Chapter 1

Sociology: Perspective, Theory, and Method

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**Author’s Note for Chapter 1**

This first chapter is the most important chapter in the text. Why? Because this chapter presents the sociological perspective, the point of view that is the foundation for everything that follows. Students who “get it” at this early stage have excellent odds of doing well throughout your course.

How can you help them understand the sociological perspective? Giving clear definitions is important. But it is vital that you illustrate the perspective with lots of examples. Notice how the Power of Society Figure on page 2 of the text helps show that what we feel to be the personal force called “love” is guided by society. Here are additional examples found throughout the chapter:

* Page 4 explains how women’s expectations for a spouse are guided by their class position.
* Global Map 1–1 on page 5 explains how women’s decisions about childbearing are guided by the level of economic development of the society in which they live.
* Figure 1–1 on page 6 shows how the most personal choice about ending one’s life is guided by gender and race.
* National Map 1–1 on page 14 shows suicide rates are higher in states with low population density and lower in states with higher population density.
* The discussion on pages 9 and 10 also explains how the birth of sociology itself was the result of social forces—a breakdown in the traditional social order of the middle ages with the Industrial Revolution, the growth of cities, and a more individualistic political culture.
* The discussion of applying sociology’s theoretical approaches to sports also shows insights gained from looking at sports with the sociological perspective. The “stacking” figure on page 19 shows how African–American players are disproportionately playing the outfield and not the central positions of pitcher and catcher.
* Finally, use the Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life photo essay (at the end of each chapter) to highlight the power of society to shape personal choice and individual experience. The photo essay for this chapter, found on pages 38–39, explores popular culture to see how social forces guide celebrity couples to come together.

Sociology is defined by its perspective, or point of view. But applying that perspective to the task of gathering knowledge about the social world brings us to sociological investigation. Sociology is a multi-paradigmatic discipline. This is true, as the chapter explains, in terms of theory. It is also true that there are many ways to approach sociological investigation. In part, sociology is a social science. Therefore, the second half of the chapter starts off with an explanation of scientific inquiry. But some sociologists, aware of the limitation of focusing on observable action and quantitative data, support a more qualitative inquiry that relies on interpretation and focuses on meaning. In addition, some sociologists, aware of the limitation of science imposed by its struggle to claim objectivity, embrace a more critical and activist vision of research in pursuit of social change.

In sum, scientific sociology, qualitative sociology, and activist or critical sociology all fall within the “big tent” of our discipline. Many sociologists favor one approach; many blend them in various ways. Notice, too, that these approaches roughly correspond to the differences in theoretical orientations: scientific sociology is consistent with structural-function theory, interpretive sociology shows commonality with symbolic-interaction theory, and critical sociology shares traits with various social-conflict and feminist theories.

Keep students focused on the reason we study the social world in the first place—there is much to learn and this knowledge can help us live richer lives and improve our society. But to shape our world, first we must understand it.

Chapter 1 explains and illustrates four major methods of doing research:

* Experimental research, which is heavily used in the sciences such as psychology and is occasionally used in sociology, is illustrated with the classic research of Philip Zimbardo about the effects of prison life on people who live of work there.
* Survey research, which is widely used in sociology, is illustrated by the research of Lois Benjamin into the power of race and racism as experienced by highly successful African–American women and men.
* Fieldwork research, used by both sociologists and anthropologists, is illustrated by the participant observation research carried out by Joseph Ewoodzie, investigation the lives of homeless people in Jackson, Mississippi.
* Use of available data, which is done by sociologists, historians, and others, is illustrated by the historical study of culture and achievement in Boston and Philadelphia carried out by E. Digby Baltzell.

Late Breaking News

In this new feature, found only in Revel, John Macionis provides new data and points to recent events that are highly relevant to the chapter at hand. In this chapter, the news bulletin offers insight into why national polls incorrectly predicted that Hillary Clinton would win the 2016 presidential election

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Additional Content in Revel

Revel is the electronic version of this text that provides interactive learning, student learning assessment, and additional readings and engaging video—at remarkably low cost. All of the Revel content has been developed by John Macionis and is seamlessly integrated into the text.

For each chapter, Revel expands and deepens student learning with rich content including:

**Late Breaking News –**This brand new feature, available in every chapter, is described above.

In Greater Depth—This interactive graphic allows students to go deeper into the Power of Society figure at the beginning of the chapter, in this case showing how social class position is linked to choice of a marriage partner.

Video—These short videos present key concepts in engaging ways. In this chapter, students can access “The Basics: What is Sociology?” “Sociology on the Job,” and also “The Big Picture: Sociological Theory and Research.”

Journals—These are short student writing exercises. This chapter’s journals encourage students to apply the sociology perspective, to identify personal benefits of seeing the world sociologically, to understand the method of fieldwork, and to assess the value of sociological thinking for society as a whole.

A Global Perspective—These interactive graphics focus on global patterns, in this case showing the share of global income for nations at various levels of economic development.

Surveys—These interactive exercises ask students to assess the own attitudes and behavior and compare themselves to others in the United States or to populations in other countries. This chapter’s surveys focus on equality in marriage, how readily the student is to work with socially diverse people, and students’ assessment of their own critical thinking abilities.

Interactive Comparison Maps—These interactive graphics allow students to manipulate social maps to link variables. In this chapter, national comparison maps link population density to suicide rates and census participation rates to a community’s median income level.

Social Explorer—An interactive exercise that uses social mapping to explore societal dynamics across the United States. This chapter’s exercise allows students to investigate the link between population density and suicide rates in their own communities. A second social explorer exercise helps students discover patterns of minority populations across the United States and in their local communities.

Read the Document—These primary readings allow students to read important sociologists in their own words. All readings have been carefully chosen and edited to provide rich learning accessible to all students. This chapter’s reading is “Society in America” by Harriet Martineau, written in the 1830s to call attention to the oppression of women and people of color.

In Review—These interactive “drag and drop” exercises allow students to assess their learning and also to have fun. In this chapter, In Review exercises focus on understanding theoretical orientations, applying theory to the tops of sports, and sociology’s major research orientations.

Boxed Features—Find additional boxed features not available in the printed book, in this chapter including a Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life feature assessing the truth of what we read about sex in the popular press, and another feature that applies the concepts of mean, median, and mode. A Controversy and Debate feature explain how people can use statistics to mislead others.

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Learning Objectives

* 1.1: Explain how the sociological perspective helps us understand that society shapes our individual lives.
* 1.2: Identify the advantages of sociological thinking for developing public policy, for encouraging personal growth, and for advancing in a career.
* 1.3: Summarize sociology’s major theoretical approaches.
* 1.4: Describe sociology’s three research orientations.
* 1.5: Identify the importance of gender and ethics in sociological research.
* 1.6: Explain why a researcher might choose each of sociology’s research methods.

