

# Module One: Exploring Social Science Issues

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## 1-1 The Social Science Perspective

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### What Are the Social Sciences?

#### What Are the Social Sciences?

*What are the social sciences? What does it mean to approach the world from a social scientific perspective?*

*Social science is the study of people. Social scientists use scientific principles to observe, describe, and propose possible explanations for human behavior and attitudes.*

*Social scientists try to identify the principles that impact a person or society's day to day life. What societal factors impact their thoughts and feelings, and how do those factors guide their behavior? What impact does the environment they live in have on how they think and act? What resources do they have access to? What biological or cultural factors influence their world perspectives?*

*Further, social scientists work to identify the impact people have on the world around them.*

*Throughout this course, we'll examine social sciences through the lens of three key fields: psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Each of these disciplines focuses on a different perspective of the study of humanity. That perspective changes the types of questions that a professional in each discipline might ask.*

*Psychology zeroes in on the individual. The American Psychological Association (APA) defines psychology as "The scientific study of the behavior of individuals and their mental processes" (2016). This field asks, what behaviors and mental processes does a person exhibit, and what is the relationship between them? Psychologists are concerned with discovering the factors that shape the way a person feels, thinks, and acts.*

*Internally, these factors may include biological processes, like sleep and waking, biological structures, like the brain, and biochemistry, such as hormones or the effect of drugs. Additionally, internal cognitive processes (such as thinking, problem solving, and making judgments) play a role in influencing perception. A person's biases and ideas also shape how he or she senses, perceives, and interprets information.*

*Externally, some factors of concern could be the lessons a person is taught, either via direct teaching or observation. What information does a person's environment provide? Is it dangerous? Loving? What relationships does a person have with the people around him or her? What resources are available, and what stressors?*

*Finally, psychology examines any abnormalities related to these areas — miswiring of the brain, behaviors that cause the individual or others distress, environments that produce distress, and the inability to access factors related to basic human needs.*

*Sociology expands the focus from the individual to look at groups of people. The American Sociological Association (ASA) describes the field of sociology broadly as "the study of society" (2016). More specifically, sociologists study social collectives — groups, organizations, communities, countries, and societies.*

*Sociology looks at the dynamics of these collectives; meaning, how people behave in groups and how that behavior changes depending on the size or context of the group.*

*Sociology also looks at the social principles that make society function, such as social roles and norms. The field of sociology is concerned with how social institutions — such as government, the economy, and family — help influence and inform what we consider acceptable or normal behavior within society. Sociology asks, what resources do people have access to, and why? What differences are there from group to group, country to country, and culture to culture?*

*Finally, anthropology focuses on humans as a species. The American Anthropological Association (AAA) defines anthropology as "the study of humans, past and present" (2016). Anthropologists seek to understand how the factors defining our humanity, such as the development of language or culture, have changed and shaped human life throughout history.*

*Anthropologists look at the resources, opportunities, and disadvantages afforded by a culture's geography. How do the mountains shape the culture, and how does the culture shape the mountains?*

*In addition, anthropologists examine the progression of culture, such as the development of art and technology, or the changes in cultural values governing normative behavior.*

*Culture, tradition, and folklore are of interest, especially the differences and similarities among different peoples. Anthropologists may ask, how are traditions and values passed on over time?*

*There is certainly some overlap among these three disciplines. For example, both an anthropologist and a sociologist might be interested in the political structure of a society. Both a sociologist and a psychologist may be interested in understanding the different relationship dynamics within a family. However, it is important to note that each discipline uses the scientific method to build on the knowledge gathered. This means that humans must be studied scientifically, ethically, and objectively.*

*It is possible for anyone to approach the world using a social scientific lens. To do this, a person only needs to be curious about the how and why of human behavior, and apply the scientific method to answering those questions.*



American Anthropological Association. (2016). *What is anthropology?* <http://www.americananthro.org/>

American Psychological Association. (2016). *About APA.* <http://www.apa.org/about/>

American Sociological Association. (2016). *What is sociology?* <http://www.asanet.org/about/sociology.cfm>

## Social Science Principles

### Social Science Principles

In this course, we are concerned with highlighting four key social principles that can shape human behavior and attitudes. They can influence our behavior, govern our societal interactions, and help provide a lens through which we view the world. These principles are also influenced by the world around us. These four social science principles are social norms, social institutions, social roles, and beliefs and values.



## SOCIAL NORMS

The attitudes and behaviors that are considered regular and acceptable, and which are expected of an individual, by society.



## SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS



Complex, established patterns of norms and behaviors that are governed by rules. Generally, social scientists list five major social institutions: government, family, economy, religion, and education.

## BELIEFS AND VALUES

In sociology, the cultural ideals that the society strives to maintain. These can be ethical, spiritual, lifestyle-based, or overtly stated in the laws of the country.



## SOCIAL ROLES



A set of expectations, duties, responsibilities, attitudes, and behaviors that a person is expected to fulfill in their society. In the social sciences, the role is context-specific, and a person may have many roles depending on the various contexts he or she has; for example, the same person can be an accountant and a neighbor.

## Social Norms

Social norms are enforced by the members of a society. If someone cuts you off in traffic, you might honk; if someone wears something inappropriate, you might stare. Both of these are examples of enforcing a social norm that has been violated. You are telling those around you that they are not following the "rules" of your society as you understand them. Similarly, if someone opens the door for you, you might smile and say "thank you."

## Social Institutions

Social institutions are rule-governed norms and behaviors. They are often very complex and maintain some of the deepest-held values of a society. For example, many developed countries provide some kind of education to their citizens. There are many forms that this education may take, but the need to transmit knowledge is present in each.

Economy is another social institution. Economy controls the flow of money, goods, and services within a society and into or out of a society. Economies function very differently around the world depending on several factors. For example, many countries have laws governing the way money can be spent, earned, and taxed. The types of goods and services being exchanged also influence a culture's economy.

## Beliefs and Values

A society's beliefs and values are transmitted culturally and can change over time; for example, these can be influenced by spiritual beliefs, a country's political history, or economic situation. Often, society models its beliefs and values in everyday life. For example, German culture is often described as organized, logical, and formal. This formality means that it is not always necessary to cultivate a personal relationship with someone in order to do business with them in Germany. In contrast, family and community relationships are strongly emphasized in many Latin American cultures. As a result, personal relationships are the cornerstone of business. Without cultivating trust, the business dealings may suffer.

By internalizing the beliefs and values of their culture, the people within that culture come to understand what is expected of them. It guides their actions not only in everyday life but also in times of uncertainty. For example, an individual within a culture that values harmony and teaches against violence may try strongly to avoid conflict. In contrast, an individual within a culture that values justice may have fewer inhibitions about resorting to violence if he or she feels that the cause is appropriate. It can be argued that either reaction is justified based on the beliefs and values under which the individual operates.

In another example, a culture may teach that it is important to take time to visit with family. As a result, the society may be structured such that it is both feasible and expected for an individual to carve out time to visit with family by providing more time around major family-oriented holidays.

## Social Role

The social function of roles is to create predictability through behaviors and responsibilities. In the United States, we expect "a player" to do what "the coach" tells him or her to do. This makes the relationship easier. The two people occupying those roles do not need to waste valuable time negotiating who will make important decisions.

A role is shaped by the expectations of society but determined in part by the actions the individual takes. For example, a person in the role of "father" is expected to act a certain way based on the societal definition of that role. A man might be the biological father of a child but does not take on the role of a father; similarly, a man who is *not* the child's biological father may take on this role, living with and caring for the child.

We see this often with gender roles as well. In the United States, there is often an expectation that the woman will stay home with her children before a man would, because females are more frequently considered the nurturers, while males are more frequently considered the breadwinners.

A person may have many different roles in different contexts. At school, a person may assume the role of student. However, the same person might be the manager and mentor for a team at their job.

# Social Science in Context: Areas of Increased Longevity

## The Social Science Perspective in Context: Areas of Increased Longevity

Longevity and mortality — long life and susceptibility to death — have fascinated humans throughout recorded history. The earliest civilizations told stories of extending life, healing sickness, and preventing death. The ancient Mesopotamians, for example, told the epic poem *Gilgamesh*, about a king that embarks on a quest to attain immortality. Thousands of years later, Medieval alchemists believed that they could create life-extending elixirs by mixing metals and other materials. Qin Shi Huang, the legendary "First Emperor" of China, died after taking mercury pills that were supposed to grant him immortality, which were prescribed to him by his alchemists.

While a magic elixir that grants everlasting life may be the stuff of fairytales, the search for the secrets of long life draws human interest to this day.

It's no wonder, then, that the world has become interested in geographic areas in which the population experiences longer-than-average lifespans. These "Blue Zones," named by Poulain et al. (2004) and popularized by [Dan Buettner's \(2005\) National Geographic articles](#), encompass zones of people who have a longer life expectancy than the rest of the world. These zones also have more people that live into their 90's and 100's per 100,000 people than most other places in the world. Most strikingly, the elderly live active, engaging lives well into their golden years. The five identified areas of increased longevity are:

- Loma Linda, California, USA
- Ikaria, Greece
- Sardinia, Italy
- The Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica
- Okinawa, Japan

While these areas of increased longevity are interesting to many people, from a social science perspective, they are *fascinating*. They are of particular interest from a social science point of view because there *is no singular identifiable cause* of these peoples' longevity. (Although, junk science, popular media, and a consumer-obsessed culture would have you believe otherwise.) Instead, a unique mix of factors create a lifestyle that is theorized to promote longevity. Dan Buettner (2005), throughout his research of these areas, has identified several characteristics common among these societies:

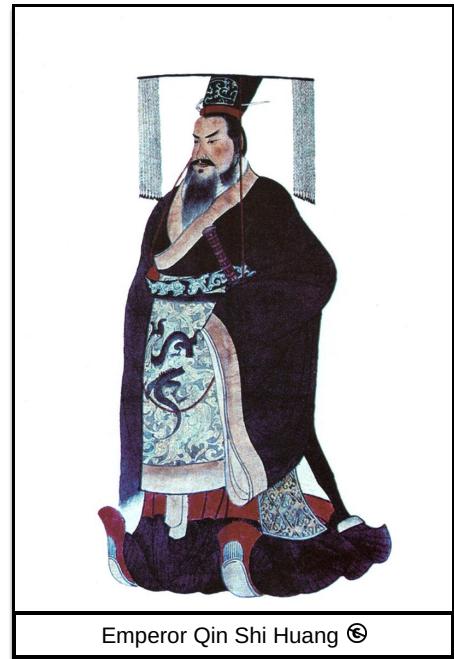
- a mostly plant-based diet
- regular, low-intensity activity
- prioritization of family and community
- a sense of purpose
- a sense of faith
- less smoking

Buettner's article sounds like a prescription: "eat these foods and do these things for a long life." However, social scientists take a much more complex approach to studying these areas.

