

Richard T. Schaefer

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co-authored with Robert Feldman

Sociology Matters

Seventh Edition

Richard T. Schaefer

DePaul University





SOCIOLOGY MATTERS, SEVENTH EDITION

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Dedication

*To my readers, may they benefit from learning that
sociology does matter.*

About the Author

Richard T. Schaefer: Professor, DePaul University

BA Northwestern University

MA, PhD University of Chicago

Growing up in Chicago at a time when neighborhoods were going through transitions in ethnic and racial composition, Richard T. Schaefer found himself increasingly intrigued by what was happening, how people were reacting, and how these changes were affecting neighborhoods and people's jobs. His interest in social issues caused him to gravitate to sociology courses at Northwestern University, where he eventually received a BA in sociology.

"Originally as an undergraduate I thought I would go on to law school and become a lawyer. But after taking a few sociology courses, I found myself wanting to learn more about what sociologists studied, and fascinated by the kinds of questions they raised." This fascination led him to obtain his MA and PhD in sociology from the University of Chicago. Dr. Schaefer's continuing interest in race relations led him to write his master's thesis on the membership of the Ku Klux Klan and his doctoral thesis on racial prejudice and race relations in Great Britain.

Dr. Schaefer went on to become a professor of sociology at DePaul University in Chicago. In 2004 he was named to the Vincent DePaul professorship in recognition of his undergraduate teaching and scholarship. He has taught introductory sociology for over 35 years to students in colleges, adult education programs, nursing programs, and even a maximum-security prison. Dr. Schaefer's love of teaching is apparent in his interaction with his students. "I find myself constantly learning from the students who are in my classes and from reading what they write. Their insights into the material we read or current events that we discuss often become part of future course material and sometimes even find their way into my writing."

Dr. Schaefer is the author of *Sociology in Modules*, fourth edition (McGraw-Hill, 2018), the thirteenth edition of *Sociology: A Brief Introduction* (McGraw-Hill, 2018), the thirteenth edition of *Sociology* (McGraw-Hill, 2012), and, with Robert Feldman, *Sociology and Your Life with P.O.W.E.R. Learning* (2016). He is also the author of *Racial and Ethnic Groups*, now in its fifteenth edition (2018), *Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the USA* (first edition, 2014), and *Race and Ethnicity in the United States* (ninth edition, 2018), all published by Pearson. Together with William Zellner, he coauthored the ninth edition of *Extraordinary Groups*, published by Waveland Press in 2015.

Dr. Schaefer served as the general editor of the three-volume *Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society*, published by Sage in 2008. These books have been translated into Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, and Spanish, as well as adapted for use in Canadian colleges.

Dr. Schaefer's articles and book reviews have appeared in many journals, including *American Journal of Sociology*; *Phylon: A Review of Race and Culture*; *Contemporary Sociology*; *Sociology and Social Research*; *Sociological Quarterly*; and *Teaching Sociology*. He served as president of the Midwest Sociological Society in 1994–1995.

Dr. Schaefer's advice to students is to “look at the material and make connections to your own life and experiences. Sociology will make you a more attentive observer of how people in groups interact and function. It will also make you more aware of people's different needs and interests—and perhaps more ready to work for the common good, while still recognizing the individuality of each person.”

Preface

Sociology has been my life's work for several decades. In the classroom and in the pages of my textbooks, I have tried to spark students' interest in the discipline by showing them its real-life implications. My aim has been to convince students that sociology is more than just another academic pursuit, an exercise in scholarship for the sake of scholarship. Sociology illuminates the world around us—our families, schools, neighborhoods, and other familiar institutions we have lived with all our lives. It puts into larger perspective our culture and our socialization—the way we come to be the way we are. Sociology makes us think deeply about the divide between ourselves and those of different races, classes, and ethnicities. It forces us to recognize the effects of power, technological advances, electronic media, and the increasingly rapid process of social change on our own lives. Sociology matters—to you, me, and everyone with a stake in the society we live in.

This concise volume stresses the same theme, in fewer pages and with fewer illustrations and study aids. *Sociology Matters* is intended for instructors who desire an especially short, relatively inexpensive introductory text. This text covers the essential content in *Sociology: A Brief Introduction*, twelfth edition, in much the same depth. Its 11 chapters can be covered easily in a quarter- or semester-long course, together with other materials instructors might wish to add.