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**Detailed Chapter Outline**

**I. The Sociological Perspective**

L.O. 1.1: Explain how the sociological perspective helps us understand that society shapes our individual lives.

A. **Sociology** is *the systematic study of human society*.

1. *The Basics: What Is Sociology?* In this video, sociology is defined as the scientific study of human society. It differs from the natural sciences in important ways, but still relies on research to understand society.

B. The sociological perspective (Berger, 1963) helps us to see general social patterns in the behavior of particular individuals (*the general in the particular)*.

C. It also encourages us to realize that society guides our thoughts and deeds—a strange idea in our individualistic culture, so that the sociological perspective can also be described as *seeing the strange in the familiar* (Berger, 1963).

D. Sociology also encourages us to see the effect of our larger society on personal choice.

1. For example, Emile Durkheim’s (1858–1917) research showed that the suicide rate was strongly influenced by the extent to which people were socially integrated with others.

2. WINDOW ON THE WORLD—Global Map 1–1 (p. 5): *Women’s Childbearing in Global Perspective*. A look around the world shows that childbearing is not a personal choice. Women living in poor countries have many more children than women living in high-income nations.

3. SEEING SOCIOLOGY IN EVERYDAY LIFE BOX (p. 7): *The Sociological Imagination: Turning Personal Problems into Public Issues*. Mills (1959) argued that society, not people’s personal failings, is the cause of poverty and other social problems. The power of the sociological perspective lies not just in changing individual lives, but in transforming society.

E. The greater people’s social marginality, the better able they are to use the sociological perspective. Just as social change encourages sociological thinking, sociological thinking can bring about social change.

1. *The Promise*, by C. Wright Mills. Mills argues in this selection that the only way to truly understand people's behavior is to examine the social context in which people live--a quality of mind that he calls the sociological imagination.

**II. The Importance of a Global Perspective**

L.O. 1.2:Identify the advantages of sociological thinking for developing public policy, for encouraging personal growth, and for advancing in a career.

1. Sociologists also strive to see issues in **global perspective**, defined as *the study of the larger world and our society’s place in it*.
   1. THINKING GLOBALLY: *The Global Village: A Social Snapshot of Our World.* Think of the population breakdown as if the world were a village of one thousand people.
2. There are three different types of nations in the world.
3. The world’s **high-income countries** are industrialized nations that have the highest overall standard of living (seventy-four nations).
4. The world’s **middle-income countries** have limited industrialization and moderate personal income (seventy-two nations).
5. The world’s **low-income countries** have little industrialization and most people are poor (forty-nine nations).
6. Global thinking is an important component of the sociological perspective for five reasons:
7. Where we live makes a great difference in shaping our lives.
8. Societies throughout the world are increasingly interconnected, making traditional distinctions between “us” and “them” less and less relevant.
9. What happens in the rest of the world affects life here in the U.S.
10. Many human problems faced in the United States are far more serious elsewhere (e.g., poverty).
11. Thinking globally is a good way to learn more about ourselves.

**III. Applying the Sociological Perspective**

L.O. 1.3:Summarize sociology’s major theoretical approaches.

A. Applying the sociological perspective is useful in many ways.

* 1. It helps guide many of the laws and policies that shape our lives.
  2. It leads to important personal growth and expanded awareness.
  3. It serves as excellent preparation for the world at work.

B. Sociologists have helped shape public policy.

C. Sociology influences personal growth.

1. The sociological perspective helps us assess the truth of “common sense.”

2. The sociological perspective helps us see both opportunities and constraints in our lives.

3. The sociological perspective empowers us to be active participants in our society.

4. The sociological perspective helps us to live in a diverse world.

D. The “sociology advantage.” A background in sociology is also good preparation for the working world. An increasing number of sociologists work in all sorts of applied fields.

1. THINKING ABOUT DIVERSITY: RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER BOX (p. 12): *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America.* Sociologist Barbara Ehrenreich (2001) took a low-wage job in order to find out more about life for people who hold these jobs.

E. Careers: The “Sociology Advantage.”

1. *Sociology on the Job: What Is Sociology?* In this video, Professor Tracy Xavia Karner, Ph.D., explores the ways in which graduates use sociology in their employment. She explains the different fields of sociology and how understanding sociology more in-depth can help in all aspects of everyday life.

**IV. The Origins of Sociology**

L.O. 1.4:Describe sociology’s three research orientations.

A. Three major social changes during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are important to the development of sociology.

1. The rise of a factory-based industrial economy.

2. The emergence of large, thriving cities in Europe.

3. Political changes, including a rising concern with individual liberty and rights. The French Revolution symbolized this dramatic break with political and social tradition.

B. Auguste Comte (1798–1857) believed that the major goal of sociology was to understand society as it actually operates. Comte favored **positivism**—*a way of understanding based on science*. He saw sociology as the product of a three-stage historical development:

1. The *theological stage*, in which thought was guided by religion.

2. The *metaphysical stage*, a transitional phase.

3. The *scientific stage*, using positivism to understand society.

**V. Sociological Theory**

L.O. 1.5: Identify the importance of gender and ethics in sociological research.

A. A **theory** is *a statement of how and why specific facts are related*. The goal of sociological theory is to explain social behavior in the real world. For example, SEEING OURSELVES—National Map 1–1 (p. 14) shows suicide rates across the United States as they relate to population density.

1. *Does Durkheim’s Theory on Suicide Rates Still Apply Today?* In this activity, students participate in a discovery exercise to see if Durkheim's theories still apply today.
2. *The Big Picture: Sociological Theory and Research.* This video addresses sociological theory and research. It focuses on three perspectives: structural functionalism, social conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism. Scientists use these three perspectives to conduct research to further understand our social world.

B. Theories are based on **theoretical approaches**, *basic images of society that guide thinking and research*. Sociologists ask two basic questions: “What issues should we study?” and “How should we connect the facts?” There are three major sociological paradigms:

1. The **structural-functional approach** is a framework for building theory that sees society as *a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability*.

* 1. It asserts that our lives are guided by **social structures** (relatively stable patterns of social behavior).
  2. Each social structure has **social functions**, or consequences, for the operation of society as a whole.
  3. Key figures in the development of this approach include Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, and Herbert Spencer.
  4. Robert Merton (1910–2003) introduced three concepts related to social function:

1) **Manifest functions**, *the recognized and intended consequences of any social pattern.*

2) **Latent functions**, *largely unrecognized and unintended consequences.*

3) **Social dysfunctions**, *undesirable consequences of a social pattern for the operation of society.*

* 1. Critical review: The influence of this approach has declined in recent decades.
     + 1. It focuses on stability, thereby ignoring inequalities of social class, race, and gender.

2. The **social-conflict approach** is a framework for building theory that sees society as *an arena of inequality that generates conflict and change*. Most sociologists who favor the conflict approach attempt not only to understand society but also to reduce social inequality.