Social scientists are not only concerned with the fact that these communities share these traits but also with **how they interact, and why**. Cultures and civilizations are all influenced by different factors (such as geography and social institutions), but the way that these factors interact can make one society very different from another. For example, when examining Ikaria, Greece, anthropologists might be interested in how geography and social institutions interact to create a unique sense of community. In this case, there are not many places for ships to safely harbor, so Ikarians could not participate in the sea trade economy. As a result, this culture gained a sense of self-sufficiency and reliance on one another. There are other mountainous places in the world where the economy relies on outsiders, such as the recreational ski and snowboard communities in the Rocky Mountains in the Western United States.

Social scientists are also interested in the differences between these societies; for example, drinking red wine is a social norm in Sardinia, and this practice is theorized to be very good for the Sardinians' health. However, the Seventh Day Adventists of Loma Linda almost never consume alcohol, and both communities report increased longevity.

Social scientists are concerned with the attitude, mindset, or point of view that each individual experiences. For example, a psychologist might ask a number of questions related to the reported sense of purpose. *Ikigai* in Okinawa and *plan de vida* in the Nicoyan Peninsula are conceptually similar, (both roughly translate to "life purpose"), but each originated in different places. How? Is this purpose linked to the type of work these populations perform, the social roles each person occupies, or both? Is it associated with the cultural attitude with which they approach their work? Is this sense of purpose something that can be taught through a particular style of parenting? How do the individuals describe their purpose?



Emperor Qin Shi Huang ©

Social scientists might be interested in the type, frequency, and quality of social interactions in these zones. Are they similar, or very different? How and when do the people interact? How do the social norms, and the general pace of life, influence their shared interactions?

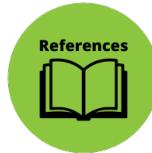
Social scientists are interested in these populations' access to resources. Paradoxically, none of these peoples are extraordinarily wealthy. A sociologist may wonder whether or how this factor influences the lifespans of these people. Could more wealth influence their lifespans even more positively? What foods do they have easy access to? What education? If one thinks about time as a resource, what societal factors enable access to time for relaxation and socialization?

Social scientists are interested in how these cultures came to be the way they are. Anthropologists may ask questions related to the beliefs and values that shape a society. What cultural beliefs inform norms, interactions, and day-to-day life? How did these cultural beliefs form? What spiritual influences are there?

While some people will point to the diet or the lifestyle as the critical factor affecting long life, social scientists understand that these areas of longevity are a perfect storm of *many* interacting factors in a particular geographic area at a moment in time.

What's more, social scientists are *interested in the fact that the world is interested!* Why do so many people care about leading longer lives? Why has civilization after civilization thought about extending life, possibly forever? Why have some civilizations believed it to be a blessing, and others a curse?

The social sciences seek to ask these types of questions about people, societies, and civilizations.



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## Exercise: Principles in Context

### Social Science Principles in the Areas of Increased Longevity





Loma Linda University Church of Seventh-day Adventists.  
©○©

Loma Linda, California is, by many standards, a haven of health within the United States. The town has banned smoking in so many areas, and in such a prohibitive way, that it is almost impossible to smoke within the city limits. There are few fast food restaurants and little availability of alcohol. A farmer's market convenes weekly to offer residents freshly grown produce. The town is also home to the largest running club in Southern California.

Loma Linda is also home to a large population of Seventh Day Adventists. This denomination of Christianity teaches that spirituality and physical well-being are interconnected. Many Adventists are vegetarian or vegan, exercise regularly, and completely refrain from smoking, drinking alcohol, or consuming caffeine. Instead, the population eats fruits, vegetables, nuts, and legumes (Buettner, 2005).

Adventists also observe a Saturday Sabbath, which is reserved for relaxation, socialization, and leisure — and this directive is followed. Many people in the population do relax. Instead of doing household chores or running errands, Adventists take the Sabbath to spend time with loved ones and other community members.

Not only do Adventists experience extreme longevity, they also have lower rates of heart disease, cancer, and stroke (Smith, 2013).

While the lifestyle does seem to produce excellent health results, Loma Linda is not for everyone. Anecdotal reports from those who left the Church felt that the lifestyle could be limiting, causing stress. Even some Seventh Day Adventists report having had difficulty socializing with non-Adventists. As a result, the community socializes primarily with itself, which has allowed for a unique subculture to emerge. Adventists have inside jokes, insider lingo, and norms unique to the community.

### Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica



Landscape of southeastern Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica.  
©○©

In the Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica, the people live so long that one might think there's

something in the water.

There may be some truth to that notion. Water trickles through limestone, fortifying it with magnesium and calcium. Here, the environment is also rich in highly nutritious foods, such as maize, beans, squash, papayas, yams, bananas, and peach palms (Barclay, 2015). The peninsula is soaked in sunshine, providing the population with a healthy dose of Vitamin D. While the food is available in abundance, many people do not eat excessively. This may contribute to their extremely long lives. Research has linked calorie restriction to longevity — but only if the quality of the food, in terms of nutrition, is high (Heilbronn & Ravussin, 2003).

The population of the Nicoya Peninsula strives for *pura vida*, which translates to "pure life." By this, they mean a life full of laughter and smiling. The social support system around which the culture is structured makes this very possible. Generations of families live together, from the youngest children to the oldest family members. Neighbors often pay each other visits. The population may feel a sense of community through their shared ancestry ("Blue Zone Photos," n.d.).

While the general pace of life on the peninsula is relaxed and peppered with occasional naps, daily activities require much physical exercise. Nicoyans walk everywhere - to work, to church, and to visit one another. Many people farm the land, while others walk many kilometers to sell homemade goods. Age does not dictate a time to retire; even the elderly participate in the daily work. Each person arises with a *plan de vida*, or life plan, which contributes to each individual's sense of purpose within their community (Howell, 2015).

Further, the Nicoyans have longer telomeres (the "cap" on the end of a chromosome that prevents it from unraveling) than the rest of the Costa Rican population. It is unclear whether this is a result of lower stress, simply genetic, or both; however, some researchers believe that stress can affect telomere length throughout life. If so, the lifestyle has had a measurable effect on this peninsula's population (Howell, 2015).

While the population is not wealthy, they have access to healthcare. The universal public health insurance system is readily available even to the poorest populations, as it is written into amendments to their constitution. Money spent on catastrophic health events is notably low (SÄjenz et al., 2010).

## Sardinia, Italy



View of Gennargentu, the highest massif of Sardinia, Italy.



Sardinia is a rocky, mountainous island off the western coast of Italy. During the Bronze Age, foreign armies were attracted to Sardinia for its many natural resources. The native Sardinians were forced to flee further inland, up into the rocky highlands, where they became Shepherds. The population became tight-knit and suspicious of outsiders, and as a result, they were able to maintain a traditional lifestyle (Buettner, 2005).

That lifestyle is one of Shepherding, drinking wine, and spending time with loved ones.

Traditionally, Sardinian men do the Shepherding, including feeding the animals, milking them, and walking long distances with their flocks. The women attend to family matters, such chopping wood, kneading bread, raising children, and managing finances. In addition, many Sardinians maintain home gardens that provide them with fresh vegetables, such as zucchini. The Shepherding culture provides a unique variety of Pecorino cheese that is high in omega-3 fatty acids. In addition, the vineyards of Sardinia produce a staple wine that is rich in elements shown to prevent cardiovascular disease (Buettner, 2015).

When they are not going about their daily tasks, Sardinians are on their way to socialize, and they must walk to do so. The community culture is such that neighbors are more than acquaintances, or even friends. Members of the community can lean on one another in times of strife, such as illness. Family is of the utmost importance in Sardinian social life. The elderly live at home with their children until death, helping to raise children and performing daily tasks. This is not simply a matter of necessity; to send an elderly person to a retirement home would be considered dishonorable (Buettner, 2008).

Recent changes to the lifestyle due to globalization have caused a shift in lifestyle and, predictably, health effects. Obesity is now a concern for a percentage of the population as less healthy foods pervade the island's markets. New usage of automobiles reduces the reliance on travel by foot.

### Ikaria, Greece



The hills of Ikaria. 

The people of Ikaria, Greece do not wear watches. The pace of life is slow; people arrive as they please, begin work when they feel ready, and take frequent naps. While slightly less than half the population is unemployed, everyone has access to food in the form of gardens or livestock.

The sense of Ikaria as a tight-knit and self-sufficient community may have originated from a combination of geographic and political factors that shaped the island. Ikaria endures extreme winds and features no natural place for ships to harbor. As a result, the population could not participate in sea trade for much of their history. Further, thousands of communists were exiled to the island during the Greek Civil War. The population learned to find support internally, and this attitude pervades the island to this day (Buettner, 2012).

There are no secrets among Ikarians; everyone knows everyone's business. Neighbors take a communal role in disciplining one another's children. The fear of public shame of wrongdoing keeps many of the youth (and the adults, too) in line. This same communal attitude allows the people to enjoy one another's company. Neighbors share wine together frequently. Married couples also report healthy relationships (including healthy sexual relationships) long into their golden years (Anthony, 2013).

