The Relationship of Sociology with Other Social Sciences

Sociology is a science of society. As a social science it attempts to study social life as a whole. But for the understanding of social life as a whole sociology requires the help of other social sciences which studies a particular aspect of society. Economics studies the economic aspects whereas political science studies political aspects.

Hence it is obvious that other social sciences are closely related to sociology. Sociology is considered as the mother of social sciences. Besides sociology synthesizes other social sciences. Hence there exists a very close and intimate relationship between Sociology and other social sciences. For our precise understanding of the relationship between sociology and other social sciences we have to discuss them individually, which are discussed below:

1. Sociology and Political Science:
As a mother of social sciences Sociology has close and intimate relationship with all other social science. Hence it has close relationship with political science as well. Their relationship is so close and intimate that led G.E.C. Catlin to remark “Political Science and Sociology are two faces or aspects of the same figure.” Similarly other scholars could not find any difference between the two disciplines.

Sociology is a Science of society. It is a science of social groups and social institutions. It is a general science of society. It studies human interaction and inter-relations their conditions and consequences. Political Science is a science of state and Government. It studies power, political processes, political systems, types of government and international relations. It deals with social groups organised under the sovereign of the state

In the words of Paul Junet, “Political Science is that part of social science which treats the foundation of the state and principles of government.” It studies the political activities of man. It only studies the organised society. However their inter-relationship and inter-dependence can be known from inter-dependence and mutual relationship.

Sociology depends on political science. In the words of Morris Ginsberg, “Historically Sociology has its main roots in politics and philosophy of history.” Sociology greatly benefited by the books written by political scientists like Plato, Aristotle and Kautilya such as The Republic, The Politics and Arthasastra respectively.

Each and every social problem has a political cause. Political Science is a part of sociology. Hence sociology depends on political science to comprehend itself. To understand different political events sociology takes the help from political science. Sociology to draw its conclusions depends on political
science. Any change in the political system or nature of power structure brings changes in society. Hence Sociology takes the help of political science to understand the changes in society. Hence both are inter-dependent.

Similarly political science also depends on Sociology. Political Science is a part of sociology. To understand the part it is necessary to understand the whole. Almost all political problems has a social cause and for the solution of these political problems political science takes the help of sociology.

State frames its rules, regulations and laws on the basis of social customs, tradition and values. Without Sociological background the study of political science will be incomplete. Political Scientists largely benefited by the researches and research methods of the Sociologist. Some consider political science as a branch of Sociology. State is considered as a social group hence is a subject of Sociology.

Besides, there are some common topics which are being studied by both the subjects. These topics are War, Propaganda, authority, communal riots and law. With the help of both political science and sociology a new subject comes into existence which is known as political sociology. Some political events like war are also significant social events.

Thus both political science and sociology contribute to each other. But inspite of their inter-relationship and inter-dependence both the sciences differ from each other in the following way.

**Differences:**

1. Sociology is a science of society and social relationship whereas political science is a science of state and government.
2. The scope of sociology is very wide but scope of political science is limited.
3. Sociology is a general science but political science is a special science.
4. Sociology studied organised, unorganized and disorganized society whereas political science studies only politically organised society.
5. Sociology studies the social activities of man whereas political science studies political activities of man.
6. Sociology is a new or young science but political science is an older science.
7. Sociology studies man as a social animal whereas political science studies man as a political animal.
8. Sociology studies both formal and informal relations whereas political science studies only formal relations.
9. Sociology analyses both conscious and unconscious activities of man whereas political science analyses only conscious activities of man.
10. Sociology deals with all forms of association whereas political science deals with only one form of association named state.
2. Sociology and History:

As a mother of social sciences sociology has close and intimate relationship with all other social sciences. Accordingly it has close relationship with history. Because present society bears symbols of past. Relationship between the two is so close and intimate that scholars like G. Von Bulow have refused to acknowledge sociology as a science distinct from history.

