# Why Study Sociology?

Sociology is a discipline and a structured or scientific study of society, human behavior and the influence of certain events and activities on society. Sociologists analyze and review patterns of human behavior, review cause and effect situations, and formulate theories about why things happen in a certain way. The importance of sociology may not always be clear because sociology has many fields and branches. In many cases, a sociology degree may not even lead to a position as a sociologist.

Many sociology majors end up pursuing careers in market research, public administration or even working for the government. Taking some time to understand the importance of sociology and how sociologists and researchers play a critical role in society today can help you decide whether this is the right field or career path for you.

## What Makes Sociology So Important?

At a fundamental level, the different disciplines of sociology involve the study of social interactions between different people and groups. Sociologists take the time to analyze interactions between different people and may also look at the management or organization of various groups. Sociology disciplines are focused on the effects of social behavior and how different social traits or norms form in the first place. The field of sociology is a branch of social sciences and encompasses several sub-categories and sub-fields. Some sociologists focus more on the field of education and psychology, while others will focus more on political sciences, business communication and organizational development.

Many students who are considering declaring a sociology major ask themselves, why study sociology? What exactly do sociologists do and what is a typical educational career path for aspiring sociologists? You can get answers to many of these questions by talking to an admissions counselor or career counselor at the college or university you wish to attend.

## Reasons for Studying Sociology

Many students pursue a sociology degree because they want to make a contribution to society and solve problems that affect society at large. Others want to make a difference for an organization or to use their research and data analysis skills for a special purpose. When you are considering the reasons for studying sociology and the importance of sociology, take some time to learn about the different fields or branches of sociology and the various types of career paths available to you.

So why study sociology? Here are some common reasons why many people pursue this interesting and dynamic discipline:

* To provide scientific contributions to society. Many sociologists are involved in scientific research and are able to solve large-scale problems that affect the world around us.
* To study the roles of institutions, organizations and individuals. Sociologists study how social institutions such as family, education, religion and governmental control affect human behavior.
* To use scientific knowledge and sociology theories to solve social problems. Sociologists can draw upon data and scientific studies to draw conclusions about certain situations and solve social problems.
* To enrich human culture. Sociologists have made great contributions throughout history, and these have provided us with in-depth knowledge about human culture, norms and behaviors.
* To improve international relations. Some sociologists work for government agencies where they can reduce the effects of political unrest and conflict between nations, and work towards solving common problems.

**How does ‘sociological thinking’ differ from commonsense?**

It is often argued that sociological thinking is just a branch out of commonsense. People associate it with analyzing the obvious and providing circular reasoning that never seem to have an empirical way of validation. However, further comparison of the two can show the distinctions that can be illustrated by a simple reflection on our own lives. Everything around us exists in a commonsensical dimension – the size of clothes we’re wearing, the brand of car we drive, or even the manner this essay is presented. It is commonsense that we choose the clothes that fit us whether we’re an S or L size, we choose a certain type of car just because it allows us to be perceived in a certain way, and this essay is written in formal English and passed up on time because it contributes to our first year evaluation. These facts may seem unquestionably simple and straightforward, but there is a deeper sociological value in them. Who gets to decide which body shapes get to be a small size or a large size? Why do we feel much better driving a Mercedes than a Hyundai? What is so important about a degree? These are the questions sociological thought would implicate that commonsense would not able to.

First, the difference of the two is that commonsense is a collective body of observed knowledge based on personal experiences, but sociological thinking is not. Nonetheless, it is understood that a part of sociological thought is derived from commonsense and everyday observation.

Sociological thinking tries to view the society not as a group of isolated individuals or separate institutions, but as a whole (Bauman and May, 2001, p. 8). According to Brown, the society is an abstract concept that cannot be seen physically. It is a conceptual web of relations between people and the social institutions (1979, p. 1-2) While commonsense is extracted and slowly built up by practical knowledge of the everyday life, sociological thinking differs as it encourages thoughts and ideas that are levels higher than individuals’ personal experiences; it sprouts thoughts on society as a whole.

Second, sociological thinking allows challenges to the presumed commonsense and urges a more radical and provoking approach to the social facts. According to Bauman and May, the relationship between commonsense and sociological thinking is a rather dependent one where sociological thinking is interpreting and investigating the meanings of social actions and facts that has been branded by commonsense. Commonsense has already labeled meanings and responses to most of the social facts that are collectively known by the members of society. (2001, p. 7).  The repetition of the actions become habitual, there are no more questionings for the meaning behind commonsense and they are somehow categorized as true and standing ways of life. (Bauman and May, 2001, p. 10) Another view of Brown’s can be incorporated to provide a clearer view of the distinction of commonsense and sociological thinking. He argues that the collection of the facts derived from collective commonsense are not equivalent to sociological thinking and research. It can only be fully understood with sociological theories (1979, p. 6-7) with are formed with the sociological thought and imagination.

Third, sociological thought can be categorized as scientific while commonsense cannot. An analytical comparison between commonsense and science by Nagel shows that science cannot be leveled with commonsense (1974, p. 21). In his rebuttal to Nagel’s claim, Elliot strived to prove that commonsense is a part of science in the most basic ways, such as the conduct of experiment requires observation that is mainly an action that requires engagement and interpretation of the researcher himself (1974, p. 24). To further assert the claim, Emile Durkheim explored the positivist methodology in social science with his research on suicide. He thus affirms that sociology can be a science, alongside biology and psychology (2004, p. 31). **Sociological thinking tries to view and analyze the social world from an objective standpoint while commonsense is a product of an individual’s subjective experiences and therefore, the latter cannot be considered science.**

Commonsense is culturally angled knowledge that is subjectively varied between individuals and societies. However, sociological thinking attempts to postulate a higher level of consciousness and objectiveness to the macro social trends and happenings in relation to the society as a whole. C. Wright Mills once wrote, “The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals.”(1959, p. 5). So, with the points above, it can be concluded that sociological thinking is commonsense further evolved and probed to allow a greater understanding of society.

**Differences between sociology and common sense:**

**1**. Common sense views are based on people’s immediate and often limited experiences. This leads to a distorted view of reality. Hence common sense knowledge is statement of the obvious which is simply based of assumption. Sociological views are based on rigorous research and therefore evidence based. This can either be based on large scale quantitative research or in-depth qualitative research. Sociology knowledge is, therefore, the product of theory development and testing.

**2.** Common sense views tend to reflect social traditions and conventions and therefore tend to reinforce the status quo and resist social change. Conflict approaches in sociology raise serious questions about the status quo and call for social change.

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