Major Emphases

Like the brief twelfth edition of *Sociology*, this volume includes comprehensive, balanced coverage of the major theoretical perspectives. Chapter 1 introduces, defines, and contrasts the functionalist, conflict, and interactionist perspectives, as well as the increasingly important feminist perspective. Later chapters use these distinctive viewpoints to explore topics such as deviance (Chapter 4); social stratification (Chapter 5); race and ethnicity (Chapter 6); gender (Chapter 7); social institutions (Chapters 8 and 9); population, community, health, and the environment (Chapter 10); and social movements, social change, and technology (Chapter 11).

This volume also includes strong coverage of gender, race, ethnicity, and social class. Three entire chapters are devoted to these topics: Chapter 5, on stratification in the United States and global inequality; Chapter 6, on race and ethnicity; and Chapter 7, on gender. Related discussions appear throughout the book. For instance, Chapter 3 examines race and gender as ascribed statuses; Chapter 4, racial profiling and the

perceived seriousness of white-collar crime; Chapter 10, the connection between health and a person's social class, race, ethnicity, and gender; and Chapter 11, the role of gender in social movements.

Finally, this volume includes considerable cross-cultural coverage. Chapter 2 covers the development of culture around the world. Chapter 4 covers international crime rates. Chapter 5 treats social stratification from a global perspective, including coverage of world systems analysis, dependency theory, modernization theory, the development of multinational corporations, and the global economy. Chapter 7 covers cross-cultural differences in gender roles. Chapter 8 takes a global view of the family. Chapter 10, which opens with a vignette on the Gulf Coast oil spill, treats global environmental issues. And Chapter 11 covers global social change.

Special Features

This volume offers a variety of learning aids designed to help students understand and review basic concepts, including:

- Chapter outline
- Chapter-opening vignette with chapter overview
- Use Your Sociological Imagination exercises, which prompt students to apply their knowledge of sociology to the world around them
- Tables and figures, some with sticker-style captions and Think About It questions
- Two series of tables, Tracking Sociological Perspectives and Summing Up, which aid students in their review of chapter content
- Photographs and cartoons
- Online Learning Center icons, which alert students to relevant material on the book's companion website
- Boldfaced key terms
- *Sociology Matters* sections at the end of each chapter, which point out the relevance of a chapter's content to students' lives
- Numbered 10-point chapter summary
- End-of-chapter key terms list with page references
- End-of-book Appendix, "Careers in Sociology"
- End-of-book glossary with page references

What's New in the Seventh Edition?

The most important changes in this edition include the following:

CHAPTER 1 THE SOCIOLOGICAL VIEW

- Chapter-opening example about fake news
- Example of different sports around the world to introduce term “sociological imagination”
- Example of minimum wage to demonstrate difference between social sciences
- Subsection on Queer Theory in section on the conflict perspective
- “Use Your Sociological Imagination” questions about suicide and social and cultural capital
- Expanded table, “Comparing Theoretical Perspectives”

CHAPTER 2 CULTURE AND SOCIALIZATION

- Expanded definition and discussion of the term “ethnocentrism”
- Expanded discussion of the concept of subcultures
- “Use Your Sociological Imagination” question about the influence of gender on research results
- Example of importance of peer groups to adolescent Syrian refugees
- Figure 2–3, Media Profiles of 8- to 12-Year-Olds: Daily Time Spent with Each Type of Media
- Updated discussion of workplace socialization

CHAPTER 3 SOCIAL INTERACTION, GROUPS, AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

- Chapter-opening photo showing Stanford Prison Experiment
- Additional details in Figure 3–1, Social Statuses, and Figure 3–2, Social Structure: An Overview
- Enhanced coverage of role exit, with Key Term treatment
- Enhanced coverage of social networks
- Cartoon about Gemeinschaft vs. Gesellschaft
- “Use Your Sociological Imagination” question about bureaucracy
- Enhanced coverage of the importance of ascribed statuses in formal organizations

CHAPTER 4 DEVIANCE AND SOCIAL CONTROL

- “Think About It” question for Table 4–2, Sociological Approaches to Deviance
- Enhanced coverage of white-collar crime
- Enhanced coverage of hate crime
- Enhanced discussion of cybercrime, including Key Term treatment

