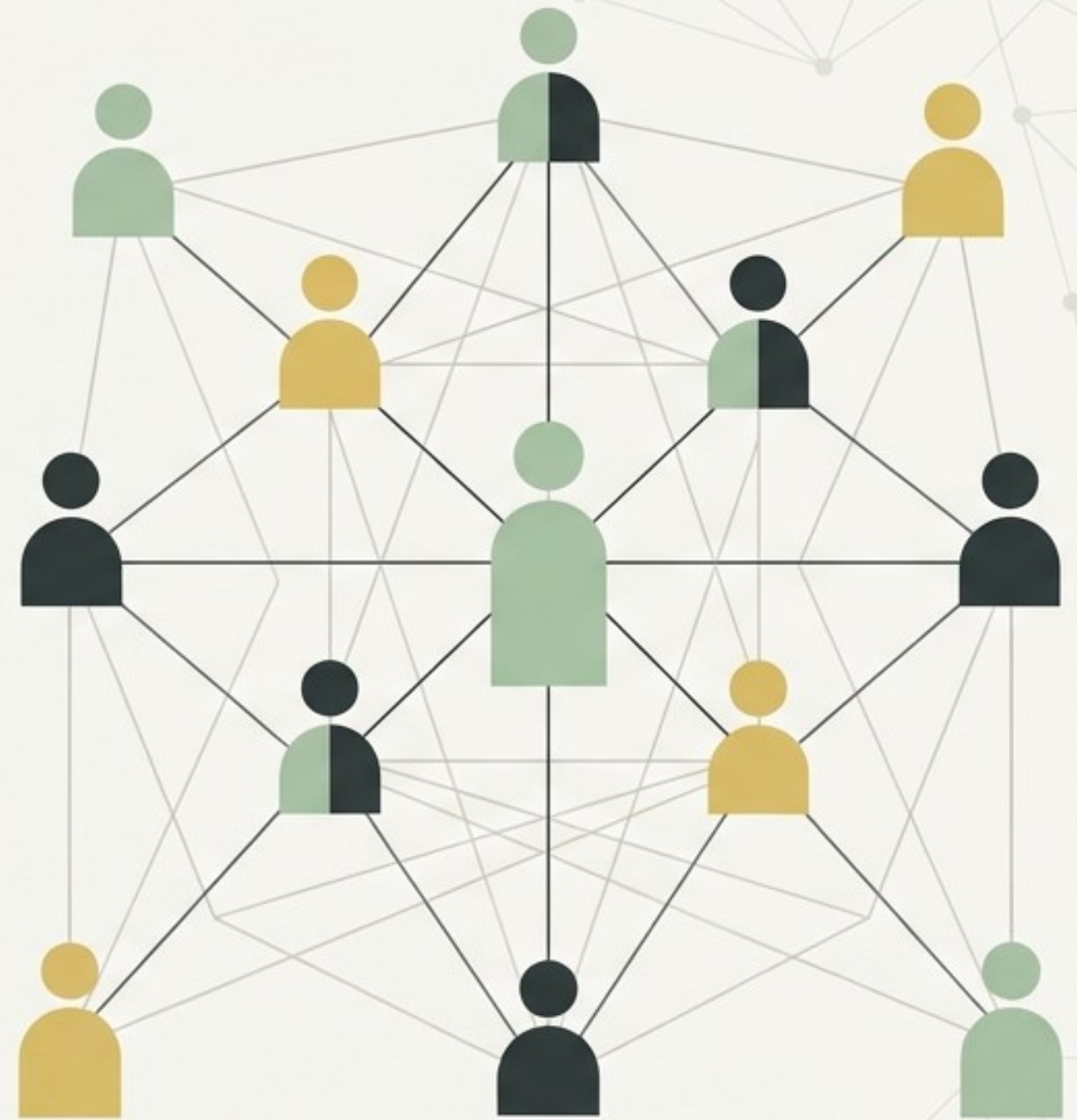


TERMS, CONCEPTS AND THEIR USES IN SOCIOLOGY



Chapter 2 — Terms, Concepts and Their Uses in Sociology

Introduction

Sociology uses specific terms and concepts to understand and explain social life.