The same forbidding geography that promotes a sense of community also offers a regular form of exercise; Ikarians traverse the hills on foot many times a day. The land is also the source of much of the Ikarians' diet, such as a unique type of honey, beans, olive oil, goat's milk, and tea made from an herb that is natural to the region, providing health benefits.

Aside from the goat's milk and cheese, Ikarians rarely eat dairy or meat products (Buettner, 2012).

## Okinawa, Japan



A beach in Okinawa, Japan. ©〇〇

Okinawa, Japan is one of the poorest regions of Japan; however, the population is one of the longest-lived in the world. This area has remained relatively isolated from the rest of the population, and the lifestyle has been fairly resilient to change. As a result, the population of this region in Japan has unique culture characterized by a different language, type of religion, social structure, and social norms (Wilcox et al., 2013).

Here, the people live with a sense of *Ikigai*, or "that which makes life worth living." Despite the fact that many people retire in their mid 50's or early 60's, retirees remain engaged in their communities by tending to gardening or becoming involved in art projects (Matsumoto, 2011). Women hold a special social role within Okinawan society; they are often viewed as respected spiritual leaders, keeping them engaged in the societal functioning well into old age. Women are also largely responsible for organizing family events and gatherings, a responsibility that is taken very seriously. Families are often large and live within close vicinity of one another, offering a strong sense of social support.

Okinawan diets are low in calories, but high in nutrition. Common foods include bitter cucumbers, tofu, eggs, pork, and onbu seaweed. They also incorporate seafood, such as various types of fish, octopus, and squid (Wilcox et al., 2013).

Not only do the Okinawans live longer, they have lower incidence rates of age-related illnesses, such as dementia, heart disease, stroke, and chronic lung disease (Okinawa Research Center for Longevity Science, n.d.).



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You have reached the end of **Learning Block 1-1**.

## 1-2 Identifying Social Science Issues

This assignment does not contain any printable content.

### Identifying Social Science Issues

#### Social Science Issues

The first step toward completing your final project is identifying a social science issue. So, what is a social science issue?

Social science issues are, simply put, topics of concern or interest within the social sciences. For example:

- The impact of stress on health
- Mistreatment of the elderly
- Low voter turnout

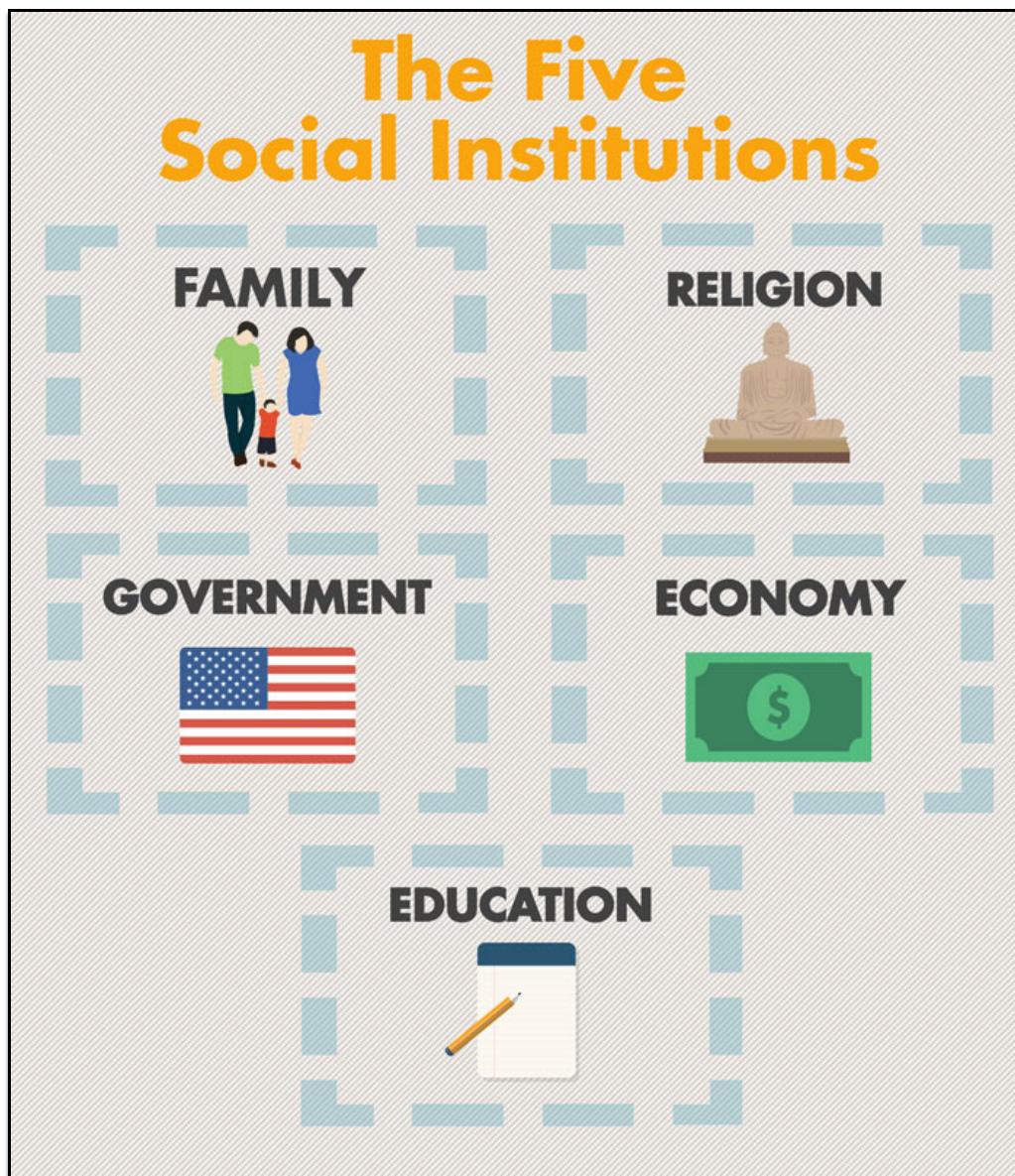
A social science issue is a particular area within the social sciences that a professional might want to investigate further. Often, social scientists investigate issues that are personally interesting to them. Hopefully, you will choose an issue that is personally interesting to you, too.

In the following exercise, we provide a few examples of social science issues and the people who would most likely be interested in investigating them further.

## Social Institutions in Areas of Increased Longevity

### Social Institutions

Now that you have an understanding of social science issues, let's turn our attention to **social institutions**. In this assignment, we will focus on the social institutions in areas of increased longevity. On the following page, we further examine social institutions using India as an example. We will use our examination of the social institutions in India to do further work identifying social science issues.



Social institutions are social science principles that shape daily life. Most societies have a system of **government**, though this government may take many forms. Historical influences, such as trade or war, may have shaped a government's structure and functioning.

The **economy** is the system that people use to exchange currency, goods, and services. The economy affects people's access

to resources, jobs, and wealth. Additionally, it impacts a person's self-perception and creates stereotypes and social divisions by class. These may be unofficial yet strongly influential, such as in the United States, or they may be more formalized by official governmental policy. For example, class and economics play a large role in the caste system of India.

**Family** is a group of individuals that have shared hereditary and or emotional bonds. Family influences the very first lessons we learn as humans, the way we interact with others, and the access to resources that we have at a young age. Later in life, the families we choose have an impact on our sense of belonging, support, and love. Family is critical for socialization.

**Religion** is an organized system of spiritual beliefs and practices, usually offering a moral code and a worldview. Religion helps provide moral and spiritual guidance. For many people, it can govern daily practices, such as when to eat, when to pray, or how to dress.

**Education**, in the sociological sense, is a society's formal system of teaching knowledge and skills. Education is critical for transmitting the knowledge that a person will need to be a successful member of that society.

Each of these social institutions influences the others, either directly or indirectly. For example, the government may regulate education and economy. The economy may affect whether a family has enough resources. The ways in which these social institutions work together may be drastically different from one culture to the next.

### Social Institutions in Areas of Increased Longevity



### Social Institutions in Loma Linda, California

#### Religion and Economy

The Seventh Day Adventist religion is likely the strongest influence on the population's lifestyle. Honoring the biblical notion that "the body is a temple," the Adventist church focuses heavily on a clean diet composed mainly of fruits, vegetables, and nuts, and they strongly discourage the consumption of alcohol and tobacco; and the food and beverage economy has taken notice. Few fast food restaurants or liquor stores can be found; in fact, the grand opening of a new McDonald's in 2012 was something of a public scandal. Instead, veggie-based restaurants and farmer's markets are abundant.

#### Economy & Government

In addition, Adventists observe Saturday Sabbath; as a result, many businesses are closed on Saturdays.

The government also echoes the lifestyle of these people. The smoking restrictions in this

city are the most prohibitive in California, including public streets and sidewalks.

The health sector is also the largest employer of the population of Loma Linda. Most of the town works at the Loma Linda University Medical Center, a world-renowned teaching hospital.

## Social institutions in the Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica

In Costa Rica, social institutions contribute to the health and well-being of the population. Costa Ricans enjoy a good standard of living resulting from political and economic stability, good health, and a good education system.

### Government

As recently as the 1990's, the Costa Rican government undertook reform of its healthcare system. It amended its constitution by expanding the meaning of "guaranteed right to life" to include "protection of health." Following the revision, the government enacted a health care system that now makes health services available to all Costa Rican citizens. Since that time, the World Health Organization has noted that money spent on catastrophic health events is notably low (Del Rocão et al., 2010).

### Education

The Costa Rican constitution also provides free, compulsory education to its citizens. The CIA's (2016) World Factbook lists the literacy rate for citizens 15 years and older at 97.8%, and the quality of education received has been reportedly high (Schwab, 2013).