CHAPTER 5 STRATIFICATION IN THE UNITED STATES AND GLOBAL INEQUALITY

- Enhanced coverage of human trafficking, including Table 5-1, Human Trafficking Report
- Enhanced discussion of conspicuous consumption
- “Think About It” question for Table 5-2, Perspectives on Social Stratification
- Updated and enhanced discussion of income and wealth
 - Updated and enhanced discussion of poverty
- Enhanced discussion of the impact of ethnicity and race on social mobility

CHAPTER 6 INEQUALITY BY RACE AND ETHNICITY

- Chapter-opening photo showing middle-school-age children
- “Use Your Sociological Imagination” question about the effects of social networking on prejudice and discrimination
- Enhanced coverage of immigration to the United States and of functions of immigration
- Expanded coverage of refugees, including Table 6-2, Sources of Refugees, 2005 and 2015
- Expanded coverage of the labeling perspective, including discussion of stop and frisk
- Key Term treatment of “refugee” and “remittances”

CHAPTER 7 INEQUALITY BY GENDER

- Updated discussion of men’s gender roles
- “Think About It” question for Table 7-1, An Experiment in Gender Norm Violation by College Students
- Figure 7-2, Weekly Time (in Hours) Spent on Primary Activities, by Gender
- Subsection “Intersectionality” in main section on sociological perspectives on gender
- Enhanced detail and “Think About It” question for Figure 7-1, Matrix of Domination
- Research projections on when White, Black, and Latino women will reach salary parity with White men
- Key Term treatment of “intersectionality,” “matrix of domination”

CHAPTER 8 SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS: FAMILY AND RELIGION

- Entirely revamped material on human sexuality, now titled Labeling and Human Sexuality
- “Use Your Sociological Imagination” questions about sociological perspectives on education institutions, viewing sexual identity as a continuum
- Figure 8-1, Living Arrangements of Adults Age 18 and Over, 2014
- Key Term treatment of “gender identity” and “sexual identity”

CHAPTER 9 SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS: EDUCATION, GOVERNMENT, AND THE ECONOMY

- “Use Your Sociological Imagination” questions about sociological functions of education, effects of tracking, schools as bureaucracies, rational-legal authority
- Enhanced information in Figure 9-1, Annual Median Earnings by Educational Level, Workers Aged 25-34
- “Think About It” question for Table 9-1, Sociological Perspectives on Education
- Figure 9-3, The World’s Largest Economies
- Discussion of the informal economy
- Main section, “Sharing Economies,” with Figure 9-4, Foreign-Born Workers in the United States, by Region, 2012
- Key Term treatment of “informal economy,” “precarious work,” “sharing economy”

CHAPTER 10 POPULATION, COMMUNITY, HEALTH, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

- “Think About It” question for Figure 10-1, Infant Mortality Rate in Selected Countries
- Enhanced discussion of labeling perspective on health and illness
- Discussion of Flint, Michigan, water crisis as an example of the need for environmental justice
- “Use Your Sociological Imagination” questions about pollution, as well as the connection between human and physical environments

CHAPTER 11 SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, SOCIAL CHANGE, AND TECHNOLOGY

- Figure 11-1, Declining Drive-Ins; Figure 11-2, Walking to Work; Figure 11-3, The Changing U.S. Economy, 1999-2012
- Enhanced discussion of technology and social change

Teaching and Learning with Sociology Matters

A wealth of complimentary teaching and learning resources is available to students and instructors who use *Sociology Matters*. Students will benefit from the free study aids accessible to them through McGraw-Hill Connect, including an online glossary and self-quizzes containing multiple-choice and true-false questions.



connect® The seventh edition of *Sociology Matters* is now available online with Connect, McGraw-Hill Education's integrated assignment and assessment platform. Connect also offers SmartBook for the new edition, which is the first adaptive reading experience proven to improve grades and help students study more effectively. All of the title's website and ancillary content is also available through Connect, including:

- A full Test Bank of multiple-choice questions that test students on central concepts and ideas in each chapter.
- An Instructor's Manual for each chapter with full chapter outlines, sample test questions, and discussion topics.
- Lecture Slides for instructor use in class

Instructors may also take advantage of two new offerings, McGraw-Hill's Create™, a custom publishing system, and CourseSmart, an adaptive learning system available through McGraw-Hill Connect.



