# "A" Level Sociology

# Teaching Notes
# for Students

## Culture and Identity
### 6. Sources of Identity

**Identity.**

1. In this section we will be exploring in more detail the various ways that conceptions about individual and group identities are **socially constructed**. That is, created against a social background that tries to make social interaction meaningful, understandable and ordered by *categorising* people in various ways.

2. As we have seen, sociologists are interested in identifying and explaining the nature of identity as a social phenomenon. That is, we are interested in the relationship between *social categories* such as *age and gender* and how these affect people's *perception* of both themselves and their relationship to others.

- In this respect we are particularly interested in the various ways that different cultures develop and use biological categories (age, sex, ethnicity and so forth) and physical categories (occupation, region and so forth) as props around which individual and group identities are built. In the main, therefore, we will be looking at five basic sources of identity, namely:

> *Gender.*
> *Social class.*
> *Age.*
> *Region* and
> *Ethnicity*.

3. These are not the only sources of identity, nor do they necessarily appear in all known societies, but they are a significant *selection* of the *main sources of identity* in modern societies such as our own. In addition, one of the reasons for looking at identity is to explore the idea of its social construction and we can do this most clearly by using examples that will be relatively familiar from your own experiences.

4. I've stressed the idea that "who we are" is socially constructed because this allows us to account for the fact that how we see ourselves / how others see us is not fixed and unchanging (*socially static*). On the contrary, sociologists believe that identity is a *dynamic* feature of social life. That is, it is something that is constantly evolving and changing. For some people, identity can change rapidly and dramatically, of course, but for most of us our identities evolve slowly and imperceptibly.

- This is perhaps one reason as to why we tend to think of our personality as being relatively fixed and unchanging, but we only have to compare our behaviour and attitudes over time to appreciate just how much we do change.

For example, think back to the time when you were a child - perhaps around five or six years old. Think about your relationships with others around you, the kinds of things you believed and the ways you behaved.

Now think about yourself now. How different are you to the person you once were?

**Explaining Identity.**

1. If you keep in mind the categories identified above, the first thing you should note is that they are all examples of *labels*. That is, they are names that our society gives to a variety of different social categories. As we will see in a moment, one of the most significant things about each of these *labels* is that they are associated with a set of *social characteristics* that tell us something about the *meaning* of each *category*.

- On a very basic level, for example, the category of *age* tells us that in our society we categorise people on the basis of time.

- On another level, however, we can see that if people bother to develop such categories they must have a meaning for them (since everything that people do has both purpose and meaning). In turn, this involves the idea that different age groups are considered to have different (biological and social) characteristics.

- Finally, because people create meanings, it follows that the characteristics associated with a category such as age are not always the same in a society over time, nor between different societies.

  - Thus, although people have always been born, grown old and eventually died (a biological fact) there are big social differences in the way people have understood the various sub-divisions of biological time. For example:

- Philip Aries ("Centuries of Childhood", 1962), argues that "youth" (for example, the period 13 -18) is a relatively modern concept (by which he means it has only developed over the past 200 - 300 years in Western societies). Before this, he argues, people simply went from being children ("little adults") to "adults".

- Alternatively, the way that the elderly are viewed and treated differs from society to society. In Sierra Leone, for example, the old are considered to have very high status because, as their life nears its biological end, they are considered to be "closer to God". Additionally, elderly people who, in our terms, start to become senile, are held in even greater esteem because their behaviour is interpreted as being indicative of their soul leaving their body and preparing to enter the next world.

2. The kinds of social categories noted above exist because they represent attempts to understand and explain the *differences* that exist between people. For example, the category gender relates to observed biological differences (males and females, for example).

- This gives us an initial clue to the way identities are formed, since they involve attempts to construct explanations for observed factual (or *empirical* - factual information we collect through observation) differences.

3. To summarise these ideas, therefore, we can note that:

a. Observed differences between people need to be explained.

b. These differences are named (*labelled*) and *categorised*. Thus, people who *share* certain similarities (such as being biologically female) are placed in a particular social category.

c. Each category of person is given or develops certain general *characteristics* that broadly define the category.

d. These characteristics become general *expectations* about how to be a person of that type (for example, expectations about how to be a woman, a child, a man, etc.).

e. On the basis of these different expectations people hold about different categories of person, the people placed in these categories have different *experiences* in society. A man, for example, has different experiences to a woman; a child has different experiences to an adult and so forth.

