers to the systematic ordering of social relations by acts of choice and decision.

It allows individual choices and decisions in response to a situational condition. Individuals choose between alternative modes of behaviour and take decisions as they evaluate them according to their perceptions to the fulfilment of a goal which are set by the group they belong.

Radcliff Brown has distinguished between social structure and social organization. According to him social structure refers to the arrangement of persons. Social organization refers to the arrangement of activities of two or more persons. Examples of social organization are social groups, industrial group, political group etc. All the participants of an organization carry out

activities assigned to them. This arrangement of activities of persons is the characteristic of the organization. Thus an organization is the arrangement of relationship that operates within the activities of an institution.

Social Structure and Role

In a social structure roles are more important than role occupants. Role occupants in turn divide themselves into sub-groups. According to Johnson it will be manifestly untrue to say that all the stability, regularity and recurrence that can be observed in social interaction are due to normative patterning, roles and sub-groups of various types are the parts of social structure to the extent that stability, regularity and recurrence in social interaction are due to the social norms that define roles and obligation of sub-groups. Sub-groups and roles are closely linked with each other because all those who are required to perform certain roles have some duties and obligations towards the group to which they belong. The responsibilities of role occupant are of different types and can be broadly divided into obligatory and permissive. Each social structure has also quasi-structural aspect. In complex society there can be standardised or institutionalized norms. Every rigid social structure is bound to result in social disharmony. In a human society its structure must go on changing.

Important Terms

Social Structure:

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The organized relationships between the basic components of a social system.

Social Needs:

The requirements of society's energy devoted to perpetuate the society are called social needs.

Culture

As Homo sapiens, evolved, several biological characteristics particularly favorable to the development of culture appeared in the species. These included erect posture; a favorable brain structure; stereoscopic vision; the structure of the hand, a flexible shoulder; and year round sexual receptivity on the part of the female. None of these biological characteristics alone, of course, accounts for the development of culture. Even in combination, all they guarantee is that human beings would be the most gifted members of the animal kingdom.

The distinctive human way of life that we call culture did not have a single definite beginning in time any more than human beings suddenly appearing on earth.

Culture evolved slowly just as some anthropoids gradually took on more human form. Unmistakably, tools existed half a million years ago and might be considerably older. If, for convenience, we say that culture is 500,000 years old, it is still difficult day has appeared very recently.

The concept of culture was rigorously defined by E.B. Taylor in 1860s. According to him culture is

the sum total of ideas, beliefs, values, material cultural equipments and non-material aspects

which man makes as a member of society. Taylor's theme that culture is a result of human

collectivity has been accepted by most anthropologists. Tylarian idea can be discerned in a

modern definition of culture - culture is the man-made part of environment (M.J. Herskovits).

From this, it follows that culture and society are separable only at the analytical level: at the

actual existential level, they can be understood as the two sides of the same coin. Culture, on one hand, is an outcome of society and, on the other hand, society is able to survive and perpetuate itself because of the existence of culture. Culture is an ally of man in the sense that it enhances man's adaptability to nature. It is because of the adaptive value of culture that Herskovits states that culture is a screen between man and nature. Culture is an instrument by which man exploits the environment and shapes it accordingly. In showing affection, the Maori rub noses; the Australians rub faces; the Chinese place nose to cheeks; the Westerners kiss; some groups practice spitting on the beloved. Or, consider this; American men are permitted to laugh in public but not to cry; Iroquois men are permitted to do neither in public; Italian men are permitted to do both. Since this is true, physiological factors have little to do with when men laugh and cry and when they do not do either. The variability of the human experience simply cannot be explained by making reference to human biology, or to the climate and geography. Instead, we must consider culture as the fabric of human society. Culture can be conceived as a continuous, cumulative reservoir containing both material and non-material elements that are socially transmitted from generation to generation. Culture is continuous because cultural patterns transcend years, reappearing in successive generations. Culture is cumulative because each generation contributes to the reservoir. An inherent paradox exists within the social heritage where culture tends to be both static and dynamic. Humans, once having internalized culture, attach positive value judgments to it and are

more or less reluctant to change their established ways of life. Through most of recorded history men have apparently considered that change per se is undesirable and that the ideal condition is stability. The prospect of change can seem threatening, yet every human culture is subject to and does experience change. Those who speak of a generation gap portray two generations at odds with each other. According to this view, the parent generation embodied the dynamic dimension. We contend that if, in fact, a generation gap does exist in modern societies, and the differences are of degree and not of substance. Part of the social heritage of almost every modern society is the high value placed on progress. Parents encourage young people to seek progress, and progress is a form of social change. Debates between generations in modern societies are seldom about whether any change should occur. The debates are usually about how such change should occur, how fast it should occur, and which methods should be used for bringing about change.