### Family

Family is another highly influential social institution on daily life. In the Nicoyan Peninsula, many generations of a family often live together, providing social support for one another. This support is beneficial for the elderly, as they remain active and engaged with their families late into life.

## Social institutions in Sardinia, Italy

### Family

In Sardinia, family structure is the most prominent social institution shaping day-to-day life. The elderly live at home with their children until death, helping to raise children and performing daily tasks. This is not simply a matter of necessity; to send an elderly person to a retirement home would be considered dishonorable.

Further, family tasks are divided by gender: women raise the children, and men do the physical work.

### Economy

The daily activities that sustain the population, such as cultivation of wine and cheese, serve as primary exports for the island's economy.

## Social institutions in Ikaria, Greece

### Economy & Government

During the Greek Civil War, thousands of communists were exiled to Ikaria, Greece, forming a population of people that prefer to live apart from others. Furthermore, few opportunities to trade with incoming ships meant that Ikarians needed to support themselves. These political and geographic factors shaped the economy, and the economy shaped the way of life. Ikarians are incredibly self-sufficient. Today, though 40% are unemployed, no individual goes hungry or homeless. Many subsist off of gardens and

livestock that they cultivate themselves.

## Social institutions in Okinawa, Japan

### Religion

Religion is a formative social institution in Okinawa, Japan. This island, as with many of the other Ryukyu Islands, has a strong influence from the Ryukyuan Religion. This religion places importance on nature and the objects found within nature. Further, this religion teaches that great spiritual power is held within women. This sentiment echoes through society, as women are considered spiritual leaders and often take on the responsibility of organizing family and cultural events.

### Education

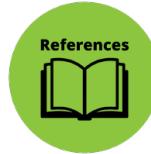
Education plays a role in the social involvement of the elderly after retirement. Retirees often take up artistic hobbies and trades, such as photography.

### Family

Family is a revered social institution, underscored by the Ryukyuan Religion. In Okinawa, families are large and often live quite close, providing social support.

Although each area of increased longevity is impacted by different forces, each force shapes the social institutions that characterize day-to-day life. The end result, it is theorized, contribute to the populations' extraordinary longevity in these societies.

On the next page, we are going to further examine social institutions using India as an example.



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## Social Institutions in India

### Social Institutions in India

When many people think of Indian social structure, they think of a rigid caste system, a hierarchical structuring of social classes. Certainly, some of India's cultural history is defined by a very strict caste system; however, this is only a small fraction of India's history! In reality, India's culture has shifted quite fluidly in response to many different influences. It has been incredibly adaptable to change. Currently, India is experiencing a period of cultural change in terms of social, economic, and governmental shifts in social norms.

To understand the change that India is currently experiencing, we must first examine the factors that shaped. Two of the

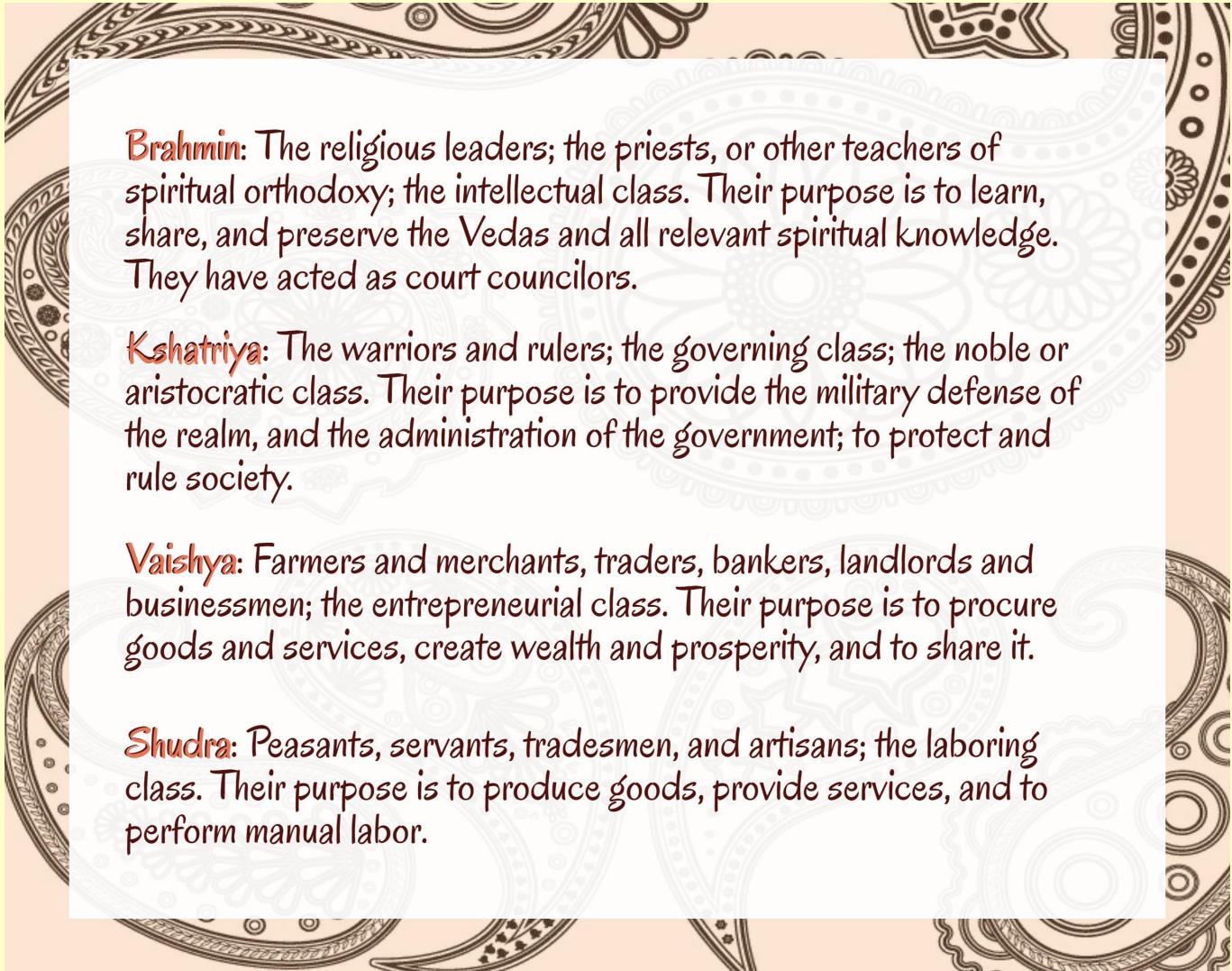
greatest influences on India's culture have been its majority religion, Hinduism, and colonial influence.

## Hinduism

### Hinduism

India's culture has been profoundly shaped by the social institution of **religion**. Its primary religion is Hinduism. There is no consensus about the exact formations of Hinduism, aside from the fact that this spirituality originates from the land that is now India and Pakistan. There is no single text that defines its teachings, no single person that founded its principles, and no clear moment in time that Hinduism was "formed" (BBC, 2009). Instead, this religion evolved alongside the culture of India, and so it became completely intertwined with the way of life for people in this region for centuries.

From Aryan settlers in the Indus River Valley region, Hinduism adopted the *Vedas*, collection of ancient, oral traditions and teachings, written into text around 300 BC. The *Vedas* divide society into four major categories, or castes:



**Brahmin:** The religious leaders; the priests, or other teachers of spiritual orthodoxy; the intellectual class. Their purpose is to learn, share, and preserve the *Vedas* and all relevant spiritual knowledge. They have acted as court councilors.

**Kshatriya:** The warriors and rulers; the governing class; the noble or aristocratic class. Their purpose is to provide the military defense of the realm, and the administration of the government; to protect and rule society.

**Vaishya:** Farmers and merchants, traders, bankers, landlords and businessmen; the entrepreneurial class. Their purpose is to procure goods and services, create wealth and prosperity, and to share it.

**Shudra:** Peasants, servants, tradesmen, and artisans; the laboring class. Their purpose is to produce goods, provide services, and to perform manual labor.

Centuries later, a fifth caste called the Dalits, known as the "Untouchables," came to represent the lowest members of society — those that are excluded from society. Hard, menial labor was reserved for this caste.

According to the *Vedas*, movement between these castes during one's lifetime is impossible. The goal, these texts state, is to live one's life virtuously. Correct actions result in rebirth (or **reincarnation**) to a higher caste, and improper actions punish an individual to a lower caste. Proper actions are *dharma*, commonly understood to mean duty, but which can more accurately be understood to mean virtue, or "maintenance of the order of things." This means that individuals must act according to their age, gender, and social caste. By acting virtuously during life, a person may influence their *karma*, or "consequence" on the next life (BBC, 2009). These scriptures provide the foundation for the Indian caste system.

## Colonialism

Many scholars argue that before European rule, caste was not a hugely influential part of everyday life (Dirks, 2011; Pomohaci, 2013). It existed, certainly, but it was British **colonialism** that transformed the caste system to the rigid system of socio-economic division as we have known it for the past few centuries. Colonialism refers to the political, economic, and cultural domination by one country over another, or over an entire region. Following colonization, the British pinpointed the caste system as the primary way to understand Indian social hierarchy. British culture, which was itself very hierarchical, helped shape the Indian society by placing a strong emphasis on the caste system. Many later changes in political leadership changed the landscape of the castes, each time redefining the notion of caste.

As these influences shaped the caste system, the caste system shaped everyday life for many people within each caste. This social distinction determined what resources people could access, whom they could marry (only people within their own caste), what jobs they could perform, whether they could enter buildings such as temples or wells, and even whom they could physically touch. "Untouchables," or Dalits, have borne the brunt of much discrimination. (Campbell, 2014)

While many of these restrictions were previously both social and legal, recently the Indian social institution of **government** has passed legislation which guarantees certain rights to some castes, widens their access to resources and seats of influence in government, and protects them from violence and discrimination. In addition to legal change, new generations of Indian youth and young professionals are reportedly becoming more lax about social involvement with people of other castes, blurring the boundaries between these societal levels (Leonard & Weller, 1980). Especially in urban areas, a person's caste might not be immediately obvious or relevant.