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Acknowledgments

Elaine Silverstein, who collaborated with me on several editions of my longer introductory textbooks for undergraduates, brought her experience and knowledge to the seventh edition of *Sociology Matters*.

I deeply appreciate the contributions my editors made to this book. Art Pomponio and Erin Melloy helped to shape this fresh approach to sociology for undergraduates. This edition also benefits from the continuing contributions made by Gina Boedeker, Managing Director, Products and Markets for Sociology, Alexander Preiss, Product Developer, and Rhona Robbin, Director of Development for Sociology, who have lent their expertise and experience to this book for several editions.

As is evident from these acknowledgments, the preparation of a textbook is truly a team effort. The most valuable member of this effort continues to be my wife, Sandy, who provides the support so necessary to my creative and scholarly activities.

I have had the good fortune to be able to introduce students to sociology for many years. Those students have been enormously helpful in spurring my own sociological imagination. In ways I can fully appreciate but cannot fully acknowledge, their questions in class and queries in the hallway have found their way into this textbook.

Richard T. Schaefer
schaeferrt@aol.com

Academic Reviewers

Many sociologists reviewed this book and offered constructive and thorough evaluations of its content. I would like to thank the following reviewers for their thoughtful comments on the sixth edition manuscript and its features:

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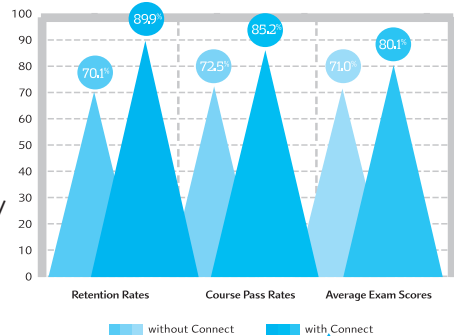
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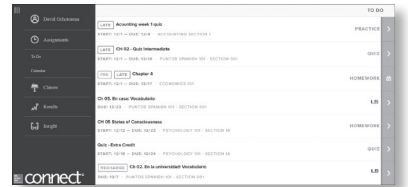
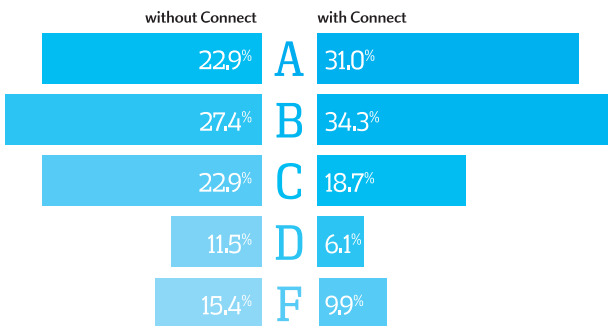
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The Sociological View

What Is Sociology?

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One presidential candidate operated a child sex ring located over Comet Ping Pong, a pizzeria in Washington, D.C. Another received the endorsement of Pope Francis. NASA confirms that the world will experience six days of total darkness. A woman wearing heavy makeup was mistaken for a clown and attacked by an angry mob.

All these accounts are false, circulated online to ridicule a public figure or just to profit from web advertisements. Yet stories like these are part of our social world today, and people often act on them as if they were true. They stop their friends and family members and say, “Have you heard . . . ?” or occasionally respond in potentially dangerous ways. For example, in 2016, a 28-year-old man marched into the pizza restaurant named above armed with an assault rifle to “investigate” the phony story about a sex ring.

Sociologists might view this development in many different ways. First, they might look at what groups tend to accept or share dubious online “news” accounts. Does the content of a story—either liberal or

conservative—relate to other social characteristics of a group? Second, sociologists might try to identify the characteristics of people who consume little news at all or who have redefined news in a very limited way. For example, what groups think of news only as the events in their own lives and the lives of favorite celebrities? And third, what is the significance of this social phenomenon of “fake news” for people whose limited online access does not allow them to select what they follow? In other words, how do limits on Internet access affect people?

Whatever the subject, sociologists study social patterns that are shared by many people. This focus on the group rather than on the individual is a distinguishing feature of sociology. As the sociologist C. Wright Mills wrote more than half a century ago, if one person is unemployed, his difficulty is a personal problem, but if thousands of people are unemployed, their difficulty is a social problem. Sociologists look for the root causes of such social patterns in the way society is organized and governed (Mills [1959] 2000a).