Sociology is the science of society. It is a study of systems of social action and their inter-relations. Sociology is a science of social groups and social institutions. History studies the important past events and incidents. It records men past life and life of societies in a systematic and chronological order. It also tries to find out the causes of past events. It also studies the past political, social and economic events of the world.

It not only studies the past but also establishes relations with present and future. That is why it is said that “History is the microscope of the past, the horoscope of the present and telescope of the future.”

However, both the sciences are closely inter-related and interdependent on each other. Both study the same human society. Their mutual dependence led G.H. Howard to remark that, “History is past Sociology and Sociology is present history.” Both takes help from each other. At the same time one depends on the other for its own comprehension.

History helps and enriches Sociology. History is the store house of knowledge from which Sociology gained a lot. History provides materials sociologists use. History is a record of past social matters, social customs and information about different stages of life. Sociology uses this information. Books written by historians like A. Toynbee are of great use for Sociologists. To know the impact of a particular past event sociology depends on history.

Similarly Sociology also provides help to history and enriches it. A historian greatly benefited from the research conducted by Sociologists. Historians now study caste, class and family by using sociological data. Sociology provides the background for the study of history.

Now history is being studied from Sociological angle. Every historical event has a social cause or social background. To understand that historical event history need the help from Sociology and Sociology helps history in this respect. Sociology provides facts on which historians rely on.

Thus history and Sociology are mutually dependent on each other. History is now being studied from Sociological angle and Sociology also now studied from historical point of view. Historical sociology now became a new branch of Sociology which depends on history. Similarly Sociological history is another specialized subject which based on both the Sciences. But in spite of the above close relationship and inter-dependence both the sciences differ from each other from different angles which are described below.
Differences:
1) Sociology is a science of society and is concerned with the present society. But history deals with the past events and studies the past society.
2) Sociology is a modern or new subject whereas history is an older social science.
3) Sociology is abstract whereas history is concrete in nature.
4) The scope of Sociology is very wide whereas the scope of history is limited. Sociology includes history within its scope.
5) Sociology is an analytical science whereas history is a descriptive science.
6) Attitude of sociology and history differ from each other. Sociology studies a particular event as a social phenomenon whereas history studies a particular event in its entirety.
7) Sociology is a general science whereas history is a special science.

3. Sociology and Economics:
Sociology is mother of all social sciences. Hence it has close relationship with all social sciences and so also with Economics. The relationship of sociology with economics is very close, intimate and personal. There exists close relationship between these two because economic relationships bear a close relation to social activities and relationships. Likewise social relationships are also affected by economic relationships. Economic activities to a great extent are social activities. Hence both are mutually related.

Sociology is a science of society. It is concerned with the association of human beings. Sociology is the study of human interactions and inter-relations their conditions and consequences. But Economics deals with economic activities of man. It is a science of wealth and choice. According to Prof. Robbins, “Economics is a social science which studies human behaviour in relation to his unlimited ends and scarce means which have alternative uses.” It is concerned with the activities of man such as production, consumption, distribution and exchange. It also studies the structure and functions of different economic organizations like banks, markets etc. It is concerned with the material needs of man as well as his material welfare.

However, there exists a great deal of inter-relationship between these two sciences. Both are interdependent and inter-related with each other. Because of this inter-relationship Thomas opines that, “Economics is, in fact, but one branch of Sociology.” Similarly Silverman opines Economics is regarded as offshoot of sociology which studies the general principles of all social relations. Their inter-relationships are as follows:

Economics takes the help of Sociology. For its own comprehension economics takes the help of sociology and depends on it. Economics is a part of Sociology hence without the help from sociology economics can’t understand itself completely. Economics is concerned with material welfare of man which is common welfare.

Economic welfare is a part of social welfare. For the solution of different economic problems such as inflation, poverty, unemployment etc. economists takes the help of sociology and takes into account the
social events of that particular time. At the same time society controls the economic activities of man. Economics is greatly benefited by the research conducted by Sociologists like Karl Marx, Max-Weber, and Pareto. Some economists also consider economic change as an aspect of social change. Economic draws its generalization basing on the data provided by Sociology. Thus economics cannot go far or develop without the help of Sociology.