Some important concepts used in Sociology are:

Social Groups
Social Structure
Social Stratification
Status
Role
Social Control

These concepts help sociologists describe patterns, relationships and processes in society.

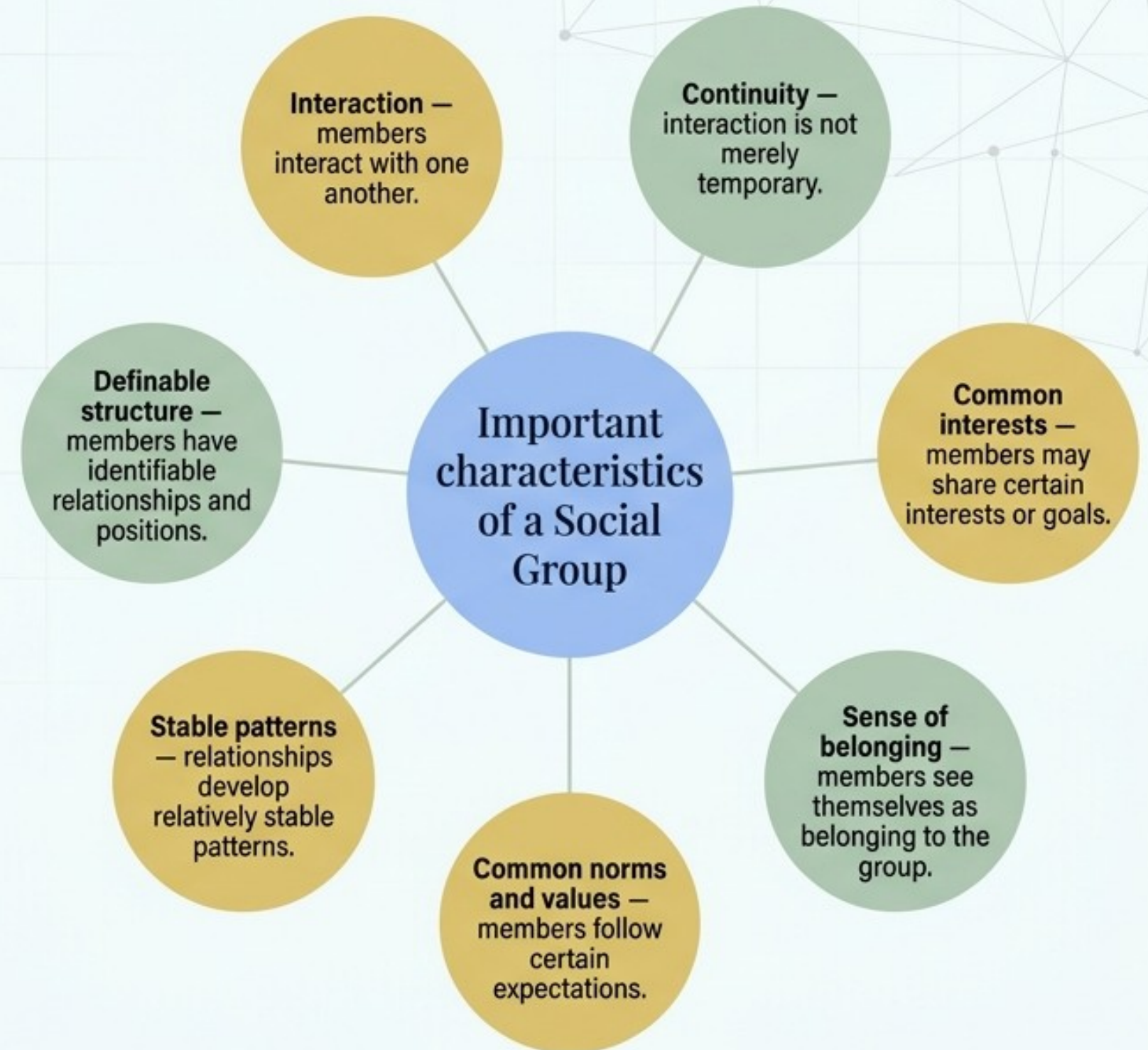
Social Groups and Society

What is a Social Group?