4. The easiest way to visualise the idea of different social categories is to think in terms of *social roles*. Each *role* that we play has:

*a. Observed differences*: The role of student is different to the role of student.

*b. A name / label that categorises the people playing a particular role*: A role involves people sharing a common belief about how to play the role and so forth.

*c. General characteristics*: These relate to norms of behaviour when playing a particular role. There are for, example, certain norms relating to how it is appropriate to play the role of female, male, child and so forth.

*d. Expectations*: When others relate to you in terms of a particular role, they have expectations about how you should behave (values and norms). Similarly, when you play a role you internalise various norms (the expectations others have of you) in order to try to play your role in an appropriate manner.

*e. Experiences*: As you play various roles you find that people relate to you in different ways, based on the expectations they have about the role you are playing. These expectations are like a hidden force acting upon you and they affect your behaviour in the sense that:

- People are trying to make you conform to certain ideas they have about appropriate role behaviour.

- People will try to punish you if you deviate from the expectations they hold.

4. Thus, the characteristics people in different societies assign to the type of categories we have noted are important because they represent general rules of expected behaviour (in sociological terms, the ***normative expectations*** associated with ***social roles***).

- That is, the various ways people are expected to behave in terms of the social roles they have ***achieved***, such as teacher, student, etc. or been given (***ascribed***), such as male, female, Northerner, etc.

5. In this respect, it is possible to see how the ***roles*** we play are an integral part of our social identity, since they represent ways people expect us to behave. When this happens, we start to define "who we are" in terms of the general characteristics associated with the roles were have chosen or are forced to play. It is through role play that we:

> - Learn how people see us and expect us to behave.
>
> - Project an image of ourselves to others.
>
> - Assume different levels of ***social status***.
>
> - Exercise different levels of ***power***.

6. As we will see, the concepts of ***social status*** (loosely defined as the level of respect that people give to us) and ***power*** (loosely defined as the ability to make others do things, regardless of whether or not they want to do them) are very important in relation to the development and maintenance of our social identity.

7. Finally, we need to be aware that at different stages in the ***biological life-cycle***, different aspects of our identity achieve more prominence in our lives.

- For example, when we are young, gender and age are likely to be the most prominent aspects of our identity, whereas when we are older social class may assume more importance.

- Overall, however, it is important to keep in mind the idea that our identity is created out of a ***combination*** of different aspects (gender, age, ethnicity, class and so forth), since it is unlikely that we either define ourselves or are defined by others totally in terms of one or other of these aspects (although this does raise the related question of stereotyping which we will discuss at a later point).

8. What we can do next, therefore, is to look in more detail at various aspects of our social identity, beginning (for no particular reason), with gender.

**a. Gender.**

1. *Gender* is defined in terms of the particular *cultural characteristics* that people give to different biological sexes. In our society, for example, we recognise only two sexes (male and female) defined by the physical differences between the two.

- Although some societies recognise a third sex (hermaphrodites - people born with various combinations of male and female sexual organs) which is a combination of male and female, for our purpose here it is enough that we simply recognise biological differences as the basis of sex labelling.

2. **Robert Stoller**, for example, argues that if the proper names for *biological* differences in our society are "*male*" and "*female*", *gender* differences are represented by *labels* such as "*masculine*" and "*feminine*". In effect, gender refers to the various ways that cultures confer (or *ascribe*) all kinds of behavioural differences to biological males and females.

3. At the moment of birth, therefore, perhaps the first conscious *label* applied to human infants is that of *sex*, followed closely and intimately by that of *gender*. These labels are significant because they will be used to tell people such things as:

> - How to raise a child appropriately in terms of its gender.
> - The types of behaviour that a culture expects from different genders.
> - The types of roles different genders will be expected to fulfil.

4. In this respect, gender is a very significant source of identity in our society, mainly because of the social characteristics we give to children of different genders. If we have different perceptions of people based around, in part, their gender, then this will clearly:

> a. Affect the various ways that we behave towards them.
> b. Affect the way they see themselves through our behaviour.

5. In basic terms, what we are referring to here are the *rules* that apparently govern (or *structure* if you prefer) the *roles* that we play in life.

- Thus, to be male or female in our society means conforming to various *cultural rules* and expectations around what it means to be male or female. The assumption here, for the moment, is that a society develops certain norms about masculinity and femininity that people then try to socialise into us.

6. The first thing we need to do, therefore, is to identify the rules of gender in our society. When we have done this we can then think about how and why these rules develop, are maintained and can be changed.

