

SOCIOLOGY SHORT CUTS 2

CORE CONCEPTS

Activities And Web Links



Identity

3. Identity**Activity 1: Who am I?**

The main objective of this Activity is to demonstrate how social and personal identities are linked by showing how we draw on a range of the former as a means of expressing the latter. This Activity is excellent in helping students to understand:

- how we construct identities
- the relationship between social structures (in the shape of social identities) and social actions (in the shape of personal identities).
- how even what we think of as our 'individuality' arises from membership of social groups and social relationships

Begin by asking students to construct a picture of their own identity. Ask them to write down 10 things about themselves.

Most students will invariably draw on a range of cultural factors (age, gender, class, region, and ethnicity), physical features and things that describe their individuality, such as easy going, loud, lazy and so on.

Remind students of the distinction between social and personal identity that was made in the video (or show them the relevant section) and invite individual students to explain to the class 'Who they are' by:

- listing the things that contribute to their sense of identity.
- explaining why they choose each of these things.
- distinguishing between their social and personal identities.

Once completed this can be used to lead into a class discussion about the relationship between personal and social identities and what this tells us about the relationship between the individuals and societies.

Activity 2. Gender Socialisation and Identities.

In the previous Activity it's highly likely that, as in the video, most students will have referred to gender as a major source of their personal identity and this Activity builds on this to explore the idea of gender socialisation and difference and the role of culture in shaping gender identities. It also helps to establish synoptic links with two other popular A-level topics, Education and Deviance (as well as, a little more abstrusely, Stratification and Differentiation in terms of something like different life chances).

Give your students a copy of the following report (or copy it to acetate and display for the whole class) to read:

Gender stereotypes still hamper young

Will Woodward: The Guardian, 20/09/2000

"Adolescents are still unable to shake off gender stereotypes that appear as entrenched as ever...Inside, outside and beyond school, young men and women are under continuing pressure to conform to traditional behaviour.

At school, women avoid physics and information technology and choose English, biology, history and modern languages. "Young women find it easier to ask for help than young men, who find it harder to admit a lack of knowledge," the report, "Young People and Gender" says. Boys are more likely to break the law - a gap which extends after the age of 14 - or be involved in crime, alcohol abuse and illegal drugs.

Girls, who are more likely to be concerned about their body image and weight, are much more likely to start smoking. Suicide rates are higher for men and double the number of boys die at 17. Boys are less likely to visit their GP or to use other health services. Girls are more at risk of depression, eating disorders and self-harm.

Boys "take greater risks and feel greater pressure" to be sexually active and find it harder to admit inexperience. But "in spite of the notion of 'girl power', young women still find it problematic to say no to sex and negotiate the use of contraception".

At work, young men are more likely to want managerial or professional jobs - 75% compared with 25% for women, who are concentrated in personal service industries with part-time jobs and lower wages. "The need to conform to masculine stereotypes prevents young men from joining traditionally female careers." Although more young men are officially unemployed, a large group of young women remains outside employment, education and training opportunities because of caring responsibilities."

The article can be used as the basis for a discussion of gender stereotyping in any, or all, of *three* ways:

1. Ask students individually to write down five ways they think their life would have been different if they had been born a boy rather than a girl and *vice versa*.

Next, ask your students which of these differences they think are primarily due to biological causes (e.g. males are stronger, women bear children) and which are due to cultural causes (e.g. expectations about appearance, educational and work opportunities and so forth).

Ask a selection of students to volunteer their answers to the rest of the class and briefly discuss the implications of these answers – what, for example, does this tell us about the relationship between biology (the sex we are born as) and culture (how social identities shape the way we see gender and personal identities)?

2. *Either* ask your students to write short answers to the following questions *or* use them as the basis for a discussion about gender:

a. Are there “masculine” and “feminine” stereotypes in adult society (and if so what sort of “traditional behaviours” do they involve?).

b. Why do boys and girls still prefer different subjects at school (do you have any personal experience of pressure to take or reject certain subjects)?

c. Why are boys are more likely to break the law?

d. Why are girls more concerned about their body image and weight?

e. Are there different pressures placed on boys and girls (from whom?) concerning sex and sexuality?

3. Finally, ask your students, in small groups or as a class, to consider how gender identities might have changed since their parents were young. This will help them to reflect on the way social changes (such as globalisation) have impacted on changing gender socialisation and identities.

Activity 3. Personal Identities

Ask your students to select one aspect of their personal identity from the list they created in Activity 1 and then ask them to:

- identify *why* they see this trait as part of their identity.
- volunteer some possible reasons to the class as to *how* they came to have this view of themselves. This will usually lead to identifying the role of others in the process of identity formation (for example, making comparisons with others, being defined by others etc.).
- recall and describe situations in which their personal identity (or some aspect of that identity) was confirmed or contradicted by the reactions or responses of others towards them.

In our experience students enjoy this Activity. It's an excellent way of illustrating how even the views they have of themselves as distinct individuals are shaped by social relationships and, talking about themselves and their own experiences helps to make the abstract concept of identity more real to them.

Web Links

3. Identity

http://elt.britcoun.org.pl/elt/i_index.htm

A wide range of facts, figures, notes, quizzes and articles on aspects of English and British identity.

http://www.virtualartroom.com/cultural_ID.htm

This site suggests how students can explore their cultural and personal identities through a mixed media project.

<http://www.philosophersnet.com/games/identity.htm>

The Personal Identity game where "The aim of the game is to stay alive!".