1. Key figures in this tradition include Karl Marx (1818–1883), Harriet Martineau (1802–1876), Jane Addams (1860–1935), and W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963).
2. One important type of conflict analysis is the **gender-conflict approach**: a point of view that focuses on inequality and conflict between males and females. The gender-conflict approach is closely linked to **feminism**, *or support of social equality for women and men.*
3. THINKING ABOUT DIVERSITY: RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER BOX (p. 17): *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Pioneer in Sociology*. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois described race as *the major problem facing the United States in the twentieth-century*.
4. Another important type of social-conflict analysis is the **race-conflict approach**, *a point of view that focuses on inequality and conflict between people of different racial and ethnic categories*.
5. Critical review: This approach has developed rapidly in recent decades. Although popular, it has several weaknesses.
   1. It ignores social unity based on mutual interdependence and shared values.
   2. Because it is explicitly political, it cannot claim scientific objectivity.
   3. Like the structural-functional paradigm, it envisions society in terms of broad abstractions (a macro paradigm).

3. The **symbolic-interaction approach** *is a framework for building theory that sees society as the product of the everyday interactions of individuals.*

1. The structural-functional and the social-conflict approaches share a **macro-level orientation**, meaning that they focus on *broad social structures that shape society as a whole*. In contrast, symbolic-interactionism has a **micro-level orientation**; it focuses on *patterns of social interaction in specific settings.*
2. Key figures in the development of this approach include Max Weber (1864–1920), George Herbert Mead (1863–1931), Erving Goffman (1922–1982), George Homans (1910–1989), and Peter Blau (1918–2002).
3. Critical review: Symbolic interactionism attempts to explain more clearly how individuals actually experience society. However, it has two weaknesses:
   1. Its micro orientation sometimes results in the error of ignoring the influence of larger social structures.
   2. By emphasizing what is unique, it risks overlooking the effects of culture, class, gender, and race.

d. SEEING SOCIOLOGY IN EVERYDAY LIFE BOX (p. 19): *Sports: Playing the Theory* Game. What can we learn by applying sociology’s major theoretical approaches to this familiar element of life in the United States?

e. The functions of sports. A structural-functional approach directs attention to the ways sports help society to operate.

f. Sports and conflict. A social-conflict analysis points out that sports are closely linked to social inequality.

g. Sports as interaction. The symbolic-interaction paradigm views sports less as a system than as an ongoing process.

**VI. Three Ways to Do Sociology**

L.O. 1.6: Explain why a researcher might choose each of sociology’s research methods.

There are three ways to do research in sociology: *positivist sociology, interpretive sociology, and critical sociology.*

A. Positivist Sociology.

1. **Positivist sociology** is *the study of society based on systematic observation of social behavior.* The scientific orientation to knowing, called *positivism*, assumes that an objective reality exists.

2. SEEING SOCIOLOGY IN EVERYDAY LIFE: *Is What We Read in the Mass Media True? The Case of Extramarital Sex.* Each day we see stories in newspapers and magazines that tell us what people think and how they behave. But a lot of what we read turns out to be misleading or even untrue. Take the issue of extramarital sex. A look at the cover of many of the so-called women’s magazines you find in the checkout aisle at the supermarket or a quick reading of the advice column in your local newspaper might lead you to think that extramarital sex is a major issue facing married couples.

3. **Concepts** are *mental constructs that represent some part of the world in a simplified form*.

4. **Variables** are *concepts whose value changes from case to case*.

5. **Measurement** is *the procedure for determining the value of a variable in a specific case.*

a. Statistical measures are frequently used to describe populations as a whole.

b. This requires that researchers **operationalize variables**, which means *specifying exactly what is to be measured before assigning a value to a variable.*

6. SEEING SOCIOLOGY IN EVERYDAY LIFE: *Three Useful (and Simple) Descriptive Statistics.*

a. The **mode** is the value that occurs most often in a series of numbers.

b. The **mean** refers to the arithmetic average of a series of numbers.

c. The **median** is the value that occurs midway in a series of numbers arranged from lowest to highest

7. For a measurement to be useful, it must be reliable and valid.

a. **Reliability** refers to *consistency in measurement*.

b. **Validity** means *precision in measuring exactly what one intends to measure.*

8. Relationships among variables.

a. **Cause and effect** is *a relationship in which change in one variable causes change in another.*

i. The **independent variable** is *the variable that causes the change*.

ii. The **dependent variable** is *the variable that changes*.

b. Cause-and-effect relationships allow us to predict how one pattern of behavior will produce another.

c. **Correlation** exists *when two (or more) variables change together*.

i. **Spurious correlation** means *an apparent, although false, association between two (or more) variables caused by some other variable*.

ii. Spurious correlations can be discovered through scientific **control**, *the ability to neutralize the effect of one variable in order to assess relationships among other variables.*

9. Sociologists strive for **objectivity**, *personal neutrality in conducting research,* whenever possible, following Max Weber’s model of value-free research.

a. One way to limit distortion caused by personal values is through **replication**, or *repetition of research by others in order to assess its accuracy.*

B. Interpretive Sociology.

1. Max Weber, who pioneered this framework, argued that the focus of sociology is interpretation. **Interpretive sociology** is *the study of society that focuses on the meanings people attach to their social world*.
2. The interpretive sociologist’s job is not just to observe what people do but to share in their world of meaning and come to appreciate why they act as they do.

C. Critical Sociology.

1. Karl Marx, who founded critical sociology, rejected the idea that society exists as a “natural” system with a fixed order. **Critical sociology** is *the study of society that focuses on the need for social change.*
2. The point is not merely to study the world as it is, but to change it.

D. Research Orientations and Theory.

1. Is there a link between research orientations and sociological theory?

2. The positivist orientation and the structural-functional approach are both concerned with understanding society as it is.

3. Interpretive sociology and the symbolic-interaction approach focus on the meanings people attach to their social world.

4. Critical sociology and the social-conflict approach both seek to reduce social inequality.

**VII. Gender and Research**

A. Research is affected by **gender**, *the personal traits and social positions that members of a society attach to being female and male*, in five ways:

1. Androcentricity, or approaching an issue from the male perspective only.

2.Overgeneralizing, or using data drawn from studying only one sex to support conclusions about human behavior in general.

3. Gender blindness,or not considering the variable of gender at all.

4. Double standards, or judging men and women differently.

5. Interferencebecause a subject reacts to the sex of the researcher.

B. The American Sociological Association has established formal guidelines for conducting research.

**VIII. Research Ethics**

1. Like all researchers, sociologists must be aware that research can harm as well as help subjects or communities. For this reason, the American Sociological Association (ASA)—the major professional association of sociologists in North America—has established formal guidelines for conducting research (1997).
2. THINKING ABOUT DIVERSITY: RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER BOX (p. 26): *Studying the Lives of Hispanics*. Gerardo and Barbara Marin (1991) have identified five areas of concern in conducting research with Hispanics:

a. Be careful with terms.

b. Realize that cultural values may differ.

c. Realize that family dynamics may vary.

d. Be aware that attitudes toward time and efficiency may vary.

e. Realize that attitudes toward personal space may vary.

