

Teaching Guide

Chapter 5 The socio-cultural approach to behaviour

Topic map

Section number and name	Learning outcome	Number of hours (suggested)	Relevant material
5.1 Overview of the socio-cultural approach to understanding human behaviour	Behaviour is strongly influenced by the way the individual experiences and interacts with people and the environment.	4	Figure 5.1
5.2 The individual and the group	<p>Social identity theory: a person's concept of who they are is strongly influenced by the social groups that they feel themselves to be part of.</p> <p>Social cognitive theory: individuals learn the social norms, skills and habits that enable participation in society by observing and imitating others.</p> <p>Stereotyping: a generalised and rather fixed way of thinking about a group of people, or an assumption that an individual connected with the group possesses the same behaviour patterns as popularly attributed to that group.</p>	11	<p>Figures 5.2–5.11</p> <p>Activity 5.1</p> <p>Activity 5.2</p> <p>Self-assessment questions 5.1</p> <p>Essay response question at the end of the chapter</p>

5.3 Cultural origins of behaviour and cognition	<p>Culture: a set of common beliefs that hold large groups of people together. These beliefs give rise to social practices that are filled with meaning, and are generally passed from one generation to another.</p> <p>Cultural dimensions: the values held by people living within a particular culture.</p> <p>Enculturation: the acquisition of the necessary and appropriate norms and skills of one's own culture of origin.</p> <p>Acculturation: where people may change or at least adapt due to contact with another culture, in order to fit in with that culture.</p>	10	<p>Figures 5.12–5.17</p> <p>Activity 5.3</p> <p>Activity 5.4</p> <p>Self-assessment questions 5.2</p> <p>Short-answer question at the end of the chapter</p>
5.4 Globalisation and identity (HL only)	The individual's interaction with globalisation can modify individual attitudes, identities and behaviours to varying degrees.	10	<p>Figure 5.18–5.22</p> <p>Activity 5.5</p> <p>Self-assessment questions 5.3</p>

5.1 Overview of the socio-cultural approach to understanding human behaviour

Overview

Students should understand that the emphasis of this approach is that behaviour is strongly, though by no means exclusively, influenced by the individual's experiences and interactions with people and the environment. Social identity, social cognition, cultural characteristics of different environments and (HL students) personal interactions with global dimensions all impact on the ways that people interact with each other, and with their surroundings.

Students may already be familiar with some socio-cultural elements from Chapter 2, such as obedience to authority figures (Milgram, 1961) and the influence of one's position of power in society on behaviour (Zimbardo, 1969, 1971), as well the research methods and ethical guidelines presented in that chapter.

You may prefer to choose the socio-cultural approach to understanding the behaviour of the individual as the first rather than the last of the three core topics. This has advantages. Students tend to find the content user-friendly, easy to handle and fun to relate to. There is also suitable scope for developing the understanding of research methods and ethical principles. In addition, understanding this topic creates a good foundation for contrasts with the cognitive and biological perspectives that they will encounter further on in the course.

Students should be able to practise their critical analysis skills in assessing the validity of the research studies and claims made by this approach. This is especially true when reviewing this topic and comparing with those made by the cognitive and biological perspectives.

The relatively straightforward nature of the material in this topic should make this chapter an ideal base for the introduction of the skills required in exam short-answer questions and essay response questions.

Suggested activities

Possible starter

One way of introducing the socio-cultural approach and its position in psychology is by brainstorming questions such as: ‘Why do people like wearing the latest and most fashionable pair of running shoes (sneakers, trainers)?’ or ‘Why do people like to go swimming?’ Students should then classify each response as socio-cultural, cognitive or biological. Allow them to justify placing a response in two or even three categories. The purpose is to elicit or review the differences between these three approaches to behaviour.

