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## **I. What is Sociology?**

This paper should present a critical assessment of definitions of sociology as presented in three (3) Sociology textbooks, including Henslin's text.

1. How do these authors define sociology?
2. What theoretical perspective, methodological approach, and level of analysis are associated with their perception of sociology? Why?
3. Of the three definitions, which one would you prefer? Why?
4. How do you define sociology? Be sure to support your definition with explanations and examples.

*Information from websites and/or dictionaries is not acceptable. Two pages double-spaced with citations and references. Due date: Feb 25.*

## What is Sociology?

Most people define a word as they see fit, just as each individual has the power to do, think and live as they see fit. Now let's try to understand why this is so and what causes their behaviors as an individual and as a whole? This topic borders around the word sociology. Sociology has been defined numerous times by several people. For example, sociology textbook authors, James Henslin, Alex Thio, Margaret Anderson and Howard Taylor, used different theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches, and levels of analysis just to define sociology.

First, let us focus on how Henslin defines Sociology in his tenth edition textbook, *Sociology: A Down-To-Earth Approach*. He states that it is "the scientific study of society and human behavior" (Henslin 29). Looking into this definition, we can see that his theoretical perspective is based on a mixture of functionalism and symbolic interactionism. The functionalism part of the definition is the "society" that is to be studied. It is considered to be a functional analysis because it will deal with relationships among the parts of society made up of "interrelated parts" that work together (Henslin 25). Because the definition will discuss the entire society, we will be able to use a quantitative approach where we can use lab experiments, structured interviews with close-ended questions, and statistics. Also, a society means that it is a whole; therefore, we are looking at it in a macroscopic level. The symbolic interactionism section of this definition is seen because "human behavior" relates to individual actions, interactions and symbols (Henslin 29). This part of the definition is at a microscopic level of analysis because it measures small scale patterns of society, such as "human face-to-face interaction" (Henslin 29). This section also appeals to a qualitative approach because of the individual actions and behaviors of people, which can be measured through open-ended questions, field experiments, participant observation, and even diaries.

Next, we focus on Alex Thio's sixth edition textbook, *Sociology a Brief Introduction*, and his definition of sociology. Thio states that sociology is "the systematic scientific study of human society" (Thio 9). This definition is based on functionalism because it focuses on the entire human society made up of many parts functioning together. This definition is based on a quantitative approach because it can be studied through numbers,

statistics, and facts. It is studied at a macro-level analysis because it “examines large-scale patterns of society” (Henslin 28).

Finally, let us focus on Margaret Anderson and Howard Taylor’s definition of sociology in their third edition textbook, *Sociology: The Essentials*. They define it as the “study of human behavior in society” (Anderson 2). We can observe that this definition is based on symbolic interactionism because we are focusing on humans and their behavior. An example of human behaviors is using symbols to “establish meaning, develop views of the world and communicate with one another” (Henslin 23). This happens to be the definition of symbolic interactionism. Anderson and Taylor’s definition is also considered to be a qualitative approach because it can be studied through interpretations and observations of experiences and behaviors. Once again, we see that this definition of sociology can be studied in a microscopic level of analysis. It is microscopic because it can focus on social interactions between people and “how people use symbols to create social life” (Henslin 28).

Of the above definitions, I prefer Anderson and Taylor’s “study of human behavior in society”. Not only is this definition short and sweet, but it gets straight to the point and covers what I believe to be the most important part of sociology. I believe the people who make up the society should be the subject most focused upon when one thinks of sociology. I understand that the macroscopic level of analysis is also important, but I personally prefer to learn about the microscopic and qualitative approaches that are related to sociology.

My definition of sociology would have to be molded from each of the definitions discussed above. Sociology, defined according to myself, is the “scientific study of human behavior at microscopic and macroscopic levels”. I believe the last part of this definition covers society and how society functions; therefore, functionalism is seen here. Additionally, the beginning of the definition focuses on individuals at a microscopic level and symbolic interactionism is demonstrated. I include the word “scientific” because it means the systematic way of gaining knowledge. Knowledge includes the natural sciences and the social sciences; therefore, I believe I am covering more. I want my definition to take care of everything one relates to sociology; however, a definition varies by individual. Therefore, people often make their own definitions from personal perspectives or with a purpose in mind such as Henslin, Thio, Anderson, Taylor and even I. Now, what is your definition of sociology?

## Works Cited

Anderson, Margaret L., and Howard F. Taylor. *Sociology: The Essentials. Third Edition*. Belmont California. Wadsworth Publishing, 2004. Print.

Henslin, James M. *Sociology: A Down-To-Earth Approach*. Tenth Edition. Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville: Pearson, 2009. Print.

Thio, Alex B. *Sociology a Brief Introduction. Sixth Edition*. Boston Massachusetts. Allyn & Bacon, 2004. Print.