**IX. Research Methods**

L.O. 1.6: Explain why a researcher might choose each of sociology’s research methods.

A **research method** is *a systematic plan for conducting research*. Four commonly used research methods are:

A.An **experiment** is *a research method for investigating cause and effect under highly controlled conditions.* Experimental research is explanatory, meaning that it asks not just what happens but why. Typically, researchers conduct experiments to test hypotheses, unverified statements of a relationship between variables. Most experiments are conducted in laboratories and employ experimental and control groups.

1. The **Hawthorne effect** is *a change in a subject’s behavior caused by the awareness of being studied*.

2. The Stanford County Prison study was an experiment conducted by Philip Zimbardo (1972) that supported the notion that the character of prison itself and not the personalities of prisoners and guards, causes prison violence.

B. A **survey** is *a research method in which subjects respond to a series of statements or questions in a questionnaire or an interview*. Survey research is usually descriptive rather than explanatory.

1. Surveys are directed at **populations**, *the people who are the focus of research.* Usually we study a **sample**, *a part of a population that represents the whole*. Random sampling is commonly used to be sure that the sample is actually representative of the entire population.
2. Surveys may involve **questionnaires**, *a series of written questions a researcher presents to subjects*. Questionnaires may be closed-ended or open-ended. Most surveys are self-administered and must be carefully pretested.
3. Surveys may also take the form of **interviews**, *a series of questions administered in person by a researcher to respondents*.
4. THINKING ABOUT DIVERSITY: RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER BOX (p. 30): *Lois Benjamin’s African–American Elite: Using Tables in Research.* A table provides a lot of information in a small amount of space, so learning to read tables can increase your reading efficiency.
   1. Lois Benjamin (1991) used interviews and snowball sampling to study one hundred elite African–Americans. Benjamin concluded that, despite the improving social standing of African–Americans, Blacks in the United States still experience racial hostility.
5. **Participant observation** is *a method by which researchers systematically observe people while joining in their routine activities*. Participant observation research is descriptive and often exploratory. It is normally qualitative research,inquiry based on subjective impressions.

1. William Whyte (1943) utilized this approach to study social life in a poor neighborhood in Boston. His research, published in the book *Street Corner Society,* illustrates the value of using a key informant in field research.

D. Using available data: Existing sources.

1. Sometimes, sociologists analyze existing sources, data collection by others.
2. SEEING OURSELVES—National Map 1–2: *Census Participation across the United States* (p. 34).
3. E. Digby Baltzell’s (1979b) *Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia* explored reasons for the prominence of New Englanders in national life. This study exemplifies a researcher’s power to analyze the past using historical sources.

**X. Putting It All Together: Ten Steps in Sociological Investigation**

A. There are ten steps in the process of carrying out sociological investigation.

1. What is your topic?

2. What have others already learned?

3. What, exactly, are your questions?

4. What will you need to carry out research?

5. Are there ethical concerns?

6. What method will you use?

7. How will you record the data?

8. What do the data tell you?

9. What are your conclusions?

10. How can you share what you’ve learned?

B. CONTROVERSY & DEBATE: *Can People Lie with Statistics?* The best way not to fall prey to statistical manipulation is to understand how people can mislead with statistics:

1. People select their data, choosing what variables to display, the time frame, and the scale of the measurement.

2. People interpret their data.

3. People use graphs to “spin” the truth.

C. CONTROVERSY & DEBATE BOX (p. 37): *Is Sociology Nothing More than Stereotypes?* In contrast to stereotypes, good sociology involves making generalizations, but with three important conditions.

a. Sociologists do not indiscriminately apply any generalization to all individuals.

b. Sociologists are careful that a generalization is supported by available facts.

c. Sociologists offer generalizations fair-mindedly, with an interest in getting at the truth.

**XI. Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life** photo essay (pp. 38–39). Use this essay to spark discussion of how research can give us a deeper understand of our everyday lives (in this case, Why do couples marry?).

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**Revel Media**

**IN GREATER DEPTH** [*graphic*] The Power of Society to Guide Our Choices in Marriage Partners: Social Class Position and the Process of Choosing a Marriage Partner, found in   
Module 1.1.

**VIDEO** The Basics: What Is Sociology? *This video focuses on sociology as the scientific study of human society and explains how sociologists use the scientific method when conducting research*, found in Module 1.2*.*

**COMPARISON MAP** Women’s Childbearing / Economic Development in Global Perspective, found in Module 1.3.

**JOURNAL** Using the Sociological Perspective, found in Module 1.4.

**THINKING GLOBALLY** [*boxed feature*] The Global Village: A Social Snapshot of Our World, found in Module 1.5.

**A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE** [*graphic*] Population Share versus Income Share, by Level of Economic Development, found in Module 1.6.

**SURVEY** Gender Equality in Marriage: Rate Yourself, found in Module 1.7.

**SURVEY** Working with Socially Diverse People: Rate Yourself, found in Module 1.8.

**VIDEO** Sociology on the Job: What Is Sociology? *This video explores the ways in which a background in sociology is excellent preparation for college graduates seeking careers in many diverse fields*, found in Module 1.9.

**JOURNAL** Benefits of the Sociological Perspective , found in Module 1.10.

**VIDEO** The Big Picture: Sociological Theory and Research *This video explores how the three major sociological approaches offer different frameworks for building theories about the operation of society and how macro-level analysis differs from micro-level analysis*, found in Module 1.11.

**COMPARISON MAP** Suicide Rates / Population Density across the United States, found in Module 1.12.

**SOCIAL EXPLORER** Explore the relationship between population density and suicide in your own community and across the United States, found in Module 1.13.

**READ THE DOCUMENT** *Society in America* by Harriet Martineau *While praising some aspects of life in the United States in the 1830s, Martineau criticized as intolerable the condition of women and the system of slavery.*, found in Module 1.14.

**IN REVIEW** Sociological Theory, found in Module 1.15.

**IN REVIEW** The Sociology of Sports, found in Module 1.16.

**SEEING SOCIOLOGY IN EVERY DAY LIFE** [*boxed feature*] Is What We Read in the Popular Press True? The Case of Extramarital Sex, found in Module 1.17.

**SEEING SOCIOLOGY IN EVERYDAY LIFE** [*boxed feature*] Three Useful (and Simple) Descriptive Statistics, found in Module 1.18.

