

# Sociology and Sociological and Global Perspectives Defined

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## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will explore the discipline of sociology and related concepts by defining and discussing:

1. Sociology
2. Sociological Perspective
3. Benefits of the Sociological Perspective
4. Global Perspective

## 1. SOCIOLOGY

**Sociology** is the scientific study of society and the social behavior of people in groups.

Sociologists study groups and the behavior of people within them. A social movement theorist might look at what would cause normally law-abiding citizens to not be so law-abiding and start to riot.

### IN CONTEXT

During the Arab Spring, all kinds of different people came into the streets to a riot that might normally not. How might a sociologist approach a situation like this? A sociologist might look at this situation and say, “OK, what were the factors that led to this group of people deciding to riot?”

Another angle of interest to a sociologist may be:

- How are these riots organized?
- Where were they congregating?
- Where are people communicating?
- Where was the actual physical space that is facilitating discussion and then, in a sense, revolution?

If somebody says to be in the square at this time, how is that information communicated? Are they using Facebook and Twitter or more old fashioned mechanisms? You can imagine, then, that a sociologist is interested in the role of technology, such as social media.

In addition to those two angles, a sociologist might also be interested in the power structure of the society and other similar factors that contribute to a revolutionary ethos:

- Who's in power?
- How do they get there?
- How do they use that power?
- How unequal is the society?



#### BIG IDEA

Although you might see only within one sphere of a social movement, there are many different angles from which a sociologist would look at it.

Sociology also incorporates systematic study. Do you think sociologists are just going out drinking coffee and generalizing? No, it doesn't work like that.

They use rigorous scientific methods, often in the form of surveys, questionnaires, interviews, and even participant observation. In addition, they can use statistical analysis and a number of regression techniques.



#### TERM TO KNOW

#### Sociology

The scientific study of society and the social behavior of people in groups.

## 2. SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

So, what kind of perspective do sociologists bring to their work?

The **sociological perspective** is defined as seeing the general in the particular. Sociologists are looking for broad, general patterns in the behavior of individuals and particular people.

#### IN CONTEXT

Around 1970 or so, America experienced deindustrialization and the loss of manufacturing jobs. The economy started to open up with globalization, and it was cheaper for companies to take the manufacturing jobs and send them anywhere else to the lowest bidder.

So, these jobs used to be done in America--and they were primarily done by poorer, blue-collar workers. Now, the capitalists were only trying to be more competitive by outsourcing these jobs.

They didn't set out to decimate the inner-city working class, but it just worked out that way. As the jobs left, poverty and crime became more rampant.

Fast forward to today, these trends have only gotten worse. Now the urban, old manufacturing core

that used to give all these people jobs is simply gone.

So what do sociologists really do? They recognize broad, general trends, and see how they work out in the lives of individual people.

➡ **EXAMPLE** A 10-year-old boy born in a poor neighborhood of South Chicago--a neighborhood that used to be a manufacturing neighborhood that had somewhat stable jobs.

Sociologists attempt to make sense of this boy's life and his future job prospects and life success by referencing trends that occurred in the past.

One of the most famous sociologist of all time, C. Wright Mills, called thinking this way using your sociological imagination. When you use your sociological imagination, you're able to see the general (big trends) in the particular (people's lives).



#### BIG IDEA

Seeing big, general social forces in the lives of particular people: this is the goal of sociological thinking. If you remember one thing from this course, remember seeing the general in the particular.



#### TERM TO KNOW

### Sociological Perspective

Finding general patterns out of details from particular people's lives.

## 3. BENEFITS OF THE SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

There are four general **benefits of the sociological perspective**:

1. It enables you to see and assess the truth of your general background assumptions about people and about society.

➡ **EXAMPLE** You may have heard people say that an individual could get ahead if they worked hard and weren't so lazy. Well, a sociologist would come along and say, "wait a second, not everybody's life chances start out the same way." It's not as easy for somebody to pull themselves up by the bootstraps if they're in a disadvantaged position from the start.

2. It enables you to recognize the constraints that affect people's lives.

3. The sociological perspective allows us to be more informed citizens. It enables you to connect your private, personal problems with larger social forces.

4. The sociological perspective helps you understand and appreciate diversity.



#### BIG IDEA

Remember, the general in the particular. When you can do that, you can be a better informed citizen, because you can understand how certain social and economic policy might affect you.



## TERM TO KNOW

### Benefits of the Sociological Perspective

The four benefits of the sociological perspective are: challenges familiar understandings, recognizes the constraints individuals face, enables more informed civic participation, and appreciates human diversity.

## 4. GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Following the final benefit of the sociological perspective is what we call the **global perspective**. This is a look at an individual society with respect to the larger global system. We look at how an individual society is operating within and with respect to the larger global system. This is increasingly the norm for sociologists, especially in reference to what we discussed earlier about globalization causing jobs to leave America.



## BRAINSTORM

How can we understand how American jobs and the American economy are affected without referencing broader global trends? This is an important part of sociological analysis: the global perspective.



## TERM TO KNOW

### Global Perspective

A look at an individual society with respect to the larger global system.



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that **sociology** is the systematic study of human society and the behavior of people in groups. The **sociological perspective** is the ability to see the general in the particular. The **global perspective** is the study of the world and society's place within it.

Finally, the four benefits of thinking this way are:

- It enables us to take on perceived generalizations and stereotypes that we all walk around with
- It recognizes the constraints that individuals face.
- It enables us to become more active, empowered citizens in society.
- It enables us to empathize with others and appreciate and understand diversity.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Zach Lamb.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Benefits of the Sociological Perspective

The four benefits of the sociological perspective are: challenges familiar understandings, recognizes the constraints individuals face, enables more informed civic participation, appreciates human diversity.

**Global Perspective**

A look at an individual society with respect to the larger global system.

**Sociological Perspective**

Finding general patterns out of details from particular people's lives.

**Sociology**

The scientific study of society and of the social behavior of people in groups.