Main lesson content

- Students should become familiar with the idea that social and cultural environments influence behaviour. That may be presented with the car jack International Focus in Section 5.1.2 in the coursebook, and followed up with a discussion on how different social and cultural factors might have elicited different behaviours in a similar situation.
- The individual’s need to connect with others could be explored with Susan Pinker’s [TED talk](#) on how social interactions increase human happiness and possibly health and longevity. You can find many talks by searching for ‘psychology’ on the [TED](#) website.
- Examples of socio-cultural influences of behaviour such as obedience to authority demonstrated by Milgram (1961) may be brought in now, if not already done so while working on Chapter 2. Other socio-cultural influences of behaviour should be considered such as conformity, compliance and cultural dimensions.
- The research methods and ethical principles outlined in Chapter 2 should be reinforced here. Research methods include observation, such as used in Festinger et al. (1950). This study is explored on the [IB Psychology InThinking](#) website.

Common misunderstandings and misconceptions

Some socio-cultural concepts also have cognitive dimensions, such as stereotyping. Emphasise that the socio-cultural approach focuses on the environmental inputs and the cognitive approach considers how the mind processes that information.

Supporting your students

The ideas above are continually reinforced in the next sections. That should enable students to sharpen their grasp of the basic concepts as they proceed through the material. In addition, the tree diagram exercise under ‘Supporting your students’ in Section 5.2 may be used here, providing a map and framework for key concepts in this topic as a whole.

Challenging your students

Susan Pinker’s [TED talk](#) has been challenged as being anecdotal. Students could discuss how far the evidence in the talk indicates that social interactions increase human happiness, health and longevity. What other elements may be involved?

Homework suggestion

- This could be an opportunity to develop short-answer question response skills, either as a homework assignment or as a homework-prepared item to be written up under exam conditions in the classroom. A possible question could be ‘Explain the use of one research method in one study using the socio-cultural approach to understanding human behaviour.’

Cross-references with other topics

2.2 Quantitative research methods in psychology

2.3 Qualitative research methods in psychology

2.5 Ethical considerations

5.2 The individual and the group

Overview

This extensive topic includes two main areas of inquiry: social identity theory and social cognitive theory, including stereotyping. The common strand for students to consider is that other people may influence our behaviour, even when we think that we are acting independently.

Suggested activities

Possible starter

Use Activity 5.1 in the coursebook (Section 5.2.1) to open the topic. You can use the [brown eyes and blue eyes racism experiment \(Children Session\)](#) video to introduce social identity theory: social categorisation, social identification and social comparison. You can enact the Jane Elliot scenario in the classroom if the class size is large enough.

Main lesson content

- Tajfel’s (1970) experiments in the coursebook (Section 5.2.1) are commonly used to present social learning theory, but they can be followed up with Chen et al. (2005), a more modern study on how social and cultural identity can affect behaviour (see the IB Psychology InThinking website for [more details](#)).
- Can one rise above needing to belong to other groups? The [TED talk](#) by Thandie Newton may challenge social identity theory. Students can explore the challenges and benefits of establishing rapport with people from completely different cultural backgrounds.
- Why do many individuals socially identify with extremist cults? The [TED lesson](#) by Janja Lalich followed by ‘Dig Deeper’ explores the topic in depth, and also considers why people join cults. The discussions posts in that lesson can stimulate critical analysis of the reasons advanced, and some students may contribute ideas and experiences personally known to them.
- Bandura’s (1965) experiment in social learning theory can be used to exemplify a true experiment, with an independent measures design and independent/dependent variables. It may be contrasted with Charlton et al. (2002) which is a natural experiment and a baseline study. See Section 5.2.2 and Section 10.1 in the coursebook. Students should also enjoy trying to account for the differences between the findings of the two studies.
- The activities in Section 5.2 enable students to encounter the different compliance techniques, and should be entertaining as well as reinforcing.