**SURVEY** Critical Thinking about Information: Rate Yourself, found in Module 1.19.

**IN REVIEW** Three Research Orientations, found in Module 1.20.

**VIDEO** Sociology on the Job: Sociological Theory and Research *A director of institutional research at a major university explains how she relies on her sociology training as she oversees the collection and reporting of various types of data to the government and to other research organizations*, found in Module 1.21.

**JOURNAL** Understanding Participant Observation, found in Module 1.22.

**COMPARISON MAP** Census Participation Rates/Median Household Income across the United States, found in Module 1.23.

**SOCIAL EXPLORER** Explore minority populations in your local community and in counties across the United States, found in Module 1.24.

**IN REVIEW** Research Method, found in Module 1.25.

**CONTROVERSY AND DEBATE** [*boxed feature*] Can People Lie with Statistics? found in Module 1.26.

**SHARED WRITING** The Value of Sociology, found in Module 1.27.

**SEEING SOCIOLOGY IN EVERYDAY LIFE** [*photo gallery*] Why do couples marry?, found in Module 1.28.

John’s Chapter Close-Up: Society and Personal Choice (A)

This chapter close-up focuses on Figure 1–1, found on page 6 of *Society: the Basics, 14th edition*. A reflection of our individualistic culture is the fact that most people respond to the act of suicide in psychological terms: *Something must be wrong with people who end up taking their own lives?*

Durkheim (the first professor of sociology in France) used suicide to help establish the discipline of sociology in his home country. Durkheim was trying to show that a psychological (or “skin in”) view of suicide could not explain broad patterns, such as why males were far more likely to take their own lives than females. So he picked a very “personal” issue to show that—*even in the very private decision to take one’s own life*—society is influencing people’s behavior.

Looking at Figure 1–1, notice first that among all racial and ethnic categories, male suicide rates are about four times higher than rates for females. Can we attribute this difference to personality disorder? Or, as Durkheim would say, is this difference a *social* fact? That is, is there something different in the social relations typical of males compared to females? Following Durkheim, men have a lower level of social integration, leading to a higher risk of suicide. In the same way, white people typically have a lower level of social integration than African–Americans or Hispanic–Americans. This difference is not racial *per* se, but reflects the importance of both class and culture. We see the effects of this difference by contrasting the higher white suicide rate with the lower African–American and Hispanic–American rates.

Notice, finally, that gender *interacts* with race and ethnicity in guiding suicide rates. Among all three categories of people, the gender differences noted earlier are evident.

One last suggestion: Link this discussion with National Map 1–1 on page 14 and the Social Explorer exercise for this chapter, which explores social causes of suicide, found in Revel.

John’s Chapter Close-Up: The Census Bureau Paints a Picture of the United States (B)

The Census Bureau has been collecting data about the population of the United States for more than 200 years. Throughout this text, you will find data gathered, processed, and presented by the Census Bureau (and other government agencies) dealing with family income, poverty rates, the various languages spoken in this country, the share of the population living in families, and hundreds of other social measures.

The people of the United States participate in this grand data project. As shown in National Map 1–2 on page 34 of the text, about three-fourths of U.S. households returned a census form in 2010. That’s pretty remarkable, and that share beats the return rate typically achieved by sociologists. Of course, the Census Bureau benefits from one factor that no other researchers can claim—the power of government. This is because returning your census form is mandated by law. (Not that anyone, to my knowledge, has ever been prosecuted for failing to do so.)

But collecting numbers is only one step on the path to understanding. Ask the class to look at National Map 2–1 in the text. It is clear that census tracts differ in terms of participation rate. Generally, we see higher return rates in the upper Midwest and the Plains States. Relatively high rates of participation are also found along both coasts. We also see lower return rates in much of the Southwest. The reasons for this pattern are far from obvious and, no doubt, any factors are involved. People with higher education have the skills that make them more likely to participate in the census work. On the other hand, people with less schooling or those who are challenged by lower levels of verbal and numerical literacy are less likely to participate.

Most social patterns have multiple causes, and sociological research typically deals with *one* or *some* of them. I also mention to students that what sociologists consider to be significant correlations are almost always below 0.5, which means that the independent variable in question explains just (0.5)2 or one-fourth of the variation in the dependent variable. In short, social life is the interplay of many, relatively weak variables and almost every social pattern has many, many social causes.

John’s Personal Video Suggestion (A)

What makes something real? Is a kiss simply a kiss? Or is “reality” socially constructed? To see how what we see—and what we fail to notice—is guided by our social surroundings, share this short video with the class. Go to YouTube and search for Joshua Bell’s subway experiment. In that video you will see Joshua Bell, who ranks among the top violinists in the world, playing in public.

If this were the Kennedy Center or the Carnegie Hall, people would be paying big bucks to enjoy this artist’s talents. But Bell is playing in a subway station in Washington, D.C., as if he were a busker playing for coins. The man is the same, the music is the same, but the setting is different. How much of a difference does the social setting make? Watch how almost no one notices the extraordinary opportunity right in front of their eyes and ears.

John’s Personal Video Suggestion (B)

One of the largest and most widely used sources of research data about the world is the Population Reference Bureau. This organization collects, analyzes, and issues reports about all sorts of patterns and trends, mostly having to do with population. To give the class some idea of the challenges faced by extending the reach of research around the world, use this eight-minute video featuring Carl Haub, a senior researcher and demographer at PRB. Use a search engine and look for “Distilled Demographics: Where Do Population Data Come From?”

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**Research for a Cutting-Edge Classroom**

For each chapter of the text, I am happy to share a short, Power-Point based presentation informed by very recent research. These presentations deal with highly current and typically controversial issues that are in the news and are part of the country’s political dialogue. Each presentation provides a clear statement of the issue, several slides that present recent research findings from Pew, Gallup, or other research organization, notes that help instructors develop the importance of the data, and questions for class discussion.

To access these PowerPoint presentations from Revel, after creating a course with either *Sociology 16/e* or *Society: The Basics 14/e,* enter the course and hover over the left-hand navigation menu. The PowerPoints (as well as the Test Item File, Instructor's Manual, and other resources) can be found in the “Resources” tab.

From outside of Revel, please go to [www.pearsonhigerhed.com](http://www.pearsonhigerhed.com) and navigate / search for *Sociology 16/e* or *Society: The Basics 14/e.* The PowerPoints can be found under the “Resources” tab.

In this chapter, the first cutting-edge classroom presentation involves identifying factors linked to the declining rate of marriage in the United States.

A second cutting-edge classroom presentation is a close-up look at today’s General Social Survey, which has been tracking important social trends for more than forty years. The GSS also operates a webpage that provides data that can be accessed and used by students.

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***Supplemental Lecture Material***

Sociology and Related Disciplines

Sociology is only one of a family of related social sciences. The following discussion examines the character of these other disciplines and explores sociology’s relationship with each of them.

