

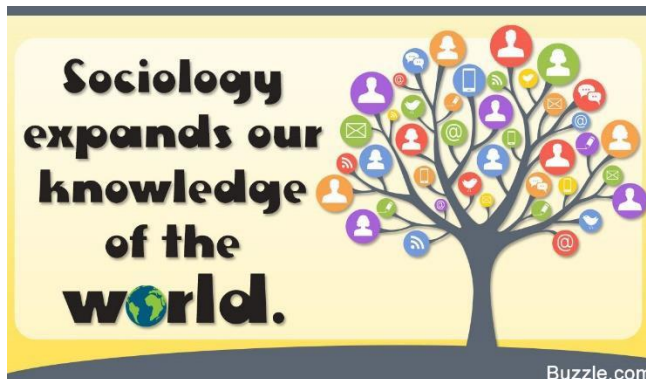
# A Level Sociology

Welcome to the resources to help prepare you for your further study of Sociology A Level at The Heathland School.

Sociology is the study of society, people and their behaviour. It helps us understand why we act the way that we do. You will explore everyday things and view them in a different light.



**STUDYING SOCIOLOGY WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE!**



## The Year 1 covers the topics of:

1. What is sociology and some key themes that you will learn throughout the course (Culture, norms and values, inequality, class, gender and ethnicity)
2. Sociological theory
3. Research methods
4. Family and households
5. Education

In these preparation resources, you will be completing some tasks to provide you with a wider understanding of the topics that you will study with us.

## TASK 1 - What is Sociology?

We will start the course by exploring what actually IS Sociology? It is defined as the 'study of society, people and behaviour' but what does that mean? To help do this, watch these clips and make some notes of why you think it is relevant.

Clip	Notes (Use the statements)	Some statements to help you make
Clip 1 – Watch this 5 minute video about 'What is Sociology' <a href="https://youtu.be/LK5J0-cM-HE">https://youtu.be/LK5J0-cM-HE</a>		<p>Whilst you watch it is useful to analyse, and this can be done through statements such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I noticed...</li> <li>• I have realised...</li> <li>• I was surprised ...</li> <li>• I begin to understand...</li> <li>• I Love the way...</li> <li>• I am not sure about...</li> <li>• <u>A question I have...</u></li> </ul> <p>The last one is very important as you will not always have the answers BUT you can always ASK QUESTIONS!</p>
Clip 2 – Watch this 5 minute video from the London School Of Economics explaining why Sociology is essential from a University perspective. <a href="https://youtu.be/7ZJIFxDavp">https://youtu.be/7ZJIFxDavp</a>		
Clip 3 – Watch this 3 minute clip about gender made by Always called #likeagirl <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dxrPeFKtUwQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dxrPeFKtUwQ</a>		
Clip 4 – Watch this 4 minute clip about privilege and inequality called 'Life of Privilege Explained in a \$100 Race' <a href="https://youtu.be/4K5fbQ1-zps">https://youtu.be/4K5fbQ1-zps</a>		

## TASK 2

### What is a culture?

Sociologists define a culture as those things that are learned and shared by a society or group of people and transmitted from generation to another. Culture includes all the things that society regards as important, such as customs, traditions, language, skills, knowledge, beliefs, norms and values.

(Extract from AQA A Level Sociology Book 1).



To help you understand what a culture is, research a culture of your choice, but NOT British or American. Use this as an opportunity to find out about another country that you know very little about. Record your findings in the table below.

<u>Laws</u>	<u>Dress</u>	<u>Food</u>
<u>Festivals and celebrations</u>	<u>Religion</u>	<u>Language</u>
<u>Sports</u>	<u>Traditions</u>	<u>Family life</u>

### TASK 3

Sociology is a new subject for you with its own language and key terminology. To give you a head start, google these keywords and find a definition.