A social group is a collection of two or more people who:

- Have regular and continuous interaction
- Share some common interests
- Develop a sense of belonging
- Have relatively stable patterns of interaction
- Follow certain norms and values

A social group is therefore more than simply a collection of people.



Social Structure

Social structure refers to the relatively stable and patterned relationships between individuals and groups in society. It gives society an organised pattern.

Examples:

- Relationships between parents and children
- Teacher and student
- Employer and employee
- Different social classes

Key idea: Social structure = patterned and relatively stable social relationships.



Aggregate

An **aggregate** is a collection of people who:

- Are temporarily in the same physical space
- Do not necessarily interact regularly
- Do not necessarily see themselves as belonging together
- Do not have sustained social relationships

Example: People waiting at a bus stop may form an aggregate. They are together physically, but this does not automatically make them a social group.



Social Category

A **social category** is a statistical grouping of people who share a particular characteristic.

Examples:

- Age groups
- Youth
- Working population
- Students
- People belonging to a particular income category

People in a social category do not necessarily interact with one another or share a sense of belonging.

Social Group, Aggregate and Social Category

Social Group	Aggregate	Social Category
Regular interaction	Temporary physical presence	Statistical grouping
Sense of belonging	No necessary sense of belonging	No necessary interaction
Relatively stable relationships	Usually temporary	Based on shared characteristic
Example: Family	Example: People at a bus stop	Example: Youth

Remember:

Group → Interaction + Belonging
Aggregate → Physical presence
Category → Shared characteristic

Types of Social Groups

Sociologists classify social groups into different types. Major types:

Social Groups

Primary & Secondary Groups

Community & Association

In-groups & Out-groups

Reference Groups

Peer Groups

Primary Group

A primary group is a relatively small group characterised by:
 - Intimate and face-to-face relationships; Emotional closeness; Personal relationships; Strong sense of belonging; Person-oriented interaction.

Examples: Family, Close friends.

Key idea: Primary Group = Small + Intimate + Personal

Secondary Group

A secondary group is generally:
 • Relatively large; More formal; Less personal; Goal-oriented;
 • Based on specific roles and responsibilities.

Examples: School, Hospital, Office, Large organisation.

Key idea: Secondary Group = Large + Formal + Goal-oriented

Community

A community generally involves:
 • A sense of belonging;
 • Close or relatively enduring social relationships;
 • Shared life or common interests;
 • Greater personal involvement.

Example: A close-knit local community.

Community vs Association

Community → broader shared life and belonging;
 Association → organised around a specific purpose

Association

An association is a more organised group formed for a specific purpose or interest. Characteristics:
 • Specific objectives; More formal relationships;
 • Organised structure; Membership may be voluntary.

Examples: Professional association, Student association, Trade or workers' association.

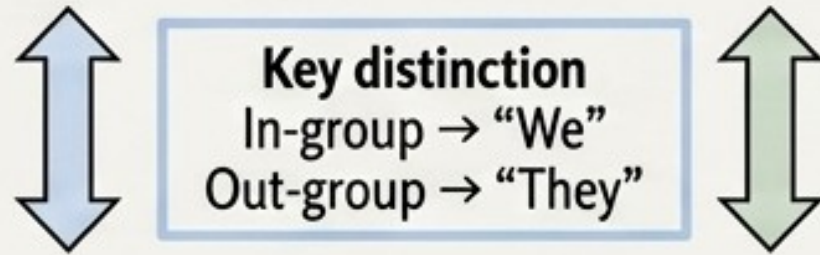
In-Group & Out-Group

In-Group

An **in-group** is a group with which an individual identifies and feels a sense of belonging. Members may experience:

- “We-group” feeling
- Loyalty
- Cooperation
- Solidarity.

Example: A person may consider their family their in-group.



Out-Group

An **out-group** is a group with which an individual does not identify. It is experienced as:

- “They-group”
- Different from one’s own group
- Sometimes associated with feelings of indifference
- In some situations, even hostility

Reference Group

A **reference group** is a group that an individual uses as a standard for evaluating themselves, their behaviour, lifestyle or aspirations.

A person may belong to the group or may not belong to it.

Functions of a Reference Group

It can provide:

- Standards for comparison
- Information
- Ideas about lifestyle
- Values and opinions
- Goals and aspirations

Example

A student may look up to a particular professional group and try to emulate its lifestyle or behaviour.

