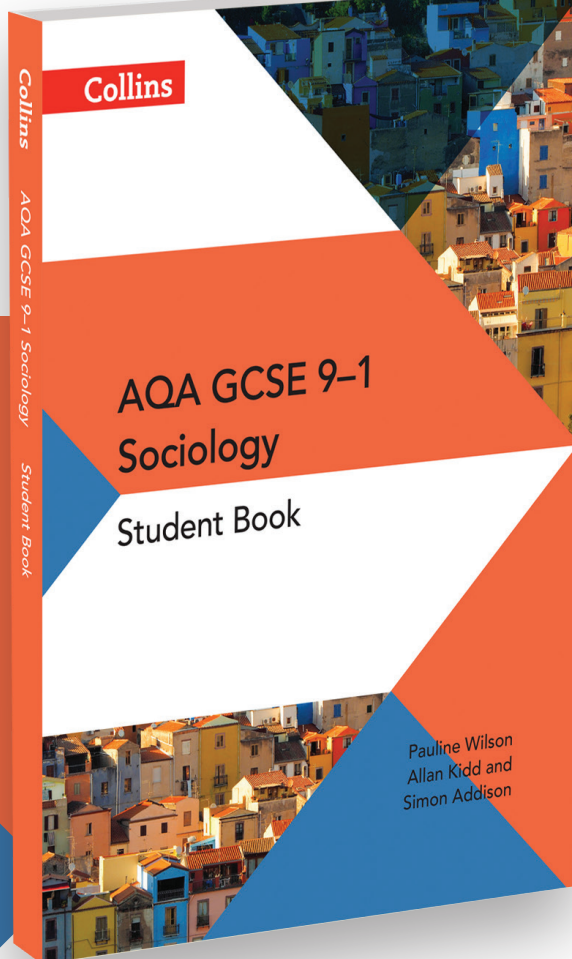


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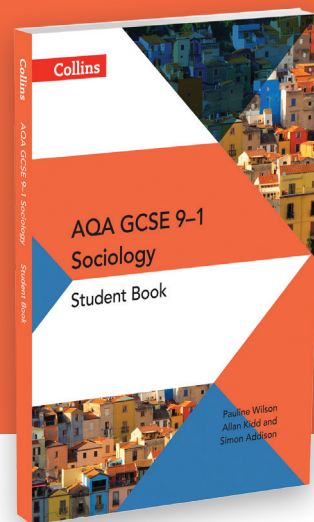


AQA GCSE 9-1 Sociology

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Chapter 1 . Topic 6

What are the key ideas of Emile Durkheim?

Objective
• Describe the key ideas of Emile Durkheim

Emile Durkheim is one of the founders of sociology as an academic subject. His worldview or perspective is very different from that of Marx in important respects.

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)
Place of birth: France

Key contribution to the development of sociology: Durkheim was a main figure in the origins of functionalism, an important perspective in sociology. This approach was popular, particularly among North American sociologists in the mid-20th century. Durkheim made a major contribution to sociologists' understanding of the functions of crime, education and religion. He also showed how individual actions such as suicide are shaped by the wider society.

The functionalist perspective

The functionalist approach explains social institutions (such as families, education systems and social stratification systems) in terms of the functions they perform for the wider society.

To understand functionalism, a biological analogy (or comparison) can be used. In other words, we can compare society to the human body. If we want to understand the human body and how it works, we could start by identifying the vital organs such as the heart, lungs or liver. We might then focus on one organ such as the heart and look at its job or function in pumping blood around the body. Next, we might examine how the heart is connected to other parts of the body such as the blood vessels. Finally, we could look at how the heart contributes to the survival of the body as a whole.

In the same way, functionalism views society as made up of different parts that interlock and fit together. The different social institutions such as the family, education and religion are important organs in the body of society. Functionalism examines these institutions in terms of their functions, that is, the job they perform to help society run smoothly. The different social institutions meet the needs of society by performing functions to ensure its survival.

Durkheim studied crime, religion and education by focusing on the functions they fulfil in meeting the needs of society. For example, he argued that the punishment of criminals has an important

1.6

function in helping to bring people together. Punishment reinforces the values and beliefs that the majority of people in society hold. By binding people together in this way, crime can contribute to social cohesion.

Stretches and Challenges
How far do you think that religion binds people together? Explain your ideas.

FOCUS ON THEORY: WRITTEN ACTIVITY
Durkheim and Marx
Durkheim focused on the functions of crime and the way crime can bind people together and contribute to social cohesion.
Did Marx focus more on social cohesion or on conflict between social groups? Write a sentence to explain your thinking.

Similarities between functionalism and Marxism

Although functionalism and Marxism are different in important ways, they are both structural approaches. This means that they focus on the structure of society and how this influences and directs human behaviour.

However, not all sociologists agree with structural approaches. Critics argue that these approaches view people as being like puppets who are at the mercy of social forces beyond their control.

