

What Is Sociology?



Sudhir Venkatesh, now a professor of sociology, stands in the Chicago neighborhood he studied as a student.

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What Is Sociology?

The Robert Taylor Homes, once the largest housing project in the United States, were demolished in the early 2000s.



WELCOME TO
ROBERT TAYLOR
HOMES
DRIVE CAREFULLY... AND
WATCH OUT FOR OUR CHILDREN
OFFICE LOCATED 4100 S. STATE

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Examining Social Life

Main Idea

- Sociology is a social science that looks at human society. Viewing the world from a sociological perspective enables sociologists to see beyond commonly held beliefs to the hidden meanings behind human actions.



Reading Focus

- What is sociology, and how does it compare to other social sciences?
- How do sociologists view and think about society?

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Sociology and Other Social Sciences

The **social sciences** are disciplines that study human social behavior or institutions and the functions of human society in a scientific manner.

- **Sociology**
 - **Sociology** studies human society and social behavior through **social interaction** and **social phenomena**
- **Anthropology**
 - **Anthropology** is the comparative study of past and present cultures
- **Psychology**
 - **Psychology** studies behavior and mental processes; **social psychology** studies how social environment affects an individual

Sociology and Other Social Sciences

- **Economics**
 - **Economics** studies choices people make to satisfy their needs and wants
- **Political Science**
 - **Political science** studies principles, organization, and operation of government
- **History**
 - **History** studies people and events of the past

THE SOCIAL SCIENCES



The social sciences are a group of related disciplines that study society and human relationships. These disciplines overlap, but each one has a distinct point of view.

Sociology

The study of human social behavior from a group perspective.

Anthropology

The comparative study of past and present cultures. In terms of subject matter, anthropology is the social science most similar to sociology.

Psychology

The study of behavior and mental processes. Social psychology, the study of how the social environment affects individual personality and behavior, uses approaches similar to those of sociology.

Economics

The study of the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services. Sociology is interested in the impact of the distribution of goods and services on inequality.

Political Science

The study of the organization and operation of governments. Government, particularly its impact on people's lives, is also of interest to sociologists.

History

The study of past events in human societies. Sociology sometimes looks to past events for explanations of present-day social phenomena.

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The Sociological Imagination

The sociological imagination enables the sociologist to see the broad social issues behind individual problems while appreciating that those broad social issues affect the lives of individuals. For example, the sociological imagination moves the sociologist beyond the private concerns of the unemployed individual to see the social phenomenon of unemployment. At the same time, however, it allows the sociologist to understand unemployment in terms of the lives of the unemployed.

C. Wright Mills suggested that the sociological imagination involves seeing the world in terms of biography and history. What do you think he meant by this?

Public Issue–Unemployment

Private Troubles–Being Unemployed



Thinking Like a Sociologist

Sociological Perspective

- Looking at social life in a scientific, systematic way
- Looking beyond commonly held beliefs
- Trying to find patterns



Sociological Imagination

- Ability to see the connection between the larger world and your personal life
- Seeing the relations between impersonal and intimate features of human life

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The Development of Sociology

Main Idea

Social upheaval in Europe during the late 1700s and 1800s encouraged scholars to closely study society. Their work led to the development of the academic discipline of sociology.

Reading Focus

- What factors led to the development of sociology?
- How did early European scholars lay the foundations of sociology?
- What contributions did later European scholars make to the development of sociology?
- How did American scholars contribute to the field of sociology?

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The Development of Sociology

- **Political changes**
 - Focus on individual liberty and rights
 - American and French Revolutions
- **Social changes**
 - Growth of cities
 - Housing shortages
 - Crime and pollution increased
- **Economic changes**
 - Industrial Revolution
 - Growth of cities



Early European Scholars

Auguste Comte

- Considered the founder of sociology
- Studied social order and social change



Harriet Martineau

- Reviewed life in the United States
- Translated Comte's work



Herbert Spencer

- Compared society to a biological organism
- Helped create **social Darwinism**



Karl Marx

- Linked societal conditions to the economy
- Believed economic imbalance would lead to conflict

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Early European Scholars

Auguste Comte

Contribution Among the first scholars to apply the methods of the physical sciences to the study of society; coined the word *sociology* and is considered the founder of the subject.