Peer Group

A **peer group** consists of people who are broadly similar in terms of age, status or social position.

Examples

- School friends
- Classmates
- People of a similar age

Peer groups are particularly important in shaping:

- Behaviour
- Attitudes
- Lifestyle
- Values

Social Stratification

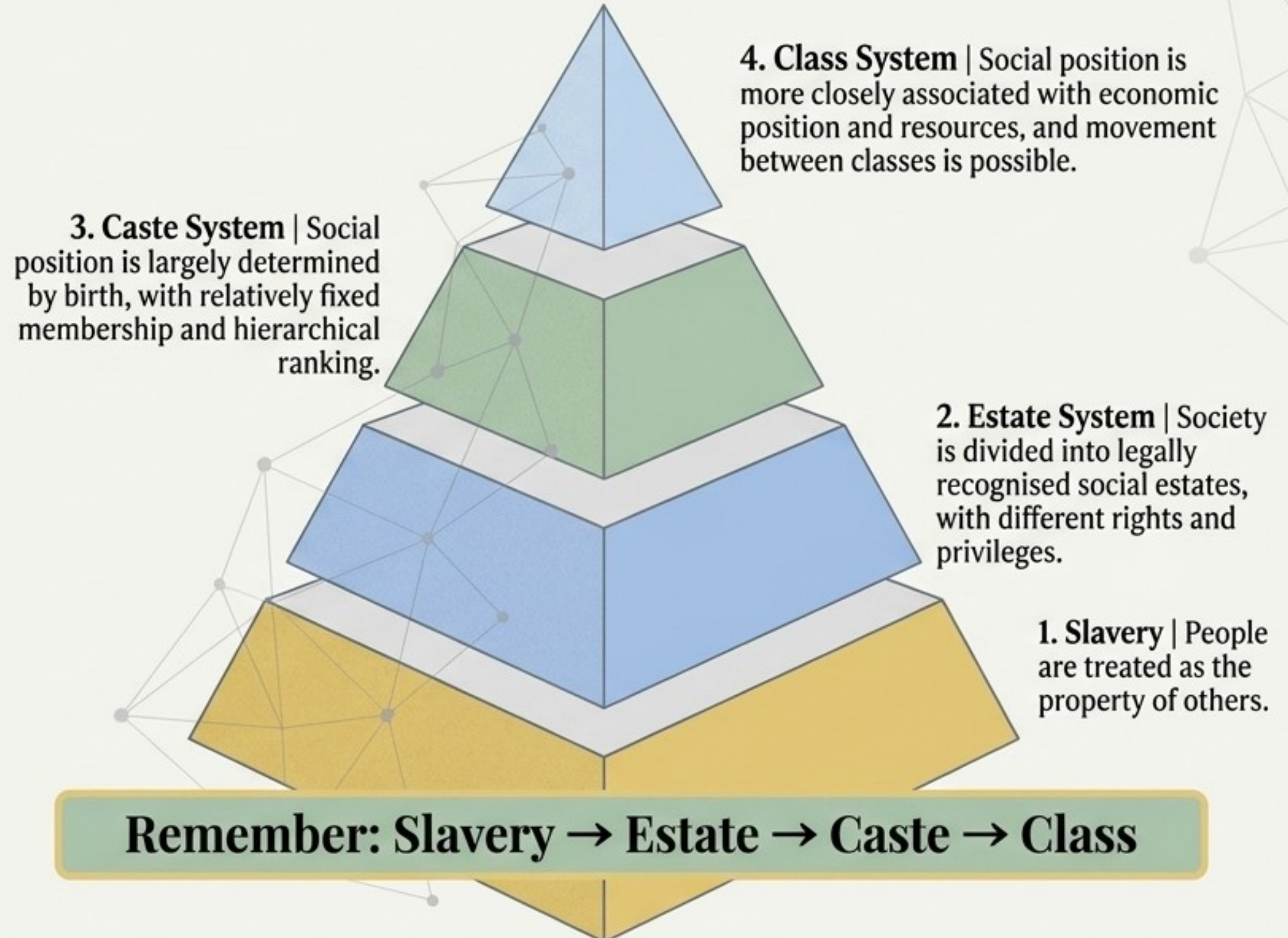
Social stratification refers to the structured inequalities between different groups of people in society.

