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THE **SOCIAL FACT**

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SCIENCE AND COMMON SENSE
THE UNEASY PARTNERSHIP



Smart Leader IAS

THE SOCIAL FACT

Is a bulletin for sociology current affairs which tries to give aspirants a new dimensions in their sociology preparations. The Magazine has been designed in such away that the reading experience is enriching and insightful for the readers.

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INSIDE THIS SOCIOLOGICAL BULLETIN

Connecting the dots :

Sociology is a process in making. Everyday newspapers and weekly have many important news, which have sociological angle in subtle form. This chapter helps you to connect those dots and give a clear picture of the reality.

Beyond Basics :

Going beyond basics in studies for examinations is crucial to foster a deeper understanding of the subject matter, enabling more comprehensive and critical thinking. It allows students to tackle complex questions with confidence and adapt to evolving exam formats.

Perspectives :

Beauty of Sociology, as a social science, is its capacity to offer different perspectives of a same topic. This chapter analyses a current topic with a unique social perspectives.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

- *The Himachal Pradesh government has approved Other Backward Class (OBC) reservation in upcoming Urban Local Bodies (ULB) elections, also known as civic polls. The government also approved the establishment of a Backward Classes Commission to collect accurate data on the population of backward classes. In **Homo Hierarchicus**, Dumont described Indian society as structured around ritual hierarchy and the ideology of purity and pollution. The introduction of OBC reservation represents a shift from ritual hierarchy to modern egalitarian principles. It shows the Indian state's ongoing effort to translate hierarchical social structures into frameworks of equality — a tension Dumont saw as central to India's modernization.*
- *Taliban announced a deal with the Gulf state this month to recruit 3,100 workers from Afghanistan; it says the deal will help fight unemployment, poverty in the nation; Qatar is one of the handful of countries that have strong ties with Afghan rulers. From a **Marxian** view, the deal reflects the commodification of labour in the global capitalist system. Afghan workers become a reserve army of labour, migrating from a war-torn economy to a wealthy Gulf state that relies on cheap, disposable migrant labour. This arrangement benefits capitalist accumulation in Qatar while maintaining dependency and underdevelopment in Afghanistan. Marx would see this as part of the unequal global division of labour, where the periphery (Afghanistan) supplies labour and the core (Gulf economies) extracts value.*

- Attacks against LGBTQ+ people and gay-friendly establishments are rising across Germany, including in Berlin, a city that has historically embraced the community. Last year saw a 40% increase in violence targeting LGBTQ+ people in 12 of Germany's 16 federal states as compared to 2023, according to the Association of Counseling Centers for Victims of Right-Wing, Racist and Antisemitic Violence. Hostility toward LGBTQ+ people serves as a "rallying cry" for believers in right-wing extremism, according to Judith Porath, the association's managing director. Experts have seen an increase in demonstrations and violence among neo-Nazis, most of whom are young men. Foucault famously argued that sexuality is not just a personal matter but a site of power and social control. The rise in violence represents an effort to discipline bodies and reassert control over identities that defy heteronormative norms. Right-wing extremism uses the regulation of sexuality to restore hierarchical order controlling who may express desire, visibility, and legitimacy. Policing sexuality to maintain power structures and a "pure" national identity.*
- Kavin Selvaganesh—a 27-year-old engineer—was brutally hacked to death in public by his partner's brother, Surjith, who surrendered to the police immediately after the murder. Selvaganesh belonged to the Pallar community—a Scheduled Caste (SC)—and Subhashini, his partner, is from an intermediate caste, which is a part of the Thevar caste group. Honour killings occur when individuals transgress the moral boundaries of hierarchy — for instance, inter-caste or inter-community love. Violence becomes a mechanism of social control, ensuring that social mobility through marriage does not challenge the status order. For Bêteille, these killings expose the persistence of traditional inequalities even within a formally democratic and modern society.*
- Residents of villages situated in and around Manipur's 'buffer zone', a strip of militarised farmland separating the Meitei-dominated Imphal Valley from the surrounding hills inhabited by Kuki-Zo people, have faced difficulties in cultivating their fields after the ethnic conflict broke out between the two communities in May 2023, leading to severe losses. The farmers are seeking adequate protection, support, and compensation. Nandini Sundar's ethnographic lens reveals how militarization seeps into daily life. Fields*

become frontlines, homes become checkpoints, and farming becomes risky labour. Such everyday violence corrodes normalcy — people live in fear, unable to plan for the next harvest or season.