FOCUS ON SKILLS: DISCUSSION ACTIVITY
Are people simply puppets?
One debate between sociologists focuses on how far society moulds us and controls our behaviour and how far we create and influence society.
To what extent do you agree that society influences us and directs our behaviour? Can you think of ways in which we can influence, challenge or change society?
Make a note of your ideas.

Criticisms of functionalism

The functionalist approach focuses on the positive functions that things such as crime and religion perform for society. However, critics argue that functionalism overlooks their dysfunctional (or negative) aspects. In reality, crime and religion do not always perform positive functions for society. For example, knife crime can have devastating effects on individual victims and on communities; religion can cause long-term conflicts between different social groups such as Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland.

Check your understanding
1 Describe what sociologists mean by the term 'function'. (3 marks)
2 Identify and explain one criticism of functionalism. (4 marks)

Key points

- Durkheim is one of the founders of sociology and a key figure behind the functionalist perspective.
- Durkheim made an important contribution to sociologists' understanding of the functions of crime, education and religion.

22 Chapter 1: The sociological approach

What are the key ideas of Emile Durkheim? 23

Focus on Key Thinkers sections cover the key sociological texts in the 2017 AQA specification and familiarise students with key arguments and perspectives in sociology

Focus on skills

Making connections: Written activity

Official statistics

As you study the different areas of sociology, try to look for connections or links between them. For example, the topic of official statistics can be linked to many other areas including those shown in the spider diagram.

Choose two of the links in the diagram and, in each case, explain how it is connected to official statistics.



FOCUS ON RESEARCH: WRITTEN ACTIVITY

Planning research

Imagine that you and a colleague have been given a grant to fund your research into one of the following topics.

- Young people's use of the internet
- Migrants' experiences of racism
- Changing attitudes to marriage
- Male victims of violence
- Males and females' attitudes to science lessons
- What it means to be a victim of bullying in the workplace

In pairs, choose one of these topics and answer the questions below.

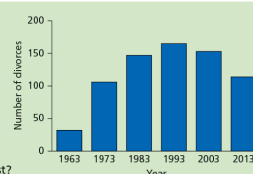
- 1 Decide on a title for your study and note it down.
- 2 Make notes on how you would go about searching for the relevant literature on your chosen topic.
- 3 Identify two research aims, questions or hypotheses.
- 4 Identify one primary research method that you would use in your investigation and explain:
 - a why you would use this particular method in your study. Try to link your chosen method to your research topic rather than discussing the advantages of this method in general terms.
 - b one disadvantage of using this particular method to study your chosen topic.
- 5 Identify one secondary source of data that you would use in your study and explain why you would use this particular source.
- 6 Explain how you would select a sample.
- 7 Identify one ethical issue that could arise during your research and explain how you would deal with this issue.
- 8 Once you have completed your study, how would you go about publicising your findings among other sociologists and policymakers?

FOCUS ON SKILLS: WRITTEN ACTIVITY

Analysing statistical data

Numerical data is often presented in graphs, particularly when showing trends. A trend refers to the general direction in which statistics on something (such as the number of births or divorces) move. The trend may be upwards, downwards or it may fluctuate (change frequently).

Study the graph and answer the questions that follow.



- 1 In which year was the number of divorces in England and Wales at its lowest?
- 2 In which year was the number of divorces at its highest?
- 3 How would you describe the trend in the number of divorces between 1993 and 2013?
- 4 How would you describe the trend between 1963 and 1993?
- 5 How would you describe the overall trend between 1963 and 2013?

Stretch and challenge

Differences between quantitative and qualitative methods

The following table is incomplete and your task is to fill in the blanks. Select one word from the list to fill in each blank. Check your answers with your teacher before copying out a complete version of the table.

Official statistics

The meaning of behaviour

Statistical data: numbers and figures

Unstructured interviews

Quantitative methods	Qualitative methods
a)	Rich data: word for word quotations
Structured interviews	b)
c)	Written documents such as letters and diaries
Human behaviour	d)

FOCUS ON RESEARCH: WRITTEN ACTIVITY

Practical issues of time, cost and access

- 1 Explain why it would be quicker and cheaper to use official statistics from the Crime Survey for England and Wales rather than unstructured interviews when investigating people's experiences of crime.
- 2 John Williams managed to gain access to, and pass himself off as, an ordinary English football fan. Identify two groups who might find this more difficult and, in each case, explain why they might find it difficult.

FOCUS ON RESEARCH: WRITTEN ACTIVITY

Mixed methods approaches

In Topic 2, you saw that sociologists today are more likely to use a mixed methods approach in order to generate both quantitative and qualitative data within one project. Mixed methods approaches have advantages, for example they allow sociologists to build a more rounded picture of the topic they are studying.

Imagine that you are investigating first-time fathers and their experiences of fatherhood. Explain briefly how you could combine quantitative and qualitative data within this study.

Stretch and challenge

When sociologists use a mixed methods approach, they collect and analyse both quantitative and qualitative data within one study. There are some practical disadvantages of doing this. Identify two practical disadvantages of using a mixed methods approach.

Focus on Theory sections put theories into context with activities to get students thinking about approaches in Sociology and methodology

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