Major Works *Plan of the Scientific Operations Necessary for Reorganizing Society* (1822), *Positive Philosophy* (1830–1842), *System of Positive Polity* (1851–1854)



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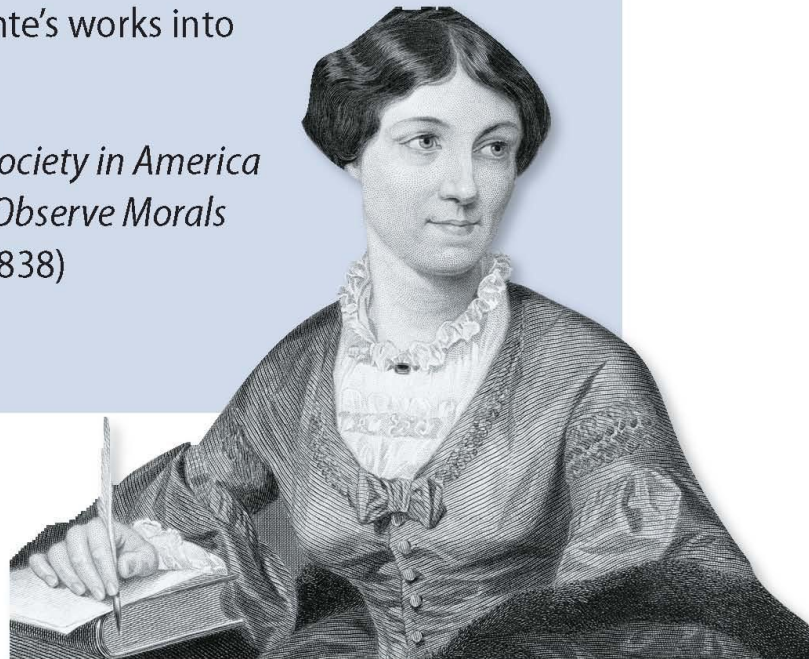
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Early European Scholars

Harriet Martineau

Contribution Conducted early sociological studies in Britain and the United States; advocate of the idea that scholars should try to improve society, not just study it; best known for translating Comte's works into English.

Major Works *Society in America* (1837), *How to Observe Morals and Manners* (1838)



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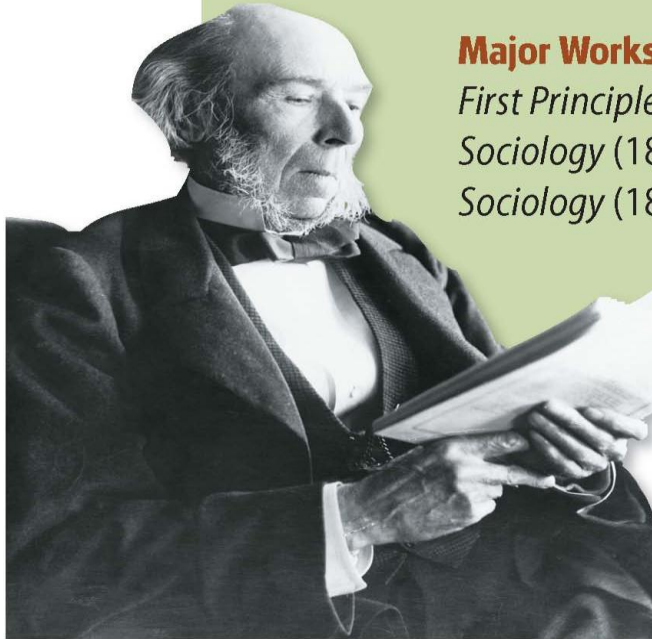
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Early European Scholars

Herbert Spencer

Contribution Applied the principles of biology to society; popularized the evolutionary theory of social change and coined the phrase “survival of the fittest.”

Major Works *Social Statics* (1851), *First Principles* (1862), *The Study of Sociology* (1872), *The Principles of Sociology* (1876–1896)



