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Introduction to

Sociology 2e

Introduction to Sociology 2e

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OpenStax
Rice University
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PRINT BOOK ISBN-10	**1-938168-41-0**
PRINT BOOK ISBN-13	**978-1-938168-41-3**
PDF VERSION ISBN-10	**1-947172-11-5**
PDF VERSION ISBN-13	**978-1-947172-11-1**
ENHANCED TEXTBOOK ISBN-10	**1-938168-97-6**
ENHANCED TEXTBOOK ISBN-13	**978-1-938168-97-0**
Revision Number	**ITS2-2015-001(03/16)-RS**
Original Publication Year	**2015**

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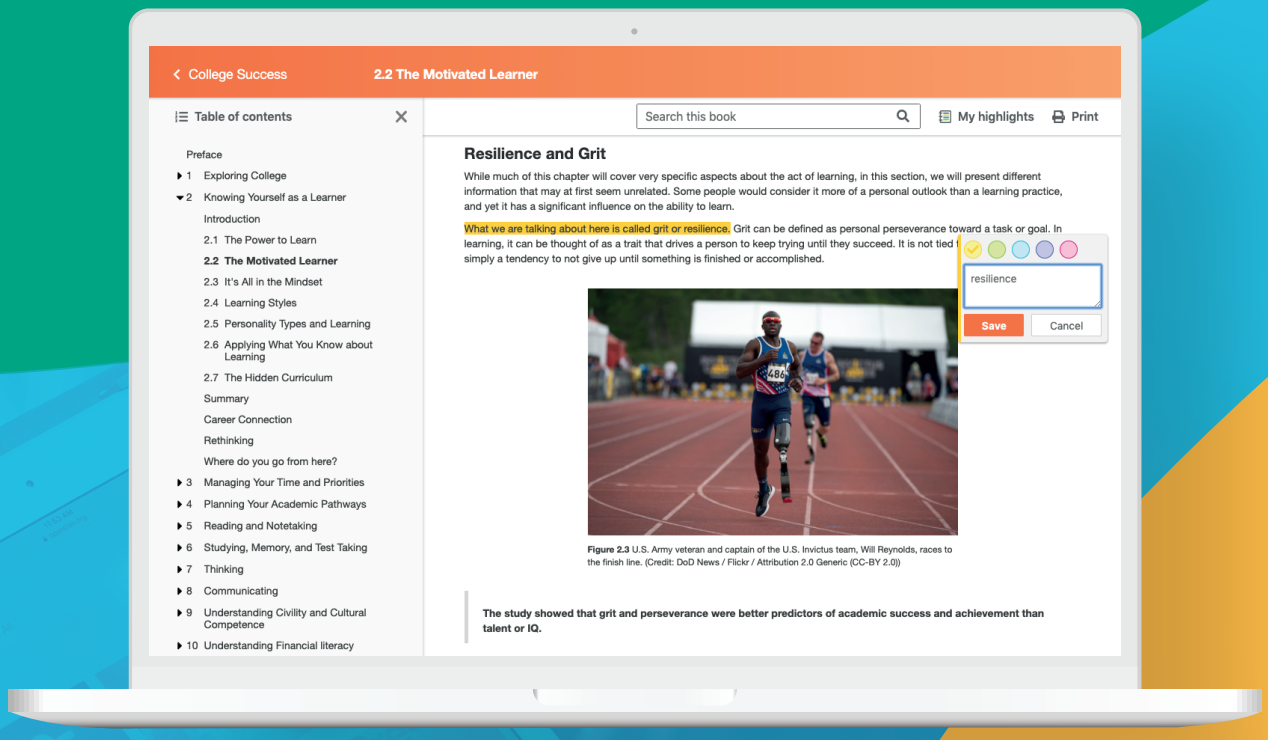

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Table of Contents

Preface . . . 1
1 An Introduction to Sociology . . . 5
- What Is Sociology? . . . 6
- The History of Sociology . . . 10
- Theoretical Perspectives . . . 14
- Why Study Sociology? . . . 19

2 Sociological Research . . . 29
- Approaches to Sociological Research . . . 30
- Research Methods . . . 33
- Ethical Concerns . . . 43

3 Culture . . . 51
- What Is Culture? . . . 52
- Elements of Culture . . . 56
- Pop Culture, Subculture, and Cultural Change . . . 62
- Theoretical Perspectives on Culture . . . 66

4 Society and Social Interaction . . . 75
- Types of Societies . . . 76
- Theoretical Perspectives on Society . . . 79
- Social Constructions of Reality . . . 84

5 Socialization . . . 93
- Theories of Self-Development . . . 95
- Why Socialization Matters . . . 98
- Agents of Socialization . . . 100
- Socialization Across the Life Course . . . 104

6 Groups and Organization . . . 115
- Types of Groups . . . 117
- Group Size and Structure . . . 121
- Formal Organizations . . . 125

7 Deviance, Crime, and Social Control . . . 135
- Deviance and Control . . . 136
- Theoretical Perspectives on Deviance . . . 138
- Crime and the Law . . . 144

8 Media and Technology . . . 155
- Technology Today . . . 157
- Media and Technology in Society . . . 160
- Global Implications of Media and Technology . . . 165
- Theoretical Perspectives on Media and Technology . . . 168

9 Social Stratification in the United States . . . 183
- What Is Social Stratification? . . . 184
- Social Stratification and Mobility in the United States . . . 189
- Global Stratification and Inequality . . . 194
- Theoretical Perspectives on Social Stratification . . . 196

10 Global Inequality . . . 205
- Global Stratification and Classification . . . 206
- Global Wealth and Poverty . . . 211
- Theoretical Perspectives on Global Stratification . . . 216

11 Race and Ethnicity . . . 225
- Racial, Ethnic, and Minority Groups . . . 226
- Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Discrimination . . . 227
- Theories of Race and Ethnicity . . . 231
- Intergroup Relationships . . . 232
- Race and Ethnicity in the United States . . . 234

12 Gender, Sex, and Sexuality . . . 251
- Sex and Gender . . . 252
- Gender . . . 257
- Sex and Sexuality . . . 262

13 Aging and the Elderly . . . 273

Who Are the Elderly? Aging in Society . . . 274
The Process of Aging . . . 281
Challenges Facing the Elderly . . . 287
Theoretical Perspectives on Aging . . . 291
14 Marriage and Family . . . 307
What Is Marriage? What Is a Family? . . . 309
Variations in Family Life . . . 313
Challenges Families Face . . . 318
15 Religion . . . 333
The Sociological Approach to Religion . . . 334
World Religions . . . 338
Religion in the United States . . . 343
16 Education . . . 353
Education around the World . . . 354
Theoretical Perspectives on Education . . . 359
Issues in Education . . . 363
17 Government and Politics . . . 375
Power and Authority . . . 376
Forms of Government . . . 380
Politics in the United States . . . 384
Theoretical Perspectives on Government and Power . . . 385
18 Work and the Economy . . . 395
Economic Systems . . . 397
Globalization and the Economy . . . 406
Work in the United States . . . 409
19 Health and Medicine . . . 423
The Social Construction of Health . . . 425
Global Health . . . 427
Health in the United States . . . 428
Comparative Health and Medicine . . . 433
Theoretical Perspectives on Health and Medicine . . . 436
20 Population, Urbanization, and the Environment . . . 449
Demography and Population . . . 452
Urbanization . . . 456
The Environment and Society . . . 460
21 Social Movements and Social Change . . . 475
Collective Behavior . . . 477
Social Movements . . . 480
Social Change . . . 486
Index . . . 497

Preface

About OpenStax

OpenStax is a non-profit organization committed to improving student access to quality learning materials. Our free textbooks are developed and peer-reviewed by educators to ensure they are readable, accurate, and meet the scope and sequence requirements of modern college courses. Unlike traditional textbooks, OpenStax resources live online and are owned by the community of educators using them. Through our partnerships with companies and foundations committed to reducing costs for students, OpenStax is working to improve access to higher education for all. OpenStax is an initiative of Rice University and is made possible through the generous support of several philanthropic foundations.