Society is divided into layers or levels, with unequal access to:

- ◆ Resources
- ◆ Power
- ◆ Prestige
- ◆ Opportunities
- ◆ Social privileges

Key idea
Social stratification =
structured social inequality

Four Basic Systems of Social Stratification



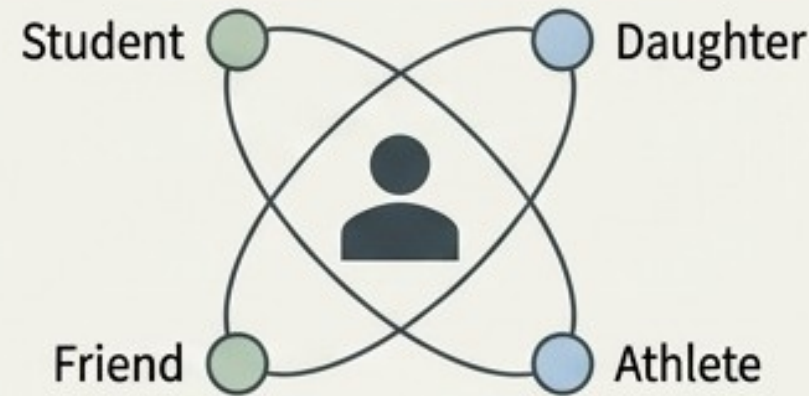
Status

A **status** is a socially defined position that an individual occupies in a society or group. Every status carries certain rights, duties and expectations.

Examples:

A person may have the statuses of:

- Student
- Daughter/son
- Friend
- Teacher
- Employee



Status Set

A **status set** is the collection of all the statuses occupied by an individual at a particular time.

A person may simultaneously be:
Student + Daughter + Friend + Athlete
Together, these form the person's status set.



Status Sequence

A **status sequence** refers to the series of statuses that an individual occupies over the course of life.

Thus:

Status Set → statuses held at the same time.

Status Sequence → statuses occupied over time.

Ascribed Status

An **ascribed status** is a social position that is generally assigned to an individual without their choice, often by birth or circumstances beyond their control.

Examples:

- Age
- Sex/gender
- Caste by birth
- Family background

Key idea: Ascribed = given/assigned

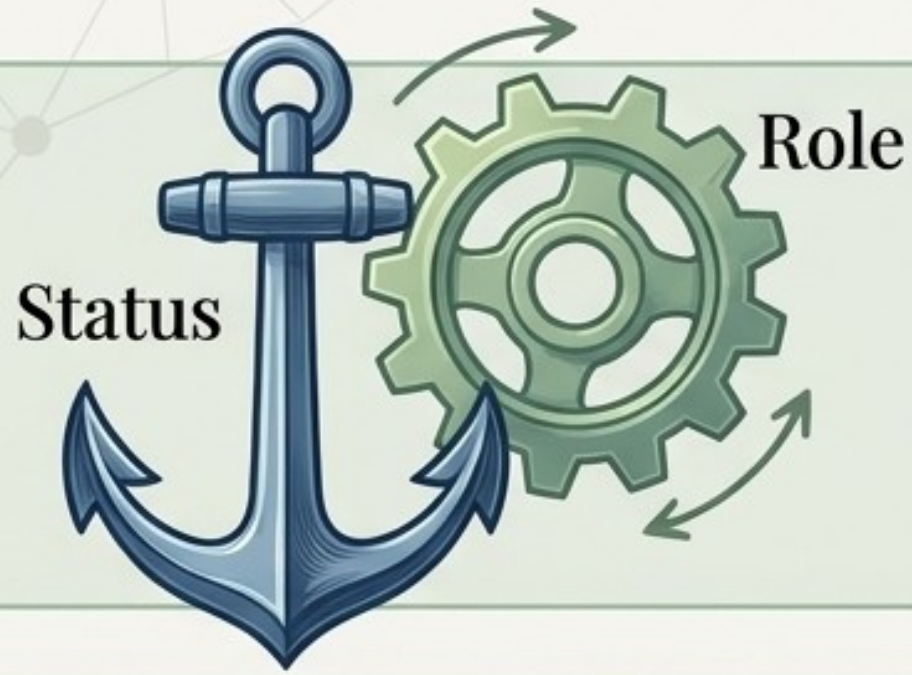
Achieved Status

An **achieved status** is a social position that an individual acquires through their own efforts, choices or actions.