As a field of study, sociology is extremely broad in scope. You’ll see throughout this book the tremendous range of topics sociologists investigate—from tattooing to tweeting, from neighborhood groups to global economic patterns, from peer pressure to class consciousness. Sociologists look at how other people influence your behavior; how the government, religion, and the economy affect you; and how you yourself affect others. These aren’t just academic questions. Sociology matters because it illuminates your life and your world, whether you are going to school, working for pay, or raising a family.

This first chapter introduces sociology as a social science, one that is characterized by a special skill called the *sociological imagination*. We’ll meet four pioneering thinkers—Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, Karl Marx, and W. E. B. DuBois—and discuss the concepts and theoretical perspectives that grew out of their work. We’ll see how sociologists use the scientific method to investigate the many questions they pose. Sociologists use surveys, ethnographic studies, experiments, and existing sources in their research; they often wrestle with ethical issues that arise during their studies. We’ll examine some practical uses for their research at the end of the chapter.

What Is Sociology?

Sociology is the scientific study of social behavior and human groups. It focuses primarily on the influence of social relationships on people’s attitudes and behavior and on how societies are established and change. This textbook deals with such varied topics as families, the workplace, street gangs, business firms, political parties, genetic engineering, schools, religions, and labor unions. It is concerned with love, poverty, conformity, discrimination, illness, technology, and community.

THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

In attempting to understand social behavior, sociologists rely on a unique type of creative thinking. C. Wright Mills described such thinking as the *sociological imagination*—an awareness of the relationship between an individual and the wider society, both today and in the past. This awareness allows all of us (not just sociologists) to comprehend the links between our immediate, personal social settings and the remote, impersonal social world that surrounds us and helps to shape us (Mills [1959] 2000a).

A key element in the sociological imagination is the ability to view one's own society as an outsider would, rather than only from the perspective of personal experiences and cultural biases. Consider something as simple as sporting events. On college campuses in the United States, thousands of students cheer well-trained football players. In parts of South America and the Caribbean, spectators gather around two cages, each holding a finch. The covers are lifted, and the owner of the first bird to sing 50 songs wins a trophy, a cash prize, and great prestige. In speed singing as in football, eager spectators debate the merits of their favorites and bet on the outcome of the events. Yet what is considered a normal sporting event in one part of the world is considered unusual in another part (Rueb 2015).

The sociological imagination allows us to go beyond personal experiences and observations to understand broader public issues. Divorce, for example, is unquestionably a personal hardship for the partners who split apart. However, C. Wright Mills advocated using the sociological imagination to view divorce not as simply an individual's personal problem but rather as a societal concern. Using this perspective, we can see that an increase in the divorce rate actually redefines a major social institution—the family. Today's households frequently include stepparents and half-siblings whose parents have divorced and remarried. Through the complexities of the blended family, this private concern becomes a public issue that affects schools, government agencies, businesses, and religious institutions.

The sociological imagination is an empowering tool. It allows us to look beyond a limited understanding of things to see the world and its people in a new way and through a broader lens than we might otherwise use. It may be as simple as understanding why a roommate prefers country music to hip-hop, or it may open up a whole different way of understanding whole populations. For example, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, many citizens wanted to understand how Muslims throughout the world perceived their country, and why. From time to time this textbook will offer you the chance to exercise your own sociological imagination in a variety of situations. We'll begin with one that may be close to home for you.



You are walking down the street in your city or hometown. Looking around, you can't help noticing that half or more of the people you see are overweight. How do you explain your observation? If you were C. Wright Mills, how do you think you would explain it?

SOCIOLOGY AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Is sociology a science? The term *science* refers to the body of knowledge obtained by methods based on systematic observation. Like researchers in other scientific disciplines, sociologists engage in organized, systematic study of phenomena (in this case, human behavior) in order to enhance understanding. All scientists, whether studying mushrooms or murderers, attempt to collect precise information through methods of study that are as objective as possible. They rely on careful recording of observations and accumulation of data.

Of course, there is a great difference between sociology and physics, between psychology and astronomy. For this reason, the sciences are commonly divided into natural and social sciences. *Natural science* is the study of the physical features of nature and the ways in which they interact and change. Astronomy, biology, chemistry, geology, and physics are all natural sciences. *Social science* is the study of various aspects of human society. The social sciences include sociology, anthropology, economics, history, psychology, and political science.