About This Book

Welcome to *Introduction to Sociology 2e*, an OpenStax resource created with several goals in mind: accessibility, affordability, customization, and student engagement—all while encouraging learners toward high levels of learning. Instructors and students alike will find that this textbook offers a strong foundation in sociology. It is available for free online and in low-cost print and e-book editions.

To broaden access and encourage community curation, *Introduction to Sociology 2e* is "open source" licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) license. Everyone is invited to submit examples, emerging research, and other feedback to enhance and strengthen the material and keep it current and relevant for today's students. You can make suggestions by contacting us at info@openstaxcollege.org.

To the Student

This book is written for you and is based on the teaching and research experience of numerous sociologists. In today's global socially networked world, the topic of sociology is more relevant than ever before. We hope that through this book, you will learn how simple, everyday human actions and interactions can change the world. In this book, you will find applications of sociology concepts that are relevant, current, and balanced.

To the Instructor

This text is intended for a one-semester introductory course. Since current events influence our social perspectives and the field of sociology in general, OpenStax encourages instructors to keep this book fresh by sending in your up-to-date examples to info@openstaxcollege.org so that students and instructors around the country can relate and engage in fruitful discussions.

General Approach

Introduction to Sociology 2e adheres to the scope and sequence of a typical introductory sociology course. In addition to comprehensive coverage of core concepts, foundational scholars, and emerging theories we have incorporated section reviews with engaging questions, discussions that help students apply the sociological imagination, and features that draw learners into the discipline in meaningful ways. Although this text can be modified and reorganized to suit your needs, the standard version is organized so that topics are introduced conceptually, with relevant, everyday experiences.

Changes to the Second Edition

Part of the mission of the second edition update was to ensure the research, examples and concepts used in this textbook are current and relevant to today's student. To this end, we have rewritten the introduction of each chapter to reflect the latest developments in sociology, history and global culture. In addition to new graphs and images, the reader of the second edition will find new feature boxes on a diverse array of topics, which has been one of the goals of the update—bringing the world into greater focus through case studies on global culture.

For instance, since the first edition there have been major cultural shifts within the Middle East and Arab world—a movement still underway called the Arab Spring—changes that are now incorporated into our coverage on social movements and social unrest (Chapter 21, "Social Movements and Social Change"). New issues in immigration, in the United States and across the world, have been brought to the forefront of the second edition, as rising income gaps and modern transportation are responsible for trends in Europe (fears of Islamic conservatism and economic recession) and political debates in the U.S. (such as border security, universal education and health care).

Since the first edition in 2012, technology and social media has ushered in new forms of communication, and, of course, these changes are altering the fabric of social life around the world. The benefits and downfalls of new technologies are

reflected in new material in Chapter 4, “Society and Social Interaction,” where we discuss how social media is changing classical models of social stratification and prestige.

In addition to updating critical facts, data, and policies from the first edition, we have expanded on essential topics, including:

Feminism and feminist theory	Health care legislation
US social stratification	Minimum wage policies
Transgender issues and changes to the DSM-V	Global statistics on education
Marriage and pay equality	Competing theories of tolerance
The use of charter schools	Cyberbullying
Impact of economy on population segments	Climate change debates
Use of technology and social media by	Global population and demographic shifts
individuals and groups	Net neutrality, online privacy and security

Other topics received a light update for relevance and student engagement. The racial tensions that have come about through the cases of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, as well as the legalization of marijuana are two examples of such additions.

Features of OpenStax Introduction to Sociology 2e

We have retained and updated the special features of the original text for this updated version.

Modularity

This textbook is organized on Connexions (http://cnx.org (http://cnx.org)) as a collection of modules that can be rearranged and modified to suit the needs of a particular professor or class. That being said, modules often contain references to content in other modules, as most topics in sociology cannot be discussed in isolation.

Learning Objectives

Every module begins with a set of clear and concise learning objectives. These objectives are designed to help the instructor decide what content to include or assign, and to guide the student with respect to what he or she can expect to learn. After completing the module and end-of-module exercises, students should be able to demonstrate mastery of the learning objectives.

Key Features

The following features show students the dynamic nature of sociology:

- **Sociological Research:** Highlights specific current and relevant research studies. Examples include “Is Music a Cultural Universal?” and “Deceptive Divorce Rates.”
- **Sociology in the Real World:** Ties chapter content to student life and discusses sociology in terms of the everyday. Topics include “Secrets of the McJob” and “Grade Inflation: When Is an A Really a C?”
- **Big Picture:** Features present sociological concepts at a national or international level, including “Education in Afghanistan” and “American Indian Tribes and Environmental Racism.”
- **Case Study:** Describes real-life people whose experiences relate to chapter content, such as “Catherine Middleton: The Commoner Who Would Be Queen.”
- **Social Policy and Debate:** Discusses political issues that relate to chapter content, such as “The Legalese of Sex and Gender” and “Is the U.S. Bilingual?”
- **Careers in Sociology:** Explores the lives and work of those in careers in sociology, including the real-world issues and debates these professionals encounter on a daily basis.

Section Summaries

Section summaries distill the information in each section for both students and instructors down to key, concise points addressed in the section.

Key Terms

Key terms are bold and are followed by a definition in context. Definitions of key terms are also listed in the Glossary, which appears at the end of the module online and at the end of the chapter in print.

Section Quizzes

Section quizzes provide opportunities to apply and test the information students learn throughout each section. Both multiple-choice and short-response questions feature a variety of question types and range of difficulty.

Further Research

This feature helps students further explore the section topic and offers related research topics that could be explored.

Acknowledgements

Introduction to Sociology 2e is based on the work of numerous professors, writers, editors, and reviewers who are able to bring topics to students in the most engaging way.

We would like to thank all those listed below as well as many others who have contributed their time and energy to review and provide feedback on the manuscript. Especially Clint Lalonde and team at BC Campus for sharing the updates they made for use in this edition, and the team at Stark State College for their editorial support in this update. Their input has been critical in maintaining the pedagogical integrity and accuracy of the text.

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Supplements

Accompanying the main text is an Instructor's PowerPoint (https://openstaxcollege.org/textbooks/introduction-to-sociology) file, which includes all of the images and captions found throughout the text and an Instructor's test bank.

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1 An Introduction to Sociology

Figure 1.1 Sociologists study how society affects people and how people affect society. (Photo courtesy of Diego Torres Silvestre/flickr)

Learning Objectives

1.1. What Is Sociology?

- Explain concepts central to sociology
- Understand how different sociological perspectives have developed

1.2. The History of Sociology

- Explain why sociology emerged when it did
- Describe how sociology became a separate academic discipline

1.3. Theoretical Perspectives

- Explain what sociological theories are and how they are used
- Understand the similarities and differences between structural functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism

1.4. Why Study Sociology?

- Explain why it is worthwhile to study sociology
- Identify ways sociology is applied in the real world

Introduction to Sociology

We all belong to many groups; you're a member of your sociology class, and you're a member of your family; you may belong to a political party, sports team, or the crowd watching a sporting event; you're a citizen of your country, and you're a part of a generation. You may have a somewhat different role in each group and feel differently in each.