- The exploration of stereotyping and discriminatory behaviour may be explored with [Shopping while black – a social experiment](#). Students could discuss why certain shoppers interfered with discriminatory behaviour and others did not. This could reinforce social identity theory (in-groups and out-groups) as well as stereotyping.
- As well as Bargh et al. (1996), other recommended research studies on stereotyping include Hamilton and Gifford (1976), and Steele and Aronson (1995).
- The ethical principles outlined in Chapter 2 should be reinforced here. Students could discuss whether the classic studies of Tajfel (1970) and Bandura (1965) could obtain the approval of an ethical board today.

Common misunderstandings and misconceptions

- Students need to clearly distinguish between social identity theory and social cognitive theory (including stereotyping). Each has different roles in influencing and explaining behaviour.
- Stereotyping can influence prejudice and discrimination. These terms are not interchangeable. The first refers to thinking, the second to behaviour.
- Make sure that the students can clearly distinguish between conformity, compliance and obedience.

Supporting your students

- Ensure that the students are familiar with differences between social categorisation, social identification and social comparison.
- The terminology in the social identity and social cognition section is fairly extensive. It may be reinforced by Self-assessment questions 5.1 on social identity and social cognition.
- Students can construct a tree diagram showing links between the different concepts used in social cognition, including the different aspects of social learning theory, attribution theory, compliance, conformity, self-efficacy theory and stereotyping. Alternatively, you could provide them with a pre-prepared outline tree diagram, with clues for each input.

Challenging your students

The Research Idea which follows Activity 5.2 should challenge students to apply the experimental design to a compliance technique. They could then present their findings in terms of aims of the investigation, operationalised null or research hypothesis, research design, sampling technique, choice of participants and materials used. The results could be graphed, and both descriptive and inferential statistics applied. The students could then interpret the data to decide whether to accept or reject the hypothesis.

Homework suggestions

- The theory of knowledge exercise in the coursebook (Section 5.2.2) on *12 Angry Men* may simultaneously reinforce conformity through minority influence, and be contrasted with the Asch paradigm of conformity through majority influence.
- For exam practice, a range of potential short-answer questions may be accessed on the [IB Psychology InThinking](#) website. At the end of the chapter in the coursebook there is an essay response question with a sample answer.

Cross-references with other topics

2.5 Ethical considerations

10.1 Introduction to research methods in psychology

10.2 Elements of researching behaviour

10.3 Analysing data

5.3 Cultural origins of behaviour and cognition

Overview

This extensive topic includes two main areas of inquiry: cultural origins of behaviour and cognition, and cultural influences on individual attitudes, identities and behaviours.

Suggested activities

Possible starter

Cultural differences may be introduced by the 'Janice' International Focus in the coursebook and follow-on Activity 5.3. You could extend the task by asking the students to research the social norms of Janice's western culture and the Latin American Mexican culture. They could use their findings to suggest the origins of the elements contributing to the situation behind the cultural misunderstanding on both sides. It is also a good idea to encourage students to contribute anecdotes about similar situations experienced or known about.

Main lesson content

- Max Jobrani's TED talk, [A Saudi, an Indian and an Iranian walk into a Qatari bar](#), presents a light and enjoyable entry into cultural dimensions. If revisited in a plenary session, each student could be assigned a different cultural dimension. The task would be to identify the positions of the individuals along the spectrum of their assigned cultural dimension.
- Though students should be aware of all the different cultural dimensions, one of them should be studied in depth. A suitable example would be individualism/collectivism. Students could use the study of Berry (1974) on conformity in two contrasting traditional societies, one collectivist and farming and the other individualist and hunting.
- The emic approach to socio-cultural research may additionally be presented in Cole and Scribner (1974). In this study, the researchers observed the cultural differences between the groups of children studied before investigating the effect of schooling on children's memories in different societies.

Common misunderstandings and misconceptions

- Enculturation and acculturation are not synonymous and neither are the following pairs of concepts: acculturation gap and acculturation stress; assimilation and integration; separation and marginalisation.
- An etic approach is not necessarily inferior to an emic approach, but it is probably less likely to yield valid results where the behaviours investigated could be culture-influenced rather than universal.

