

# Is there a distinction of sociology from the other social sciences

[Science](#), [Anthropology](#)



In today's modern world it is the desire of the practitioners of the social sciences or social scientists as they are called to be clearly distinguished one from the other, instead of being placed into one general category as suggested by a "Professor Small" in his manifesto entitled "The Relation Between Sociology and the Other Social Sciences". (Hoxie 739) An anthropologist would certainly not want to be identified as a Psychologist or vice versa, and since the need for clear distinction exists in respect to titles relative to academic disciplines, then this leads me to answer in the affirmative, the question: is there a clear distinction of sociology from the other social sciences? To begin discussing this argument one must first ask the question: What is sociology? Sociology can be defined as, "the systematic study of human society". (Macionis & Plummer 4) More technically, sociology is the analysis of the structure of social relationships as constituted by social interaction, but no definition is entirely satisfactory because of the diversity of perspectives. (Abercrombie 232) Sociology then, is a systematic approach to thinking about, studying and understanding society, human social behaviour and social groups. It is based on the premise that these areas of social life can be better understood through systematic study and observation. The term sociology was coined in 1838 by French social thinker, Auguste Comte. Comte along with other early pioneers of modern sociology, such as Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and Karl Marx were not known as sociologists then. Weber was a German Economist, Durkheim, a French social theorist and Marx, a German philosopher. The work of these early pioneers gave rise to sociology, a social science which was distinctly different from the other social sciences of the day, as it

focused on analyzing groups that formed society and society as a whole, while the others tended to be individualistic in their approaches. A brief look at some other social sciences includes: § Anthropology: looks at cultures within society and not the society as a whole. § Psychology: takes the individual out of the society to examine mental processes. § Economics: deals with the production and distribution of society's goods. § Management Studies: evaluates human behaviour in an organizational setting. § Political Science: deals with society's present and future governments. Is there a need for a clear distinction of one social science from the others? The answer is yes and is supported by Hoxie, who stated, " the real ground of distinction between modern social sciences is, I take it, the fact that human experience presents to the observer a number of distinct problems. That is to say, human experience is capable of being viewed, and is habitually viewed, from the standpoint of many different interests and presents thus many different aspects". (745) Individuals are faced with many different challenges, and the attendant problems see some individuals incapable of effectively dealing with them. According to Hoxie, to one man it is all a matter of ethical relations, to another a struggle for wealth, to a third a process of political institutional development while the fourth may be having struggles with his individuality" (745). Each individual presents with a different case and needs a solution. One individual sees suicide as a way out; another uses traditional methods (obeah, prayer, etc) while the others opt to seek professional help. Each individual has a specific problem but the individual who may be contemplating suicide needs more urgent attention. The potential suicide victim could not be referred to the economist but to a social worker, a

psychologist or a sociologist. Sociology differs in key ways from the other social sciences in their approaches to understanding human behaviour. It focuses heavily on the influences of social groups and the wider society, the operative word being society. This social science differs from the others in that it seeks ways and uses methods to improve society as a whole, not just the individual and also to understand how society operates. It looks at the individual in the context of society. The need exists to find out what is that that sets sociology apart from earlier social thought. Prior to the birth of sociology, philosophers and theologians mostly focused on imagining the ideal society. None attempted to analyze society as it really was. Pioneers of the discipline such as Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim and Ferdinand Toennies reversed these priorities. Although they were certainly concerned with how human society could be improved, their major goal was to understand how society actually operates. (Macionis & Plummer 10) From the previous paragraph one concludes that sociology, the baby of the social sciences, was birthed with one major goal in mind, the understanding of how society functions from an analytical perspective. It was not enough to just picture what the ideal society should be in the mind's eye. The social sciences which are comprised of academic disciplines concerned with the study of the social life of human groups and individuals include, anthropology, criminology, economics, history, psychology, geography, political science, communication studies and sociology. Each academic discipline focuses on a specific area of study of human life, and is meant to benefit individuals and communities within society which would inevitably benefit society as a whole. Sociologists examine the ways in which social

structures and institutions such as class, family, community and power, and social problems such as crime and abuse influence society. Social interaction or the responses of individuals to each other is the basic concept of sociology, because such interaction is the elementary component of all relationships and groups that form human society. " Sociology Par. 1"