Groups vary in their sizes and formalities, as well as in the levels of attachment between group members, among other things. Within a large group, smaller groups may exist, and each group may behave differently.

At a rock concert, for example, some may enjoy singing along, others prefer to sit and observe, while still others may join in a mosh pit or try crowd surfing. Why do we feel and act differently in different types of social situations? Why might people of a single group exhibit different behaviors in the same situation? Why might people acting similarly not feel connected to others exhibiting the same behavior? These are some of the many questions sociologists ask as they study people and societies.

1.1 What Is Sociology?

Figure 1.2 Sociologists learn about society as a whole while studying one-to-one and group interactions. (Photo courtesy of Gareth Williams/flickr)

What Are Society and Culture?

Sociology is the study of groups and group interactions, societies and social interactions, from small and personal groups to very large groups. A group of people who live in a defined geographic area, who interact with one another, and who share a common culture is what sociologists call a **society**. Sociologists study all aspects and levels of society. Sociologists working from the **micro-level** study small groups and individual interactions, while those using **macro-level** analysis look at trends among and between large groups and societies. For example, a micro-level study might look at the accepted rules of conversation in various groups such as among teenagers or business professionals. In contrast, a macro-level analysis might research the ways that language use has changed over time or in social media outlets.

The term **culture** refers to the group's shared practices, values, and beliefs. Culture encompasses a group's way of life, from routine, everyday interactions to the most important parts of group members' lives. It includes everything produced by a society, including all of the social rules. Sociologists often study culture using the **sociological imagination**, which pioneer sociologist C. Wright Mills described as an awareness of the relationship between a person's behavior and experience and the wider culture that shaped the person's choices and perceptions. It's a way of seeing our own and other people's behavior in relationship to history and social structure (1959).

One illustration of this is a person's decision to marry. In the United States, this choice is heavily influenced by individual feelings; however, the social acceptability of marriage relative to the person's circumstances also plays a part. Remember,

though, that culture is a product of the people in a society; sociologists take care not to treat the concept of “culture” as though it were alive in its own right. **Reification** is an error of treating an abstract concept as though it has a real, material existence (Sahn 2013).

Studying Patterns: How Sociologists View Society

All sociologists are interested in the experiences of individuals and how those experiences are shaped by interactions with social groups and society as a whole. To a sociologist, the personal decisions an individual makes do not exist in a vacuum. Cultural patterns and social forces put pressure on people to select one choice over another. Sociologists try to identify these general patterns by examining the behavior of large groups of people living in the same society and experiencing the same societal pressures.

Changes in the U.S. family structure offer an example of patterns that sociologists are interested in studying. A “typical” family now is vastly different than in past decades when most U.S. families consisted of married parents living in a home with their unmarried children. The percent of unmarried couples, same-sex couples, single-parent and single-adult households is increasing, as well as is the number of expanded households, in which extended family members such as grandparents, cousins, or adult children live together in the family home (U.S. Census Bureau 2013).

While mothers still make up the majority of single parents, millions of fathers are also raising their children alone, and more than 1 million of these single fathers have never been married (Williams Institute 2010; cited in Ludden 2012). Increasingly, single men and women and cohabitating opposite-sex or same-sex couples are choosing to raise children outside of marriage through surrogates or adoption.

Some sociologists study **social facts**, which are the laws, morals, values, religious beliefs, customs, fashions, rituals, and all of the cultural rules that govern social life, that may contribute to these changes in the family. Do people in the United States view marriage and family differently than before? Do employment and economic conditions play a role? How has culture influenced the choices that individuals make in living arrangements? Other sociologists are studying the consequences of these new patterns, such as the ways children are affected by them or changing needs for education, housing, and healthcare.

Figure 1.3 Modern U.S. families may be very different in structure from what was historically typical. (Photo courtesy of Tony Alter/Wikimedia Commons)

Another example of the way society influences individual decisions can be seen in people's opinions about and use of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP benefits. Some people believe those who receive SNAP benefits are lazy and unmotivated. Statistics from the United States Department of Agriculture show a complex picture.

Table 1.1 SNAP Use by State in 2005 Sociologists examine social conditions in different states to explain differences in the number of people receiving SNAP benefits. (Table courtesy of U.S. Department of Agriculture)

Percent Eligible by Reason for Eligibility					
	Living in Waiver Area	Have Not Exceeded Time Limits[1]	In E & T Program	Received Exemption	Total Percent Eligible for the FSP[2]
Alabama	29	62 / 72	0	1	73 / 80
Alaska	100	62 / 72	0	0	100
California	6	62 / 72	0	0	64 / 74
District of Columbia	100	62 / 72	0	0	100
Florida	48	62 / 72	0	0	80 / 85
Mississippi	39	62 / 72	0	3	100
Wyoming	7	62 / 72	0	0	64 / 74

The percentage of the population receiving SNAP benefits is much higher in certain states than in others. Does this mean, if the stereotype above were applied, that people in some states are lazier and less motivated than those in other states? Sociologists study the economies in each state—comparing unemployment rates, food, energy costs, and other factors—to explain differences in social issues like this.

To identify social trends, sociologists also study how people use SNAP benefits and how people react to their use. Research has found that for many people from all classes, there is a strong stigma attached to the use of SNAP benefits. This stigma can prevent people who qualify for this type of assistance from using SNAP benefits. According to Hanson and Gundersen (2002), how strongly this stigma is felt is linked to the general economic climate. This illustrates how sociologists observe a pattern in society.

Sociologists identify and study patterns related to all kinds of contemporary social issues. The “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, the emergence of the Tea Party as a political faction, how Twitter has influenced everyday communication—these are all examples of topics that sociologists might explore.

Studying Part and Whole: How Sociologists View Social Structures

A key basis of the sociological perspective is the concept that the individual and society are inseparable. It is impossible to study one without the other. German sociologist Norbert Elias called the process of simultaneously analyzing the behavior of individuals and the society that shapes that behavior **figuration**.

An application that makes this concept understandable is the practice of religion. While people experience their religions in a distinctly individual manner, religion exists in a larger social context. For instance, an individual’s religious practice may be influenced by what government dictates, holidays, teachers, places of worship, rituals, and so on. These influences underscore the important relationship between individual practices of religion and social pressures that influence that religious experience (Elias 1978).

1. The lower number is for individuals in households reporting food stamp receipt in the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP). The higher number is for individuals in households not reporting food stamp receipt in the SIPP.
2. The lower number is for individuals in households reporting food stamp receipt in the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP). The higher number is for individuals in households not reporting food stamp receipt in the SIPP.

Making Connections: Sociology in the Real World

Individual-Society Connections

When sociologist Nathan Kierns spoke to his friend Ashley (a pseudonym) about the move she and her partner had made from an urban center to a small Midwestern town, he was curious about how the social pressures placed on a lesbian couple differed from one community to the other. Ashley said that in the city they had been accustomed to getting looks and hearing comments when she and her partner walked hand in hand. Otherwise, she felt that they were at least being tolerated. There had been little to no outright discrimination.

