1.1A: Studying Sociology

Sociological studies range from the analysis of conversations and behaviors to the development of theories in order to understand how the world works.

Learning Objectives

• Identify ways in which sociology is applied in the real world

Key Points

• Sociology uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to study both face-to-face human social interactions and large scale social trends.
• Sociology uses empirical and critical analysis methods to study human social interaction.
• Sociology includes both macrosociology and microsociology; microsociology examines the study of people in face-to-face interactions, and macrosociology involves the study of widespread social processes.
• Sociology is a branch of the social sciences that uses systematic methods of empirical investigation and critical analysis to develop and refine a body of knowledge about human social structure and activity.

Key Terms

• sociology: The study of society, human social interaction, and the rules and processes that bind and separate people, not only as individuals, but as members of associations, groups, and institutions
• quantitative: Of a measurement based on some quantity or number rather than on some quality.
• qualitative: Of descriptions or distinctions based on some quality rather than on some quantity.
Sociology is the study of human social life. Sociology has many sub-sections of study, ranging from the analysis of conversations to the development of theories to try to understand how the entire world works. This chapter will introduce you to sociology and explain why it is important and how it can change your perspective of the world around you, and give a brief history of the discipline.

Sociology is a branch of the social sciences that uses systematic methods of empirical investigation and critical analysis to develop and refine a body of knowledge about human social structure and activity. Sometimes the goal of sociology is to apply such knowledge to the pursuit of government policies designed to benefit the general social welfare. Its subject matter ranges from the micro level to the macro level. Microsociology involves the study of people in face-to-face interactions. Macrosociology involves the study of widespread social processes. Sociology is a broad discipline in terms of both methodology and subject matter. The traditional focuses of sociology have included social relations, social stratification, social interaction, culture, and deviance, and the approaches of sociology have included both qualitative and quantitative research techniques.

Much of what human activity falls under the category of social structure or social activity; because of this, sociology has gradually expanded its focus to such far-flung subjects as the study of economic activity, health disparities, and even the role of social activity in the creation of scientific knowledge. The range of social scientific methods has also been broadly expanded. For example, the “cultural turn” of the 1970s and 1980s brought more humanistic interpretive approaches to the study of culture in sociology. Conversely, the same decades saw the rise of new mathematically rigorous approaches, such as social network analysis.