- A Senior Defence Ministry official said that they were opening more and more branches for women for all categories. Women are eligible for various roles, including technical and non-technical positions, and can join through different entry schemes. Most of the defence training institutes and academies have been opened for women as per data, women make up 13.4% of IAF, 6.85% of Army, 6% of Navy, with numbers rising steadily since 2005. **Parsons would see this as society's adaptive response to changing gender norms. As women take on defence roles, institutional equilibrium adjusts - balancing expressive (family-oriented) and instrumental (professional) functions.**
- The Jammu & Kashmir government on Wednesday declared 25 books, many by prominent writers such as A.G. Noorani, Sumantra Bose, Arundhati Roy and Ayesha Jalal, as "forfeited for propagating false narrative and secessionism" in J&K. **Foucault would see this as an example of discursive power — where controlling knowledge means controlling people. The state defines what constitutes "truth" and labels alternate histories as "secessionist." The act of banning books reveals how power operates through knowledge, not just by force.**
- A 200-foot-long, 10-foot-high wall was allegedly built by the Thottia Naicker community in a Karur village to prevent access to the Arunthathiyar Scheduled Caste community. The wall was built on government land and the Thottia Naicker community claims it was to deter "outsiders" from "anti-social activities" under the influence of alcohol. The local administration has ordered the wall to be demolished, and it was partially razed in August 2025 after intervention from revenue officials and police. **Ambedkar would view the wall as a physical manifestation of untouchability and caste-based segregation. The wall symbolizes how caste operates not just socially but spatially, excluding Dalits (Arunthathiyars) from access to shared resources and spaces. Ambedkar argued that true democracy requires "liberty, equality, and fraternity" — all violated by such segregation. The wall is not just concrete; it is the architecture of caste oppression.**

- Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Tuesday launched the ‘Thayumanavar Thittam’ aimed at delivering ration supplies at the doorstep of over 21.7 lakh elderly citizens and persons with disabilities across the State. **By delivering rations to the doorstep, the state bypasses systemic obstacles — long queues, transportation challenges, or discrimination at ration shops — thus promoting fairness and addressing inequalities in resource distribution as said by Beteille.**
- Four years have passed since the Taliban retook power in August 2021, and the UN continues to criticize the widespread ban on girls’ and women’s education beyond primary school. **Amartya Sen emphasizes education as central to enhancing human capabilities and freedom. Banning education for girls drastically reduces their opportunity to exercise agency, economic choice, and social participation.**
- In June and July, the east African country, usually known as a beacon of calm in the turbulent Horn of Africa region, saw anti-government protests that left 65 dead, according to a police watchdog. While the protests have disappeared from the streets, many of the issues — police brutality, a troubled economy — have not. But thanks to football, public anger against Mr. Ruto’s administration seems to be fizzing out. **Gramsci would see football as a tool of cultural hegemony, where popular culture helps the ruling elite maintain consent without force. National or club football channels emotional energy into symbolic unity, reducing likelihood of disruptive collective action. Sports can legitimize social order while diffusing dissent.**
- “Schools for husbands” in Senegal are community-based programs that train respected men in “positive masculinity,” focusing on gender equality, women’s health, and shared domestic duties. These UN-supported initiatives have led to men supporting hospital deliveries, sharing chores, and promoting family planning. Butler’s theory of gender as performed is relevant: **Programs encourage men to perform care, equality, and shared responsibility, demonstrating that masculinity is learned and flexible, not fixed. Positive masculinity redefines what it means to be a man in Senegalese households.**