Things changed when they moved to the small town for her partner's job. For the first time, Ashley found herself experiencing direct discrimination because of her sexual orientation. Some of it was particularly hurtful. Landlords would not rent to them. Ashley, who is a highly trained professional, had a great deal of difficulty finding a new job.

When Nathan asked Ashley if she and her partner became discouraged or bitter about this new situation, Ashley said that rather than letting it get to them, they decided to do something about it. Ashley approached groups at a local college and several churches in the area. Together they decided to form the town's first gay-straight alliance.

The alliance has worked successfully to educate their community about same-sex couples. It also worked to raise awareness about the kinds of discrimination that Ashley and her partner experienced in the town and how those could be eliminated. The alliance has become a strong advocacy group, and it is working to attain equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, or LBGT individuals.

Kierns observed that this is an excellent example of how negative social forces can result in a positive response from individuals to bring about social change (Kierns 2011).

1.2 The History of Sociology

(a) (b) (c) (d)

Figure 1.4 People have been thinking like sociologists long before sociology became a separate academic discipline: Plato and Aristotle, Confucius, Khaldun, and Voltaire all set the stage for modern sociology. (Photos (a),(b),(d) courtesy of Wikimedia Commons; Photo (c) courtesy of Moumou82/Wikimedia Commons)

Since ancient times, people have been fascinated by the relationship between individuals and the societies to which they belong. Many topics studied in modern sociology were also studied by ancient philosophers in their desire to describe an ideal society, including theories of social conflict, economics, social cohesion, and power (Hannoum 2003).

In the thirteenth century, Ma Tuan-Lin, a Chinese historian, first recognized social dynamics as an underlying component of historical development in his seminal encyclopedia, *General Study of Literary Remains*. The next century saw the emergence of the historian some consider to be the world's first sociologist: Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) of Tunisia. He wrote about many topics of interest today, setting a foundation for both modern sociology and economics, including a theory of social conflict, a comparison of nomadic and sedentary life, a description of political economy, and a study connecting a tribe's social cohesion to its capacity for power (Hannoum 2003).

In the eighteenth century, Age of Enlightenment philosophers developed general principles that could be used to explain social life. Thinkers such as John Locke, Voltaire, Immanuel Kant, and Thomas Hobbes responded to what they saw as

social ills by writing on topics that they hoped would lead to social reform. Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) wrote about women's conditions in society. Her works were long ignored by the male academic structure, but since the 1970s, Wollstonecraft has been widely considered the first feminist thinker of consequence.

The early nineteenth century saw great changes with the Industrial Revolution, increased mobility, and new kinds of employment. It was also a time of great social and political upheaval with the rise of empires that exposed many people—for the first time—to societies and cultures other than their own. Millions of people moved into cities and many people turned away from their traditional religious beliefs.

Creating a Discipline

Auguste Comte (1798–1857)

Figure 1.5 Auguste Comte played an important role in the development of sociology as a recognized discipline. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

The term sociology was first coined in 1780 by the French essayist Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès (1748–1836) in an unpublished manuscript (Fauré et al. 1999). In 1838, the term was reinvented by Auguste Comte (1798–1857). Comte originally studied to be an engineer, but later became a pupil of social philosopher Claude Henri de Rouvroy Comte de Saint-Simon (1760–1825). They both thought that social scientists could study society using the same scientific methods utilized in natural sciences. Comte also believed in the potential of social scientists to work toward the betterment of society. He held that once scholars identified the laws that governed society, sociologists could address problems such as poor education and poverty (Abercrombie et al. 2000).

Comte named the scientific study of social patterns **positivism**. He described his philosophy in a series of books called *The Course in Positive Philosophy* (1830–1842) and *A General View of Positivism* (1848). He believed that using scientific methods to reveal the laws by which societies and individuals interact would usher in a new "positivist" age of history. While the field and its terminology have grown, sociologists still believe in the positive impact of their work.

Harriet Martineau (1802–1876)—the First Woman Sociologist

Harriet Martineau was a writer who addressed a wide range of social science issues. She was an early observer of social practices, including economics, social class, religion, suicide, government, and women's rights. Her writing career began in 1931 with a series of stories titled *Illustrations of Political Economy*, in which she tried to educate ordinary people about the principles of economics (Johnson 2003).

Martineau was the first to translate Comte's writing from French to English and thereby introduced sociology to English-speaking scholars (Hill 1991). She is also credited with the first systematic methodological international comparisons of social institutions in two of her most famous sociological works: *Society in America* (1837) and *Retrospect of Western Travel* (1838). Martineau found the workings of capitalism at odds with the professed moral principles of people in the United States; she pointed out the faults with the free enterprise system in which workers were exploited and impoverished while business owners became wealthy. She further noted that the belief in all being created equal was inconsistent with the lack of women's rights. Much like Mary Wollstonecraft, Martineau was often discounted in her own time by the male domination of academic sociology.

Karl Marx (1818–1883)

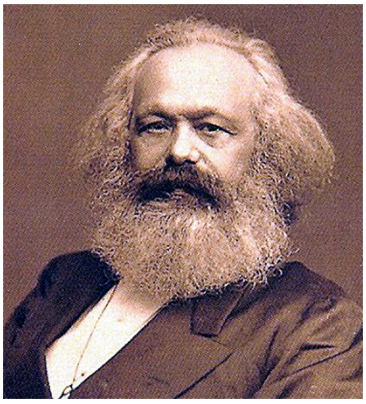


Figure 1.6 Karl Marx was one of the founders of sociology. His ideas about social conflict are still relevant today. (Photo courtesy of John Mayall/ Wikimedia Commons)

Karl Marx (1818–1883) was a German philosopher and economist. In 1848 he and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) coauthored the *Communist Manifesto*. This book is one of the most influential political manuscripts in history. It also presents Marx's theory of society, which differed from what Comte proposed.

Marx rejected Comte's positivism. He believed that societies grew and changed as a result of the struggles of different social classes over the means of production. At the time he was developing his theories, the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism led to great disparities in wealth between the owners of the factories and workers. Capitalism, an economic system characterized by private or corporate ownership of goods and the means to produce them, grew in many nations.

Marx predicted that inequalities of capitalism would become so extreme that workers would eventually revolt. This would lead to the collapse of capitalism, which would be replaced by communism. Communism is an economic system under which there is no private or corporate ownership: everything is owned communally and distributed as needed. Marx believed that communism was a more equitable system than capitalism.

While his economic predictions may not have come true in the time frame he predicted, Marx’s idea that social conflict leads to change in society is still one of the major theories used in modern sociology.

Herbert Spencer (1820–1903)

In 1873, the English philosopher Herbert Spencer published *The Study of Sociology*, the first book with the term “sociology” in the title. Spencer rejected much of Comte’s philosophy as well as Marx's theory of class struggle and his support of communism. Instead, he favored a form of government that allowed market forces to control capitalism. His work influenced many early sociologists including Émile Durkheim (1858–1917).

Georg Simmel (1858–1918)

Georg Simmel was a German art critic who wrote widely on social and political issues as well. Simmel took an anti-positivism stance and addressed topics such as social conflict, the function of money, individual identity in city life, and the European fear of outsiders (Stapley 2010). Much of his work focused on the micro-level theories, and it analyzed the dynamics of two-person and three-person groups. His work also emphasized individual culture as the creative capacities of individuals. Simmel’s contributions to sociology are not often included in academic histories of the discipline, perhaps overshadowed by his contemporaries Durkheim, Mead, and Weber (Ritzer and Goodman 2004).