Similarly Sociology also takes the help from economics. Economics greatly enriches sociological knowledge. An economic factor greatly influences each and every aspects of social life. Economics is a part of sociology hence without the help of economics we can’t understand sociology properly.

Knowledge and research in the field of economics greatly contributes to sociology. Each and every social problem has an economic cause. For the solution of social problems like dowry, suicide etc. Sociologists take the help from economics.

Marx opines, “Economic relations constitute the foundation of Society.” Economic factors play a very important role in every aspect of our social life that is why Sociologists concerned with economic institutions. For this reason Sociologists like Spencer, Weber, Durkheim and others have taken the help from economics in their analysis of social relationships.

Thus both sociology and economics are very closely related with each other. There are some problems which are being studied by both sociologists and economists. Economic changes results in social changes and vice versa. However, in spite of the above closeness, inter-relationship and inter-dependence both the sciences have certain differences which are described below:

**Differences:**
(1) Sociology is a science of society and social relationships whereas economics is a science of wealth and choice.
(2) Sociology is a much younger science which has very recent origin whereas economics is comparatively an older science.
(3) Sociology is an abstract science whereas economics is concrete in nature.
(4) Sociology is a general social science whereas economics is a special social science.
(5) The scope of sociology is very wide whereas the scope of economics is very limited.
(6) Sociology is concerned with the social activities of man whereas economics is concerned with the economic activities of man.
(7) Society is studied as a unit of study in Sociology whereas man is taken as a unit of study in economics.
(8) Both Sociology and economics differ from each other in respect of the methods and techniques they use for their study.
4. Sociology and Psychology:

Sociology is a science of society. Hence it is closely related to other social sciences and so also with psychology. Sociology and Psychology are very closely interlinked interrelated and interdependent. Relationship between the two is so close and intimate that Psychologist like Karl Pearson refuses to accept both as special science. Both depend on each other for their own comprehension. Their relationship will be clear if we analyze their inter-relationship and mutual dependency.

Sociology is a science of social phenomena and social relationship. It is a science of social group and social institutions. It is a science of collective behaviour. It studies human behaviour in groups. But psychology is a science of mind or mental processes.

It is a science of human behaviour. It analyses attitudes, emotions, perception, process of learning and values of individuals and process of personality formation in society. In the words of Thouless, “Psychology is the positive science of human experience and behaviour.” But both the sciences are closely related to each other which can be known from the following.

Sociology receives help from Psychology. Psychology is a part of sociology hence without the help from Psychology Sociology can’t understand itself fully and properly. There are many psychologists like Freud, MacDougal and others who have enrich Sociology in many respects. They opines that the whole social life could be reduced finally to psychological forces. Each and every social problems and social phenomenon must have a psychological basis for the solution of which sociology requires the help from psychology. A new branch of knowledge has developed with the combination of sociology and psychology which is known as social psychology.

Similarly, psychology depends on Sociology to comprehend itself fully. Psychology also requires help from sociology in many cases. As human mind and personality is being influenced by social environment, culture, customs and traditions hence psychology takes the help from Sociology to understand this.

To understand human nature and behaviour properly psychology depends on sociology. There are many Psychological problems which must have a Social Cause. Psychology requires the help from Sociology to understand these social problems. A research in Sociology richly contributes to psychology. Contributions and theories of many Sociologists also are of great help to Psychologists.

Thus Sociology and Psychology are mutually dependent on each other. One can’t comprehend itself without the help from others. Besides there are some common area of study such as social disorganization, public opinion etc. which are being studied by both Sociologists and Psychologists. Social Psychology a branch of Psychology is developed with the combination of the two. In the words of Kretch and Crutchfield, “Social Psychology is the science of behaviour of the individuals in society.”
Differences:

However, inspite of the mutual relationship and dependence both the sciences differ from each other in the following ways.