Key term	Definition
Norms and values	
Social consensus	
Bourgeoisie	
Proletariat	
Capitalism	
Marxism	
Patriarchy	
Feminism	
Postmodernism	
Confluent love	

#### TASK 4

Your next task is designed to challenge you, in this section you will find **TWO** articles that are aimed at A-level students. These articles do use challenging words and may be difficult to understand at first so remember to take your time.

As you read the articles you may wish to make notes and record your findings on the grids below.

#### Exploring the family!

The first article is **Why Marry?** Is on the next page. Produce a spider diagram of the possible reasons why a person will marry. **THEN** in a different colour pen, can you think of reasons why they might choose **NOT** to get married? Add them both in the space below.

List as many reasons why a  
person will choose to marry



# Why marry?

## Understanding marriage in modern Britain

Julia Carter

Sociologists talk routinely today about change in family life, but tradition is also important and it informs the reasons why most of us still get married

### Signposts

This article is relevant to the topics of 'Families and Households' and 'Culture and Identity'. It also provides an example of a small-scale qualitative study.

### Key concepts

marriage, tradition, functions of marriage

In the early 1990s Anthony Giddens proposed that major changes in working life, equal rights and globalisation trends had impacted significantly on the ways in which men and women relate to each other in their personal lives (Giddens 1992). This breakdown in traditional restrictions around courtship arguably led to more 'experimental' intimate ties that could be broken easily and at will: the emphasis being on flexibility, negotiation and contingency.

Others, however, suggest that it is still important to consider the stabilising influence of the 'family'. Carter and Duncan (2018), for example, demonstrate that there is much continuity in family life practices, such as in marriage, women's marital name changing and weddings, and that the notion of 'change' is often overstated in discussions of the family.

### Tradition and family lives

Despite being free to live life differently and explore individual life projects, traditions such as those passed down through the family, and beliefs influenced by friends, media and schooling still play a significant role in influencing family practices. While some people clearly choose unconventional relationships, others are rejecting this notion of family change through choosing

traditional family lives. For example, the proportion of married couple families out of all family types has remained stable over the last 5 years (ONS 2015). Office of National Statistics data from 2017 show that married couples made up 12.9 million of the 19 million families in the UK.

This article offers a critique of the notion of family change by drawing attention to the importance of tradition in informing marriage decisions. Tradition is an important sociological concept and here it will be the focus in understanding how decisions about marriage are made. I will make particular reference to:

- marital security
- aspiring to traditional family life
- traditional fantasies

Boxes 1 and 2 outline the methodology and sampling we used to investigate these themes (Carter and Duncan 2017).

### Marriage and security

Many of the women we interviewed discussed pragmatic reasons for marriage, including: providing a clear line of ancestry (assuming monogamy), financial co-dependence and ensuring legal status of the relationship. Marriage, therefore, continues to provide certain functions: reproductive, financial and legal.

Moreover, marriage offered more security than other forms of relationships, pointing to its continued precedence over cohabitation and alternative relationships. Hermione (29, married), for example, said that being married was 'a more secure way of being with [her husband]'. The inference being that marriage is more secure than 'just' cohabitation.

### Security for future children

Participants also emphasised the importance of marital security for future children. Of the 23 women interviewed, 15 said that

they would rather be married before having children. Eleanor (26, cohabiting), for example, said:

I think we kind of thought if we were going to have children we should get married before we had children because it provides a bit more stability and security.

This is despite just 37% agreeing in a recent national survey that those who want children ought to marry (NatCen 2016). It is not that long ago that women who gave birth outside of a marriage or women who had many sexual encounters were outcasts from society. While moral judgements in other areas appear to be in sharp decline (regarding same-sex relationships, for example), the importance of marriage for children remains evident.

This view has also been reinforced by recent government policy which has supported marriage through the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 and through the promotion of the 'Marriage Allowance' (a small tax break for married couples).

### Financial and legal security

Marriage also means financial and legal security. Michelle (29, cohabiting), for example, commented:

You would have that security that if you lost your job that that person would support you while you looked for another job.