Émile Durkheim (1858–1917)

Durkheim helped establish sociology as a formal academic discipline by establishing the first European department of sociology at the University of Bordeaux in 1895 and by publishing his *Rules of the Sociological Method* in 1895. In another important work, *Division of Labour in Society* (1893), Durkheim laid out his theory on how societies transformed from a primitive state into a capitalist, industrial society. According to Durkheim, people rise to their proper levels in society based on merit.

Durkheim believed that sociologists could study objective “social facts” (Poggi 2000). He also believed that through such studies it would be possible to determine if a society was “healthy” or “pathological.” He saw healthy societies as stable, while pathological societies experienced a breakdown in social norms between individuals and society.

In 1897, Durkheim attempted to demonstrate the effectiveness of his rules of social research when he published a work titled *Suicide*. Durkheim examined suicide statistics in different police districts to research differences between Catholic and Protestant communities. He attributed the differences to socioreligious forces rather than to individual or psychological causes.

George Herbert Mead (1863–1931)

George Herbert Mead was a philosopher and sociologist whose work focused on the ways in which the mind and the self were developed as a result of social processes (Cronk n.d.). He argued that how an individual comes to view himself or herself is based to a very large extent on interactions with others. Mead called specific individuals that impacted a person's life **significant others,** and he also conceptualized " **generalized others**" as the organized and generalized attitude of a social group. Mead's work is closely associated with the symbolic interactionist approach and emphasizes the micro-level of analysis.

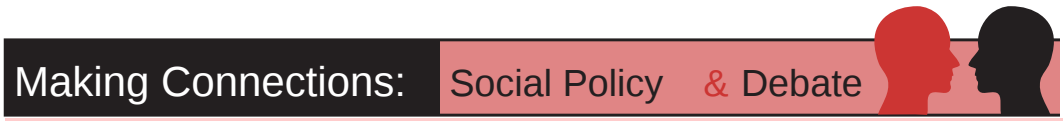
Max Weber (1864–1920)

Prominent sociologist Max Weber established a sociology department in Germany at the Ludwig Maximilians University of Munich in 1919. Weber wrote on many topics related to sociology including political change in Russia and social forces that affect factory workers. He is known best for his 1904 book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. The theory that Weber sets forth in this book is still controversial. Some believe that Weber argued that the beliefs of many Protestants, especially Calvinists, led to the creation of capitalism. Others interpret it as simply claiming that the ideologies of capitalism and Protestantism are complementary.

Weber believed that it was difficult, if not impossible, to use standard scientific methods to accurately predict the behavior of groups as people hoped to do. They argued that the influence of culture on human behavior had to be taken into account. This even applied to the researchers themselves, who, they believed, should be aware of how their own cultural biases could influence their research. To deal with this problem, Weber and Dilthey introduced the concept of ***verstehen***, a German word that means to understand in a deep way. In seeking verstehen, outside observers of a social world—an entire culture or a small setting—attempt to understand it from an insider's point of view.

In his book *The Nature of Social Action* (1922), Weber described sociology as striving to "interpret the meaning of social action and thereby give a causal explanation of the way in which action proceeds and the effects it produces." He and other like-minded sociologists proposed a philosophy of **antipositivism** whereby social researchers would strive for subjectivity as they worked to represent social processes, cultural norms, and societal values. This approach led to some research methods whose aim was not to generalize or predict (traditional in science), but to systematically gain an in-depth understanding of social worlds.

The different approaches to research based on positivism or antipositivism are often considered the foundation for the differences found today between quantitative sociology and qualitative sociology. **Quantitative sociology** uses statistical methods such as surveys with large numbers of participants. Researchers analyze data using statistical techniques to see if they can uncover patterns of human behavior. **Qualitative sociology** seeks to understand human behavior by learning about it through in-depth interviews, focus groups, and analysis of content sources (like books, magazines, journals, and popular media).



Should We Raise the Minimum Wage?

In the 2014 State of the Union Address, President Obama called on Congress to raise the national minimum wage, and he signed an executive order putting this into effect for individuals working on new federal service contracts. Congress did not pass legislation to change the national minimum wage more broadly. The result has become a national controversy, with various economists taking different sides on the issue, and public protests being staged by several groups of minimum-wage workers.

Opponents of raising the minimum wage argue that some workers would get larger paychecks while others would lose their jobs, and companies would be less likely to hire new workers because of the increased cost of paying them (Bernstein 2014; cited in CNN).

Proponents of raising the minimum wage contend that some job loss would be greatly offset by the positive effects on the economy of low-wage workers having more income (Hassett 2014; cited in CNN).

Sociologists may consider the minimum wage issue from differing perspectives as well. How much of an impact would a minimum wage raise have for a single mother? Some might study the economic effects, such as her ability to pay bills and keep food on the table. Others might look at how reduced economic stress could improve family relationships. Some sociologists might research the impact on the status of small business owners. These could all be examples of public sociology, a branch of sociology that strives to bring sociological dialogue to public forums. The goals of public sociology are to increase understanding of the social factors that underlie social problems and assist in finding solutions. According to Michael Burawoy (2005), the challenge of public sociology is to engage multiple publics in multiple ways.

1.3 Theoretical Perspectives

Figure 1.7 Sociologists develop theories to explain social occurrences such as protest rallies. (Photo courtesy of voanews.com/Wikimedia Commons)

Sociologists study social events, interactions, and patterns, and they develop a theory in an attempt to explain why things work as they do. In sociology, a **theory** is a way to explain different aspects of social interactions and to create a testable proposition, called a **hypothesis,** about society (Allan 2006).

For example, although suicide is generally considered an individual phenomenon, Émile Durkheim was interested in studying the social factors that affect it. His studied social ties within a group, or **social solidarity**, and hypothesized that differences in suicide rates might be explained by religion-based differences. Durkheim gathered a large amount of data about Europeans who had ended their lives, and he did indeed find differences based on religion. Protestants were more likely to commit suicide than Catholics in Durkheim's society, and his work supports the utility of theory in sociological research.

Theories vary in scope depending on the scale of the issues that they are meant to explain. Macro-level theories relate to large-scale issues and large groups of people, while micro-level theories look at very specific relationships between individuals or small groups. **Grand theories** attempt to explain large-scale relationships and answer fundamental questions such as why societies form and why they change. Sociological theory is constantly evolving and should never be considered complete. Classic sociological theories are still considered important and current, but new sociological theories build upon the work of their predecessors and add to them (Calhoun 2002).

In sociology, a few theories provide broad perspectives that help explain many different aspects of social life, and these are called paradigms. **Paradigms** are philosophical and theoretical frameworks used within a discipline to formulate theories, generalizations, and the experiments performed in support of them. Three paradigms have come to dominate sociological thinking, because they provide useful explanations: structural functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism.

Table 1.2 Sociological Theories or Perspectives Different sociological perspectives enable sociologists to view social issues through a variety of useful lenses.