- The Karnataka High Court ruled that the POCSO Act is gender-neutral and a woman can be made an accused for **sexual offences against children**. **Nancy Fraser emphasizes both redistribution and recognition in justice**. **The ruling recognizes women as possible offenders, confronting gendered stereotypes while ensuring redistributive justice through equal legal accountability. Justice requires both material and symbolic equality in law.**
- Bengal migrant workers are facing harassment and discrimination, leading the state government to launch the Shramashree scheme to provide financial assistance, food, healthcare, and skill training for those returning home. **Smith examines how states intervene to manage migration flows and support returnees. Shramashree exemplifies proactive state engagement in labor reintegration, ensuring returning migrants are economically and socially supported. Policy-driven support transforms precarious migration into structured reintegration.**
- Uttarakhand's anti-conversion law, the Freedom of Religion Act, 2018 was recently amended by the Freedom of Religion (Amendment) Bill, 2025 to make it more stringent. The new law imposes harsher penalties, including prison sentences from three years to life for forced conversions, and allows for the confiscation of property acquired through such means. **Yogendra Singh highlighted how modernization increases state intervention in regulating social practices. The amendment reflects the state's effort to regulate religion as part of social order, illustrating the tension between modern legal authority and traditional religious freedoms. Law is both a tool of modern governance and a potential source of social conflict.**
- 17. Nigeria is the largest economy in Africa, and one of its largest oil producers. Yet, the northern states of the country are in the grip of an acute malnutrition crisis. Over 600 children have died in northern Nigeria in the last six months due to malnourishment, and according to the medical charity, Doctors Without Borders (MSF), the region is "currently facing an alarming malnutrition crisis". **Frank argued that underdevelopment is a structural condition imposed by global capitalism. Northern Nigeria suffers because resources and wealth are extracted for the benefit of elites and foreign powers, leaving peripheral regions impoverished. Malnutrition is a symptom of dependency, where local populations do not benefit from resource wealth.**

- *International Booker Prize winner Banu Mushtaq sparked a controversy after being invited to inaugurate the Mysuru Dasara festival, as some politicians and critics objected on religious grounds. Opponents cited the festival's traditional Hindu rituals and an old, controversial video clip of Mushtaq, but the Supreme Court dismissed a petition against her involvement, upholding the state's secular invitation based on the Constitution. **Ashis Nandy would interpret the controversy as a struggle over cultural identity and symbolic power. Rituals and festivals are arenas where dominant groups assert cultural norms, sometimes marginalizing minority voices. The debate reveals how cultural nationalism can clash with secular pluralism***
- *Mumbai came to a standstill and traffic snarls were witnessed for kilometres on Friday after thousands joined Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange-Patil at Azad Maidan for his protest demanding benefits for the community under the Other Backward Classes category. **Desai highlighted the intersection of class, caste, and state policies in shaping social conflicts. The protest demonstrates how economic aspirations, caste identity, and political engagement converge in contemporary India. Quota movements reflect struggles over resources mediated by both caste and class.***
- *The Supreme Court has issued a notice to the Union government, NCERT, and several states, including Maharashtra, Punjab, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu, to respond to a petition demanding the integration of transgender-inclusive comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) into school curriculum. **Nandy highlights how cultural and moral norms shape social exclusion. Transgender-inclusive education challenges dominant cultural prejudices, promoting recognition and acceptance of diverse identities. Curriculum reforms can foster cultural pluralism and social inclusion.***
- *The term "social and educational survey 2025" primarily refers to the ongoing survey in the Indian state of Karnataka to gather data on the social and educational status of its population. While the survey is intended to collect data on social and economic status to inform policy, it has faced extensions and controversy, with debates over its purpose and*

*execution. The survey, which began in September 2025, was initially set to end earlier but has been extended to ensure data completeness. **Giddens emphasizes that modern societies constantly monitor themselves to manage risks and plan development.** The survey represents reflexive governance, where empirical data is used to anticipate social challenges and design policies. Collecting and analyzing social data is a hallmark of modern state planning.*



BEYOND BASICS

SCIENCE, SOCIOLOGY, AND COMMON SENSE: A DIALOGUE BETWEEN REASON AND REALITY

“Why should we go beyond the basics?”

Science, sociology, and common sense each offer powerful ways of making sense of the world, but taken alone they give an incomplete picture. Science supplies systematic methods and empirical rigor; sociology uncovers the social patterns and power relations that shape behaviour; common sense captures everyday meanings and practical reasoning. This dialogue - between carefully tested knowledge, the study of social life, and the intuitions people live by - reveals how reason and reality interact. Going beyond the basics means learning to move between these registers: to test commonsense assumptions with evidence, to see how social structures shape what counts as “obvious,” and to use theoretical tools to explain not just what happens but why it happens.

Human understanding evolves through multiple lenses from the intuitive grasp of common sense to the disciplined inquiry of science and the reflective depth of sociology. Each represents a distinct way of knowing, yet all remain interconnected in shaping how societies think, act, and change. This essay explores that continuum from the rational ideals of the Indian Constitution to Thomas Paine’s revolutionary humanism, from Robert K. Merton’s sociology of science to André Bétaille’s reflections on common sense, culminating in C. Wright Mills’ vision of

the sociological imagination. Together, they reveal that knowledge is not merely a pursuit of truth but a moral and social enterprise defining the very character of a democratic civilization.