The social institution of **education** is playing a role in this cultural shift as well — particularly by influencing another social institution:

**economy.** Enrollment in English schools in Bombay, for example, has shown a wider array of white-collar career options for these students. While the working class tends to funnel boys into the native-language schools, in turn funneling them into traditional working-class jobs, many children, and especially girls, are taking advantage of the opportunities that English schools offer. Not only do these girls take up white-collar jobs more frequently, but there is also a greater instance of inter-caste marriage among children that attend the English speaking schools (Munshi & Rosenzweig, 2006).

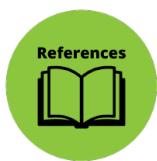
Hierarchy and traditional values still strongly influence Indian **family** structure; although, this social institution, too, is shifting to accommodate modern cultural changes in attitude. Families and extended families are traditionally quite large, supportive, and interdependent. Elders, especially older males, hold the authority in the family, and all members in the family must show respect of those higher in the intricate social hierarchy. Elders are also highly respected members of the community and key participants in religious or cultural ceremonies. Arranged marriages are still common, but "love marriages," especially among individuals that meet in college, for example, are becoming more common and socially acceptable. Marriage usually serves to strengthen the social support network. Historically, and in many places still, young brides go to live with their husband's family. She is expected to show respect to his relatives and cheerfully fulfill her duties. However, as more and more young people take on less traditional roles, the power dynamics in their marriages are changing as well.

In recent years, the extended family is breaking down more commonly into the nuclear family (parents and children); however, family remains a central structure in daily life. Elderly individuals are likely to live with their children rather than with extended family networks or villages (Deshmukh et al., 2015).

However, Indians are not abandoning Hinduism — they are reforming it. Indians are continuing to practice Hinduism; however, they are also adapting their beliefs and practices to align with modern cultural forces, such as changing social roles for men and women and civil rights movements advocating for low caste populations. As it has many times before in its several thousand-years-old history, Hinduism and Indian culture are proving their malleability and adaptability.



A school of untouchables near Bangalore, by Lady Ottoline Morrell  
©



BBC. (2009). *Hinduism*. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/>

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## Exercise: Identifying Social Science Issues

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### 1-3 Asking Social Science Questions

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### Asking Social Science Questions

#### Asking Social Science Questions

In the video in the first learning block, you learned about the social science perspective by examining human behavior through the eyes of a psychologist, a sociologist, and an anthropologist. While there is some overlap, each field has a general focus that guides the types of questions that a professional in the field might ask.

To ask questions like a social scientist, you must step into the shoes of someone from a social scientific discipline. In the tabs below, you are presented with the parts of the script from the video in learning block one that describe each field. You'll also find a helpful infographic that simplifies this information. Review this information.

#### Psychology

*Psychology zeroes in on the individual. The American Psychological Association (APA) (2016) defines psychology as "The scientific study of the behavior of individuals and their mental processes." This field asks, what behaviors and mental processes does a person exhibit, and what is the relationship between them? Psychologists are concerned with discovering the factors that shape the way a person feels, thinks, and acts.*

*Internally, these factors may include biological processes, like sleep and waking, biological structures, like the brain, and biochemistry, such as hormones or the effect of drugs. Additionally, internal cognitive processes — such as thinking, problem solving, and making judgments — play a role in influencing perception. A person's biases and ideas also shape how he or she senses, perceives, and interprets information.*

*Externally, some factors of concern could be the lessons a person is taught, either via direct teaching or observation. What information does a person's environment provide? Is it dangerous? Loving? What relationships does a person have with the people around him or her? What resources are available, and what stressors?*

*Finally, psychology examines patterns related to brain function, behaviors, and distress, seeking to better understand the*

*different factors that influence how individuals engage in the world around them to meet their needs.*

## **Sociology**

*Sociology expands the focus from the individual to look at groups of people. The American Sociological Association (ASA) (2016) describes the field of sociology broadly as "the study of society." More specifically, sociologists study social collectives — groups, organizations, communities, countries, and societies.*

*Sociology looks at the dynamics of these collectives; meaning, how people behave in groups and how that behavior changes depending on the size or context of the group.*

*Sociology also looks at the social principles that make society function, such as social roles and norms. This field is concerned with how social institutions — such as government, economy, and family — structure acceptable or normal behavior within a society. Sociology asks, what resources do people have access to, and why? What differences are there from group to group, country to country, and culture to culture?*

## **Anthropology**

*Finally, anthropology focuses on humans as a species. The American Anthropological Association (AAA) (2016) defines anthropology as "the study of humans, past and present." Anthropologists seek to understand how the factors defining our humanity, such as the development of language or culture, have changed and shaped human life throughout history.*

*Anthropologists look at the resources, opportunities, and disadvantages afforded by a culture's geography. How do the mountains shape the culture, and how does the culture shape the mountains?*

*In addition, anthropologists examine the progression of culture, such as the development of art and technology, or the changes in cultural values governing normative behavior.*

*Culture, tradition, and folklore are of interest, especially the differences and similarities among different peoples. Anthropologists may ask, how are traditions and values passed on over time?*

# THE SOCIAL SCIENCES



# THE FIELDS

## PSYCHOLOGY



Concerned with individuals' thoughts, feelings, behaviors.

## SOCIOLOGY



Concerned with group dynamics, collective attitudes and behaviors.

## ANTHROPOLOGY



Concerned with the factors that have defined humans as a species throughout history.

# STUDIES

biological processes and structures

environment

drugs, hormones

abnormalities

group size

group dynamics

societal guidelines for normal behavior

group context

environment

history

development of language

geography

progression, transmission of culture

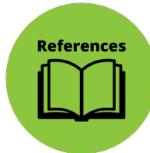
# COMMONALITIES

Using the **scientific method** to study areas of interest.

Identifying **social scientific principles** shaping behavior, such as norms, beliefs & values, institutions, and roles.

Understanding how the fields of the social

## Understanding how the fields of the social sciences relate to one another.



American Anthropological Association. (2016). *What is anthropology?* <http://www.americananthro.org/>

American Psychological Association. (2016). *About APA.* <http://www.apa.org/about/>

American Sociological Association. (2016). *What is sociology?* <http://www.asanet.org/about/sociology.cfm>

## Social Norms in Areas of Increased Longevity

### Social Norms

Social norms are the attitudes and behaviors that are considered regular and acceptable, which are expected of an individual by his or her society.

Essentially, social norms are informal guidelines for how to act. One method of uncovering the social norms in your society is to think about how people normally act. You can do this by thinking of common scenarios that people experience on a daily basis.

Try this now. Consider the following scenarios. As you review each one, consider what you expect to happen next. Why do you expect this? How do you react when reality doesn't meet your expectations?

**You meet a new person for the first time. He opens his mouth to speak.**

**Someone accidentally bumps into you while walking down the street.**

**You go out to a nice restaurant for dinner and notice a woman at the table next to you.**

**You are sitting in a classroom and the person next to you signals that she wants to ask a question.**

In certain situations, there are culturally-determined ways to behave appropriately. Societies create scripts, or a sequence of appropriate things to do or say, for common interactions among people. This saves time — imagine if you received a completely new reaction to "Hello," each time you greeted someone new!

By conducting ourselves according to social norms, we teach others what is appropriate and expected of them in these situations. In addition, these same expectations govern the way that we act &dash; and there are consequences! Not behaving appropriately can be met with confusion, criticism, or ridicule. In some cases, social norms are also legal requirements. For example, as you'll see in the reading about Dubai on the next page, public affection between couples in this Middle Eastern country is highly inappropriate. This is even punishable by jailtime. In the United States, it is fairly normal in most places for couples to hold hands or kiss on the streets.

This example illustrates another interesting fact about social norms: they differ among communities, regions, countries, and cultures. What is acceptable in one location may be completely unusual in another.

Finally, social norms influence lifestyle. In the pop-map below, read about the social norms that can be found in each area of increased longevity. While reading, think about the social norms in your culture and how they influence your own lifestyle.

### Social Norms in Areas of Increased Longevity



### Social Norms in Loma Linda, California

Many social norms in Loma Linda are connected to the community's preoccupation with leading a healthful lifestyle. Concern with healthfulness is influenced by the large population of Seventh Day Adventists that live in the area. This denomination of Christianity teaches that spirituality and physical well-being are interconnected. Many Adventists (and therefore many people living in Loma Linda) eat vegetarian or vegan diets full of fruits, vegetables, nuts, and legumes (Buettner, 2005). The residents here also exercise regularly. This means that it is quite normal to bike or walk places as a primary means of transportation instead of driving and to spend time gardening as a hobby. While the Adventists were the underlying reason the community became so health-friendly, the non-Adventist residents also live this lifestyle. The people in this area are influenced by the "normal" behavior for the community.

Some behaviors that are common in other parts of the world are very uncommon in Loma Linda. Very few residents smoke, drink alcohol, or consume caffeine. Additionally, it is uncommon for people to run errands on Saturdays. This, too, is shaped by the Adventist religion. Most Adventists observe a Saturday Sabbath, which is reserved for relaxation, socialization, and leisure. (Smith, 2013)

### Social Norms in the Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica

Social norms in the Nicoya Peninsula are strongly influenced by the relaxed pace of daily life, the emphasis on community and family, and the environment.

The work that Nicoyans do contributes to a more relaxed lifestyle. The Nicoyans' work revolves around what the environment has to offer; they primarily farm the land, bake, or create items for sale in nearby towns. As a result, the people do not start or end their days at a set hour. It is quite normal to take frequent naps. Further, they primarily walk from place to place. (Howell, 2015)

In the Nicoya Peninsula, fruits and healthful crops grow in abundance, but it is not socially normative to eat excessively.

Cultural emphasis on family and community means that the residents spend much of their free time socializing with one another. Generations of families live together, and neighbors often pay each other visits ("Blue Zone Photos," n.d.).