**Gender Identities**.

1. As should be apparent, when thinking about any form of social identity we are talking about the way we see ourselves and the way others see us. As I have suggested throughout this section, these are not separate features of social life but rather they are wholly interdependent.

2. In this respect we can look generally at various types of gender expectations (or gender appropriate norms) in a variety of ways. **Farley** ("Sociology", 1990) for example, is a useful starting point when he notes that:

> "Different and unequal sex roles have long been a part of Western culture. In most Western societies, social positions involving leadership, power, decision making and interacting with the larger world have traditionally gone to men. Positions centring around dependency, family concerns, child care and self-adornment have traditionally gone to women. These unequal sex roles mean that men and women are expected to behave differently in a number of situations".

3. Aspects of *male roles*, reflecting the kinds of *assumptions* we make about how men should behave, include:

- Leadership,
- Taking control of situations,
- Making decisions and being
- Active, worldly, unemotional and aggressive.

- In addition, men are not supposed to be particularly emotional (crying, for example, is generally not considered a permissible male action - except perhaps in certain clearly-defined situations). Men are allowed, by and large, to be blunt, loud, sloppy in their behaviour and dress. In their sexual relationships, men are expected to openly take the initiative and they are allowed much greater scope in their sexuality (sexual promiscuity).

4. Aspects of *female roles* on the other hand, again reflecting the kinds of assumptions we make about how men should behave, include:

- Physical dependency (especially during pregnancy),
- Emotional behaviour,
- Lack of control,
- Passive, motherly and family-orientated.

- In addition, women are encouraged to take more care with their appearance (how they dress, use of make-up and so forth. Femininity involves caring for others, especially children, and this is related to one of the primary roles associated with women in most Western societies, namely motherhood.

5. There are, of course, many other aspects of gender identity that we could note, but the important thing for our current purpose is the idea that gender identity involves (or even rests on) the belief that you have things in common with others - in this case, your biology and particular ways of seeing and behaving in the social world.

• Conversely, in the case of gender identity we are perhaps more usually aware of having a particular identity when we look at opposite identities. That is, when we mix with people of the opposite sex, although clearly we do behave in ways, with our own gender, that reinforce gender norms, experiences and beliefs ("male bonding" being a particularly recent rationalisation for men behaving badly).

**b. Age.**

1. As we have seen, the concept of age is rooted in *biological development*. In this respect we clearly all pass through various phases of physical development, although once again this fact is probably less important to sociologists than the various norms of behaviour that are associated with age / physical development.

2. As with the concept of gender, *age group* has clear *cultural connotations* with regard to identity. That is, people are *socialised* into *normative associations* between age and behaviour. In our society, for example, we can identity four very broad cultural groupings based around age, namely:

> • *Childhood,*
> • *Youth,*
> • *Adulthood* and
> • *Old Age.*

3. Each of these groups reflect certain *cultural assumptions* about how it is appropriate / inappropriate for people of a certain age to behave. In many ways these assumptions about behaviour are related to things like *lifestyle* and people are generally encouraged to identify themselves with different kinds of behaviour based around their biological age. For example:

*Children*: During this phase, a child is encouraged to see themselves as largely dependent on adults. Much of their behaviour is closely controlled and little independent behaviour is seen as possible or desirable.

*Youth*: This is a period between childhood and adulthood where the young person (teenager?) is being prepared for full acceptance into adulthood. Young people are increasingly given independence from adults during this period, although much of their behaviour is still fairly tightly controlled (sexual activity, for example, is frequently encouraged or discouraged on the basis of gender).

- Some cultures, (Jews for example), have clear *rites of passage* relating to the formal passing from childhood into adulthood (the Bar Mitzvah, for boys and the Bat Mitzvah for girls, for example). In Britain, we tend to mark the passage from childhood to adulthood at age 18 by symbolically giving the new adult "the key to the door".

*Adults*: Full adulthood brings with it full legal rights and independence as an individual in our society. It also brings with it a range of responsibilities, depending on the choices that people make (family responsibilities, work commitments, etc.).

- In many ways this is probably the least distinctive and most general of the age groupings in our society and it is usual to sub-divide this group into a variety of age-based categories. For example, one relatively modern category is "*thirty-somethings*" to denote relatively young, socially-successful, individuals.

*Old Age*: In our society, one of the most important rites of passage is that undergone between adulthood and old age. The most frequent rite is official retirement from work which has the effect of literally and symbolically marking-off the elderly as different from the rest of society.