Psychology shares with sociology (and cultural anthropology) a broadly-based interest in understanding a wide variety of human behavior; the disciplines differ from each other in that psychology is principally concerned with the behavior of individuals, while sociologists more commonly study group behavior and the extent to which group membership (including factors such as race, class, and gender) influences individual behavior. Because psychology focuses on internal cognitive processes, it is sometimes characterized as a “skin in” approach to understanding humanity. Sociology’s focus on the surrounding social world makes our discipline a “skin out” approach.

Psychology has both academic and applied branches. Applied psychology is a therapeutic effort to help people understand their own behavior and cope with their problems. Academic psychology is closer to the work most sociologists do, placing its emphasis on understanding such phenomena as learning, thinking, personality formation and functioning, intelligence, memory, and motivation. Think of psychology as situated with biology on one side (natural-science psychology or biologically-oriented psychology) and sociology on the other (social psychology). All psychology shows its links to biology and other natural sciences in its orientation toward experimental research. Some more natural-science psychologists conduct research into animal behavior and the physiology of the brain; others concern themselves with variables such as gender and other environmental influences and ask much the same sort of questions as sociologists do. The two fields meet in the subdiscipline of social psychology, which is commonly taught in both psychology and sociology curricula and which focuses on how human personality and behavior are influenced by an individual’s social environment.

Anthropology, like psychology, has some concerns it shares with sociology but also studies some very different subjects. The two main subfields are physical anthropology and cultural anthropology, although some attention is also devoted to archaeology and linguistics. Physical anthropology uses natural science research methods to study such topics as the biological evolution of the human race and the differences between the races. Cultural anthropologists study many of the same topics as sociologists, but there are two main differences between the fields: (1) anthropology tends to study small, preliterate, traditional societies, whereas most sociologists concentrate on modern industrial societies; and (2) anthropology generally studies cultures as a whole, while sociology commonly studies smaller systems (for example, groups or institutions) within complex societies. However, sociology and cultural anthropology are closer than the other social sciences. Furthermore, as the traditional societies that anthropologists have historically preferred to study have become increasingly scarce, more and more cultural anthropologists are studying such aspects of contemporary society as street gangs, immigrant life, and ethnic subcultures, which are indistinguishable from the subject matter usually studied by sociologists. Cultural anthropologists and sociologists use similar research methods, although anthropologists are more likely to develop elaborate descriptive ethnographies of the social scenes they observe by means of extended periods of participant observation, whereas sociologists more commonly collect narrower and more quantitative data using survey research methods.

Economics is a much more narrow and focused discipline than sociology, psychology, or anthropology, concerning itself with the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services. Because economists restrict their attention to phenomena that can be precisely measured, such as interest rates, taxes, economic production rates, and unemployment, they have developed by far the most sophisticated statistical techniques for manipulating and presenting data of any of the social sciences. On the other hand, this precision may limit the ability of economists to deal effectively with the sorts of larger issues that many people find most interesting and important. Sociologists who study economic behavior, in contrast to economists, focus on the relationship between economics and other aspects of social reality—for example, on the way in which value orientations (such as support for the environmental movement) may affect consumption patterns, on the ways in which corporations are organized and changed, or on how human beings experience the world of work subjectively.

Political science, like economics, focuses on a relatively narrow segment of human social behavior, in this case the issues of power and authority. Traditionally, political science focused either on political philosophy or on relatively limited studies of the ways in which governments and political parties are organized and function. More recently, under the influence of the developing field of political sociology, political scientists have been increasingly interested in such topics as political socialization, the social forces influencing voting behavior, the structure of institutional and noninstitutional power in local communities, and the origin and development of movements of political protest, all of which are shared concerns with sociologists working in this area. The two disciplines use broadly similar research methods, with political scientists having played an especially important role in the development of opinion polling and related techniques of survey research.

Two additional disciplines deserve mention, though each is only marginally compatible with the basic definition of a social science.

History straddles the line between the humanities and the social sciences. Traditionally, the field studied historical developments as unique events, not as examples of general categories or patterns. More recently, however, many historians have become more interested in the social forces that shape historical events and in developing theories of broad patterns of sociohistorical change; they also have begun using more quantitative and precise data. To the extent that these trends continue, history is moving in the direction of becoming a true social science.

Social work is comparable to applied psychology in that its central purpose is not to understand human behavior but rather to help people, groups, and communities cope more effectively with their personal and social problems. Of course, it is essential to understand the causes of these problems, and social workers rely heavily on sociological and psychological research and theory, but the fundamental thrust of the field is different from that of sociology and academic psychology because of its practical orientation.

***Supplemental Lecture Material***

**Using the ASA Journal *Teaching Sociology* in Your Classroom**

*This feature will appear in every chapter of the Instructor’s Manual. In case you are unfamiliar with the journal* Teaching Sociology*, it is published quarterly by the American Sociological Association and is devoted to providing resources for academic sociologists who teach in college and university settings.*

The October 1992 issue of *Teaching Sociology* (Vol. 20, No. 4) is entitled “GIFTS: A Special Issue, 20 Great Ideas for Teaching Sociology.” In this collection, a number of articles appear that are well suited to your introductory course and the opening chapter in the Macionis text. For example, R. Marie Bricher has contributed an article entitled “Teaching Introductory Sociology: Using Aspects of the Classroom as Sociological Events” (pp. 270–275). Bricher points out that the college classroom can function as a “strategic research site,” as students apply sociological insights and grow in their ability to recognize “social facts.”

Two articles deal with introducing students to the concept of the *sociological imagination*: John R. Brouillette and Ronny E. Turner’s “Creating the Sociological Imagination on the First Day of Class: The Social Construction of Deviance” (pp. 276–279), and Kathleen M. O’Flaherty’s “Introducing Students to the Concept of the Sociological Imagination: A Written Assignment” (pp. 326–328). Brouillette and Turner’s article offers unique suggestions for helping introductory students to understand sociology as a “way of seeing,” rather than with a body of information to be memorized and regurgitated on examinations. O’Flaherty’s article offers a student assignment that is designed to help students appreciate C. Wright Mills’s concept of the intersection between personal biography and history, as well as the sociological imagination.

There are other articles in this issue that may be helpful in your classroom.

Discussion Questions

* + - 1. What are the benefits of studying sociology? That is, in what ways does understanding the social world make us better people? Better citizens? Better prepared for our careers? (See the “Seeing Sociology in *Your* Everyday Life” essay in Revel).
      2. Which of the social sciences (for example, psychology, political science, economics, anthropology, gender studies) strikes you as closest to sociology? Which is most distinct? Why?
      3. Sociologists and political scientists both study political behavior. Sociologists and economists both study economic behavior. Is this simply duplication of effort, or do sociologists, with their characteristic perspectives, have the ability to develop insights that might not occur to their colleagues in other departments?
      4. Sociologists have in the past several decades developed and refined a specialization called applied sociology. Like applied psychology, it focuses on coping with problems rather than studying what causes those problems. In what ways can sociology contribute to the more effective resolution of social problems at the individual, group, and community levels? Should we promote development of this subdiscipline or would it be better left to the social workers?