### Social Norms in Sardinia, Italy

## Lifestyle

Many of Sardinia's social norms center around family. It is normative for families to have breakfasts together and socialize with one another at the end of the day. When they are not going about their daily tasks, Sardinians are on their way to socialize, and they must walk to do so.

Because Sardinia has many vineyards, socialization often occurs around an open bottle of wine (Buettner, 2015).

While historically the social norms in the area have been thought to positively contribute to the residents' long lives, the norms are shifting as a result of globalization. It is more common for residents to drive places instead of walk, as automobiles are becoming more common on the island. In addition, an influx of unhealthy junk food is now available on the island, meaning that it is more normal to snack on these items. These changing social norms are correlated with a recent rise in obesity.

## Social Norms in Ikaria, Greece

In Ikaria, Greece, social norms related to the pace of life encourage people to live with less stress. Like in the Nicoya Peninsula, residents can begin their daily tasks when the people wish to rather than they have to, and they frequently take daily naps. It's not normal to be over concerned with the time; therefore, most people don't wear watches. (Buettner, 2012)

Close community involvement means that it is socially normative for residents to know one another's business. Many Ikarians take responsibility for disciplining each other's children. While other areas of the world would view this behavior as nosy, gossipy, or rude, this behavior is completely acceptable in Ikaria. The fear of public shame due to wrongdoing keeps many of the youth (and the adults, too) in line. This sense of involvement means that residents expect one another to take a shared role in keeping the community, and one another, safe and happy. Keeping one another safe extends to the lifestyle of caring for one another. Neighbors check in on one another frequently. They often spend time together in the evenings.

The geography also influences social norms. When traveling to visit neighbors, many people choose to traverse the steep hills on foot.

## Social Norms in Okinawa, Japan

The Okinawan community is one where calm, stress-free, social living is encouraged. Much of the population is involved in agriculture, and members of the community typically remain involved in the production of food and other resources for their entire lives — there's no age of retirement for most Okinawans.

The traditional Okinawan religion of Ryukyu, which is significantly influenced by Confucianism, influences the social norm of eating in moderation. This practice is captured by the phrase *hara hachi-bu*, meaning "Eat until you are 80 percent full" (Buettner, 2005).

However, these norms are changing as the community becomes more influenced by globalized practices. Over-eating and changes in diet have begun to influence the community in recent years. Previously, the Okinawan lifestyle and diet was theorized to contribute to the population's extreme longevity; however, the average life expectancy for the community —particularly for men— has begun to decline, as health issues like obesity have become more common (Joyce, 2006).

As we've discussed, social science principles function differently across cultures. On the next page, you'll continue your exploration of social norms by examining the forces shaping them in a new culture: Dubai.



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## Social Norms in Dubai

### Social Norms in Dubai

Dubai is a city in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and with a population of over 2,250,000, it is the largest member of the UAE. Located on the Persian Gulf, Dubai is a center of culture and economy. Dubai has received a great deal of attention in recent years as a result of the city's ambitious construction projects, and it is home to the Burj Khalifa — the world's tallest building. As many as 85 percent of the people living in Dubai were not born in the UAE, and there is no way for individuals who were born outside of the Emirates to gain citizenship. Arabic is the official and most widely spoken language in Dubai, although English is commonly used as a second language. The UAE has a strong foothold in the global economy as one of the leading producers of oil, and for that reason, has a reputation for extreme, extravagant wealth. Dubai has come to be one of the most expensive cities in the world.



Dubai is an interesting culture because the many influences on daily life seem to be in contradiction. The extreme wealth makes for some pretty interesting "normal" aspects of day-to-day: rich businessmen ride with pet cheetahs or lions in their expensive sports cars, and architects construct islands for their luxury hotels. Meanwhile, social attitudes are very modest and conservative. Emirates are political territories ruled with Sharia Law, or Islamic Law. Because religion is fundamentally intertwined with the legal code in Dubai, the laws structure appropriate behavior based on Islamic principles. As a result, normative behavior is much more modest in Dubai than in other places in the world.

However, Dubai is a modern, international city that depends on its business with Western nations. Western businesspeople and tourists bring their own social norms, dress, and attitudes, mixing with the culture of Dubai. This leads to misunderstandings, culture clashes, and shifts in socio-cultural attitudes.

Overall, the city is a unique space where Western values and practices meet traditional Islamic and Middle Eastern customs. The social norms, or attitudes and behaviors that are considered acceptable, in Dubai may be surprising for a Westerner.

### Public Displays of Affection

Sharia Law in Dubai underscores modesty, and this applies to the affection that couples may show one another in public. Public displays of affection are illegal in Dubai. While a couple may be able to exchange a brief kiss on the cheek, anything more may have severe social and legal consequences. In fact, in 2010 a British couple was jailed, fined, and deported after being accused of kissing on the lips in a restaurant (BBC News, 2010). This case in particular is an interesting one: the couple was turned into the authorities because another patron of the restaurant was offended by their behavior. Further, the law was interpreted more strictly because the man was of Muslim descent, even though he had grown up in Britain. This example serves to show these norms do not only exist because of the laws — public perception of decency helps to reinforce these social norms. In addition, social norms differ for foreigners as compared to natural born citizens. For this reason, public affection is rare in Dubai.



The Burj Khalifa

However, social customs do sanction some touching between people. Women greet one another by giving light kisses on each cheek several times, and men touch noses when they shake hands. Men and women rarely touch or shake hands in public (Advameg, Inc., n.d.).

## Dress

Social norms in Dubai also strongly affect how men and women dress. Women in Dubai wear traditional Muslim attire, including long black robes called *abayas* and headscarves called *hijabs*. Some women may cover themselves so that only their eyes are exposed. Men in Dubai also dress traditionally, wearing long white robes called *dishdashas* and tied headscarves or headscarves held in place with black cords. But because Dubai is an international city, it is common for visitors to wear less traditional attire. This clash of customs seems to be rubbing off on Dubai; in fact, conservative business clothing is becoming increasingly more acceptable for women in the workplace, demonstrating how social norms can change over time.



While Westerners and tourists are not expected to wear traditional Middle Eastern attire, it is necessary to dress modestly in designated areas. Sharia Law requires that the body be covered out of decency and respect, and this often translates to the requirement that women's knees and shoulders must be covered. In the privacy of one's own home or hotel room, Sharia Law is open to interpretation. Typically, people dress less modestly in their own homes.

## Drinking

In Dubai, social norms around dancing, smoking, and the consumption of alcohol are changing as a result of the globalization of the city. Dancing is considered unacceptable and indecent in public places. The consumption and availability of alcohol is taboo, especially for Muslims, as a result of traditional Islamic doctrine. However, it is possible to consume alcohol in the city. Restaurants that are attached to hotels are permitted to sell alcohol, and because of the climate and strong tourist contingent in Dubai, hotels are typically very large. They may be connected to other public places of interest, like shopping centers and malls, making these restrictions a little easier for tourists to navigate. Public intoxication is still criminal, though, so tourists must be careful.

## Prayer

Muslims are called to prayer five times a day, and all commercial activities are placed on hold during these times of worship. It is normal for people to stop what they are doing, music to stop playing, and cab drivers to occasionally pull over to face Mecca and pray. Further, the workweek in Dubai starts on Sunday and ends on Thursday because Friday is a holy day reserved for prayer and rest.

## Gestures

Some standard gestures that are considered socially acceptable or even expected in many places in the world should be avoided in Dubai. For example, visitors should not try to shake hands with people they meet unless the handshake is initiated by the acquaintance. Visitors should avoid crossing their legs or showing the soles of their feet, since doing so is considered disrespectful. When gesturing with one's hands, it is important not to point but instead to use the entire hand, because pointing can be found offensive. This is a gesture typically reserved for dogs.

## Photography

Many people, because of their personal beliefs, will not want their photographs taken. Islam discourages frivolous photography. Scholars of Islam state that images of people or animals should not be displayed publicly. They should be stored in drawers or cabinets but not left out for anyone to view at any time. This belief strongly influences the social norms around taking photos. It is not socially acceptable to take photos of people in public places without their permission, and this social norm can be enforced legally (Hosein, 2020).

## Social Customs

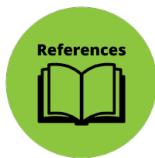
With regard to hospitality, interpersonal relationships, and social customs, the people of Dubai are formal. Traditional practices that foster relationships are important. Therefore, if a local invites you to his or her home, it is important to accept the opportunity to build the relationship. Similarly, it is rude to refuse food or drink that is offered. It is also customary to ask about a person's family many times before moving on to business discussions. Once an agreement is reached, even if only verbally, a Dubai

businessperson will expect that the other party sticks to this agreement.

While it is conservative by Western standards, Dubai is among the most tolerant cities in the United Arab Emirates. Islam is the official religion of Dubai, but large communities of Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Baha'is, and Buddhists live in the city. Each of these religions is granted protection under the law. And while social norms in the city still strongly reflect traditional Islamic beliefs and commitments to Sharia Law, as we have seen, they are changing in some ways to reflect the increasingly globalized nature of Dubai.

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Advameg, Inc. (n.d.). United Arab Emirates. Countries and Their Cultures. <http://www.everyculture.com/To-Z/United-Arab-Emirates.html>

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[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/8602449.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/8602449.stm)

Hosein, I. N. (2020). *Is photography prohibited in Islam?* Sheikh Imran Hosein. <http://imranhosein.org/n/is-photography-prohibited-in-islam/>

## Discussion: Asking Questions

This assignment does not contain any printable content.

## 1-4 Researching a Social Science Issue

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### The Research Investigation

#### The Research Investigation



For the purposes of this course, a research investigation is an investigation into a social science issue. The primary goals of a research investigation are to understand the social science issue and to identify opportunities for further research. Social scientists don't just attempt to understand the field; they also wish to add to it.