The Indian Vision of Scientific Temper

The Indian Constitution envisions a citizenry guided by reason, inquiry, and reform - principles rooted deeply in the essence of science. Far beyond laboratories and equations, science is a way of life: a habit of mind grounded in curiosity, skepticism, and a relentless pursuit of truth. Our civilization has long associated knowledge with logic and inquiry. Yet, the question “What is science?” remains profound. Is it the work of scientists, the mastery of disciplines like physics or biology, or something deeper - a process of knowing, a philosophy of understanding the world around us? India’s first Prime Minister, **Jawaharlal Nehru**, offered a defining answer. In *The Discovery of India* (1946), he described the scientific temper as “a way of life - a process of thinking, a method of acting and associating with fellow human beings.” To Nehru, science symbolized not only intellectual rigor but also moral progress - an attitude that values questioning over blind faith, dialogue over dogma. Scientists like **Prafulla Chandra Ray** and **Meghnad Saha** echoed this vision, asserting that scientific inquiry must serve social emancipation, freeing the mind from superstition and prejudice. For them, science was both knowledge and conscience - a commitment to truth and to the collective good.

The Meaning and Nature of Science

The word science derives from the Latin *scientia*, meaning “knowledge.” Before the eighteenth century, it was called natural philosophy - a quest to comprehend the universe through observation and reason. Over time, science evolved into a systematic study of nature, encompassing many disciplines yet united by a shared method of inquiry. Science is not a static body of facts but a dynamic, self-correcting process. It thrives on testing, evidence, and verification. It deals not with the supernatural but with the observable - plants growing, stars shining, species evolving. In education, science must transcend the classroom.

Learners should encounter it as a human pursuit full of curiosity, creativity, competition, and even failure. Scientists are not detached figures in lab coats but human beings driven by wonder, imagination, and persistence.

The Tentative Nature of Scientific Knowledge

Scientific knowledge is tentative open to revision as new evidence emerges. When Pluto, once hailed as the ninth planet, was reclassified as a “dwarf planet” in 2006, it demonstrated that science adapts with discovery. Similarly, our understanding of dinosaurs has evolved; once thought to descend from reptiles, they are now linked to birds through evidence such as Archaeopteryx. These examples reveal that science is not dogmatic; its strength lies in its capacity to evolve. Yet some principles like Newton’s Laws of Motion endure through centuries, illustrating that science harmonizes continuity and change.

The Three Domains of Science

Science can be viewed through three interwoven domains, each vital to its character:

- ***Science as a Body of Knowledge*** – the accumulated wisdom of generations expressed through facts, definitions, laws, and theories. Yet, memorization alone does not make one scientific; genuine understanding arises through exploration and reflection.
- ***Science as a Process of Inquiry*** – a disciplined method of questioning, hypothesizing, observing, and analyzing. Developing inquiry skills such as measurement, inference, and reasoning enables learners to connect phenomena logically and meaningfully.
- ***Science as a Way of Thinking*** – as Carl Sagan (1995) observed, “Science is more than a body of knowledge; it is a way of thinking.” It cultivates curiosity, critical reasoning, and open-mindedness valuing evidence over emotion, inquiry over ideology.

Together, these domains embody the scientific temper a cornerstone of rational and democratic life.

Thomas Paine and the Spirit of Common Sense

Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* (1776) stands as both a political and sociological reflection on human nature and power. Written when the American colonies sought identity and freedom, Paine questioned the moral legitimacy of monarchy and hereditary privilege. He famously distinguished society from government, asserting that "society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness; the former promotes our happiness positively by uniting our affections, the latter negatively by restraining our vices."

In this distinction lies an early insight into the social contract — the idea that people unite for mutual benefit, yet establish authority to restrain excesses. Paine argued that while society arises naturally from human cooperation, government is an artificial creation born of necessity. He warned that concentrated power corrupts equality and justice. "Mankind being originally equals in the order of creation," he wrote, "the equality could only be destroyed by some subsequent circumstance." Paine's critique of monarchy was, at heart, a sociological argument against institutionalized inequality and inherited authority.

His call for independence transcended politics; it was a plea for moral and intellectual awakening. "The cause of America," he wrote, "is in a great measure the cause of all mankind." More than two centuries later, *Common Sense* remains a timeless reminder that reason, empathy, and justice form the bedrock of any civilized society.

Science and Sociology: Understanding Knowledge as a Social Institution

The sociological study of science emerged in the mid-twentieth century, seeking to understand science not only as a body of knowledge but as a social institution. Early inquiries began in the 1940s, but it was by the 1950s that scholars systematically examined how science is shaped by norms, values, and institutional structures.