1. Sociology is a science of society but Psychology is a science of mind.
2. Scope of Sociology is wide whereas scope of Psychology is limited.
3. Society is the unit of study in sociology but individual is the unit of study in case of Psychology.
4. Sociology studies social processes whereas Psychology studies mental processes.
5. Sociology studies and analyses human behaviour from Sociological angle whereas psychology studies and analyses human behaviour from Psychological angles.

5. Sociology and Anthropology:

Sociology is the mother of all social sciences. Hence it has close and intimate relationship with Anthropology. The relationship is so close that Anthropologists like A.L. Kroeber consider Sociology and Anthropology as twin sisters. They often appear as two names for the same subject. R. Reddfield recognizes the closeness between these two social sciences.

Sociology is a science of society. It studies behaviour of man in groups. The term Sociology has been derived from the Latin word ‘Socius’ means society, companion or association and the Greek word ‘logos’ means study or science. Hence Sociology is concerned with the association of human beings. It is a science that deals with social groups.

Similarly the term Anthropology is derived from two Greek words ‘anthropos’ meaning man and ‘logos’ meaning study or science. It is a scientific study of man in all its dimensions, both biological and socio-cultural. The branch of anthropology that studies the biological aspects of humankind is called Physical or Biological Anthropology, while the study of social and cultural aspects is known as Social Anthropology or Cultural Anthropology. The third branch of anthropology is study of languages in a comparative perspective. It is known as Linguistic Anthropology or Anthropological linguistics. The branch of anthropology that studies the pre-historic past of mankind, before writing began, is called Archaeological Anthropology or Pre-historic Archaeology. Of the four branches of anthropology, Sociology is the most closely related to Social Anthropology.
Mutual Help:

However there exists a very close and intimate relationship between Sociology and Anthropology. Both contribute to the growth of others. Both are mutually related to each other. Of course Sociology studies society whereas anthropology studies man. But as man and society are mutually interrelated hence it is very difficult to distinguish two. However their close relationship can be known from the following.

Anthropology contributes to the growth of Sociology. Without the help of anthropology the study of Sociology can’t be complete. It is a part of Sociology. Anthropology provides knowledge about ancient societies. To have a comprehensive understanding of present society Sociology takes the help of anthropology. Contributions of many Anthropologists like R. Brown, Linton, Mead and Pritchard enriches sociological knowledge’s. The origin of family, marriage, religion etc. can be better understood through anthropological knowledge. The concepts like cultural area, cultural traits, and cultural lag etc. sociology accept from anthropology.

Sociology accepts the anthropological conclusion that ‘racial superiority is not responsible for mental development.’ Thus Sociology is greatly benefited by anthropological studies.

Similarly, Sociology contributes richly towards the growth of anthropology. Anthropology accepts many concepts of Sociology. Research and contributions of many Sociologists like Emile Durkheim, Herbert Spencer is of great help to anthropology. Anthropologists greatly benefited by the Sociological researches. Ideas and conclusions of Sociology contributes to the research in anthropology.

Thus there exists a great deal of relationship between Sociology and Anthropology. Both study human society and both are concerned with all kinds of social groups like families, friends, tribes etc. Many of the ideas and concepts are used in both the discipline. Hence both are interrelated and interdependent. But in spite of the inter-relationship both differ from each other.

Differences:

1. Sociology is a science of society whereas anthropology is a science of man and his behavior.
2. The scope of Sociology is very wide whereas the scope of Anthropology is very limited. Because anthropology is a part of Sociology.
3. Sociology studies society as a whole whereas anthropology studies man as a part of society.
4. Sociology studies civilizations which are vast and dynamic on the other hand Anthropology studies cultures which are small and static.
5. Sociology studies modern, civilized and complex societies whereas Anthropology studies ancient and non-literate societies.
6. Sociology is concerned with social planning whereas anthropology is not concerned with social planning. On the basis of social planning sociology make suggestion for future but anthropology do not make any suggestion for future.
In the words of Kluckhon, “The Sociological attitude has tended towards the Practical and Present, the anthropological towards pure understanding of the past.”