Examples:

- Teacher
- Doctor
- Athlete
- Graduate

Key idea: Achieved = acquired/earned



Role

A **role** refers to the **expected behaviour** associated with a particular status.

If status = position, then:

Role = expected behaviour attached to that position

Example

Status: Teacher Role: Teaching students, evaluating work, maintaining classroom responsibilities.

Role Specification

Role specification refers to the specific expectations and responsibilities attached to a particular role.

For example, the role of a teacher includes specific expectations such as:
Teaching Guiding students Evaluating performance
Maintaining classroom discipline

Role Stereotyping

Role stereotyping occurs when fixed and oversimplified ideas are attached to particular roles or groups.

Example

The belief that: “Women should only perform household roles.”
Such assumptions can restrict individuals and reinforce gender inequality.



Role Conflict

Role conflict occurs when an individual faces incompatible expectations associated with different roles.

Example

A person may be both: Employee + Parent
If an important work responsibility clashes with an important family responsibility, the person may experience role conflict.

Remember:

Different roles → conflicting expectations → Role Conflict

Social Control

Social control refers to the mechanisms through which society regulates behaviour and maintains social order.

It encourages people to follow:

- Norms
- Values
- Rules
- Laws
- Social expectations

Why is social control necessary?

- It helps:
- Maintain social order
 - Regulate behaviour
 - Encourage conformity to social norms
 - Discourage socially unacceptable behaviour

Functional Perspective on Social Control

From a functional perspective, social control contributes to the maintenance of social order and stability.

It helps society function by encouraging people to follow shared norms and values.

Keep this point brief for the marathon:
Social control → order + stability

Forms of Social Control

There are two major forms:

Formal Social Control
Formal social control is exercised through official rules and institutions.
Examples
Laws
Police Courts
Schools
Government regulations
It is usually explicit and officially organised.

Informal Social Control
Informal social control operates through everyday social relationships and expectations.
Examples
Family approval/disapproval Customs
Praise Traditions
Social pressure Community expectations
It is generally unofficial and less structured.

Formal vs Informal Social Control	
Formal	Informal
Official	Unofficial
Based on formal rules/laws	Based on norms and social expectations
Courts, police, institutions	Family, friends, community
More structured	Less structured
Easy memory:	Formal → Law Informal → Society

Sanctions

Sanctions are the rewards or punishments used to encourage conformity to social norms.

Positive sanctions
Reward desired behaviour.
Examples: Praise, awards, promotion.

Negative sanctions
Punish or discourage unacceptable behaviour.
Examples: Criticism, fines, punishment.

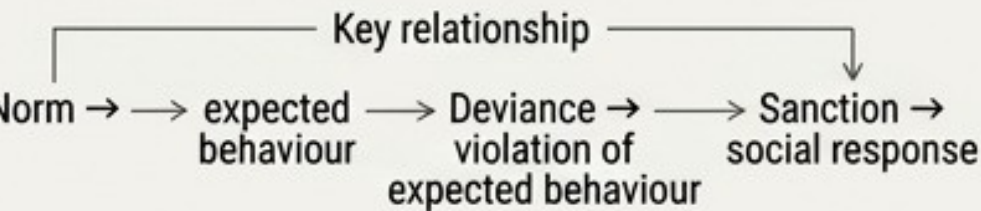
Remember: Sanction = social response to behaviour

Deviance

Deviance refers to behaviour that violates or goes against accepted social norms.

What is considered deviant can vary according to:
Society
Culture
Time
Social context

Example
A behaviour considered unacceptable in one society may not necessarily be viewed in the same way in another.