The sociology of knowledge approach, influenced by thinkers like **Karl Mannheim (1936)**, explored how ideas are rooted in social contexts and how intellectual positions reflect social hierarchies. The normative approach, led by Robert K. Merton, viewed science as a system guided by shared values. **Merton (1942)** outlined four foundational norms: Universalism, Communism, Disinterestedness, and Organized Skepticism, defining science as a cooperative, self-correcting enterprise. Recognition, he argued, serves as a crucial reward within the scientific community, often manifested through citations and reputation.

W.O. Hagstrom (1965) later portrayed science as an exchange system, where scientists trade information for recognition in a social economy of knowledge. Meanwhile, Thomas Kuhn (1962) introduced the idea of paradigm shifts, showing that scientific progress occurs through revolutions rather than steady accumulation. Finally, Derek de Solla Price (1965) and others developed scientometrics, mapping patterns of citation and communication to show that science evolves cumulatively yet rapidly. Together, these perspectives illuminate science as both a cognitive and social enterprise, an institution bound by ideals yet shaped by human competition and cooperation.

Science, Society, and Ethics

Science exists not in isolation but within the web of society. Every discovery carries ethical and social implications: who benefits, who bears the risks, and how knowledge reshapes human relations. The development of biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and nuclear energy has revealed that scientific progress, if detached from ethical reflection, can amplify inequality or endanger life itself.

Sociology provides the lens to examine these tensions. It reminds us that science, though objective in method, operates within systems of power and policy. Ethical reasoning, therefore, becomes the meeting ground between scientific rationality and social responsibility. As **J. Bronowski (1973)** noted, “Science is a tribute to what we can know

although we are fallible.” The future of science depends not only on discovery but on conscience on using knowledge to elevate, not dominate, humanity.

Common Sense and Sociology: André Béteille’s Perspective

In his essay “*Sociology and Common Sense*” (1998), Indian sociologist **André Béteille** explores how sociological understanding differs from yet remains tied to everyday reasoning. Both deal with the same realities of social life, but they diverge in their method and intent.

Common sense is immediate, emotional, and shaped by culture. It helps people navigate daily life but also mirrors the biases and hierarchies of their society. Common sense may accept inequality, caste, or gender roles as “natural” without questioning their origins.

Sociology, in contrast, is deliberate and self-critical. Béteille insists that sociology demands *objectivity* and *detachment*. It seeks to understand not only what people believe but why they believe it. Where common sense interprets poverty as personal failure, sociology investigates structures of power, economy, and opportunity. It transforms the “natural” into the socially constructed, revealing how ideas and institutions are historically produced.

Yet Béteille cautions that sociologists, too, are products of their culture. Their challenge is to recognize and transcend their own assumptions. Sociology, he concludes, refines and disciplines common sense turning intuition into insight and observation into analysis.

The Sociological Imagination: Connecting the Personal and the Public

Extending Béteille’s insights, **C. Wright Mills** (1959) introduced the concept of the sociological imagination — the capacity to link individual experiences with broader social forces. Mills argued that personal troubles such as unemployment, anxiety, or poverty are not isolated misfortunes

but reflections of structural conditions like industrial change, political power, or cultural transformation.

The sociological imagination enables people to view their private lives in historical and systemic context. What seems like personal failure may, in truth, be a symptom of social design. For instance, job loss can reflect not laziness but automation or economic restructuring. This ability to move between biography and history, between the micro and the macro, defines sociological thinking.

Mills' vision complements B  teille's emphasis on objectivity but adds empathy and awareness that individuals live within structures they did not create yet must navigate. The sociological imagination thus unites reason with moral awareness, helping citizens recognize the interplay between self and society. In this sense, it parallels the scientific temper Nehru championed a habit of mind that questions, connects, and transforms understanding into action.

Science and Common Sense: The Uneasy Partnership

From the dawn of civilization, human beings have relied on common sense the intuitive faculty that interprets everyday experience. It is the accumulated wisdom of generations, grounded in practicality. Yet, as psychologist **Scott Lilienfeld (2010)** noted, common sense often deceives: we may believe that opposites attract or that "venting" anger reduces aggression claims disproved by research. What feels self-evident is not always true.