***Supplemental Lecture Material***

# The Liberation Sociology Tradition

Joe Feagin (University of Florida), in a 1997 plenary presentation, noted that there is a long liberation–sociology tradition in the discipline, which stretches back to Jane Addams and W. E. B. Du Bois in the late nineteenth century. He describes liberation sociology as “sociology from the bottom up.” From this perspective the point of sociology is to enhance the lives of ordinary people, to bring changes in social systems of discrimination and oppression.

A major twentieth-century figure to accent this progressive tradition was Robert S. Lynd, with a focus on class oppression. He hypothesized that “Private capitalism does not know how to operate and probably cannot be made to operate, to assure the amount of general welfare to which the present stage of our technological skills and intelligence entitle us; and other ways of managing our economy, therefore, need to be explored.” Thus, the question that social science appears to face is “What kind of culture would be that which would use its full array of knowledge and productive resources to maximize the quantity, quality, and useful variety of daily living for the masses of American people?”

Another major figure of the progressive tradition in sociology is the African–American sociologist, Oliver C. Cox, who accented the importance of sociological research and passion in favor of change, particularly against racism. [See Oliver C. Cox: *Caste, Class & Race* (1948)].

The best known figure in twentieth-century progressive tradition is C. Wright Mills, who accented the importance of sociologists listening to those who are insurgent [See C. Wright Mills: *The Sociological Imagination* (1959)]. Alfred M. Lee [*Sociology for Whom?* (1978)] continued the criticism of mainstream sociology for its failure to deal with class and other oppressions.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, several feminist sociologists began to re-emphasize the maleness of traditional sociology and the need to incorporate a feminist perspective on gendered oppression in sociology. Jesse Bernard stated “without equivocation that sociology was a male science of society and that practically all sociology to date has been a sociology of the male world.” [Dale Spender: *Man Made Language* 1980)].

**Source**

The Southwestern Sociological Association’s *Newsletter*, Vol. 23: No. 2 (Spring 1997), pp. 4–5.

# Discussion Questions

1. Oliver C. Cox wrote that “Clearly, the social scientist should be accurate and objective but not neutral; he should be passionately partisan in favor of the welfare of the people and against the interests of the few when they seem to submerge that welfare.” What’s your opinion of this position?
2. Explain how liberation sociology is related to the social conflict paradigm (cited in Chapter 1 of the text).
3. Explain the parallels that exist between contemporary liberation sociology and today’s feminist sociology.

***Supplemental Lecture Material***

**The Social Conflict Approach and the Sociology of Sport**

As noted in the textbook, each of the three major paradigms may be applied to a wide variety of topics. The conflict perspective has been especially popular among sports sociologists. In fact, Harry Edwards, who published the first major text in this area in 1973 while a member of the faculty at San Jose State University, is a strong adherent of the conflict perspective.

More recently, Richard Lapchick, the director since 1984 of Northeastern University’s Center for the Study of Sport in Society, has emerged as a second well-known conflict theory-oriented sports sociologist. Unlike Edwards, Lapchick is white and was heavily involved as a civil rights supporter and anti-apartheid activist in his youth; he has repeatedly received death threats and has also been physically attacked by opponents of his struggle for racial justice.

The Center began with an operating budget of $125,000, which has now grown to over a million dollars a year. Lapchick and his twenty-one person staff have collected a massive amount of data documenting the persistent discrimination against minorities and women in sports. Some examples: Lapchick points out that African–Americans have a substantial share of players in only five professional sports: boxing, track, basketball, football, and baseball. The share of black players in major league baseball shows a notable decline, falling from 19 percent in 1995 to 8 percent in 2015. In all professional sports, the vast majority of team owners, managers, and head coaches are white.

In a tradition established by Marx, conflict-oriented sociologists have commonly felt obliged to go beyond merely documenting the existence of injustice. They actually work to overcome it. Harry Edwards attempted to organize a boycott by African–American athletes of the 1968 Mexico City Summer Olympics as a protest over the lack of black coaches on the U.S. team and related issues. Although the boycott failed, Edwards was instrumental in encouraging sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos to publicize their political beliefs by bowing their heads and giving black power salutes during the awards ceremony for the 200-meter dash.

Like Edwards, Lapchick is also an activist. His center has spent over twelve million dollars in tuition assistance for students who have used up their athletic eligibility. The organization also sponsors outreach programs such as TEAMWORK, which encourages professional athletes to speak to schoolchildren about the realities of high-level sports. A favored theme: stay in school and get your degree, because while almost half of black professional athletes believe that they will make it in the pros, in actuality, only a small percentage actually do so.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Do you think it is appropriate for sociologists like Edwards and Lapchick to become involved in reform efforts or would they be wiser to concentrate merely on studying society? Develop arguments supporting each position.
2. Why do you think many people find Lapchick’s contention that African–Americans are widely discriminated against in sports hard to accept?

***Supplemental Lecture Material***

**Academic Freedom and “Political Correctness”**

James S. Coleman, a highly distinguished scholar and past president of the American Sociological Association, published an intensely controversial article arguing that what conservatives derisively call the “political correctness” movement poses a real threat to academic freedom.

Traditionally, professors have viewed university administrators as the principal enemies of academic freedom. But Coleman sees a new and more serious threat resulting from collegial pressure. He writes, “The greatest enemy of academic freedom is the norms that exist about what kinds of questions may be raised in research (and in teaching as well) and what kinds of questions may not be raised... The taboos that a sociologist is most likely to encounter are those concerning questions of differences between genders or differences among races which might be genetic in origin” (p. 28).

Such taboos are primarily designed to prevent attacks on what Coleman terms “the policies of conspicuous benevolence.” “There are certain policies, certain public activities that have the property that they stem from benevolent intentions toward others less fortunate or in some way oppressed—policies intended to aid the poor, or to aid blacks or Hispanics or women. Any research that would hinder these policies is subject to much disapproval and attack” (p. 34).

For example, Coleman’s widely reported research into educational opportunity among the races discovered, among other things, that “...teachers’ scores on vocabulary tests were related to the verbal achievements of students...” (p. 30). It is widely known that African–American teachers, “...themselves products of segregated school systems... (are) on the whole less well prepared, less qualified, with lower verbal skills, than their white counterparts” (pp. 30–31).