6. Sociology and Biology:
Sociology is the study of society including human evolution, their behavior, and their development and so on. It also studies genetics and sexual behavior which can be considered as one of the most important branches of Biology. As, Biology is related with the biological development of living organisms, the biological development of human beings also come under this. Human behavior is influenced or affected by heredity or gene which is studied in Biology. Sociology also studies human behavior likewise one that major concerns of sociology is marriage that is based on Biology.

Herbert Spencer explained his theory of the evolution of society on the principle of natural evolution. So, nature and society are very close to each other.

Differences:
(1) Sociology is the general science and biology is pure science.
(2) Sociology studies human as social beings were as biology studies human as biological beings.
(3) Sociology studies human society and its development in sociological prospective and biological studies human beings and other all living organisms as well as their living organisms as well as their development in biological prospective.
(4) Sociology analyses the social process of human beings and biology analyses the biological process of human beings and other living organisms.
(5) Sociology is a young science as it came into existence later which does not have even two hundred (200) years history and biology is old science which has a long history.

7. Sociology and Philosophy:
Sociology means the study of society on a generalized or abstract level. In an empirical science, the generalizations concerning a specified field of inquiry are drawn from facts observed in that field or un closely related fields these generalizations are drawn without assuming neither asserting nor denying any knowledge on a level of higher abstraction concerning reality as a whole all propositions that constitute an empirical science from a self – sufficient system. No proposition is allowed to play a role in the system if it contains knowledge which is not empirical. In other words, it is not formulated under the limitations just stated.

On the contrary, philosophy is primarily an attempt to understand reality in its totality. From a multitude of observed facts, the philosopher proceeds to certain ultimate principles which, taken together, attempt to explain reality as a whole. Thus, whereas the sociologist explains society in terms of acts observed in society and explanation he gives to total reality. The latter can speak of first causes, supreme values, and ultimate ends, the sociologist is not entitled to do so.
Modern philosophy and sociology came into existence during one time period to explain the social crisis of Europe in the 19th century. Sociology aimed, to be in with, to provide a social doctrine that would guide social policy. This aim has now been abandoned. Even then some links exist between sociology and philosophy. First, there is a philosophy of sociology in the same sense as a philosophy of science: that is and examination of the methods, concepts and arguments used in sociology.

Secondly, there is a close relationship between sociology and moral and social philosophy the subject matter of sociology is human social behavior as guided by values: moral and social philosophy studies values and the sociologists study values and human valuation as facts. On occasions, the sociologists is made to distinguish between fact and value. It is only by some training that social philosophy becomes competent to distinguish between fact and value. Thirdly, it can be said that the study of sociology leads to philosophical quest. Durkheim thought that sociology, has to necessarily contribute to a renewal of philosophical questions. This made him indulge in some epistemological discussions, a branch of philosophy. Karl Mannheim argued that sociology of knowledge had implications for epistemology. Both of them thought that sociology can make a direct contribution of philosophy. But this is an incorrect approach. Epistemology is the basis of the sociology of knowledge not vice versa.

It can also be said here that while sociology leads on to philosophical reflections, much of it also begins there. Sociological research will become trivial if it ignore the larger problems of social life which are coordinated in philosophical world-reviews and in social doctrines. The stimulating character of early Marxism in social research was to a great extent due to the fact the Marxism was not only a sociology theory but also philosophical base was helpful for social research. Active participation in social movement and commitment to a social doctrine helped Beatrice Webb in her social research. In brief, although each social science, including philosophy, has its own specific area of study, there is a growing collaboration and faster cross fertilization among them. The unity of social science is best conceived as a unity of methods and of conceptual segments but not as a universal history.