These social science disciplines have a common focus on the social behavior of people, yet each has a particular orientation. Anthropologists usually study past cultures and preindustrial societies that continue today, as well as the origins of men and women. Economists explore the ways in which people produce and exchange goods and services, along with money and other resources. Historians are concerned with the peoples and events of the past and their significance for us today. Political scientists study international relations, the workings of government, and the exercise of power and authority. Psychologists investigate personality and individual behavior. So what does *sociology* focus on? It emphasizes the influence that society has on people's attitudes and behavior and the ways in which people shape society. Humans are social animals; therefore, sociologists examine our social relationships scientifically.

Let's consider how different social scientists might consider the minimum wage and efforts to raise it. Historians would stress that the contemporary effort is the latest in a long list of labor reforms dating back to the 1800s. These include restrictions on child labor as well as health and safety regulations.

Economists would use quantitative methods to evaluate whether a rise in the minimum wage would help or hurt workers overall. In contrast, anthropologists would examine how minimum wage laws work in different types of societies. For example, Bangladesh, one of the world's largest apparel exporters, raised its minimum wage for garment workers to about \$68 per month in 2013. Combined with the rise in wages, what was the impact of the increase in the number of women workers? Further, in a country where labor laws are weakly enforced, what were the effects on young workers age 10 to 17 (Asadullah and Wahhaj 2016)?

Psychologists would be interested in how increased income, especially among low-income workers, affects emotional and behavioral disorders. Would self-esteem improve as wages grew? And political scientists, aware of the strong support for an increase in the minimum wage among the general public, would focus on how policy makers frame the issue. Would there be efforts to make legislation bipartisan? Would it be accompanied by protections for small businesses, which often feel they can least afford wage hikes? Would lobbyists from certain groups, such as restaurant franchise operations, try to protect their special interests?

What approach might sociologists take? Many aspects of the issue would be of interest. Is it possible for a family to live on the current minimum wage, and if not, what wage is practical? How is the Fight for 15 movement (as in a \$15 per hour minimum wage) organized? What are the long-term effects on the education opportunities for the children of low-income workers? Would low-paying jobs be less stigmatized if people earned closer to a living wage?

Sociologists put their sociological imaginations to work on a variety of subjects—including gender, the family, human ecology, and religion. Throughout this textbook, you will see how sociologists develop theories and conduct research to study and better understand societies. And you will be encouraged to use your own sociological imagination to examine the United States (and other societies) from the viewpoint of a respectful but questioning outsider.

SOCIOLOGY AND COMMON SENSE

Sociology focuses on the study of human behavior. Yet we all have experience with human behavior and at least some knowledge of it. All of us might well have theories about why people buy lottery tickets, for example, or why people become homeless. Our theories and opinions typically come from “common sense”—that is, from our experiences and conversations, from what we read, from what we see on television, and so forth.

In our daily lives, we rely on common sense to get us through many unfamiliar situations. However, this commonsense knowledge, while sometimes accurate, is not always reliable, because it rests on commonly held beliefs rather than on systematic analysis of facts. It was once considered “common sense” to accept the idea that the earth was flat—a view rightly questioned by Pythagoras and Aristotle. Incorrect commonsense notions are not just a part of the distant past; they remain with us today.

Contrary to the common notion that women tend to be chatty compared to men, researchers have found little difference between the sexes in terms of their talkativeness. Over a five-year period they placed unobtrusive microphones on 396 college students in various fields, at campuses in Mexico as well as the United States. They found that both men and women spoke about 16,000 words per day (Mehl et al. 2007).

Similarly, common sense tells us that today, violent crime holds communities on the border between the United States and Mexico in a kind of death grip, creating an atmosphere of lawlessness reminiscent of the old Wild West. Based on news accounts of political candidates and elected officials calling for massive deportations and efforts to secure the border, this assertion may sound reasonable; however, it is not true. Although some communities in Mexico have fallen under the control of drug cartels, the story is different on the U.S. side of the border. All available crime data—including murder, extortion, robbery, and kidnapping rates, whether reported or documented in victim surveys—show that in the hundred-mile-deep border area stretching from San Diego to Brownsville, Texas, crime rates are significantly lower than in similar U.S. cities outside the area. Furthermore, the crime rate has been dropping faster near the border than in other similar-size U.S. communities for at least the last 15 years (Aguillar 2016; Johnson and Gomez 2012).