Slide 1



First, you'll need to choose a social science issue. Later in this theme, you'll be given a list of possible topics, or you can create your own and have it approved by your professor. This topic should be one that you have a personal interest in or connection to.

### Choosing a social science issue

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#### Slide 2



After choosing your issue, you'll need to create a list of questions that you have about the issue, which you'll try to answer during the investigation. You should adopt the social science perspective to create this list of questions.

### Asking questions

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#### Slide 3



In the next theme, you'll research your social science issue. The goal of this research is to get background information about the issue and answer the list of questions that you formed about the issue.

### **Researching the issue**

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#### **Slide 4**

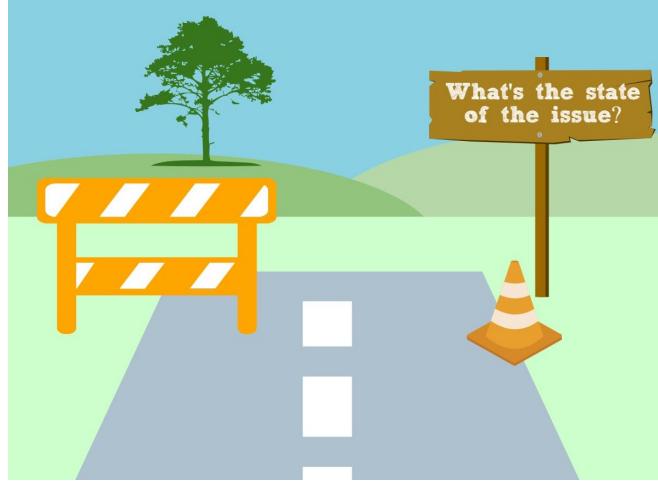


Throughout the research investigation, you'll gather credible sources that help you understand the social science issue.

### **Gathering sources**

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#### **Slide 5**

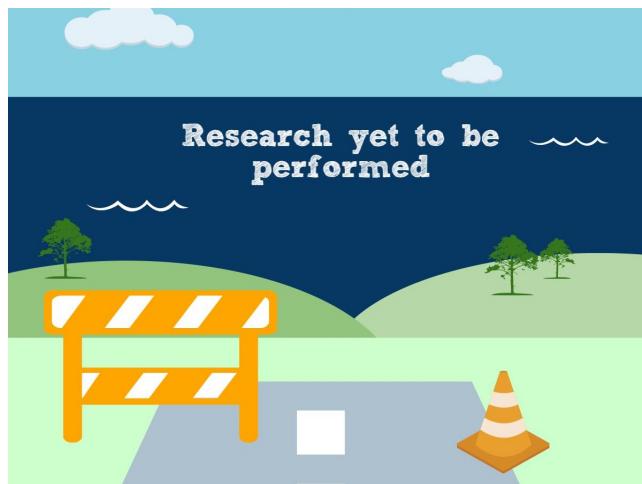


At the end of the research investigation, you should be able to talk about the state of the issue. You should know what research has been performed in the field, the opinions of professionals working in the field, and the general history of the issue.

### **Researching the issue**

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#### **Slide 6**



The research investigation also allows you to see what research on the social science issue still needs to be performed.

### **Understanding what's next**

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#### **Slide 7**

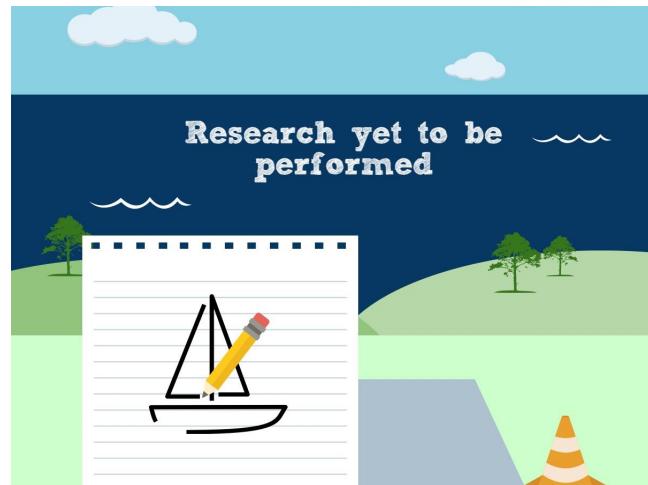


After identifying future work for the social science issue, you'll form a research question, which is a question that can be further explored and addressed through work in the field.

### Forming the research question

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#### Slide 8



Finally, you'll describe how professionals in the field might complete that work. For example, you might suggest a study, a survey, or a media campaign. Essentially, suggest the best way that professionals could answer your research question.

### Answering the research question

## Social Roles

### Social Roles

A social role is a set of expectations, duties, responsibilities, attitudes, and behaviors that a person is expected to fulfill in their society. Just like you might think of a role in a movie, this is a part that you play in society. A person fulfills his or her social role by acting, or *doing* what is appropriate and expected. For example, Marie might act like a mother by caring for her children's health, education, and general well-being.

Roles are context-specific, meaning that a person's role may change depending on where they are and who they're with. For this reason, a person will have many social roles, each dependent on the various contexts he or she has. The same woman from the previous example fills the role of salesperson and coworker when she is at work by speaking with clients in order to make sales. She is a friend when she meets up with her group of longtime college roommates. Social roles can even be embedded in other social roles. While with her friend group, the woman may be considered "the funny one" and feel pressure to act in an outgoing

manner in order to make them laugh.

A role is shaped in part by the expectations of society but determined in part by the actions the individual takes. The woman and her husband care for the children, but he — although he reads them books and bandages up their scraped knees — is not their biological father. The actual biological father is not fulfilling the role of father, and the woman's new husband has chosen to take on that role.

The social function of roles and statuses is to create predictability in these various contexts. A person transitioning from one context to the next can easily understand her relationship to the people she meets. She knows how she is expected to act, and she has expectations for the actions of others. She does not need to spend time negotiating or defining her role in the context every time she interacts with her friends or plays the role of customer at the grocery store.

However, in these examples, how exactly are the expectations of these roles determined? Certainly, the role of "salesperson" has a concrete definition that is measured by the needs of the company and the expectations of the sales director. However, the roles of mother, father, and friend are not assessed by a manager. So, how does a society decide how to appropriately fill these roles?



The expectations about how to fulfill some social roles, such as mother, are collectively determined as a culture. These expectations can differ depending on the values that the society believes to be most important. Interestingly, they can change over time. For example, traditionally, mothers were expected to stay home with the children. Today, it is more common for women to return to work outside the home after the child is born. Therefore, the expectations are changing. It is not assumed that a woman will stay home anymore; she has options as to exactly how she will fulfill her role as mother.

A person's own expectations or values are hugely important for this shift to occur, because (as we've discussed) *actions* help determine how the role is fulfilled. Previously, women might have wanted to work outside the home but had a low expectation that it was possible. As more and more women have become educated and worked to build careers that are valuable to them, their own expectations have changed. More and more women are choosing to work outside the home after having children. This changes the expectations that society has about how a woman can fulfill the role of mother. Similarly, men are feeling more comfortable staying at home with the children. Previously, society's expectations were quite rigid that the man work outside the home. However, the role of "stay at home dad" is becoming more common. As a result, society's expectations are changing about how a man can fulfill the role of father.

The expectations for certain roles also change across cultures. If a child is observed misbehaving in public without being corrected, people in some cultures might feel critical of the caregiver. If it is later discovered that the adult with the child is the child's neighbor, we might excuse him because we don't expect neighbors to discipline children. In some cultures, all adults are

supposed to take responsibility for correcting children. People in these cultures would expect the neighbor in his status as "an adult" to correct the child's misbehavior. For this reason, social roles differ from culture to culture and are influenced heavily by the norms of the culture.

In the pop-map below, you will read about how the social roles in each area of increased longevity are influenced by the factors shaping those societies and how those social roles, in turn, shape daily life.

### Social Roles in Areas of Increased Longevity

#### Social Roles in Loma Linda, California



Because many residents of Loma Linda are Seventh Day Adventists, one of their social roles includes being an Adventist. To fulfill this role, members of the church are expected to comply with the lifestyle that the Church emphasizes, including eating healthfully, exercising, refraining from consuming alcohol or caffeine, and resting on Saturdays.

Some Loma Lindans also report a sense of responsibility to share the success of their lifestyles with others as a sort of spiritual and health-oriented ministry (MacVean, 2015).

Fulfilling these roles can provide Adventist community members with a strong sense of place and purpose, but it is not for everyone. Anecdotal reports from those who left the Church felt that the lifestyle could be limiting, causing stress (Leaving the Seventh Day Adventist Church, n.d.).

### Social Roles in the Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica

In the Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica, the population's social roles are largely shaped by their sense of belonging to the community. One's ability to contribute physically to the maintenance of the community is important, and people continue working the land and doing chores well into old age. Hard work is appreciated by Nicoyans, and part of living a good life is waking up with a *plan de vida*, or life plan, every day. For example, a senior woman in Nicoya may wake up before the sun, bake tortillas for a few hours, and then walk five hours to sell them in a nearby village (National Geographic, n.d.).

In addition, the Nicoyan's emphasis on family shapes social roles for the many. Families live together, providing a sense of support and sense of purpose within the familial community. Further, many Nicoyans share ancestry, and this contributes to a sense of communal identity and shared history.

### Social Roles in Sardinia, Italy

Within the Sardinian family, social roles are centered around keeping the family fed and the household maintained. Roles are commonly divided according to gender. Traditionally, Sardinian men do the shepherding, including feeding the animals, milking them, and walking long distances with their flocks. The women attend to family matters, such as chopping wood, kneading bread, raising children, and managing finances. In addition, many Sardinians maintain home gardens that provide them with fresh vegetables, such as zucchini.

The elderly play prominent social roles within the Sardinian family and community; they live at home, helping to raise the children and complete daily house tasks (Buettner, 2008).