Eva (23, single) linked the financial security of marriage to legal safeguards:

I'd like the security of it. I'd like to know, legally as well, knowing that our money is sort of all together in one place if he dies or something um [...] I'd be, sort of, in the eyes of the law part of his life sort of financially.

### Box 1

#### Methods and sampling

Our small-scale qualitative study was designed to understand the meaning of marriage for young women in Britain. An intensive approach was adopted that suits such interpretative aims rather than the search for broad trends or patterns. Rather than making any claims to generalisation, therefore, this paper instead presents themes that emerged from the data. Only women between 19 and 30 years old were recruited in order to reflect those who best have the means and capacity to forge the way in 'experiments' in personal life (Giddens 1992).

The sample of 23 women was recruited through convenience sampling methods, including leafleting and snowballing. I used semi-structured interviews to gather data and asked participants questions about their relationship history, aspirations and experiences. These topics were covered in each interview to ensure consistency, but conversations were free-flowing, allowing participants to direct the interview.

### Box 2 Recruiting the sample: sexuality and social class

Beyond age and gender, no other restrictions were placed on the selection of the sample (such as sexuality, relationship status), and respondents ranged in relationship status from single to married. Class was not openly discussed with participants, but women were recruited from a range of backgrounds stratifying through education level.

The resulting sample is varied, with some participants being the first in their family to access higher education and others following parents into postgraduate study. All respondents were born and raised in the UK.

One participant identified as bisexual, and 22 as heterosexual. Some 22 respondents were white and one was mixed race, perhaps reflecting the ethnic composition of the locations of recruitment (a wealthy city in the northeast and a provincial area in the southwest of England). Interviews were transcribed and coded thematically.



Security for future children is seen as important



The reliance seen here on stability, certainty and legal commitment was striking. The decision to marry is clearly based, at least partly, on notions of obligation (to partners and children), and legal and financial security. In this way, marriage continues to operate as a legitimating institution that sanctions sexual relationships, financial co-dependence and child bearing.

#### Aspiring to traditional family life

While cohabitation and 'living apart together' relationships (LAT) are now more acceptable than in the past, they are still not as privileged as marriage, which remains the dominant family type (living alone and lone-parent families are even more marginalised). This appeal of the 'traditional' family was reflected in many participants' narratives. Zoe (19, single) commented,

I think I'd rather see like more old-fashioned like families and they all sit down and have their tea at the same time [...] I'd rather it be more acceptable to be a normal family.

Zoe at once normalises marriage while also placing it outside the norm within

society now ('I'd rather see...'). This illustrates an appeal to 'traditional' family life alongside an assumption that it no longer exists. This is a result of the contradiction between notions of family change (illustrated by declining marriage rates, growth in rates of childbirth outside of marriage, legalisation of same-sex marriage) and the continuation of important family rituals and traditions.

#### A stepping-stone in life

One important remaining family ritual is the order of relationship formation. Mandy (30, married) provides an example:

There still seems to be quite a traditional pattern of: we'll meet, we'll settle down, we'll have an engagement, have a wedding, have a year or so, and then have children.

Although most overt forms of pressure to marry are now invisible, this view of marriage as a stepping-stone in life, one that is actively desired, remains widely endorsed. Marriage is a practice that is fundamental to the historical identity of the UK and Western culture, which is why marriage itself and the ritual of a particular relationship order

remains a strong imperative. Those who do not marry risk becoming morally excluded, since such activities distinguish between insiders and outsiders in a culture.

#### Cohabitation

One notable extension of the 'traditional' family is the inclusion of non-married cohabitation in the order of relationship progression. Almost all participants in this cohort expected to live with their future husband before marrying. This progression is assumed to be traditional and the 'correct' way to live life, yet cohabitation prior to marriage is a break from recent tradition. In less than half a century, this relationship process, now taken-for-granted, has changed from being almost taboo to being the norm.