4. Each of the above cultural groups confer a sense of identity on people; that is, a sense of belonging to a specific grouping with its own *values, norms* and *forms of behaviour*.

- Of the four I've noted, *youth* and *old age* are probably the most individually meaningful to people as sources of identity, mainly because children are probably too young to appreciate the significance of their age group as a source of identity and adulthood is too wide a category for this purpose (adults may see themselves as having very little in common in terms of age, for example).

- Having said this, adulthood as a source of identity does assume significance for people in terms of its relationship to these other categories (adults, for example, may see themselves as having more status and power than teenagers).

5. This leads us to a second interpretation of the relationship between age and identity in terms of the concept of sub-culture. Youth and the elderly are much more likely to think of themselves in sub-cultural terms - as an identifiable social grouping where people have important things in common that they do not share with other groups.

- Youth sub-cultures, for example, frequently and periodically arise in Western society. These tend to be based around fairly unique lifestyles involving symbolic forms of dissent (music, dress, attitudes, behaviour and so forth). Most people will be familiar with such sub-cultural styles as skinheads, punks, ravers and so forth. The wide variety of different youth sub-cultures and styles is considered in more detail in other parts of the course (in relation to *Deviance*).

**c. Region.**

1. *Region* (or *geographic location*) is a further example of the way we use our perception of physical objects (in this case, places where we were born or now live) as a means of constructing a sense of identity (both personal and group). Initially we can focus on two main aspects of region:

> a. The concepts of *Nation* and *nationality* and
> b. The idea of *regional variations* within different Nations.

2. The concept of a *Nation* (and, as a consequence, the concept of nationality) relates, *geographically*, to the idea of dividing the world into various States (hence the concept of a Nation-state). For our purposes, a State is simply an area of land that is administered by some form of national government. Nation states are usually clearly defined in terms of geographic boundaries (England, France, China and so forth).

3. Sociologically, however, Nation-states are also what *Anderson* ("Imagined Communities", 1983) has termed an "*imagined community*". That is, the people who are born and live within certain geographic boundaries have a sense of belonging to or being a part of a particular Nation. That is, people imagine themselves (for a number of reasons) to have a specific *nationality*.

- As you may be aware, the ideas of nationality (related to concepts of *patriotism* and *national identity*) have been - and continue to be - powerfully emotive cultural forms in modern societies. In this respect, we need to note that concepts of nationality and race are invariably talked about in the same breath, since for many people to two ideas are *synonymous* (that is, they mean the same thing).

4. As you may also be aware, sociologists are generally wary of discussing concepts of nationality and race as if they are the same thing, since both are seen to be social constructs. That is, they are debatable (or *contested*) ideas around which certain social characteristics are developed.

- You might, for example, like to think about the way people talk about "Englishness" or "the British way of life" as if there is some general form of agreement about what these things might be.

- In addition, one of the major political controversies of the moment is the relationship between Britain and the *European Community (EC)*. In basic terms, the argument revolves around the idea that by joining with countries such as France, Germany, Spain and so forth we are in danger of "losing our national identity". That is, we will gradually lose our identity as "Britons" and, instead, become simply "Europeans".

5. When we start to think sociologically about this type of current controversy, we find that it highlights some of the difficulties we face when thinking about concepts like nationality. For example, it forces us to confront questions such as:

> What is a "English way of life" (culture)?
>
> How does this culture differ from that of other cultures?
>
> Is there one way of life or many possible ways of life in our Nation-state?
>
> Is being English, Welsh, Scottish or Irish different to being British - and in what ways?
>
> Is the concept of "being English" something that is fixed (something we are born being) or does it change over time (something we achieve)?

- Although we may not think about these ideas too much in our everyday lives, these types of question are academically significant because they force us to think about and define ideas that are all too easy to take for granted.

6. I noted earlier the idea of nationality as an ***imagined community*** and this is significant because it illustrates the way that various national characteristics - and by extension, national identity - are developed around the idea of physical region. It is, for example, reasonably clear that when people talk about "being English" or "being French" they are saying that each nationality can be uniquely defined in terms of various social (and perhaps biological) characteristics. This idea cuts two ways:

> - Firstly, by defining myself as English I may imagine myself to have certain characteristics associated with this nationality.
>
> - Secondly, however, people of other nationalities may have very different perceptions of "The English" that may be largely unrecognisable to me.