To fulfill the social role of neighbor or community member in Sardinia means being much more than an acquaintance, or even a friend. Members of the community fulfill roles of social, financial, and medical support. Neighbors can lean on one another in times of strife, such as illness. The societal expectations as to how to fulfill the role of "neighbor" in Sardinia are quite different than in other cultures.

### Social Roles in Ikaria, Greece

In Ikaria, Greece, the culture allows the people to share roles and responsibilities that are critical for social well-being. Adult members of the community collectively assume childrearing responsibility, regardless of whose child it is.

In addition, the close-knit social structure places each person in the social role of "police officer." The lack of privacy among Ikarian residents ensures that any shameful or illegal behavior would immediately be discovered. Each member of the community assumes this watchful role. As a result, would-be criminals rarely bother to attempt any activity that would bring shame on their families. The crime rate in Ikaria is markedly low (Buettner, 2012).

### Social Roles in Okinawa, Japan

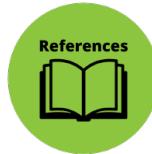
Here, the people live with a sense of *Ikigai*, or "that which makes life worth living." In Okinawa, Japan, well-defined social roles for the elderly keep them engaged in the family and community long into old age. For example, women, especially elderly women, are charged with organizing family events and activities. Given that family is a central focus of Okinawan life, the responsibility is an important one.

Many rural communities in Japan prescribe clear functions for the elderly even after they are unemployed in the traditional sense. Approximately half of the elderly population (individuals over the age of 60) report leaving their homes on a daily basis to work on farms or in gardens, contributing to the agricultural society of which they are members. Elderly women, especially, play an important role in Okinawan culture; they are seen as respected spiritual leaders.

Despite the fact that many people retire in their mid 50's or early 60's, retirees remain engaged in their communities by tending to gardening or becoming involved in art projects (Matsumoto, 2011). Women hold a special social role within Okinawan society; they are often viewed as respected spiritual leaders, keeping them engaged in the societal functioning well into old age. Women

are also largely responsible for organizing family events and gatherings, a responsibility that is taken very seriously. Families are often large and live within close vicinity of one another, offering a strong sense of social support.

However, these social roles may be changing, as many young people in Japan have flocked to cities as a result of rapid urbanization.



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## Social Roles in Papua New Guinea

### Papua New Guinea

Papua New Guinea, officially called the Independent State of Papua New Guinea, occupies the eastern half of the island of New Guinea as well as hundreds of small islands located in the Southwestern Pacific Ocean.

# Papua New Guinea

Australia

New Zealand

Papua New Guinea's culture has been shaped by many forces throughout history. Geographic features have played a role; the terrain includes mountains, rainforests, swamps, and active volcanoes. This makes traveling within the country difficult. Some parts of Papua New Guinea are only accessible by foot or by airplane. There are areas of Papua New Guinea that are largely unexplored and completely cut off from outside influence. This may be why most of the population has lived in rural areas, disconnected from one another and the rest of the world.

The physical separation of the people has led, in part, to a diversity of cultures. There are over 820 indigenous languages being spoken throughout the country and hundreds of ethnic groups. Papua New Guinea is home to more languages than any other country in the world.

Historically, these pockets of people were organized into kinship groups — tribes of people consisting of family members, in-laws, and other personal connections. Leadership, language, and customs differ from kinship group to kinship group. These tribes were traditionally led by a "Big Man," or a person who was able to establish relationships, trade ties, and support within the tribe and among other tribes. Disputes were handled in tribal courts and determined using customary, traditional laws.

Early missionaries began to impose Christianity on Papua New Guinea in the 1800's, which was blended with local spiritual beliefs. Today, most families and tribes do not have spiritual leaders. Instead, it is believed that all adults acquire some knowledge of sorcery and spirituality related to growing crops, matters of love, and healing. Some "Big Men" claim to have powerful spiritual abilities, but for the most part, the adults in each kinship group mostly tend to their own spiritual practices.

Daily life is largely centered around agriculture, with many communities and villages primarily farming to eat. Generally, men clear the land and butcher animals, while women cook, garden crops, and tend to livestock. Childrearing is handled by both men and women. Within families, the elderly have more power in the decision-making process and are much more likely to inhabit a position of leadership within the family or tribe. Children are allowed to run free in early childhood, and then they are taught by example. Young girls follow older women, and young boys follow the men (Advameg, Inc., n.d.).

The islands that make up Papua New Guinea were inhabited over a 40,000-year period. However, outside influences began to shape the traditional culture of Papua New Guinea in the 1930's, as an influx of missionaries brought new religion, built

infrastructure, created a formal system of education, and impacted the economy. In the 1960's, Australia began taking steps to ready Papua New Guinea for independence.

Colonizers created a centralized government and provided a set of uniform laws, taking some power away from the "Big Men" that formerly ruled.

Readyng the country for this transition also meant trying to unite Papua New Guineans in a sense of national identity rather than loyalty to their individual kinships. This was largely done through higher education, which was also intended to prepare the country's population for government on a global level. While the generations attending school did become formally educated, their parents did not pass along their native languages. As a result, younger generations became farther and farther removed from their kinship roots, unable to connect or communicate with their extended family members. Patchy availability of formal education and resources created a socio-economic stratification.

After nearly a decade of external rule by Australia, the United Nations, and Germany, Papua New Guinea became an independent nation state under the Commonwealth of the Queen in 1975. The country is ruled by a Prime Minister, a governor general to represent the British Crown, and a parliamentary cabinet that represents each of nineteen provinces. Federal courts enforce federal law, and a national police force maintains order.

While this may seem straightforward, the transition between tribal groups to united nation did not go entirely smoothly. As a result, there is some ambiguity about how leadership is handled in present day Papua New Guinea. "Big Men" still exist, but they have less power than they previously did. The police force is feared in rural areas because they tend to use excessive force. Many are afraid to approach the police or report crimes at all.

Instead, Papua New Guineans settle disputes themselves, or they utilize the old village courts. These measures to settle disputes often resort to older, customary traditions instead of federal law. Often, the practices and rulings of these village-based legislative systems are exactly the opposite of the official laws of the country. For example, polygamy is not legally permitted, but it is practiced on a large scale within Papua New Guinea because it is customarily accepted.

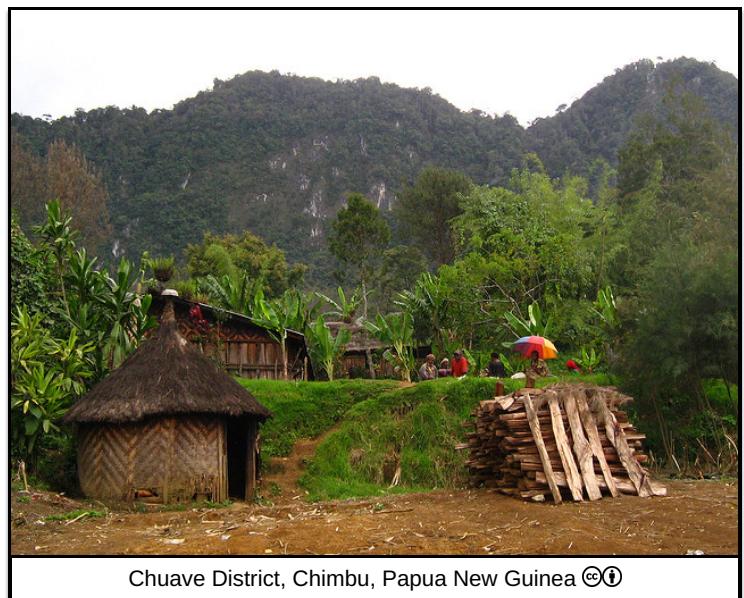
Most people only have access to these village courts when they are trying to find justice or resolve conflicts. Therefore, many illegal practices are still very common, and many legally guaranteed rights for some citizens are ignored.

The tension between the federal government and tribal kinships plays a large part in how women are treated in Papua New Guinea. On a national level, women legally have many of the same rights and protections as men: parental authority, financial responsibility, property rights, the right to assembly, and rights to participate in politics. But in rural areas — where as much as 80 percent of the population lives — customary laws and courts allow for discrimination in favor of men.

For example, women should be able to inherit property according to federal law, but the courts often give inheritances to men. Sexual assault is also a serious and widespread problem that women face in Papua New Guinea. The US Department of State reports widespread sexual abuse by police. Although rape is a crime in Papua New Guinea, accused rapists rarely face any legal consequences. Finally, women are more likely to be illiterate than men, since education is generally considered more important for men than for women.

Women's social roles are also limited. Since family units are the central elements of Papua New Guinean society, women are likely to be defined in terms of their roles within the family—as daughters, mothers, or elders. Parents often arrange their young daughters' marriages. They may consent to have their daughters married as young as 14 if they are physically developed enough. Dowries, or bride prices, are also common. If a woman is unhappy in her marriage, she may (in some instances) return home; however, in other instances, she must threaten or actually commit suicide to escape her husband.

Despite this, many international groups are working to bring awareness to instances of domestic violence and empower women in Papua New Guinea.



Chuave District, Chimbu, Papua New Guinea © ⓘ



Kainantu on the Highlands Highway, Papua New Guinea © ⓘ ⓘ

## Margaret Mead and the Chambri

Although many tribes in Papua New Guinea face limits as a result of their gender roles, this is not the case in every Papua New Guinean community. In 1933, Margaret Mead conducted a now famous anthropological study of three villages known as the Chambri community, concluding that within this community women had more power and influence than their male counterparts. Mead observed that Chambri women are the primary providers of food for their communities, contributing not only to agriculture but also to fishing. Women in this community not only provide sustenance for their families, but they also engage in trade with other villages.

However, Mead's findings are controversial. Other anthropologists have pointed out that although Chambri women are often the primary providers for their families, they still have limited political power and authority. While Mead saw Chambri women as holding a position of dominance over their male counterparts, other experts have suggested that neither gender is dominant among the Chambri people; instead, both men and women control their assigned domains without conflict.



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## Module One Short Responses

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