Question & Answers MCQs

1. Which of the following is a characteristic of a social group?

- A. No interaction among members
- B. Regular interaction and a sense of belonging
- C. Only temporary physical presence
- D. Similarity in one characteristic only

Answer: B. Regular interaction and a sense of belonging

2. People waiting at a bus stop are an example of:

- A. Primary group
- B. Secondary group
- C. Aggregate
- D. Association

Answer: C. Aggregate

3. A statistical grouping of people based on a shared characteristic is called:

- A. Social category
- B. Social group
- C. Community
- D. Association

Answer: A. Social category

Question & Answers MCQs

4. Which group is characterised by intimate and face-to-face relationships?

- A. Secondary group
- B. Primary group
- C. Association
- D. Aggregate

Answer: B. Primary group

5. A social position assigned largely by birth is known as:

- A. Achieved status
- B. Ascribed status
- C. Role
- D. Role set

Answer: B. Ascribed status

6. Which of the following is an example of formal social control?

- A. Family disapproval
- B. Social criticism
- C. Law and courts
- D. Peer pressure

Answer: C. Law and courts

Very Short Questions

Q1. What is meant by a Social Group?

Answer: A social group is a collection of two or more people who interact regularly, share common interests and develop a sense of belonging.

Q2. Define Quasi-group with an example.

Answer: A quasi-group is a social grouping that lacks a clear structure, organisation or sustained interaction among its members.

Example: An aggregate or social category.

Q3. Define Sanctions.

Answer: Sanctions are the rewards or punishments used by society to encourage conformity to social norms.

Short-Answer Questions

Q1. Differentiate between a Social Group, Aggregate and Social Category.

Social Group	Aggregate	Social Category
Involves regular interaction, relationships and a sense of belonging. Examples: Family → Social Group	People who are temporarily together in the same physical space without sustained interaction. Examples: People at a bus stop → Aggregate	People grouped on the basis of a shared characteristic. Examples: Youth → Social Category

Q2. Differentiate between Ascribed Status and Achieved Status.

Ascribed Status	Achieved Status
- Assigned without individual choice - Often linked to birth or circumstances - Example: Caste by birth	- Acquired through effort/choice - Usually based on achievement - Example: Teacher

Easy recall: Ascribed = assigned Achieved = acquired

Q3. What is the difference between Primary and Secondary Groups?

Primary Groups

- Small in size
- Intimate and face-to-face relationships
- Personal and emotional
- Example: Family, close friends

Secondary Groups

- Relatively larger
- More formal relationships
- Goal-oriented
- Example: School, hospital, office

Long-Answer Questions

Q1. Discuss Social Stratification and its impact on individuals.

Answer: Social stratification refers to structured inequalities between different groups in society. People may have unequal access to resources, power, prestige, opportunities and privileges.

Major systems of stratification:

- Slavery
- Estate system
- Caste system
- Class system

Impact on individuals:

- Influences access to education and economic resources.
- Affects life chances and opportunities.
- Influences social status and prestige.
- Can create advantages for some groups and disadvantages for others.
- May limit social mobility, particularly in more rigid systems such as caste.

Conclusion: Social stratification shapes an individual's social position, opportunities and life experiences.

Q2. What is Social Control? Discuss its types.

Answer:

Social control refers to the mechanisms through which society regulates behaviour and encourages people to follow accepted norms, values and rules.

Types of Social Control

1. Formal Social Control

Based on official rules and laws. Exercised through institutions. Examples: Police, courts, laws and government regulations.

2. Informal Social Control

Operates through everyday social relationships. Based on social expectations and norms. Examples: Family approval/disapproval, criticism, praise and social pressure.

Importance

Social control helps maintain social order and stability and regulates behaviour within society.

Q3.

"Social control is necessary but also reflects power relations." Discuss.

Answer:

Social control is necessary because it helps maintain social order, regulate behaviour and encourage conformity to shared norms and values.

However, social control can also reflect power relations because:

- Powerful groups may influence which behaviours are considered acceptable.
- Rules and norms may reflect the interests and values of dominant groups.
- Institutions such as the state, law and other organisations can exercise control over individuals.
- Some groups may have greater power to define what is considered normal or deviant.
- Therefore, social control is not always neutral; it can sometimes reproduce existing inequalities and power differences.

Conclusion: Social control is important for maintaining order, but Sociology also examines who creates the rules, whose interests they serve, and who has the power to enforce them.