Like other social scientists, sociologists do not accept something as a fact because “everyone knows it.” Instead, each piece of information must be tested and recorded, then analyzed in relation to other data. Sociologists rely on scientific studies in order to describe and understand a social environment. At times, the findings of sociologists may seem like common sense, because they deal with familiar facets of everyday life. The difference is that such findings have been *tested* by researchers. Common sense now tells us that the earth is round. However, that particular commonsense notion is based on centuries of scientific work that began with the breakthroughs made by Pythagoras and Aristotle.

What Is Sociological Theory?

Why do people die by suicide? One traditional commonsense answer is that people inherit the desire to kill themselves. Another view is that sunspots drive people to take their own lives. These explanations may not seem especially convincing to contemporary researchers, but they represent beliefs widely held as recently as 1900.

Sociologists are not particularly interested in why any one individual completes suicide; they are more concerned with identifying the social forces that systematically cause some people to take their own lives. In order to undertake this research, sociologists develop a theory that offers a general explanation of suicidal behavior.

We can think of theories as attempts to explain events, forces, materials, ideas, or behavior in a comprehensive manner. Within sociology, a *theory* is a set of statements that seeks to explain problems, actions, or behavior. An effective theory may have both explanatory and predictive power. That is, it can help us to see the relationships among seemingly isolated phenomena, as well as to understand how one type of change in an environment leads to other changes.

The World Health Organization (2010) estimates that nearly 1 million people die by suicide each year. More than a hundred years ago, a sociologist tried to look at suicide data scientifically. Émile Durkheim ([1897] 1951) developed a highly original theory about the relationship between suicide and social factors. He was primarily concerned not with the personalities of individual suicide victims but rather with suicide *rates* and how they varied from country to country. As a result, when he looked at the number of reported suicides in France, England, and Denmark in 1869, he noted the total population of each country so that he could determine the rate of suicide in each. He found that whereas England had only 67 reported suicides per million inhabitants, France had 135 per million and Denmark had 277 per million. The question then became: “Why did Denmark have a comparatively high rate of reported suicides?”

Durkheim went much deeper into his investigation of suicide rates; the result was his landmark work *Suicide*, published in 1897. He refused to automatically accept unproven explanations regarding suicide, including the beliefs that cosmic forces or inherited tendencies caused such deaths. Instead, he focused on such problems as the cohesiveness or lack of cohesiveness of religious, social, and occupational groups.

Durkheim’s research suggested that suicide, while a solitary act, is related to group life. Protestants had much higher suicide rates than Catholics; the unmarried had much higher rates than married people; soldiers were more likely to take their lives than civilians. In addition, there seemed to be higher rates of suicide in times of peace than in times of war and revolution, and in times of economic instability and recession rather than in times of prosperity. Durkheim concluded that the suicide rate of a society reflected the extent to which people were or were not integrated into the group life of the society.

Émile Durkheim, like many other social scientists, developed a theory to explain how individual behavior can be understood within a social context. He pointed out the influence of groups and societal forces on what had always been viewed as a highly personal act. Clearly, Durkheim offered a more *scientific* explanation for the causes of suicide than that of sunspots or inherited tendencies. His theory has predictive power, since it suggests that suicide rates will rise or fall in conjunction with certain social and economic changes.

Of course, a theory—even the best of theories—is not a final statement about human behavior. Durkheim’s theory of suicide is no exception. Sociologists continue to examine factors that contribute to differences in suicide rates around the world and to a particular society’s rate of suicide. In Las Vegas, for example, sociologists have observed that the chances of dying by suicide are strikingly high—twice as high as in the United States as a whole. Noting Durkheim’s emphasis on the relationship between suicide and social isolation, researchers have suggested that Las Vegas’s rapid growth and constant influx of tourists have undermined the community’s sense of permanence, even among longtime residents. Although

gambling—or more accurately, losing while gambling—may seem a likely precipitating factor in suicides there, careful study of the data has allowed researchers to dismiss that explanation. What happens in Vegas may stay in Vegas, but the sense of community cohesiveness that the rest of the country enjoys may be lacking (Wray et al. 2008, 2011).



If you were Durkheim’s successor in his research on suicide, how would you investigate the factors that may explain the increase in suicide rates among young people in the United States today?