#### The marriage fantasy

Ruth (27, LAT) saw marriage and having a family as her 'life's ambition'. She said:

I want to have a husband and I want to have kids and I want to be the Mum and, you know, do the shopping and all the rest of it. And that's...that's always been a dream, that's always been a bit of a fantasy.

Ruth idealises traditional family life and a gendered division of labour, perhaps as a means of escaping from the daily grind. The image of this exact fantasy — of the married mother and father with children — is common in popular culture, media and politics in the UK. Indeed, it is a so-called 'fairy-tale' outcome, which can often be found at the end of many films and TV shows.

#### The Disney ending

Disney films are synonymous with stories that have a 'happily ever after' ending; sugar-coating the original, often sinister, fairy tales to produce a modern-day romantic interpretation (see, for example, the original Hans Christian Andersen story of 'The Little Mermaid').

The format of the standard fairy tale is that of a female searching for her one and only true love, falling in love, overcoming all obstacles and getting married. (This is perhaps changing. The hugely popular Disney film *Frozen*, with heroic and fearless Princess Anna of Arendelle as its star, represents a deviation from the traditional fairy-tale ending.)

This taken-for-granted fairy-tale story naturalises marriage as the culmination of the saga, and it is reflected in a number of participants' discussions about marriage. Grace said she was influenced by 'all the fairy tales and meeting Prince Charming and living happily ever after'. And Amy commented:

People are still brought up with, like, Disney films and looking in the media and stuff, and there is still marriage and it's the most brilliant day of your life.

Rebecca (24, LAT) who, from the start, positioned herself as unlikely to marry, said:

I think most of my friends, and maybe deep down [I], have got this little fantasy in their head, they'll just meet Mr Right [he'll] sweep them off their feet you'll get married and live happily ever after.

This is such a powerful story that even reluctant Rebecca could not resist the fairy-tale imagery. This discourse is not only promoted through fairy tales and Disney films, of course, but it is also represented in

countless romantic (comedy) films. The daily grind of married life need not be shown, perhaps contributing to young people's high expectations of marriage.

In this way, a language of love, romance and the specialness of monogamous, and preferably married couple relationships is created, which also hides the far more mundane, pragmatic and un-romantic reasons to marry. By using romantic language and fairy-tale comparisons, family life and marriage become fantasy — they become extra-ordinary.

#### Conclusion

Marriage is desired because it is assumed, traditional, natural and 'normal'; not to marry is undesirable and abnormal, and socially unacceptable in a culture of individuals free to 'choose to do so'. This is the paradox inherent in the culture of marriage.

Tradition is used as a legitimating ideology for the continuing practice of marriage — it justifies the continued appeal of marriage to young women in a context of declining marriage rates. Whether appealing to tradition or deciding to reject it, what is

Living together before marriage is a new, but established, cultural norm







For many participants, the 'fairy-tale' of married life was a powerful force

clear is that notions of tradition were still incredibly influential in these participants' behaviours and present in their language of relationships.

The accounts presented here reflect little of the processes associated with family change, with appeals to security and stability, and claims to morally appropriate 'normal' families alongside discussions of 'the fairy-tale ending'.

It cannot be denied that there is more opportunity now for couples to create the

relationship that suits them. However, this research suggests that despite having the opportunity to experience alternative relationships, this is not that desirable. In fact, relationship decisions are still very often bound by considerations of tradition, family, obligation and convention.

Tradition can even be used to create a romantic aura around an institution that often seems cynical, commercialised and pragmatic. Since pragmatism is not romantic, notions such as legal protection and

financial security are accompanied here by far more romanticised reasons to marry.

### Summary



The findings from this research show that while there are many pragmatic reasons for young women to marry, there also exist romantic 'fantasies' about marriage and married life. A strong theme to emerge is the importance of tradition, despite the many changes that have occurred in marriage and family life.