The Example of Juvenile Delinquency

Because all the social sciences focus on human behavior, they differ from one another not so much in the content of what each study but, rather, in what the social scientists look for when they conduct their studies. It is basically their approaches, their orientation, or their emphases that differentiate the social sciences. Accordingly, to make clearer the differences between them, it might be helpful to look at how different social scientists might approach the same topic. **We shall use juvenile delinquency as our example.**

Historians interested in juvenile delinquency would examine juvenile delinquency in some particular past setting, such as New York City in the 1920s or Los Angeles in the 1950s. The historian would try to interpret the delinquency by stressing the social context (or social milieu) of the period. For example, if delinquent gangs in New York City in the 1920s were the focus, historians might emphasize the social disruption caused by World War 1: the problems of unassimilated, recently arrived ethnic groups;
competition and rivalry for social standing among those ethnic groups; intergenerational conflict; the national, state, and local political and economic situation; and so on. The historian might also document the number of gangs, as well as their ethnic makeup. He or she would then produce a history of juvenile delinquency in New York City in the 1920s.

Political scientists are less likely to be interested in juvenile delinquency. But if they were, they would want to know how the existence of juvenile gangs is related to politics. For examples, are the children of people who have less access to political decision making more likely to join gangs? Or political scientists might study the power structure within a particular gang by identifying its leaders and followers. They might then compare one gang with another, perhaps even drawing analogies with the political structure of some legitimate group.

Economists also are not likely to study delinquent gangs or juvenile delinquency. But if they did, they, of course, would emphasize the economic aspects of delinquency. They might determine how material goods, such as “loot,” are allocated within a gang. But they would be more inclined to focus on delinquency in general, emphasizing the relationship of gangs to economic factors in the country. Economists might wish to examine the effects of economic conditions, such as booms and busts, on the formation of gangs or on the incidence or prevalence of delinquency. They might also wish to determine the cost of juvenile delinquency to the nation in terms of property stolen and destroyed and wages paid to police and social workers.

Anthropologists are likely to be highly interested in studying juvenile delinquency and the formation of juvenile gangs. If anthropologists were to study a particular gang, they might examine the implements of delinquency, such as tools used in car theft or in burglary. They would focus on the social organization of the gang, perhaps looking at its power structure. They would study the belief system of the group to see how it supports the group’s delinquent activities. They would also concentrate on the ways in which group members communicate with one another, especially their argot, or special language. Anthropologists would stress the larger cultural context in order to see what it is about a culture, such as the ways in which it marks entry into manhood, that leads to the formation of such groups. They would compare their findings with what anthropologists have discovered about delinquency in other cultures. In making such a cross-cultural comparison, they probably would note that juvenile delinquency is not a universal phenomenon but is largely a characteristic of industrialized and post-industrialized societies. They would point out that these societies require many years of formal education for their youth. This postpones the age at which young men and women are allowed to assume the role of adults, and it is during the “between status” that delinquency occurs. The emphasis given by anthropologists in such a study, then, would be true to their calling; that is, anthropologists would be focusing on culture.

Psychologists also have high interest in juvenile delinquency. When psychologists approach the subject, however, they tend to focus on what exists within the delinquent. They might test the assumption (or hypothesis) that, compared with their followers, gang leaders have more outgoing personality traits, or...
greater hostility and aggressiveness. Psychologists might also compare the personality traits of adolescent males who join gangs with boys from the same neighborhood or in the general population who do not become gang members. They might give a series of tests to determine whether gang members are more insecure, dominant, hostile, or aggressive than nonmembers.

Sociologists are also interested in most of the aspects emphasized by the other social scientists. Sociologists, however, ordinarily are not concerned with a particular gang from some past period, as historians might be, although they, too, try to identify the relevant social context. Sociologists focus on the power structure of gangs, as would political scientists, and they also are interested in certain aspects of property, as an economist might be. But sociologists would be more interested in the gang members’ attitudes toward property, why delinquents feel it is legitimate to steal and vandalize, and how they divide up the property they steal.