Sociological Paradigm	Level of Analysis	Focus
Structural Functionalism	Macro or mid	The way each part of society functions together to contribute to the whole
Conflict Theory	Macro	The way inequalities contribute to social differences and perpetuate differences in power
Symbolic Interactionism	Micro	One-to-one interactions and communications

Functionalism

Functionalism, also called structural-functional theory, sees society as a structure with interrelated parts designed to meet the biological and social needs of the individuals in that society. Functionalism grew out of the writings of English philosopher and biologist, Hebert Spencer (1820–1903), who saw similarities between society and the human body; he argued that just as the various organs of the body work together to keep the body functioning, the various parts of society work together to keep society functioning (Spencer 1898). The parts of society that Spencer referred to were the **social institutions,** or patterns of beliefs and behaviors focused on meeting social needs, such as government, education, family, healthcare, religion, and the economy.

Émile Durkheim, another early sociologist, applied Spencer's theory to explain how societies change and survive over time. Durkheim believed that society is a complex system of interrelated and interdependent parts that work together to maintain stability (Durkheim 1893), and that society is held together by shared values, languages, and symbols. He believed that to study society, a sociologist must look beyond individuals to social facts such as laws, morals, values, religious beliefs, customs, fashion, and rituals, which all serve to govern social life. Alfred Radcliff-Brown (1881–1955) defined the **function** of any recurrent activity as the part it played in social life as a whole, and therefore the contribution it makes to social stability and continuity (Radcliff-Brown 1952). In a healthy society, all parts work together to maintain stability, a state called **dynamic equilibrium** by later sociologists such as Parsons (1961).

Durkheim believed that individuals may make up society, but in order to study society, sociologists have to look beyond individuals to social facts. **Social facts** are the laws, morals, values, religious beliefs, customs, fashions, rituals, and all of the cultural rules that govern social life (Durkheim 1895). Each of these social facts serves one or more functions within a society. For example, one function of a society's laws may be to protect society from violence, while another is to punish criminal behavior, while another is to preserve public health.

Another noted structural functionalist, Robert Merton (1910–2003), pointed out that social processes often have many functions. **Manifest functions** are the consequences of a social process that are sought or anticipated, while **latent functions** are the unsought consequences of a social process. A manifest function of college education, for example, includes gaining knowledge, preparing for a career, and finding a good job that utilizes that education. Latent functions of your college years include meeting new people, participating in extracurricular activities, or even finding a spouse or partner. Another latent function of education is creating a hierarchy of employment based on the level of education attained. Latent functions can be beneficial, neutral, or harmful. Social processes that have undesirable consequences for the operation of society are called **dysfunctions**. In education, examples of dysfunction include getting bad grades, truancy, dropping out, not graduating, and not finding suitable employment.

Criticism

One criticism of the structural-functional theory is that it can't adequately explain social change. Also problematic is the somewhat circular nature of this theory; repetitive behavior patterns are assumed to have a function, yet we profess to know that they have a function only because they are repeated. Furthermore, dysfunctions may continue, even though they don't serve a function, which seemingly contradicts the basic premise of the theory. Many sociologists now believe that functionalism is no longer useful as a macro-level theory, but that it does serve a useful purpose in some mid-level analyses.

Making Connections: the Big Picture

A Global Culture?

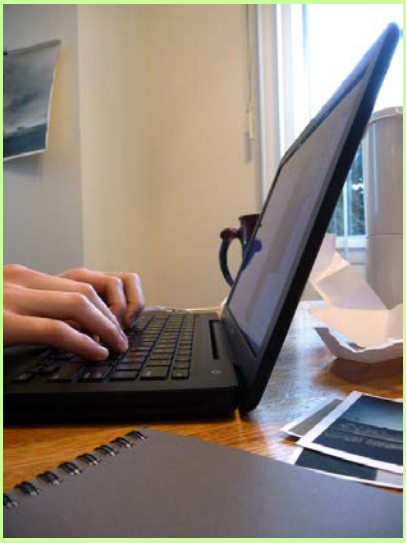


Figure 1.8 Some sociologists see the online world contributing to the creation of an emerging global culture. Are you a part of any global communities? (Photo courtesy of quasireversible/flickr)

Sociologists around the world look closely for signs of what would be an unprecedented event: the emergence of a global culture. In the past, empires such as those that existed in China, Europe, Africa, and Central and South America linked people from many different countries, but those people rarely became part of a common culture. They lived too far from each other, spoke different languages, practiced different religions, and traded few goods. Today, increases in communication, travel, and trade have made the world a much smaller place. More and more people are able to communicate with each other instantly—wherever they are located—by telephone, video, and text. They share movies, television shows, music, games, and information over the Internet. Students can study with teachers and pupils from the other side of the globe. Governments find it harder to hide conditions inside their countries from the rest of the world.

Sociologists research many different aspects of this potential global culture. Some explore the dynamics involved in the social interactions of global online communities, such as when members feel a closer kinship to other group members than to people residing in their own countries. Other sociologists study the impact this growing international culture has on smaller, less-powerful local cultures. Yet other researchers explore how international markets and the outsourcing of labor impact social inequalities. Sociology can play a key role in people's abilities to understand the nature of this emerging global culture and how to respond to it.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory looks at society as a competition for limited resources. This perspective is a macro-level approach most identified with the writings of German philosopher and sociologist Karl Marx (1818–1883), who saw society as being made up of individuals in different social classes who must compete for social, material, and political resources such as food and housing, employment, education, and leisure time. Social institutions like government, education, and religion reflect this competition in their inherent inequalities and help maintain the unequal social structure. Some individuals and organizations are able to obtain and keep more resources than others, and these “winners” use their power and influence to maintain social institutions. Several theorist suggested variations on this basic theme.

Polish-Austrian sociologist Ludwig Gumplowicz (1838–1909) expanded on Marx’s ideas by arguing that war and conquest are the basis of civilizations. He believed that cultural and ethnic conflicts led to states being identified and defined by a dominant group that had power over other groups (Irving 2007).

German sociologist Max Weber agreed with Marx but also believed that, in addition to economic inequalities, inequalities of political power and social structure cause conflict. Weber noted that different groups were affected differently based on

education, race, and gender, and that people's reactions to inequality were moderated by class differences and rates of social mobility, as well as by perceptions about the legitimacy of those in power.

German sociologist Georg Simmel (1858–1918) believed that conflict can help integrate and stabilize a society. He said that the intensity of the conflict varies depending on the emotional involvement of the parties, the degree of solidarity within the opposing groups, and the clarity and limited nature of the goals. Simmel also showed that groups work to create internal solidarity, centralize power, and reduce dissent. Resolving conflicts can reduce tension and hostility and can pave the way for future agreements.

In the 1930s and 1940s, German philosophers, known as the Frankfurt School, developed critical theory as an elaboration on Marxist principles. Critical theory is an expansion of conflict theory and is broader than just sociology, including other social sciences and philosophy. A critical theory attempts to address structural issues causing inequality; it must explain what's wrong in current social reality, identify the people who can make changes, and provide practical goals for social transformation (Horkeimer 1982).

More recently, inequality based on gender or race has been explained in a similar manner and has identified institutionalized power structures that help to maintain inequality between groups. Janet Saltzman Chafetz (1941–2006) presented a model of feminist theory that attempts to explain the forces that maintain gender inequality as well as a theory of how such a system can be changed (Turner 2003). Similarly, critical race theory grew out of a critical analysis of race and racism from a legal point of view. Critical race theory looks at structural inequality based on white privilege and associated wealth, power, and prestige.