Supporting your students

Students are more likely to struggle with matching the terminology to the concepts than with understanding the concepts themselves. The vocabulary could be reinforced by Self-assessment questions 5.2 on cultural influences on individual attitudes and behaviour. You could also design a simple unscrambling exercise where they have to match the correct term to the described concept.

Challenging your students

The exercise on the IB Psychology InThinking website, [Critically thinking about sociocultural](#), brings three culturally bound social problems for the student-turned-socio-cultural-psychologist to resolve.

Homework suggestions

- The IB Psychology InThinking website, under [Sociocultural approach: Teaching ideas](#), has several suitable homework items, including '[Critical thinking about dimensions](#)' and (in groups) the '[Enculturation library analysis](#)'.
- Develop short-answer response skills, either as a homework assignment or as a homework-prepared item to be written up under exam conditions in the classroom. Use the question in the coursebook, and the accompanying model answer.

Cross-references with other topics

5.2 The individual and the group

6.1 Introduction to abnormal psychology

6.2 Abnormal psychological conditions

6.3 Approaches to treatment of disorders

7.2 Interpersonal relationships

7.3 Group dynamics

9.2 Developing an identity

5.4 Globalisation and identity (HL only)

Overview

This extends the scope of the socio-cultural approach to understanding behaviour by considering how globalisation can modify individual attitudes, identities and behaviours to varying degrees.

Suggested activities

Possible starter

Activity 5.5 on Starbucks in the Forbidden City, Beijing (Section 5.4.2) should be thought-provoking and also link to the social identity issues studied in Section 5.2.

Main lesson content

- Globalisation issues occur in different branches of psychology, for example with the effect of introducing television at St Helena on violence (Charlton et al., 2002, Chapter 5) and in Fiji on eating disorders (Becker et al., 2002, Chapter 6). These could supplement the coursebook material on globalisation's influence on attitudes, identity and behaviour.
- Globalisation has been connected with the rise of the maladaptive condition described in Norasakkunkit and Uchida (2011) (Section 5.4.1) called *hikikomori*, and also with 'herbivores': a rise in Japan in number of young men with no interest in sex or marriage. There is detailed material on the [IB Psychology InThinking](#) website.
- The ongoing debate on the psychological effects of international tourism on visitors and the host society is developed in [I oppose: tourism](#) on the IB Psychology InThinking website, which adds a further dimension by linking it to the stages of tourism model.

Common misunderstandings and misconceptions

The literature on the psychological dimensions of globalisation forms only a small proportion of the literature on globalisation as a whole. Students should carefully assess globalisation concepts they may have studied in other subjects (e.g. geography, economics and global politics) for psychology content before incorporating them into this unit.

Supporting your students

Self-assessment questions 5.3 on globalisation's influence on the individual's attitudes and behaviour should help to spell out and reinforce the key concepts in this unit. The homework item (below) involves a scaffolded exercise in carrying out research into the psychological aspects of tourism as part of globalisation, that should help students link the content and methodologies for investigating this branch of psychology.

Challenging your students

Peter Alfandary's TED presentation on [The myth of globalisation](#) considers whether globalisation means sharing a global culture or designing new cultural borders. Students could summarise his viewpoint and discuss how far they agree with it in the light of their studies of the psychology of globalisation.

Homework suggestions

- The Theory of Knowledge item on whether travel opens the mind to trusting strangers can also serve as a focus on the psychological issues faced by those making international face-to-face global interactions.
- The [I oppose: Tourism](#) item (above) includes a scaffolded exercise in carrying out research into the psychological aspects of tourism as part of globalisation.

Cross-references with other topics

5.2 The individual and the group

5.3 Cultural origins of behaviour and cognition

6.2 Abnormal psychological conditions

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