Sociologists would also approach delinquency in a way quite similar to that of anthropologists and be interested in the same sorts of things. But sociologists would place strong emphasis on social class (which is based on occupation, income, and education). They would want to know if there is greater likelihood that a person will join a gang if his or her parents have little education, and how gang membership varies with income. If sociologists found that delinquency varies with education, age, sex, religion, income, or race-ethnicity, they would want to know the reasons for this. Do children of unskilled workers have a greater chance of becoming delinquency than the children of doctors and lawyers? If so, why?

The sociologists’ emphases also separate them from psychologists. Sociologists are inclined to ignore personality, the primary focus of psychologists, and instead to stress the effects of social class on recruitment into delinquency. Sociologists also examine group structure and interaction. For example, both sociologists and psychologists would be interested in differences between a gang’s leaders and followers. To discover these, however, sociologists are not likely to give paper-and-pencil tests. They are much more likely to observe face-to-face interaction among gang members (what they do in each other’s presence). Sociologists would want to see if leaders and followers uphold the group’s values differently; who suggests their activities; and who does what when they do them—whether the activity be simply some form of recreation or a criminal act. For example, do leaders maintain their leadership by committing more acts of daring and bravery then their followers?

Compared with other social scientists, sociologists are more likely to emphasize the routine activities of the police, the courts, and changing norms. The police approach their job with preconceived ideas about who is likely to commit crimes and who is not. Their ideas are based on what they have experienced “on the streets,” as well as on stereotypes nurtured within their occupation. The police typically view some people (usually lower-class males living in some particular areas of the city) to be more apt to commit crimes than males from other areas of the city, males from a higher social class, or females in general. How do the police develop their ideas? How are such stereotypes supported in their occupational subculture?
effects do they have on the police and on those whom they encounter? In other words, sociologists are deeply interested in finding out how the police define people and how those definitions help to determine whom the police arrested.

Sociologists are also interested in what occurs following an arrest. Prosecutors wield much discretion. For the same act they can level a variety of charges. They can charge an individual with first degree burglary, second degree burglary, breaking and entering, or merely trespassing. Sociologists want to know how such decisions are made, as well as their effects on the lives of those charged with crimes. Sociologists also study what happens when an individual comes before a judge, especially the outcome of the trial by the type of offense and the sex, age, or race-ethnicity of the offender. They also focus on the effects of detention and incarceration, as well as how people adjust when they are released back into the community.

Norms, the behaviors that people expect of others, obviously change over time. What was considered proper behavior a generation ago is certainly not the same as what is considered proper today. Consequently, the law changes, and acts considered to be law violations at one time are not necessarily considered criminal at another time. Similarly, acts not now considered criminal may become law violations at a later date. For example, at one point in our history drinking alcohol in public at age sixteen was within the law in many communities, while today it would be an act of delinquency. In the same way, a person under sixteen who is on the streets after 10 PM unaccompanied by an adult is breaking the law in some communities. But if the law is changed or if the sixteen-year-old has a birthday or moves to a different community, the same act is not a violation of the law. With marijuana, the case is similar. Millions of Americans break the law when they smoke grass, but for several years Alaska allowed possession of marijuana for personal use, a legal right later revoked.

Perhaps more than any of the other social scientists, the sociologist maintains a crucial interest in the effects of changing legal definitions in determining what people are arrested for and charged with. In effect, sociologists are interested in what juvenile delinquency is in the first place. They take the definition of delinquency not as obvious but as problematic, something to be studied in the context of lawmaking, lawbreaking, and the workaday world of the judicial system.

By means of this example of juvenile delinquency, it is easy to see that the social sciences greatly overlap one another. Sociology, however, is an overarching social science, because sociologists are, for the most part, interested in the same things that other social scientists are interested in. They are, however, not as limited in their scope or focus as are the others. Except for its traditional concerns with tribal societies, anthropology is similarly broad in its treatment of human behavior.