Criticism

Making Connections: Sociology in the Real World

Farming and Locavores: How Sociological Perspectives Might View Food Consumption

The consumption of food is a commonplace, daily occurrence, yet it can also be associated with important moments in our lives. Eating can be an individual or a group action, and eating habits and customs are influenced by our cultures. In the context of society, our nation's food system is at the core of numerous social movements, political issues, and economic debates. Any of these factors might become a topic of sociological study.

A structural-functional approach to the topic of food consumption might be interested in the role of the agriculture industry within the nation's economy and how this has changed from the early days of manual-labor farming to modern mechanized production. Another examination might study the different functions that occur in food production: from farming and harvesting to flashy packaging and mass consumerism.

A conflict theorist might be interested in the power differentials present in the regulation of food, by exploring where people's right to information intersects with corporations' drive for profit and how the government mediates those interests. Or a conflict theorist might be interested in the power and powerlessness experienced by local farmers versus large farming conglomerates, such as the documentary *Food Inc.* depicts as resulting from Monsanto's patenting of seed technology. Another topic of study might be how nutrition varies between different social classes.

A sociologist viewing food consumption through a symbolic interactionist lens would be more interested in micro-level topics, such as the symbolic use of food in religious rituals, or the role it plays in the social interaction of a family dinner. This perspective might also study the interactions among group members who identify themselves based on their sharing a particular diet, such as vegetarians (people who don't eat meat) or locavores (people who strive to eat locally produced food).

Just as structural functionalism was criticized for focusing too much on the stability of societies, conflict theory has been criticized because it tends to focus on conflict to the exclusion of recognizing stability. Many social structures are extremely stable or have gradually progressed over time rather than changing abruptly as conflict theory would suggest.

Symbolic Interactionist Theory

Symbolic interactionism is a micro-level theory that focuses on the relationships among individuals within a society. Communication—the exchange of meaning through language and symbols—is believed to be the way in which people

make sense of their social worlds. Theorists Herman and Reynolds (1994) note that this perspective sees people as being active in shaping the social world rather than simply being acted upon.

George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) is considered a founder of symbolic interactionism though he never published his work on it (LaRossa and Reitzes 1993). Mead's student, Herbert Blumer, coined the term "symbolic interactionism" and outlined these basic premises: humans interact with things based on meanings ascribed to those things; the ascribed meaning of things comes from our interactions with others and society; the meanings of things are interpreted by a person when dealing with things in specific circumstances (Blumer 1969). If you love books, for example, a symbolic interactionist might propose that you learned that books are good or important in the interactions you had with family, friends, school, or church; maybe your family had a special reading time each week, getting your library card was treated as a special event, or bedtime stories were associated with warmth and comfort.

Social scientists who apply symbolic-interactionist thinking look for patterns of interaction between individuals. Their studies often involve observation of one-on-one interactions. For example, while a conflict theorist studying a political protest might focus on class difference, a symbolic interactionist would be more interested in how individuals in the protesting group interact, as well as the signs and symbols protesters use to communicate their message. The focus on the importance of symbols in building a society led sociologists like Erving Goffman (1922–1982) to develop a technique called **dramaturgical analysis**. Goffman used theater as an analogy for social interaction and recognized that people's interactions showed patterns of cultural "scripts." Because it can be unclear what part a person may play in a given situation, he or she has to improvise his or her role as the situation unfolds (Goffman 1958).

Studies that use the symbolic interactionist perspective are more likely to use qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews or participant observation, because they seek to understand the symbolic worlds in which research subjects live.

Constructivism is an extension of symbolic interaction theory which proposes that reality is what humans cognitively construct it to be. We develop social constructs based on interactions with others, and those constructs that last over time are those that have meanings which are widely agreed-upon or generally accepted by most within the society. This approach is often used to understand what's defined as deviant within a society. There is no absolute definition of deviance, and different societies have constructed different meanings for deviance, as well as associating different behaviors with deviance. One situation that illustrates this is what you believe you're to do if you find a wallet in the street. In the United States, turning the wallet in to local authorities would be considered the appropriate action, and to keep the wallet would be seen as deviant. In contrast, many Eastern societies would consider it much more appropriate to keep the wallet and search for the owner yourself; turning it over to someone else, even the authorities, would be considered deviant behavior.

Criticism

Research done from this perspective is often scrutinized because of the difficulty of remaining objective. Others criticize the extremely narrow focus on symbolic interaction. Proponents, of course, consider this one of its greatest strengths.

Sociological Theory Today

These three approaches are still the main foundation of modern sociological theory, but some evolution has been seen. Structural-functionalism was a dominant force after World War II and until the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, sociologists began to feel that structural-functionalism did not sufficiently explain the rapid social changes happening in the United States at that time.

Conflict theory then gained prominence, as there was renewed emphasis on institutionalized social inequality. Critical theory, and the particular aspects of feminist theory and critical race theory, focused on creating social change through the application of sociological principles, and the field saw a renewed emphasis on helping ordinary people understand sociology principles, in the form of public sociology.

Postmodern social theory attempts to look at society through an entirely new lens by rejecting previous macro-level attempts to explain social phenomena. Generally considered as gaining acceptance in the late 1970s and early 1980s, postmodern social theory is a micro-level approach that looks at small, local groups and individual reality. Its growth in popularity coincides with the constructivist aspects of symbolic interactionism.

1.4 Why Study Sociology?

Figure 1.9 The research of sociologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark helped the Supreme Court decide to end “separate but equal” racial segregation in schools in the United States. (Photo courtesy of public domain)

When Elizabeth Eckford tried to enter Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in September 1957, she was met by an angry crowd. But she knew she had the law on her side. Three years earlier in the landmark *Brown vs. the Board of Education* case, the U.S. Supreme Court had overturned twenty-one state laws that allowed blacks and whites to be taught in separate school systems as long as the school systems were “equal.” One of the major factors influencing that decision was research conducted by the husband-and-wife team of sociologists, Kenneth and Mamie Clark. Their research showed that segregation was harmful to young black schoolchildren, and the Court found that harm to be unconstitutional.

Since it was first founded, many people interested in sociology have been driven by the scholarly desire to contribute knowledge to this field, while others have seen it as way not only to study society but also to improve it. Besides desegregation, sociology has played a crucial role in many important social reforms, such as equal opportunity for women in the workplace, improved treatment for individuals with mental handicaps or learning disabilities, increased accessibility and accommodation for people with physical handicaps, the right of native populations to preserve their land and culture, and prison system reforms.

The prominent sociologist Peter L. Berger (1929–), in his 1963 book *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective*, describes a sociologist as "someone concerned with understanding society in a disciplined way." He asserts that sociologists have a natural interest in the monumental moments of people’s lives, as well as a fascination with banal, everyday occurrences. Berger also describes the “aha” moment when a sociological theory becomes applicable and understood:

> [T]here is a deceptive simplicity and obviousness about some sociological investigations. One reads them, nods at the familiar scene, remarks that one has heard all this before and don't people have better things to do than to waste their time on truisms—until one is suddenly brought up against an insight that radically questions everything one had previously assumed about this familiar scene. This is the point at which one begins to sense the excitement of sociology. (Berger 1963)

Sociology can be exciting because it teaches people ways to recognize how they fit into the world and how others perceive them. Looking at themselves and society from a sociological perspective helps people see where they connect to different groups based on the many different ways they classify themselves and how society classifies them in turn. It raises awareness of how those classifications—such as economic and status levels, education, ethnicity, or sexual orientation—affect perceptions.