Sociology, though different in its approach, cannot be divorced from the other social sciences as it shares deep ties with a wide array of other disciplines that deal with the study of human society. The fields of economics, psychology and anthropology for instance have influenced and have been influenced by sociology, and these fields share a great amount of history and common research methods. Sociologists who concentrate on details of particular interactions occurring in everyday life are termed micro-sociologists, while those that are concerned with larger patterns of relationships among major social sectors, such as the state and the economy and even with international relations are called macro-sociologists. Has anyone ever heard of a micro-psychologist or a macro-anthropologist? In psychology, we study the way the brain functions and how it affects the way people behave, whereas in sociology we study groups of people in communities, be it church, school, prison, to name a few and the way they are affected by external sources. It can be posited that psychology is more about the individual or small groups and sociology is more concerned with communities and larger groups of persons. The perception of the difference between psychology and sociology is that psychology is optimistic ("believing in a cure") in that the individual may be helped and may function independently in personal relationships and within the community

appropriately. Sociology on the other hand assists individuals and families through the hardships and the crises they face through continuous support as needed or deemed necessary. " psychology vs. sociology" par. 3

Psychology might be perceived as a goal toward independence while sociology might be perceived as the support necessary to sustain families and society. This however does not mean that sociology does not provide programs of support towards independence; it does, as is seen in parenting classes. Sociology, though an independent social science can also be deemed an interdependent discipline as it gives support to and is supported by other social sciences

Anthropology is the study of humankind in all its aspects, especially human culture and human development. Encarta dictionary 55. Both anthropology and psychology differ from sociology, in that they have forensic components that deal with the anatomy and other types of laboratory research. Sociological research methods are diverse and include case studies, interviewing, participant observation, surveys, historical research and statistical analysis with results more often than not portrayed in a statistical format. One distinct difference between sociology and the other social sciences is, sociology is a discipline that mainly nurtures, and its nurturing has a much stronger influence on human behaviour than, let's say psychology, which focuses on the nature aspect. Where sociology focuses on an individual's behaviour in relation to society, psychology places more importance on the genetic framework that influences an individual's behaviour. A case in point is Emile Durkheim's demonstration of how social factors affect human behaviour, in his research done on suicide. Durkheim's study showed how rates of suicide were based

on certain variables in the society. The study concentrated on the variables in the society that were influencing individuals to commit suicide rather than study the individuals themselves. Sociology takes a broad approach to helping us understand human interactions while other social sciences focus on specific areas. As a discipline, sociology does not focus on certain specific areas of human behaviour as do political science and economics, but rather seeks to explain the broad range of human behaviour as it is influenced by society and human groups. James Augustus Cotter Morrison wrote, " it is hardly necessary to add that a broad distinction must be made between history and what has been called the philosophy of history, a term now replaced by the far better one " sociology" invented by Comte. Sociology has the purely scientific aim of investigating the nature and constitution of societies, to discover the laws which regulate their growth and decay, to do in short for them what biology has already done for the animal and vegetable kingdoms. History, while it can never again dispense with the assistance of sociology, remains occupied with the description of the social organism (at a given period) in its ensemble and the term " descriptive sociology" has been suggested as an improvement for the old one, history. We may question whether the innovation will be accepted or is needed. The human interest attaching to the story of man's past fortunes will always provoke the means of his own satisfaction, and there is little that history, the name and the thing, as the highest form of prose literature, will continue to instruct and console mankind to the remotest generations". (Morrison part 18) Sociology, as a generalizing social science, is surpassed in its breadth only by anthropology—a discipline that encompasses archaeology, physical

anthropology, and linguistics. The broad nature of sociological inquiry causes it to overlap with other social sciences such as economics, political science, psychology, geography, education, and law. Sociology's distinguishing feature is its practice of drawing on a larger societal context to explain social phenomena. Sociology devotes most of its attention to the collective aspects of human behaviour, because sociologists place greater emphasis on the ways external groups influence the behaviour of individuals. The field of social anthropology has been historically quite close to sociology. Until about the first quarter of the 20th century, the two subjects were usually combined in one department (especially in Britain), differentiated mainly by anthropology's emphasis on the sociology of preliterate peoples. Recently, however, this distinction has faded, as social anthropologists have turned their interests toward the study of modern culture. Two other social sciences, political science and economics, developed largely from the practical interests of nations. Increasingly, both fields have recognized the utility of sociological concepts and methods. A comparable synergy has also developed with respect to law, education, and religion and even in such contrasting fields as engineering and architecture. All of these fields can benefit from the study of institutions and social interaction. (Faris) There are also distinct similarities shared among sociology and the other social sciences. All social sciences are concerned with human behaviour, relationships and interactions, the methods of study and research (both qualitative and quantitative) are similar across social sciences and most social sciences, (including sociology, psychology, social work, economics and others) are concerned with solving society's problems. The social sciences



though distinct, are interconnected and share symbiotic relationships. There is no structure of hierarchy, making none subordinate to the other, they all work together to benefit individuals and the societies in which they live.

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