7. In significant respects, therefore, ***national identity*** is something that is created in relation to perceived differences with other nationalities. That is, I define my sense of "being English" against my sense of what I believe "being Scottish" or "being French" means. Thus, a sense of nationality may involve less an understanding of what it actually means to be English and more what it means to be some other nationality. That is, my sense of national identity evolves more from what I am not (Welsh, French, American and so forth) than from what I actually am.

- In this respect, we are starting to get into the idea of national (cultural) ***stereotypes***. That is, the idea that I can define myself as having a certain national identity - a sense of belonging to a specific national group - by identifying the basic characteristics of other nationalities.

8. We also need to note a further dimension of nationality since it also involves idea of claim to *loyalty* (to a country, to a people and so forth). Thus, by identifying myself as being of a particular nationality I am, in effect, saying that I have something in common with one group of people. When I start to think in these terms it is evident that these people can be considered to have some sort of claim to my loyalty.

- The most obvious example here might be wars, where people of one proclaimed nationality fight against people of another proclaimed nationality. Fighting for one's country, therefore, is a powerful expression of identity.

9. Turning briefly to the second aspect of region noted above (the idea of *regional variations* within different Nations), it is clear that within a particular nationality people can develop a more specific and personal sense of regional identity. That is, the idea that being born and raised within a particular geographic area within a Nation-state also has some significance for our sense of identity. This is because *regional cultural variations* (dress, accent, language-use and the like) create social characteristics that can be used to impose or develop a sense of local identity.

- Obvious examples form our society here might things like:

  > Northerner,
  > Southerner,
  > Essex Man,
  > Cornish identity and so forth.

- Each of these *labels* has a set of more or less identifiable social characteristics that could be explored in more detail if we had the time or inclination.

**d. Ethnicity.**

1. There tends, in everyday language, to be some confusion over the use of the terms *ethnicity* and "*race*" and we need, initially, to resolve any possible sociological confusion.

- The term "*race*" refers to the idea that human beings can be classified in different ways on the basis of various supposed *racial types* - European, Nordic, Aborigine, African or whatever. At various times this idea has been popular in both the biological sciences and everyday language, but there seems to be little or no genetic evidence to support the idea that there is sufficient genetic variation between human beings to support the idea that there are definite racial types.

- A major problem with this type of usage is not simply the question of whether or not distinctive racial types actually exist, but rather that the concept of race is frequently used to justify the alleged superiority / inferiority of one "race" over another.

2. Sociologists recognise that the term "race" is frequently used in everyday language even though its academic use (especially in the biological sciences where it was once popular) is increasingly rare.

- Thus, whenever the term "race" is used it should always be qualified by the use of "quotation marks" to denote that although we recognise its everyday use, we do not necessarily agree with its everyday meaning.

3. Of more use to us is the concept of *ethnicity*, which basically means a recognition that different people develop different forms of *culture*. Thus, whereas "race" has frequently been used to denote supposed biological / genetic differences between human beings (in the past people have talked about human beings being divided into distinctive racial groupings - usually based around things such as skin colour), ethnicity is now more often used to denote *cultural differences* between different peoples.

4. One advantage of the concept of ethnicity - aside from the fact that we can talk about cultural differences free from the stigma of doctrines relating to "racial superiority" - is that it forces us to focus on the different ways of life that human beings develop. In addition, we can also focus on the concept of ethnicity in terms of *cultural identities*.

5. Although this is not the place to develop theories about the nature of ethnic group interaction, it is clear that people draw a sense of identity from the fact of belonging to this or that ethnic group and culture. This *sense of belonging* is particularly evident when we look at relationships between ethnic minorities and the wider cultures within which they reside.

6. In very general terms, *ethnic group identity* can be based around a number of different areas, singularly or, more usually, in combination. For example:

> *Cultural traditions,*
> *Religious beliefs,*
> *Common language,*
> *Territorial origin,*
> *Lifestyles* and so forth.

- The most important point to note, however, is that people see both themselves and others as belonging to different cultural groups which, in turn, provide a sense of belonging and identity - the key concepts that run through this section of the course.

**e. Social Class.**

1. *Social class* is an important concept in Sociology and it usually refers to the various ways that people can be classified on the basis of their occupation. Thus, within Sociology, *class* has tended to be used as an *economic* or *occupational* classification system.

2. As we will see, the concept of class is frequently a difficult one to come to terms with, mainly because:

> a. It can be defined in many different ways.
>
> b. There are frequent disagreements (in society as well as Sociology) as to the significance of social class.