### References and further reading



- Carter, J. and Duncan, S. (2017) 'Weddings paradoxes: individualised conformity and the "perfect" day', *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 65, No. 1, pp. 3–20.
- Carter, J. and Duncan, S. (2018) *Reinventing Couples: tradition, agency and bricolage*, Palgrave.
- Giddens, A. (1992) *The Transformation of Intimacy*, Polity Press.
- Lewis, J. (2001) *The End of Marriage?* Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.
- NatCen (9 May 2016) 'Is Britain getting a divorce from marriage?', NatCen Social Research Press Release. Available at: [www.tinyurl.com/y84jh9xq](http://www.tinyurl.com/y84jh9xq).
- ONS (2015) *Families and Households 2013*. Reference tables.

Julia Carter is a senior lecturer in sociology at the University of the West of England. Her research interests include marriage and relationships, families and personal life, and gender, sexuality and popular culture. She is particularly interested in intimate relationships and the roles these play in an ever-changing social context.



## Inequality in school!

The second article is Educational Disadvantage. Please read the article on the next page and answer the question below.

<p>1. What do the following stand for?</p> <p>FSM</p> <p>ESCS</p> <p>PISA</p>	<p>5. Read the section on Performance and Equality.</p> <p>The aim of school is to achieve <u>high performance</u> – this means:</p> <p>AND <u>greater equality</u> – this means:</p>
<p>2. How is the UK ranked in the following:</p> <p>In maths            _____ / 44</p> <p>In reading         _____ / 44</p>	<p>6. Which countries achieve BOTH of the above?</p> <p>E _____; C _____;</p> <p>D _____; H _____ K _____;</p> <p>J _____.</p>
<p>3. Do students on FSM do better on average or worse (in their educational achievement). Circle the correct answer.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Better                      Worse</p>	<p>7. What are the two aspects that the OECD define as EQUITY?</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p>
<p>4. Why do YOU think that might be? This will need further thinking beyond the article. Note your ideas below:</p>	<p>8. Why does the English education system not achieve these principles. The first one is given for you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• School selection (e.g. Grammar school can select their students).</li></ul>

# Educational disadvantage

How does England compare with other developed nations?



In England, eligibility for free school meals is the indicator of 'disadvantaged pupils'

In a report published in April 2018 by the Education Policy Institute, in conjunction with UCL Institute of Education, the authors looked at the performance of disadvantaged pupils in England and the gap between such pupils and their peers. These measures were then compared to those in other developed countries around the world.

How was the term 'disadvantaged pupils' defined? For pupils in England, it referred to those eligible for Free School Meals (FSM). This definition was not applicable to other countries, so disadvantaged pupils elsewhere were identified using the Economic, Social and Cultural Status index (ESCS). This was developed for the PISA studies (Programme for International Student Assessment) and is used in other international comparisons of this type.

## Performance in maths

The average GCSE maths grade in England for disadvantaged pupils is 3.8, which, under the new GCSE recording scheme is lower than a 'pass'. This put England as 25th out of the 44 nations in the study. The gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in England is equivalent to one whole GCSE grade, which put England as 27th out of 44 in terms of the socioeconomic gap. See Figure 1.

## Performance in reading

Performance in reading was slightly better than that for maths. FSM pupils in England scored an average GCSE grade of 4, which put England as 17th out of 44. The leading Western nations — Canada, Finland, Estonia, Norway and the Republic of Ireland — all did better than England, with average scores of

4.2/4.3. The gap between FSM pupils and their peers was around three-quarters of a GCSE grade, which was about average for the countries surveyed. However, Wales and Northern Ireland both performed better than England in this regard, with a gap of about two-thirds of a GCSE grade.

## Further evidence

A report from the Sutton Trust published in July 2018 compared the performance of disadvantaged pupils with that of their more affluent peers. Using data from the National Pupil Database, it looked at the performance of both groups over a period of 3 years, from 2014 to 2016. It found that disadvantaged pupils were three times less likely to be in the top 10% for English and maths at the end of primary school.



