



The Sociology FAQ

Abstract

A collection of Sociology Frequently Asked Questions. Feel free to mail suggestions, corrections and additions to: faq@sociology.net.

Resumen

Una colección de sociología hizo con frecuencia preguntas. Sentirte libre enviar sugerencias, correcciones y adiciones: faq@sociology.net.

1. What is Sociology?

Sociology is "the science of society"[1]. It is the study of the social, how humans interact with each other and with social institutions. It relies heavily on theory, statistical analysis and thought.

2. Where did Sociology start?

Probably with the advent of society. People have probably always speculated on the nature of society and had Sociological imaginations.

However, Sociology, as a profession, began with Aguste Comte, he coined the term Sociology. Comte envisioned Sociology as a scientific study of society.

Emile Durkheim, was the first person to set up a Sociology department at a University. Durkheim has also had a more significant impact on the way Sociologists conduct their studies, and the methodology they use.

3. **What is the Sociological Imagination?**

The Sociological Imagination is a term coined by C. Wright Mills, to indicate the ability to perceive patterns in social occurrences. It is the ability to be in a society, yet also be able to step out of that society in order to try to get a clearer grasp of the forces shaping that society. In other words to think sociologically.

4. **What is the Ideal Type?**

The ideal type is a term coined by Max Weber. It is a hypothetical construction used as a comparative tool to help better understand a concept. The ideal type lists all of the ideal aspects of a construct (by ideal, I do not mean that it is "good", instead that it is a perfect model). For instance, the ideal type of a bureaucracy would contain all possible aspects of a bureaucracy, but no bureaucracy would actually have all these characteristics.

5. **Who are important Sociologists?**

The question here should really be *Who is important to Sociology?*. Not everyone on this list is a Sociologist by trade, but they have helped defined *current* Sociological theory. The emphasis is on current because theorists tend to fall into and out of fashion, and as they do the face of Sociology and Sociological study changes.

Important People in Sociology

Aguste Comte	Coined the term Sociology, viewed the discipline as a science.
Emile Durkheim	Helped to define the standards for Sociological research.
Karl Marx	Has had more impact on Sociology than perhaps any other theorist
Max Weber	Introduced the idea of Bureaucracy and Rationalization, linked the development of Capitalism to Protestantism.
Georg Simmel	Helped to define microsociology. Significant impact on symbolic interactionism.
C. Wright Mills	Introduced the term Sociological Imagination
Talcott Parsons	Legitimized Sociological theorizing. Introduced the idea of the action system
Robert Merton	Structural functionalist introduced the idea that there must be levels of analysis.
Anthony Giddens	Strong proponent of modernity, which he views as a juggernaut, careening out of control, taking over society.
George Ritzer	Coined term McDonaldization. Prolific theorist, Sociological Theory is an excellent historical compilation of Sociology.
Jean Baudrillard	Introduced the idea of the Simulacra and Simulations, nothing is real.
Michel Foucault	Advanced the idea of an Archaeology of Knowledge.

6. What are the important Sociological Theories?

As with theorists, Sociological theories fall in and out of favor with Sociologists. However, there are three "camps" of theorists who have stood the test of time, and continue to be used, in varying forms, in Sociology today. These camps are Functionalism, Conflict, and Symbolic Interactionism.

Before giving a brief overview of these different theories, let me first explain that most theories don't fit exclusively into one of these categories, but tend to draw from two or more of the groups. For instance Neo-Marxists are predominantly blanketed in Conflict theory, however they do draw on some ideas from Symbolic Interactionists. These theories are generally considered ideal types, as we know the real world, doesn't adhere to ideal types very well.

- **Functionalism:** Functionalism, sometimes called Structural Functionalism, is the oldest of the Sociological Theories. The essence of Functionalism is that society is similar to an organism. Everything within an organism works to make it better, or stronger. So, every aspect of a society interacts with other parts to make society better. This model tends to fail in times of unrest or conflict.

- **Conflict:** Conflict theory was developed within Sociology, largely in reaction to the shortcomings of Functionalism. Conflict theorists see groups in society vying for the limited resources that the society produces. Though by many to be a struggle between the haves and have nots, there is more to Conflict theory, in that different aspects cover all types of conflict. Conflict theory still faces prejudice in some arenas because of the close association with Marx, and Marxist theories.

- **Symbolic Interactionism:** Symbolic Interactionism first came to prominence in the 1970's. While it has not been around as long as Functionalism or Conflict theory it has gained fast acceptance in many Sociological corridors. Symbolic Interactionism focuses on the relationship between the self and society. How we use symbolic communications to interact with society.

7. What are the top thirteen books every Sociologist should read?

Warning, I'm sure if you ask 10 Sociologists you'll get 10 different answers to this question. In addition, each subset of Sociology has its own "classics" or definitive works. The books selected for this list meet two criteria: 1) Have stood the test of time or debate and 2) have helped to frame the current Sociological paradigm. So without further ado, here's the list:

- *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol I*, Karl Marx
- *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Emile Durkheim
- *Suicide*, Emile Durkheim
- *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Max Weber
- *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber
- *Sociological Theory* (Classical and Contemporary combined into one volume), George Ritzer
- *The Power Elite*, C. Wright Mills
- *The Sociological Imagination*, C. Wright Mills
- *Social Theory and Social Structure*, Robert Merton
- *The Social Construction of Reality : A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann .
- *Social Statistics* (If you don't read it you should have this on your shelf as a handy reference for doing statistical work) Hubert Blalock Jr.

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- *The Second Shift*, Arlie Hochschild with Anne Machung
- *Simulacra and Simulation*, Jean Baudrillard

8. **What kind of job can I get with a Sociology Degree?**

There are a lot of careers you can pursue with a degree in Sociology, these are some of the more common, but depending on your area of specialty, your choices can be limitless:

- Research Design
- Interviewers
- Data Processors
- Marketing
- Research for business, and labor
- Instructor: Universities, Colleges, High School
- Instructor: In-service Training Institutes
- Department of Education
- Bureau of Census
- Arbitration/Conflict Resolution
- Law Enforcement--Federal, State, and Local
- Special Problems in Corrections