Common sense is limited by emotion and immediacy; science extends understanding through systematic reasoning. Philosopher **Paul Hoyningen-Huene (2013)** bridges this gap by calling science "organized common sense." Both aim to make sense of the world, but science does so with greater systematicity organizing methods, evidence, and critique. Science refines what common sense begins, turning spontaneous intuition into structured knowledge.

Yet, science often contradicts intuition. When *Copernicus* declared that Earth revolved around the Sun, or *Einstein* revealed that time and space are relative, they defied centuries of “self-evident” belief. These moments of epistemic rupture remind us that science, while born from human reasoning, transcends its limits. It demands humility the courage to unlearn.

Educational theorists like *Jon Ogborn (1996)* show that learning science mirrors this process. Students carry “mini-theories” drawn from common sense, which education must reorganize rather than erase. Similarly, societies absorb scientific revolutions by negotiating between inherited beliefs and new paradigms. Knowledge, in this sense, is both cognitive and cultural a dialogue between what we know and what we dare to question.

Common Sense as a Cultural Necessity

Despite its limits, common sense remains essential. It offers meaning, moral grounding, and emotional resonance the human texture that pure rationality lacks. Just as Bêteille distinguishes between civil society (institutional reality) and the good society (moral aspiration), we might say that common sense provides the ethical soil from which scientific rationality grows. Science corrects our intuitions; common sense keeps them human. One provides structure, the other significance.

From Certainty to Curiosity

The relationship between science, sociology, and common sense is not one of opposition but of creative tension. Common sense anchors knowledge in lived experience; science challenges it with disciplined doubt; sociology bridges the two by revealing their social roots and moral implications. Together, they form a continuum of human understanding from intuition to inquiry, from belief to evidence, from certainty to curiosity.

In an age of rapid technological change and social polarization, this triad becomes ever more vital. Science gives us tools; sociology gives us understanding; and common sense keeps us human. When guided by imagination and ethics, these ways of knowing sustain a civilization grounded in both reason and compassion. The challenge of our century is not merely to produce information but to cultivate judgment to balance the precision of science with the empathy of sociology and the wisdom of common sense. Knowledge, after all, is not an end in itself but a journey one that begins in wonder and culminates in understanding.





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PERSPECTIVES

SEXUALITY AS SOCIAL TEXT: CULTURE, POWER, AND THE LIMITS OF BIOLOGY

Sex as a Social Text

Sex has long been imagined as the most private of human instincts—a natural, biological drive that lies beyond culture's reach. For centuries, both science and morality cast it as an essential fact of life, one rooted in the body's immutable needs. Yet sociology challenges this assumption. From the ways we define attraction to the rules that demarcate propriety and shame, sexuality is not simply natural; it is social. It is a language through which societies express hierarchies, identities, and values—a text written upon the body but authored by culture.

To call sexuality a “social text” is to suggest that desire is learned, symbolized, and performed through historically specific scripts. These scripts tell us who may love whom, which acts count as intimacy, and how emotions like jealousy or fidelity should be expressed. Every society codifies sex through institutions—religion, law, medicine, and media—that translate biological drives into moral and social meaning. This perspective does not deny the body's reality but insists that even the most visceral experiences of passion are mediated by discourse and structure.

From Biology to Sociology: A Disciplinary Shift

For much of modern science, sexuality was treated as an object of biology or medicine. Early sexologists such as Havelock Ellis and Alfred Kinsey sought to catalog human sexual variation, but their methods still assumed that sexuality was a matter of natural types rather than social meanings. Psychology, too, approached desire as an internal drive, locating its origins in hormones, libido, or developmental experience.

Sociology entered this terrain hesitantly. In the early twentieth century, topics like sex and intimacy were dismissed as too private or scandalous for legitimate inquiry. The discipline preferred to study labor, class, and politics the public face of social life while relegating sexuality to the domain of morality or psychology. This division reflected a gendered assumption: public life was rational and masculine; private life, emotional and feminine. It was feminist scholars who would later tear down that barrier, insisting that the “personal is political” and that the bedroom was as much a site of power as the factory floor (*Millet, 1970*).

By mid-century, sociologists began to conceptualize sexuality not as a set of acts but as a system of relations a social structure that both reflects and reproduces inequality. The work of *John Gagnon and William Simon (1973)* marked a turning point. Their sexual script theory proposed that human sexual behavior follows socially learned “scripts,” much like actors in a play. These scripts dictate what counts as passion, who initiates, how consent is negotiated, and even how pleasure is imagined. Sexuality, in this view, is a performance sustained by culture’s expectations.