A UK grammar school. The OECD report suggests that selective schools are a barrier to inclusion and fairness

When these disadvantaged pupils went to secondary school, they fell even further behind. While 72% of non-disadvantaged pupils got at least five A\* to A grades at GCSE, only 52% of disadvantaged pupils did so. The report notes that if disadvantaged pupils performed as well as their non-disadvantaged peers, an additional 1,000 pupils each year would achieve at least five A\* to A grades (or equivalent) at GCSE.

## Performance and equality

The aim of education should be to achieve high performance and greater equality between pupils from different social backgrounds. It is sometimes argued that you can't have both — it has to be one or the other. However, countries such as Estonia, Canada,

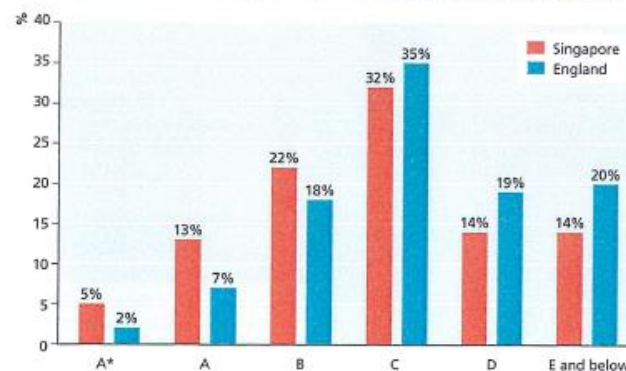
Denmark, Hong Kong and Japan demonstrate that it is possible to achieve both. The findings from the EPI report support other evidence from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) that 'high performance and greater equity in educational opportunities and outcomes are not mutually exclusive'.

## Implications for educational policy

What are some of the key differences between England and its education system and those of high-performing and high equity countries?

The OECD definition of 'equity' has two aspects:

- 1 Inclusion, which means that everybody reaches at least a basic minimum level of skills.



Source: Educational Policy Institute

Figure 1 The estimated GCSE mathematics grade for FSM pupils in England and Singapore

## References

- Jerrim, J., Greany, T. and Perera, N. (April 2018) 'Educational disadvantage: how does England compare?', Educational Policy Institute. Available at: [www.tinyurl.com/y7q9fv5m](http://www.tinyurl.com/y7q9fv5m).
- Montacute, R. (2018) 'Potential for success', Sutton Trust. Available at: [www.tinyurl.com/y87sptnr](http://www.tinyurl.com/y87sptnr).
- OECD (2012) 'Equity and quality in education: supporting disadvantaged students and schools', OECD Publishing. Available at: [www.tinyurl.com/y87sptnr](http://www.tinyurl.com/y87sptnr).

- 2 Fairness, which means that attributes such as gender, ethnic origin and family background are not obstacles to fulfilling educational potential.

Certain elements of the English education system mitigate against these two principles. In short, the OECD suggests that in order to increase both inclusion and fairness, and thereby improve educational outcomes, policies such as selection (for example grammar schools), segregation (different types of school with very different pupil characteristics), and features within schools such as streaming and setting, should be eliminated or limited.

It is ironic that, given this evidence, such policies seem to be increasing rather than disappearing in England.

Another significant feature identified was the importance of the attraction, support and retention of high-quality teachers. In the PISA 2015 study, 45% of headteachers in England reported that teacher shortages were the greatest barrier to improving educational outcomes. This is even more of a problem for schools in disadvantaged areas.

## Conclusion

Once again, evidence is forthcoming of the negative impact of many educational policies in England. The outcomes of these are felt not only by the individuals concerned and their families, but in society as a whole. Evidence from other countries shows that it is possible to have a system which is fair and which also allows pupils from all backgrounds to achieve their potential.

Joan Garrod is a managing editor of Sociology Review.

## BONUS TASK



Sociology is a popular subject to study at degree level. How many **FAMOUS** people can you find who have a degree in Sociology?

Use google to help you