



# Chapter 1: What Is Sociology?

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## Case Study: Street Science

Sudhir Venkatesh studied the social life of a public housing project in Chicago. He discovered that the community sustained itself “off the books” and that it had its own set of rules and behavior. Venkatesh became closely involved with a gang leader of the project and used this closeness to further study the rules of the community. His book *Off the Books: The Underground Economy of the Urban Poor* presented poverty in a more realistic light than previous studies.



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



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**

**4700 S. STATE**

## Section 1 at a Glance

### Examining Social Life

- The social sciences are disciplines that study human social behavior or institutions and functions of human society in a scientific manner. Sociology is the social science that studies human society and social behavior.
- The sociological perspective is a way of looking at the world that enables sociologists to see beyond commonly held beliefs to the hidden meanings behind human actions.

# 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.



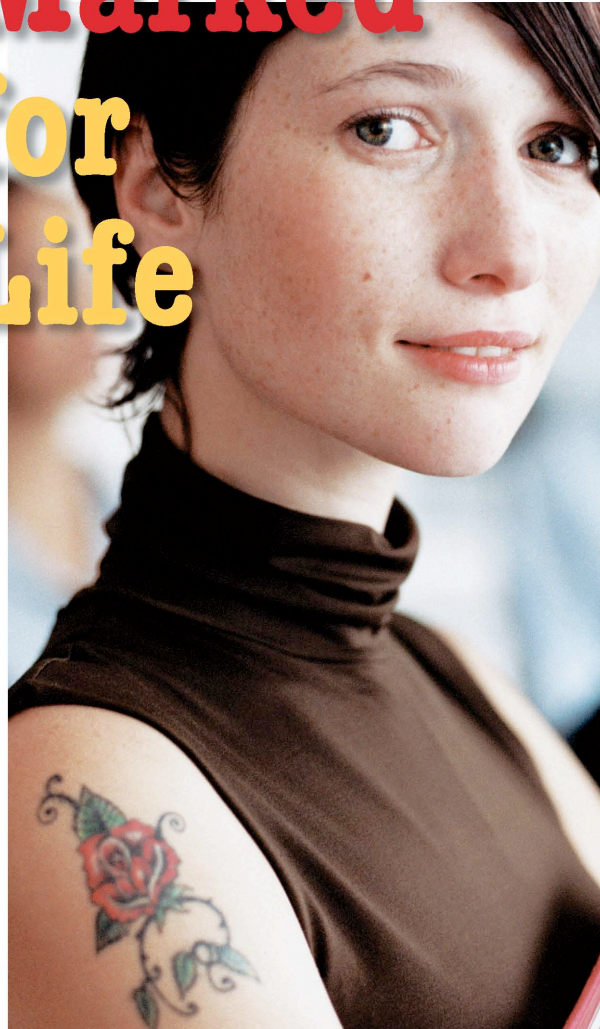
## Reading Focus

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



**SOCIOLOGY  
CLOSE UP**

# Marked for Life



**Why are so many  
Americans getting  
tattoos?**

While many Americans still look upon tattoos negatively, the norm against body marking is losing its authority, especially among the young.



# 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

QUICK  
FACTS

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.

## Reading Check

### Summarize

What are the social sciences?

**Answer:** *Sociology, anthropology, psychology, economics, political science, and history*

# 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



## Reading Check

### Find the Main Idea

What is the sociological perspective?

**Answer:** *the ability to look beyond commonly held beliefs to the hidden meanings behind human actions*