The Body and Power

If Gagnon and Simon showed that sexuality is scripted, *Michel Foucault* demonstrated that it is also policed. In *The History of Sexuality (1978)*, Foucault

dismantled the myth that modern societies repressed sex. Instead, he argued, they became obsessed with talking about it regulating it through confession, classification, and surveillance. Power, he claimed, does not silence sex but produces it as an object of knowledge.

Through this “deployment of sexuality,” the modern subject is invited to know themselves through sexual discourse as normal or deviant, heterosexual or homosexual, pure or perverse. These categories, far from neutral, are instruments of governance. Foucault’s insight reframed sexuality as a form of social control: our desires are not merely expressed through culture but constituted by it.

Contemporary theorists extended this argument. **Pierre Bourdieu (1977)** introduced the concept of habitus the internalized dispositions through which social structures become embodied. Desire, from this angle, is shaped by the ingrained tastes, postures, and preferences of class and gender. Likewise, **Erving Goffman (1959)** portrayed intimacy as a stage-managed performance of self, where gestures, cues, and scripts are strategically employed to sustain social identities.

In feminist thought, **Judith Butler (1990)** radicalized Foucault’s ideas by treating gender and sexuality as performative not expressions of preexisting identity but repeated acts that create the illusion of naturalness. Heterosexuality, Butler argued, sustains itself through compulsory norms that punish deviation. Desire is thus not only learned but policed through reiteration: one “becomes” a gender or orientation by doing it repeatedly within power’s constraints.

Sexuality, Morality, and the Social Order

Across history, societies have treated sexuality as both a source of danger and a tool of order. From religious codes of chastity to contemporary debates about consent and representation, sex remains a boundary marker between the moral and the deviant. As **Anthony Giddens (1992)** observed, modernity

transformed intimacy by severing it from reproduction and placing it within the sphere of self-expression. The “pure relationship,” based on emotional reciprocity rather than obligation, promised freedom yet also introduced new forms of anxiety about authenticity and fulfillment.

In this sense, sexuality mirrors broader transformations in modern life: the decline of traditional authority, the rise of individualism, and the commercialization of desire. Today, the digital sphere amplifies these dynamics. Online dating, pornography, and social media blur the line between public and private, creating new norms of visibility and consent. Desire is increasingly mediated by algorithms and commodified through industries of self-presentation. Sociologists such as Eva Illouz (2012) argue that this “emotional capitalism” converts intimacy into a marketplace of experiences, where pleasure and performance intertwine.

The Biological and Evolutionary Counterview

Against the sociological emphasis on meaning and power, evolutionary and biological perspectives approach sexuality as an adaptive system shaped by natural selection. From this vantage, desire exists because it served reproductive success across human history. Scholars like **Robert Trivers (1972)** and **Donald Symons (1979)** proposed parental investment theory, which explains sex differences in mating strategies: since females invest more biologically in reproduction, they evolved to be choosier, while males evolved to compete for mates.

David Buss’s (1989, 1994) cross-cultural studies spanning 37 societies found consistent patterns: men, on average, value youth and physical attractiveness cues linked to fertility while women prioritize status and resources. Such universality, Buss argued, points to deep evolutionary underpinnings rather than mere cultural invention. Neuroscientific and hormonal research

complements this view. Testosterone, estrogen, dopamine, and oxytocin are all implicated in desire, bonding, and pleasure (*Rastrelli & Maggi, 2018*). These findings suggest that sexuality operates through biological circuits that long predate human culture.

Genetic studies add further complexity. Twin research (*Bailey & Pillard, 1991; Kendler et al., 2000*) and genome-wide analyses (*Ganna et al., 2019*) reveal that sexual orientation and behavior are modestly heritable shaped by many genes, each interacting with environment. Comparative primate research also blurs the human/animal divide. Bonobos and chimpanzees exhibit diverse sexual practices, including same-sex interactions and non-reproductive behaviors, implying that sex has social as well as reproductive functions (*de Waal, 1995*).

From the biological standpoint, then, culture refines but does not create sexuality. It decorates the edifice; it does not lay the foundation. The body, in this telling, is not merely a vessel of culture but a product of evolutionary design.

Sociology's Counterpoint: The Limits of Biology

Yet sociology presses a crucial question: even if sex evolved as an adaptive mechanism, how does that explain its meanings? Biology may tell us why desire exists, but not what it means to us, or how it is lived. The biological narrative often slips into reductionism, mistaking evolved tendencies for moral truths or social inevitabilities.