Sociology teaches people not to accept easy explanations. It teaches them a way to organize their thinking so that they can ask better questions and formulate better answers. It makes people more aware that there are many different kinds of people in the world who do not necessarily think the way they do. It increases their willingness and ability to try to see the world from other people's perspectives. This prepares them to live and work in an increasingly diverse and integrated world.

Sociology in the Workplace

Employers continue to seek people with what are called “transferable skills.” This means that they want to hire people whose knowledge and education can be applied in a variety of settings and whose skills will contribute to various tasks.

Studying sociology can provide people with this wide knowledge and a skill set that can contribute to many workplaces, including

- an understanding of social systems and large bureaucracies;
- the ability to devise and carry out research projects to assess whether a program or policy is working;
- the ability to collect, read, and analyze statistical information from polls or surveys;
- the ability to recognize important differences in people's social, cultural, and economic backgrounds;
- skills in preparing reports and communicating complex ideas; and
- the capacity for critical thinking about social issues and problems that confront modern society. (Department of Sociology, University of Alabama)

Sociology prepares people for a wide variety of careers. Besides actually conducting social research or training others in the field, people who graduate from college with a degree in sociology are hired by government agencies and corporations in fields such as social services, counseling (e.g., family planning, career, substance abuse), community planning, health services, marketing, market research, and human resources. Even a small amount of training in sociology can be an asset in careers like sales, public relations, journalism, teaching, law, and criminal justice.

Making Connections: Sociology in the Real World

Please "Friend" Me: Students and Social Networking

The phenomenon known as Facebook was designed specifically for students. Whereas earlier generations wrote notes in each other's printed yearbooks at the end of the academic year, modern technology and the Internet ushered in dynamic new ways for people to interact socially. Instead of having to meet up on campus, students can call, text, and Skype from their dorm rooms. Instead of a study group gathering weekly in the library, online forums and chat rooms help learners connect. The availability and immediacy of computer technology has forever changed the ways in which students engage with each other.

Now, after several social networks have vied for primacy, a few have established their place in the market and some have attracted niche audience. While Facebook launched the social networking trend geared toward teens and young adults, now people of all ages are actively "friending" each other. LinkedIn distinguished itself by focusing on professional connections and served as a virtual world for workplace networking. Newer offshoots like Foursquare help people connect based on the real-world places they frequent, while Twitter has cornered the market on brevity.

The widespread ownership of smartphones adds to this social experience; the Pew Research Center (2012) found that the majority of people in the United States with mobile phones now have "smart" phones with Internet capability. Many people worldwide can now access Facebook, Twitter, and other social media from virtually anywhere, and there seems to be an increasing acceptance of smartphone use in many diverse and previously prohibited settings. The outcomes of smartphone use, as with other social media, are not yet clear.

These newer modes of social interaction have also spawned harmful consequences, such as cyberbullying and what some call FAD, or Facebook Addiction Disorder. Researchers have also examined other potential negative impacts, such as whether Facebooking lowers a student's GPA, or whether there might be long-term effects of replacing face-to-face interaction with social media.

All of these social networks demonstrate emerging ways that people interact, whether positive or negative. They illustrate how sociological topics are alive and changing today. Social media will most certainly be a developing topic in the study of sociology for decades to come.

Chapter Review

Key Terms

antipositivism: the view that social researchers should strive for subjectivity as they worked to represent social processes, cultural norms, and societal values

conflict theory: a theory that looks at society as a competition for limited resources

constructivism: an extension of symbolic interaction theory which proposes that reality is what humans cognitively construct it to be

culture: a group's shared practices, values, and beliefs

dramaturgical analysis: a technique sociologists use in which they view society through the metaphor of theatrical performance

dynamic equilibrium: a stable state in which all parts of a healthy society work together properly

dysfunctions: social patterns that have undesirable consequences for the operation of society

figuration: the process of simultaneously analyzing the behavior of an individual and the society that shapes that behavior

function: the part a recurrent activity plays in the social life as a whole and the contribution it makes to structural continuity

functionalism: a theoretical approach that sees society as a structure with interrelated parts designed to meet the biological and social needs of individuals that make up that society

generalized others: the organized and generalized attitude of a social group

grand theories: an attempt to explain large-scale relationships and answer fundamental questions such as why societies form and why they change

hypothesis: a testable proposition

latent functions: the unrecognized or unintended consequences of a social process

macro-level: a wide-scale view of the role of social structures within a society

manifest functions: sought consequences of a social process

micro-level theories: the study of specific relationships between individuals or small groups

paradigms: philosophical and theoretical frameworks used within a discipline to formulate theories, generalizations, and the experiments performed in support of them

positivism: the scientific study of social patterns

qualitative sociology: in-depth interviews, focus groups, and/or analysis of content sources as the source of its data

quantitative sociology: statistical methods such as surveys with large numbers of participants

reification: an error of treating an abstract concept as though it has a real, material existence

significant others: specific individuals that impact a person's life

social facts: the laws, morals, values, religious beliefs, customs, fashions, rituals, and all of the cultural rules that govern social life

social institutions: patterns of beliefs and behaviors focused on meeting social needs

social solidarity: the social ties that bind a group of people together such as kinship, shared location, and religion

society: a group of people who live in a defined geographical area who interact with one another and who share a common culture

sociological imagination: the ability to understand how your own past relates to that of other people, as well as to history in general and societal structures in particular

sociology: the systematic study of society and social interaction

symbolic interactionism: a theoretical perspective through which scholars examine the relationship of individuals within their society by studying their communication (language and symbols)

theory: a proposed explanation about social interactions or society

verstehen: a German word that means to understand in a deep way

Section Summary

1.1 What Is Sociology?

Sociology is the systematic study of society and social interaction. In order to carry out their studies, sociologists identify cultural patterns and social forces and determine how they affect individuals and groups. They also develop ways to apply their findings to the real world.

1.2 The History of Sociology

Sociology was developed as a way to study and try to understand the changes to society brought on by the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some of the earliest sociologists thought that societies and individuals' roles in society could be studied using the same scientific methodologies that were used in the natural sciences, while others believed that is was impossible to predict human behavior scientifically, and still others debated the value of such predictions. Those perspectives continue to be represented within sociology today.

1.3 Theoretical Perspectives

Sociologists develop theories to explain social events, interactions, and patterns. A theory is a proposed explanation of those social interactions. Theories have different scales. Macro-level theories, such as structural functionalism and conflict theory, attempt to explain how societies operate as a whole. Micro-level theories, such as symbolic interactionism, focus on interactions between individuals.

1.4 Why Study Sociology?

Studying sociology is beneficial both for the individual and for society. By studying sociology people learn how to think critically about social issues and problems that confront our society. The study of sociology enriches students' lives and prepares them for careers in an increasingly diverse world. Society benefits because people with sociological training are better prepared to make informed decisions about social issues and take effective action to deal with them.

Section Quiz

1.1 What Is Sociology?

1. Which of the following best describes sociology as a subject?

a. The study of individual behavior
b. The study of cultures
c. The study of society and social interaction
d. The study of economics

2. C. Wright Mills once said that sociologists need to develop a sociological _____ to study how society affects individuals.

a. culture
b. imagination
c. method
d. tool

3. A sociologist defines society as a group of people who reside in a defined area, share a culture, and who:

a. interact
b. work in the same industry