Cultural Relativism

This is a method whereby different societies or cultures are analyzed objectively without using the values of one culture to judge the worth of another. We cannot possibly understand the actions of other groups if we analyze them in terms of our motives and values.

We must interpret their behavior in the light of their motives, habits and values if we are to understand them. Cultural relativism means that the function and meaning of a trait are relative

to its cultural setting. A trait is neither good nor bad in itself. It is good or bad only with reference to the culture in which it is to function. Fur clothing is good in the Arctic but not in the tropics. In some hunting societies which occasionally face long periods of hunger to be fat is good; it has real survival value and fat people are admired. In our society to be fat is not only unnecessary but is known to be unhealthful and fat people are not admired. The concept of cultural relativism does not mean that all customs are equally valuable, nor does it imply that no customs are harmful. Some patterns of behavior may be injurious everywhere, but even such patterns serve some purpose in the culture and the society will suffer unless a substitute is provided. The central point in cultural relativism is that in a particular cultural setting certain traits are right because they work well in that setting while other traits are wrong because they would clash painfully with parts of that culture.

Cultural Lag

The role played by material inventions, that is, by technology, in social change probably received most emphasis in the work of William F. Ogburn. It was Ogburn, also, who was chiefly responsible for the idea that the rate of invention within society is a function of the size of the existing culture base. He saw the rate of material invention as increasing with the passage of time. Ogburn believed that material and non-material cultures change in different ways. Change in material culture is believed to have a marked directional or progressive character. This is because there are agreed-upon standards of efficiency that are used to evaluate material inventions. To use air-planes, as an example, we keep working to develop planes that will fly,

higher and faster, and carry more payloads on a lower unit cost. Because airplanes can be measured against these standards, inventions in this area appear rapidly and predictably. In the area of non-material culture, on the other hand there often are no such generally accepted standards. Whether one prefers a Hussain, a Picasso, or a Gainsborough, for example, is a matter of taste, and styles of painting fluctuate unevenly. Similarly, in institutions such as government and the economic system there are competing forms of styles, Governments may be dictatorships, oligarchies, republics or democracies. Economic system includes communist, socialist, feudal, and capitalist ones. As far as can be told, there is no regular progression from one form of government or economic system to another. The obvious directional character of change in material culture is lacking in many areas of nonmaterial culture. In addition to the difference in the directional character of change, Ogburn and others believe that material culture tends to change faster than non-material culture. Certainly one of the imperative aspects of modern American life is the tremendous development of technology. Within this century, life has been transformed by invention of the radio, TV, automobiles, airplanes, rockets, transistors, and computers and so on. While this has been happening in material culture, change in government, economic system, family life, education, and religion seems to have been much slower. This difference in rates of cultural change led Ogburn to formulate the concept of culture lag. Material inventions, he believed bring changes that require adjustments in various areas of non-material culture. Invention of the automobile,

for instance, freed young people from direct parental observation, made it possible for them to work at distances from their homes, and, among other things, facilitated crime by making escape easier. Half a century earlier, families still were structured as they were in the era of the family farm when young people were under continuous observation and worked right on the homestead.

Culture lag is defined as the time between the appearance of a new material invention and the making of appropriate adjustments in corresponding area of non-material culture. This time is often long. It was over fifty years, for example, after the typewriter was invented before it was used systematically in offices. Even today, we may have a family system better adapted to a farm economy than to an urban industrial one, and nuclear weapons exist in a diplomatic atmosphere attuned to the nineteenth century. As the discussion implies, the concept of culture lag is associated with the definition of social problems. Scholars envision some balance or adjustment existing between material and non-material cultures. That balance is upset by the appearance of raw material objects. The resulting imbalance is defined as a social problem until non-material culture changes in adjustment to the new technology.

Cultural Values

A culture's **values** are its ideas about what is good, right, fair, and just. Sociologists disagree, however, on how to conceptualize values. Conflict theory focuses on how values differ between groups within a culture, while functionalism focuses on the shared values within a culture. For example, American sociologist **Robert K. Merton** suggested that the most important values in

American society are wealth, success, power, and prestige, but that everyone does not have an equal opportunity to attain these values. Functional sociologist

Talcott Parsons noted that

Americans share the common value of the “American work ethic,” which encourages hard work.

Other sociologists have proposed a common core of American values, including accomplishment,

material success, problem-solving, reliance on science and technology, democracy, patriotism,

charity, freedom, equality and justice, individualism, responsibility, and accountability.

A culture, though, may harbor conflicting values. For instance, the value of material success may

conflict with the value of charity. Or the value of equality may conflict with the value of

individualism. Such contradictions may exist due to an inconsistency between people's actions

and their professed values, which explains why sociologists must carefully distinguish between

what people do and what they say. **Real culture** refers to the values and norms that a society

actually follows, while **ideal culture** refers to the values and norms that a society professes to

believe.