- Some sociologists, for example, use the concept as a convenient way of classifying different occupational groups in society (managers, supervisors, employees and so forth). In this respect social class is seen to be a statistical category that does not have much significance outside the fact that it allows us to conveniently group people of similar occupations. This usage is probably closest to the Functionalist perspective in Sociology.

- Other sociologists, however, view social class as far more than a convenient classification of related occupations. Marxist sociologists, for example, see social class as a much more active concept. That is, social class is seen to influence people's experiences in the social world and, most importantly, how they see the nature of their world.

3. For the moment, we will assume that a simple definition of social class involves identifying three major social classes:

> *The upper class* - consisting of people who own and control businesses (*owners*).
>
> *The middle class* - consisting of people who, although they do not own businesses, are charged with the day-to-day running of these enterprises (*managers*).
>
> *The working class* - consisting of people who lack both ownership and control and simply work for a wage.

- Although this is a very simplistic view of social class, it will suffice for our purposes for the moment, since it conveys the main idea of people experiencing the world differently based upon their working situation.

4. In terms of *culture and identity*, the basic idea here is that *different classes* develop different ways of life based around their different experiences. *Values* and *norms* frequently develop in different ways for different social classes, such that the *culture* of an *upper class male or female* will appear very different to that of a *working class male or female*.

5. One way that social class can be used to provide people with a sense of identity is through their *work / occupation*. In this sense, where people work together, doing the same kinds of job they develop something in common with each other - in effect, they identify themselves through what they do.

- For example, when we meet someone for the first time we tend to ask them "what they do". There are a number of reasons for this (knowing someone's occupation gives us a number of clues about that person - their job status, approximate level of income, future prospects and so forth), but we are simply interested in the idea of occupation as a source of social status. That is, the work that we do has a certain status in society and, from this status we develop a sense of who we are in relation to other people (in a very broad sense).

6. Another way that social class relates to identity - although perhaps one that may be rapidly declining in significance in modern societies - is through the idea of *community*. That is, the idea that people of a similar social class tend to live and work in the same area and develop common bonds through sharing similar experiences in the social world.

- For example, traditional mining villages consisted of people who shared roughly the same type of employment and experiences - and this fact gave them a sense of common identity.

7. Finally, perhaps, the third area relating to class and identity is *class consciousness*. That is, an awareness of belonging to a particular social class with its own way of life, traditions and interests. Many people, for example, are keenly aware that they are working class or upper class and this awareness helps to create a sense of social identity; that is, the idea that you can broadly define both yourself and others in class terms.

- This idea has further significance if we see social classes as having different interests in society (a Marxist view of class). If this is the case we can talk about things like *class solidarity* (an awareness of the idea that people of a particular class should stick together, help each other and so forth).

- These and other ideas about social class will be developed further as we go through the course.

**Conclusion.**

1. In this section of the course we have looked - briefly and in general terms - at a variety of different sources of identity. In particular, we have looked at the various ways that conceptions about individual and group identities are **socially constructed**. That is, created against a social background that tries to make social interaction meaningful, understandable and ordered by *categorising* people in various ways.

2. We have focused on a number of major sources of social identity, mainly to give you an idea about how these social categories can be and are used for the purpose of creating and maintaining individual and group identities.

3. In all of these cases, the basic concern has been to show some of the ways that membership of social groups (such as those based around categories such as class, age and ethnicity) helps to create a sense of belonging in human beings. This sense of belonging - of having certain things in common with people - is important to us, as social animals, mainly because we can use it as a source of telling us who and what we are.

4. The sociological concept most often used in the context of identity is that *of social integration* (which simply means a "sense of belonging"). Thus, as social beings we need to feel that we belong to various groups (the biggest of these being *humanity -* the *human race*).

- This need to "feel we belong" is significant because we draw from these groups a sense of identity. That is, by becoming *integrated* into a social group we feel we belong to it and, by extension, we are able to define ourselves in terms of the groups to which we belong. Group membership gives us not just a sense of identity, but also a sense of purpose to life.

5. Finally, I have stressed the idea that beliefs about "who we are" are created in a *social context*. This reflects the basic sociological idea that human beings are socially created, not prisoners of instincts.

- Evidence of this is all around us, not just in terms of differences *within* our society but also, perhaps more clearly, in terms of differences *between* societies. Although, genetically, everyone in the world belongs to the same *biological class*, behavioural differences are everywhere in evidence and we can start to explain these differences in attitudes and behaviour through an examination of various social sources of identity.