Feminist and queer theorists have long warned of this danger. Biological accounts, they argue, risk naturalizing inequality by treating gendered behavior as biologically ordained. The idea that women are “naturally” nurturing or men “naturally” promiscuous has justified everything from domestic labor divisions to sexual double standards (*Fausto-Sterling, 2000*). Sociology, in contrast, reveals how these supposed instincts are enforced through institutions, ideology, and socialization.

Moreover, evolutionary psychology often overlooks variation within societies. If biology were destiny, why do sexual norms differ so dramatically across cultures and eras from Victorian prudery to contemporary polyamory? Even mate preferences, once claimed to be universal, shift with context: women's emphasis on male resources declines in societies with gender equality (*Eagly & Wood, 1999*). Such evidence underscores that biology sets capacities, not certainties.

Foucault's insight remains decisive: sexuality is a site of power because it defines not only who we desire but who we are allowed to be. To speak of "biological drives" without considering how they are disciplined through law, religion, or media is to miss the social machinery that turns instinct into identity.

Desire as Dialogue: The Sociological Lens

To approach sex sociologically is to treat it as dialogue between bodies and norms, pleasure and prohibition, individuality and structure. Desire is not a monologue of the flesh but a conversation with culture. Even the hormones and neural circuits that underlie arousal operate within social feedback loops. The neurotransmitter oxytocin may promote bonding, but bonding itself takes culturally specific forms: monogamy in one context, extended kinship or communal raising in another.

This perspective invites us to think of sexuality not as a fixed property but as a dynamic field - a "cultural technology" through which people negotiate belonging, status, and meaning. Gender, race, and class intersect to shape whose bodies are deemed desirable or deviant, whose pleasures are celebrated or silenced. Intersectional analysis (Crenshaw, 1989) shows how power flows through sexual hierarchies: colonialism exoticized certain bodies, capitalism commodified them, and patriarchy disciplined them.

Queer theory amplifies this critique by rejecting the assumption that sexuality must be stable or binary. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990) argued, the boundaries between “hetero” and “homo” are porous, maintained only by cultural effort. The instability of desire exposes the instability of the social order itself.

Technology, Capital, and the New Intimacy

In the digital age, sexuality has become ever more mediated. Dating apps, online pornography, and virtual intimacy transform how desire circulates and is visualized. Sociologists such as *Illouz (2012) and Attwood (2020)* note that digital technologies not only facilitate connection but commodify it, turning intimacy into a form of social capital. Profiles and images become curated performances of the self echoes of Goffman’s dramaturgy for the algorithmic age.

Yet, technology also democratizes visibility. Queer and marginalized communities use online spaces to resist stigma, build solidarity, and reimagine identity. The sociological challenge, then, is to interpret how power, agency, and commodification coexist in this new sexual economy. The digital sphere magnifies both freedom and control expanding possibilities for expression while embedding them within surveillance and consumerism.

The Sociological Critique: Beyond Reductionism

Sociology’s enduring contribution is not to deny biology but to contextualize it. Desire may have biological roots, but it blooms through language, law, and power. The danger of biological reductionism lies in its tendency to mistake the conditions of existence for conditions of meaning. To explain sex purely as adaptation is to overlook how adaptation itself is interpreted and organized within human systems.

Where evolutionary psychology sees universal strategies, sociology sees historically contingent norms. Where biology identifies hormones, sociology asks how those hormones are understood and regulated why, for instance, testosterone becomes a symbol of masculinity in one culture and medicalized risk in another. Where geneticists trace variation, sociologists trace value: who benefits from defining certain behaviors as “natural” and others as “deviant”?

The sociological imagination (*Mills, 1959*) is vital here. It bridges the personal and the structural, showing that what we call private desire is deeply entangled with public systems of inequality. Sex is thus not merely reproduction but reproduction of the social order itself.

Toward a Reflexive Understanding of Desire

Ultimately, the study of sexuality demands an integrative but critical lens one that acknowledges the body’s biological substrate while foregrounding its inscription by culture. The biological and the social are not opposing realms but interdependent dimensions of human experience. Yet only sociology, with its sensitivity to power, meaning, and context, can explain why the same biological capacities yield such diverse moral worlds.

Desire, then, is both instinct and institution. It is shaped by hormones and histories, by evolution and by discourse. To study it sociologically is to see how every kiss, every taboo, every fantasy carries traces of collective life - of who we imagine ourselves to be and who we are forbidden to become.

If biology offers the grammar of sex, sociology writes its poetry.





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