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Explore the world of sociology.



CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS SOCIOLOGY?

Chapter at a Glance

SECTION 1: 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.

SECTION 2: The Development of Sociology

- Social upheaval in Europe during the late 1700s and 1800s encouraged scholars to closely study society.
- European scholars such as Auguste Comte, Harriet Martineau, Herbert Spencer, Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber made important contributions to the development of the academic discipline of sociology.
- The Chicago School of sociologists introduced new ways to analyze society.

SECTION 3: Modern Perspectives

- Sociology employs three major theoretical perspectives—functionalism, conflict, and interactionism.
- The functionalist perspective focuses on order and stability, the conflict perspective focuses on power relations, and the interactionist perspective focuses on how individuals interact with one another in everyday life.
- Sociologists employ two levels of analysis: macrosociology, which focuses on large-scale systems or society as a whole, and micro-sociology, which focuses on small-group settings.

SECTION 4: Conducting Sociological Research

- Sociologists employ a seven-step process when they conduct research.
- Research approaches available to sociologists include survey, analysis of existing documents, observation, and experiment.

J.T. In response to Venkatesh's challenge that the job looked easy, J.T. suggested that Venkatesh try being gang leader for a day. Soon, however, this involvement with the illegal side of neighborhood life began to worry Venkatesh. When he readily took part in the beating of a neighborhood thug, he knew he had crossed the line from observer to accessory.

Venkatesh's professors, fearing for his safety, suggested that he step back from his research. One urged him to refocus his studies and take a more traditional approach to the issue of poverty. Even Venkatesh began to doubt that what he was doing had any academic value.

After considerable thought, Venkatesh continued on and completed the research as planned. His book based on that research, *Off the Books: The Underground Economy of the Urban Poor*, discussed the violence of day-to-day life and the illegal activities of J.T. and his drug-dealing gang. However, it also described a community of people who looked out for each other and community leaders who got things done despite having few resources. Further, it showed that the families in the projects were little different from other families—mothers and fathers did their utmost to make a decent life for themselves and their children. Venkatesh noted that the sociological studies he had read in preparation for his research had defined poverty in terms of what was missing. In *Off the Books*, he hoped to present the issue of poverty in terms of what was actually there.

What do you think?

1. What did Sudhir Venkatesh learn from the community he studied?
2. Do you think that to really understand a situation, you need to be part of it? Why or why not?

Holt Sociology Study Guide Answer

Julia Schneider



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