

**Trevor McCaffrey**  
**SOC101 - Reflection 1**

Sociology studies human society as a whole. The sociological perspective is described by Berner (1963) as “seeing the general in the particular,” where we make general conclusions about societies based on the particular actions of certain individuals or groups. Sociology arose as a result of historical events; for example, the industrial revolution forced many people that were originally farmers in their local community to move and work for factory owners, which over time lowered the importance of family/community values. Events like these made people realize that it is not only us that determines our own personal fate – society can play an equal, or even more important, role as well.

It is critical to advance the study of sociology because it has the ability to bring attention to many issues affecting those on the margins of society that others, who aren't as affected, may not naturally realize. Making people more aware of these issues can then allow for positive changes to society, improving the lives of everyone. To do this, sociologists conduct their research in three different ways. “Positivists” make observations of social behavior and use empirical evidence that comes from these observations to support their conclusions. Other researchers practice “interpretive” sociology. These people still collect data to make their conclusions, but are more focused on interpreting the meaning people place on their social interactions, rather than simply taking the data at “face value.” Interpretive sociologists care more about *why* people do what they do, whereas positivist sociologists generally only care about *what* people are doing. “Critical” sociologists tend to combine the two subdisciplines: they may take the positivist approach to answer their initial question, collating data and performing statistical tests, but they additionally ask if their results reflect how society *ought* to be. If they feel that their results imply that a change is needed in society, they will do what they can to address that; many critical sociologists may even consider themselves political activists.

One view of sociology involves the structural-functional approach, which views society as a complex system of many smaller parts which operate to promote general content and stability within society. These “social structures” all serve particular “social functions.” Sports are an example of one social structure in society. Sports have manifest functions – intended consequences, like getting you in shape – as well as latent functions, like building personal relationships. I play soccer and when I tore my ACL last year, I realized how important soccer – particularly its latent function of uniting me with my friends – was to my well-being. I normally see myself as very individualistic, trying to not let society have a huge impact on my state-of-mind, but without a (in the grand scheme of things) relatively minor social structure in my life, I struggled to stay positive throughout the year and realized that I actually rely on the structures built by society a lot more than I thought.

**Reference:**

Berger, Peter L. 1963. *Invitation to Sociology*. New York: Anchor Books.

Macionis, John J. 2017. *Society: The Basics*. Hoboken, NJ: Pearson Education.