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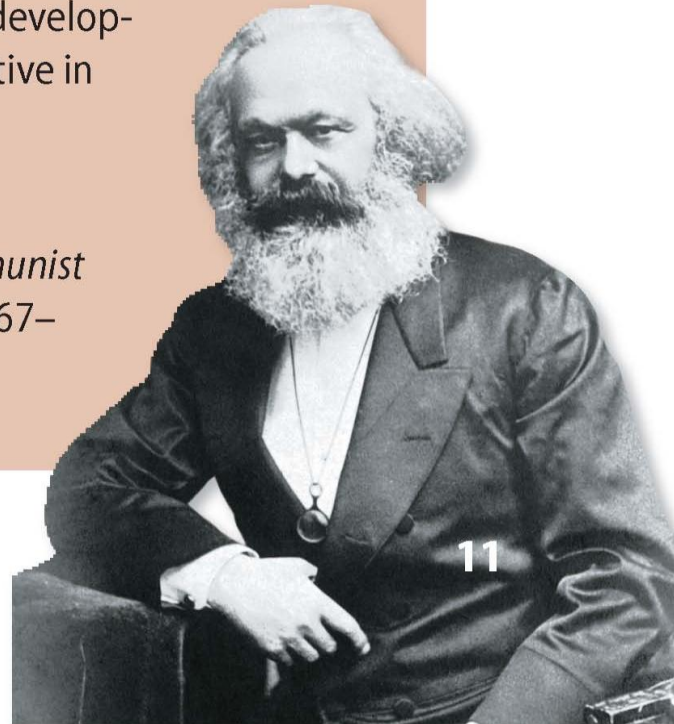
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Early European Scholars

Karl Marx

Contribution Emphasized the primary role that conflict plays in social change and advocated revolution to speed up the process of change; his ideas led to the development of the conflict perspective in sociology.

Major Works *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), *Capital* (1867–1894)



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Later European Scholars

Émile Durkheim

- Developed first sociology class in France
- Systematically applied the methods of science
- Viewed segments of society by their **function**
- Particularly interested in the role of religion

Max Weber

- Interested in certain groups instead of an entire society
- Used the idea of **Verstehen** to understand the actions of individuals
- Used the idea of **ideal type** to understand the goals of a society

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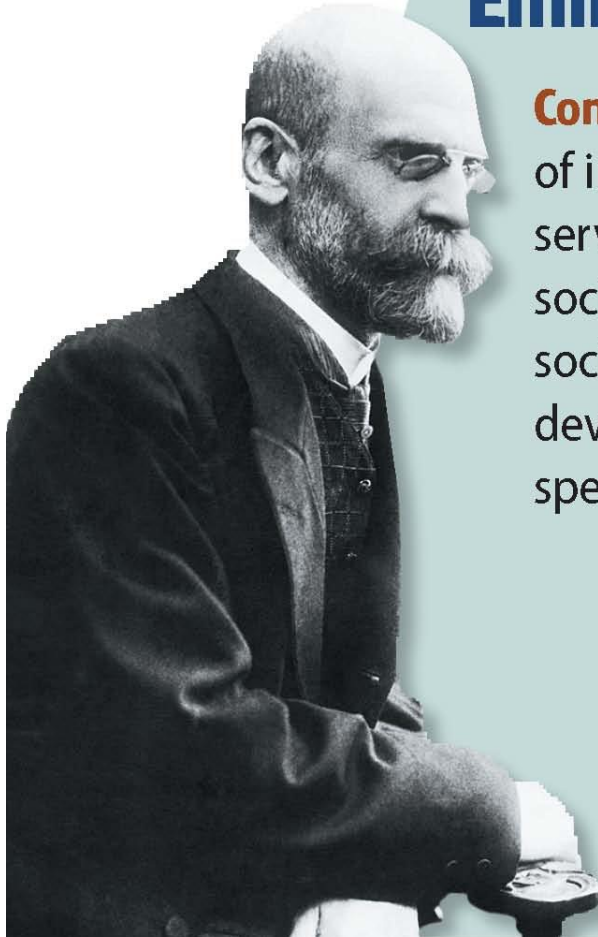
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Later European Scholars

Émile Durkheim



Contribution Described society as a set of interdependent parts, with each part serving a specific function; believed that sociologists should focus on observable social phenomena; influential in the development of the functionalist perspective in sociology.

Major Works *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893), *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895), *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (1897), *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912)

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Later European Scholars

Max Weber

Contribution Developed the concept of the ideal type, a model against which social reality can be measured; believed that sociology should attempt to understand the meanings that individuals attach to their actions; his work influenced the development of the interactionist perspective in sociology.

Major Works *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), *Economy and Society* (1922)



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American Scholars

The University of Chicago department of sociology became known for a certain set of sociological theories, as well as the idea that sociologists should look for solutions to social problems.

Jane Addams

- Opened a settlement house in Chicago
- Published a series of surveys about the problems of the urban poor
- Not taken seriously as a sociologist

W.E.B. Du Bois

- Took an approach similar to the Chicago School
- Examined life in African American neighborhoods
- Encouraged scholars to examine the problems of race

What Is Sociology?