The Development of Sociology

People have always been curious about sociological matters—such as how we get along with others, what we do for a living, and whom we select as our leaders. Philosophers and religious authorities of ancient and medieval societies made countless observations about human behavior. They did not test or verify their observations scientifically; nevertheless, those observations often became the foundation for moral codes. Several of the early social philosophers predicted that a systematic study of human behavior would one day emerge. Beginning in the 19th century, European theorists made pioneering contributions to the development of a science of human behavior.

EARLY THINKERS: COMTE, MARTINEAU, AND SPENCER

The 19th century was an unsettled time in France. The French monarchy had been deposed in the revolution of 1789, and Napoleon had subsequently suffered defeat in his effort to conquer Europe. Amid this chaos, philosophers considered how society might be improved. Auguste Comte (1798–1857), credited with being the most influential of the philosophers of the early 1800s, believed that a theoretical science of society and a systematic investigation of behavior were needed to improve French society. He coined the term *sociology* to apply to the science of human behavior.

Writing in the 1800s, Comte feared that the excesses of the French Revolution had permanently impaired France’s stability. Yet he hoped that the systematic study of social behavior would eventually lead to more rational human interactions. In Comte’s hierarchy of sciences, sociology was at the top. He called it the “queen,” and its practitioners “scientist-priests.” This French theorist did not simply give sociology its name; he also presented a rather ambitious challenge to the fledgling discipline.

Scholars learned of Comte’s works largely through translations by the English sociologist Harriet Martineau (1802–1876). As a sociologist, Martineau was a pathbreaker in her own right. She offered insightful observations of the customs and social practices of both her native Britain and the United States. Martineau’s book *Society in America* ([1837] 1962) examines religion, politics, child rearing, and immigration in the young nation. This groundbreaking book gives special attention to social class distinctions and to such factors as gender and race. Martineau ([1838] 1989) also wrote the first book on sociological methods.

Martineau's writings emphasized the impact that the economy, law, trade, health, and population could have on social problems. She spoke out in favor of the rights of women, the emancipation of slaves, and religious tolerance. Later in life, deafness did not keep her from being an activist. In Martineau's ([1837] 1962) view, intellectuals and scholars should not simply offer observations of social conditions; they should *act* on their convictions in a manner that will benefit society. That is why Martineau conducted research on the nature of female employment and pointed to the need for further investigation of the issue (Deegan 2003; Hill and Hoecker-Drysdale 2001).

Another important contributor to the discipline of sociology is Herbert Spencer (1820–1903). A relatively prosperous Victorian Englishman, Spencer (unlike Martineau) did not feel compelled to correct or improve society; instead, he merely hoped to understand it better. Drawing on Charles Darwin's study *On the Origin of Species*, Spencer applied the concept of evolution of the species to societies in order to explain how they change, or evolve, over time. Similarly, he adapted Darwin's evolutionary view of the "survival of the fittest" by arguing that it is "natural" that some people are rich while others are poor.

Spencer's approach to societal change was extremely popular in his own lifetime. Unlike Comte, Spencer suggested that since societies are bound to change eventually, one need not be highly critical of present social arrangements or work actively for social change. This viewpoint appealed to many influential people in England and the United States who had a vested interest in the status quo and were suspicious of social thinkers who endorsed change.

ÉMILE DURKHEIM

As discussed earlier, Émile Durkheim made many pioneering contributions to sociology, including his important theoretical work on suicide. The son of a rabbi, Durkheim (1858–1917) was educated in both France and Germany. He established an impressive academic reputation and was appointed one of the first professors of sociology in France. Above all, Durkheim will be remembered for his insistence that behavior must be understood within a larger social context, not just in individualistic terms.

To give one example of this emphasis, Durkheim ([1912] 2001) developed a fundamental thesis to help understand all forms of society. Through intensive study of the Arunta, an Australian tribe, he focused on the functions that religion performs and underscored the role that group life plays in defining what we consider to be religious. Durkheim concluded that like other forms of group behavior, religion reinforces a group's solidarity.

Like many other sociologists, Durkheim did not limit his interests to one aspect of social behavior. Later in this book, we will consider his thinking on crime and punishment, religion, and the workplace. Few sociologists have had such a dramatic impact on so many different areas within the discipline.