Statistically Speaking...

Hull House Studies Perhaps Jane Addams' best demonstration of her commitment to both social reform and sociological analysis was *Hull House Maps and Papers*. Published in 1895, this study's most striking aspect was the color-coded maps that showed race, ethnicity, and income levels on Chicago's West Side. During her study Addams discovered the following:

18 Nationalities living in the area

\$9.44 Average weekly wage for garment workers

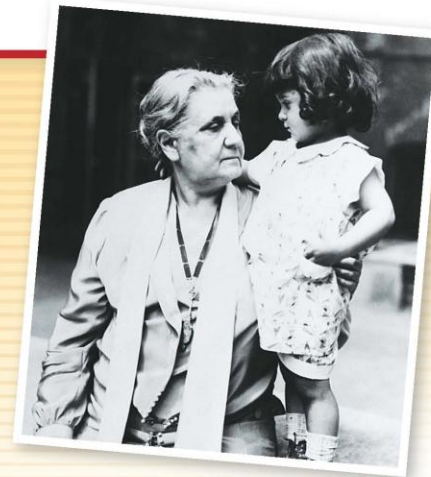
12 Hours per day worked by garment workers

\$1.25 Average daily wage for laborers

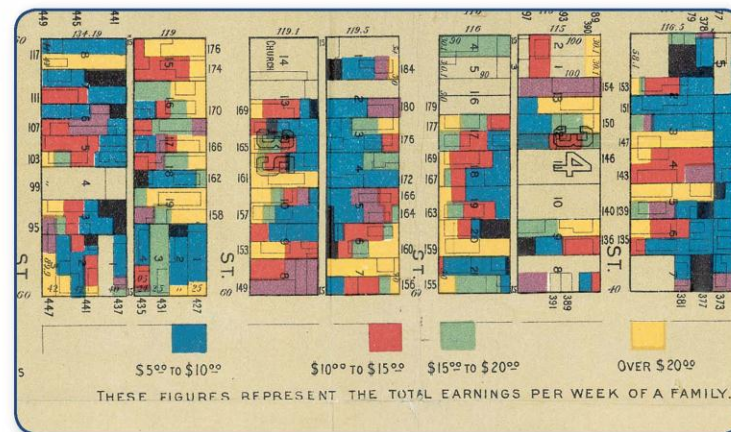
17-32 Weeks per year laborers were unemployed

\$8.47 Average monthly rent

Thinking Critically **Draw Conclusions** Why were the Hull House studies important for the development of sociology?



Jane Addams (above) thought that analyzing social problems was the first step to solving them. She presented some of her findings in color-coded maps like this one below, which shows differences in family income.



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American Scholars

W.E.B. Du Bois

Contribution Used community studies to underscore the significance of race in American society; believed that sociologists should be involved in social reform as well as academic study.

Major Works *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (1899), *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)



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Modern Perspectives

Main Idea

Sociology employs three major theoretical perspectives—functionalism, which focuses on order and stability; conflict, which focuses on power relations; and interactionism, which focuses on how individuals interact with one another in everyday life.

Reading Focus

- In what ways do the three major theoretical perspectives in sociology differ in their focus?
- How do the three theoretical perspectives differ in terms of their levels of analysis?

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Major Theoretical Perspectives

Sociologists use **theories** to describe the relationships among different elements of society. A **theoretical perspective** is a group of such theories. Three major theoretical perspectives form the basis of modern sociology.

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Functionalist Perspective

View of society as a set of interrelated parts that work together to produce a stable social system

- **Dysfunction**
 - A negative consequence of an element of society
- **Manifest function**
 - The intended and recognized consequence of an element of society
- **Latent function**
 - Unintended and unrecognized consequence of an element of society

Conflict Perspective

- **Conflict perspective**
 - Focuses on elements that create competition and change
- **Feminist perspective**
 - A version of the conflict perspective that describes inequalities based on gender

Interactionist Perspective

- **Interactionist perspective**
 - Focuses on the interaction of individuals with each other
- **Symbol**
 - Anything that represents something else
- **Symbolic interaction**
 - Using symbols while interacting with others

Click on the image to play the Interactive.

INTERACTIVE *

Sociological Perspectives on

School

Functionalist Perspective

School integrates individuals into society by transmitting culture and values and promoting acceptable behavior.



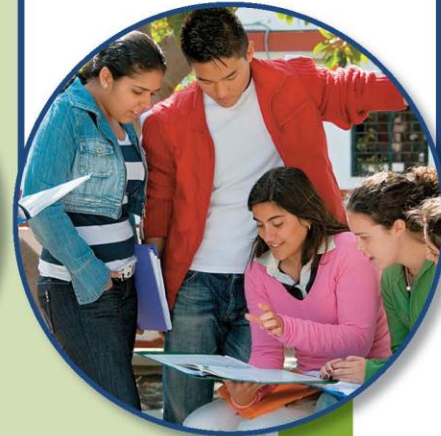
Conflict Perspective

School has established patterns of authority that reflect and underscore power relationships and conflict in society.



Interactionist Perspective

Social interaction among groups in school influences the way groups and individuals behave.



Interactive Feature

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Levels of Analysis

• **Macrosociology**

- The study of large-scale systems or societies as a whole
- The study of long-term problems

• **Microsociology**

- The study of small-group settings
- The study of everyday interactions among group members

• **Globalization**

- A process of creating a world-wide system of interactions, larger than any one society

Conducting Sociological Research

Main Idea

Sociologists use several approaches to conducting research. Regardless of the approaches they use, all sociologists follow a seven-step research process.

Reading Focus

- What are the seven steps in the research process?
- How do sociologists uncover causation and correlation?
- What basic research methods do sociologists employ?
- How do ethical issues affect sociological research?

The Research Process

Sociologists use the **scientific method** to conduct their research.

Scientific Method

The scientific method is an objective, logical, and systematic way of collecting and analyzing data.

A **hypothesis** is a statement that predicts what the outcome of an experiment will be.

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THE RESEARCH PROCESS

QUICK
FACTS

Sociologists follow a seven-step process when conducting empirical research.

Step 1 Define the Problem

The researcher selects a topic for study and develops operational definitions of key concepts.

Step 2 Review the Literature

The researcher reviews existing literature on the topic.

Step 3 Form a Hypothesis

The researcher develops a testable hypothesis on the research topic.

Step 4 Choose a Research Design

The researcher develops a plan for collecting, analyzing, and evaluating data.

Step 5 Collect the Data

The researcher gathers and carefully records data.

Step 6 Analyze the Data

The researcher objectively analyzes the data to determine whether it supports the research hypotheses.

Step 7 Present Conclusions

The researcher presents the research findings to other sociologists.

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Causation and Correlation

Causation

- Every event has at least one cause.
- **Variables**, or traits, of a social group help determine why an event occurs the way it does.
- Causal relationships exist when a change in one variable causes change in another variable.
- Independent variables cause changes in dependent variables.

Correlation

- **Correlation** is the first step in proving causation.
- A correlation exists when a change in one variable is regularly associated with a change in another variable.
- Correlations can have a causal relationship or not.

Evidence of a correlation is not evidence of a causation.

Spurious Correlation



“A spurious correlation exists where variables appear to be related but actually are being affected by a third variable.”

Suppose that studies show that students who get good grades are also members of the school band. Does this mean that involvement in the school band causes students to get good grades? Not necessarily. There might be a third variable—such as a general desire to do well in school—that encourages both good grades and involvement in extracurricular activities such as the band. *Why is spurious correlation an important concept for researchers?*

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Basic Research Methods

Survey

- **Survey** method is used for large numbers of people
- Researchers use questionnaires and interviews
- The data available in a short amount of time
- The answers may not be accurate
- Researchers use **samples**, or small groups

Analysis of Existing Sources

- **Historical method** uses information from the past
- **Content analysis** counts uses of words or symbols



Observational Studies

- Researchers watch people in detached observation.
- Researchers become part of the group being studied in **participant observation**.
- A **case study** uses information gathered during observation.

Experiments

- In an **experiment**, the data is gathered under controlled conditions.
- Researchers use a control group and an experimental group.
- Information gathered is somewhat limited because of the controlled conditions.

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Statistical Analysis

- Researchers use mathematical data.
- **Statistical analysis** is the analyzing of collected data to determine the kind of relationship between two or more variables.
- The *mode* is the most common number in the data.
- The *mean* is the average of the numbers in the data.
- The *median* is the number that divides the data into two equal parts.

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Ethical Issues in Research

- Specific rules set by the American Sociological Association
- Rules focus on:
 - Confidentiality
 - Deception
 - Informed consent
- Must protect the rights of subjects