These observations lead to the disturbing conclusion that African–American students “...would do less well, on average, under black teachers than under white teachers. But the role-modeling or cultural-difference hypotheses implicit in much current theorizing would lead to the opposite conjecture that they would be doing better, on average, under black teachers. If the first conjecture were right, it would have some disturbing implications. One would be that a major source of inequality of educational opportunity for black students was the fact that they were being taught by black teachers. Another, directly relevant to the policy issue, would be that both black and white students would have greater educational opportunity if they were not taught by these teachers. This potential implication was the cause of our not asking the question that followed naturally from our research” (p. 31). And this, according to Coleman, is the real problem: pressure for “political correctness” muzzles the impulse to ask the crucial questions. Researchers who are afraid to challenge the policies of conspicuous benevolence for fear of censure by their colleagues will be unable to investigate possible negative latent consequences of these policies, with the end result being failure to achieve the very goals promoted by their supporters.

There are several ways out of this dilemma. Coleman suggests an alteration in the hierarchy of values held within the academic community: “If, in the hierarchy of values held by the academic community of which one is a part, the value of freedom of inquiry is higher than the value of equality (the value that gives rise to conspicuous benevolence), then such constraints, such self-suppression of research into inconvenient questions, will no longer be effective” (p. 34).

**Source:**

Coleman, James S. “A Quiet Threat to Academic Freedom.” *National Review* XLII, 2 (March 18, 1991), pp. 28–34.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Do you feel pressure to ask certain questions in research, and *not* to ask other questions? What are some other examples of research topics that might prompt disapproval from colleagues?
2. How would sociologists who disagree with Coleman defend their position?

***Supplemental Lecture Material***

**The False God of Numbers**

Many articles have been written about how statistics can be misused in order to accomplish various political goals. In other words, numbers may be employed to support oversimplified conclusions. For example, consider this statement:

“New air quality standards must be enacted because they will prevent precisely 15,000 deaths a year from respiration ailments.” Sounds simple, doesn’t it? Yet the problem is a thorny one. One might ask whether all those respiratory deaths are due only to air pollution. And what about the cost of new standards to industry? How will these affect the economy in the long run?

Here are a few other examples begging alternate explanations or further exploration:

* U.S. quality of life is diminishing since, according to one study, the average one-way commute now takes forty seconds longer than it did a decade earlier.
* High divorce rates are seen as evidence of the breakdown of the family and poorer conditions for children.
* Because corporations seek to save money by laying off full-time employees, the number of people working part-time or on a contract basis has increased.

All in all, these questions are complex and multidimensional. It is not likely that one answer alone is sufficient. Yet politicians and the media often make reality sound simpler and more straightforward than it really is.

**Source**

“Keeping Score: Big Social Changes Revive the False God of Numbers.” *The New York Times (*August 17, 1997), pp. 1 and 4.

**Discussion Questions**

1. What rules of research are these statements violating?
2. Why are politicians so willing to simplify statistics? How do social researchers handle statistics more carefully? In what way does their responsibility to society differ from that of politicians?
3. Name several alternative conclusions that might be drawn from some of the statements presented above.

**Activity:** Look through several newspapers for the statistics quoted there. Analyze them using scientific standards. Keep in mind such issues as the difference between cause and effect and correlation, sample size and population, and the way the study was conducted. Also consider interpretations of the data.

***Supplemental Lecture Material***

**Separating the Wheat and the Chaff: Spurious Correlations**

Researchers commonly encounter behaviors that seem to be related to one another in some way. In the case of the number of miles a car is driven and its gas consumption, there is an obvious and genuine connection. But simply because two behaviors share a significant statistical correlation does not always prove that there is a real relationship between the two variables.

With complex systems, it may be difficult to determine if a statistical correlation is genuine or completely coincidental and spurious. While the continental drift of the West Coast of North America may be highly correlated with the growth of the federal deficit in recent decades, it is unlikely that there is a meaningful connection between the two. Apparently, there is also a strong negative correlation between the number of PhDs and the number of mules in a state. As one commentator remarked, “Are the PhDs created when mules die?” Similarly, a positive correlation exists between ice cream sales and deaths by drowning. The same researcher humorously asked if “people buy more ice cream when they hear of a drowning?” Even when a connection exists, it may be trivial or misleading. In the end, correlation is worthless without interpretation, and that interpretation should be as well-grounded as possible. Consider the following examples:

• My favorite spurious correlation is between shoe size and the ability to solve mathematical equations (or any other task requiring schooling). The students usually express a lot of puzzlement over that one, until you point out that children’s feet tend to grow as they go through school. (Wuensch, p. 3)

• One... (example of a spurious connection) is the strong positive correlation between places of worship in a locale and the number of bars in the same vicinity. The explanation is obvious: Religion drives people to drink. (Beins, p. 3)

In most research problems, however, the spurious nature of the correlation may not be immediately clear, requiring additional information and careful interpretation to establish the real nature of the connection between the variables. Indeed, important issues may be riding on correctly evaluating and understanding the correlation.

(A) story I sometimes use is based on a *Nova* television show from a few years back. Chinese medical researchers had found a correlation between incidence of human esophageal cancer and the incidence of tumors in chickens. Were the chickens the source of the human cancers? Were the humans giving the chickens their tumors? What they eventually found was that regional preferences for a fermented cabbage dish and minerals in the soil in which the cabbage was grown gave both the humans, who ate the cabbage, and the chickens, who ate the scraps, their tumors. (Street, p. 3)

**Source:**

Staff, 1993. “Examples of Spuriousness,” in *Teaching Methods.* Fall (2).

**Discussion Questions**

1. What steps can individual researchers adopt to prevent spurious correlations? What can the community of researchers do?
2. What spurious correlations have you come across in your own thinking?
3. Can you think of spurious correlations that have had important effects upon history?

Essay Topics

1. What is a global perspective? How does it compare to the sociological perspective? How are societies all over the world increasingly connected and what are the consequences of these links?
2. After reviewing your text’s discussion of the social factors that influence a student’s decision regarding which college to attend, identify some of the social factors which might help explain why you selected your major or intended career.
3. Describe the experience of being a new member of a group or some setting. (For example, the first few days after you arrived on campus.) Explain how your marginality made it easier for you to observe something about that group of the setting that was not evident to those who had been in it longer.
4. List the various benefits of learning to use the sociological perspective for your own life.
5. What sociological insights about the U.S. educational system can you gain from applying sociology’s theoretical approaches? Consider structural-functional theory, symbolic-interaction theory, social-conflict theory, feminist theory, and race-conflict theory.
6. How have sociologists helped shape public policy and law?
7. Identify what you regard as some of the manifest and latent functions of attending a U.S. college or university?
8. This chapter of the text explains how society affects peoples’ selection of marriage partners. Using the sociological perspective, what can we say about peoples’ decisions to attend or not attend college? To become a physician or police officer? To end up in a profession or in jail?
9. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each of sociology’s main approaches to doing research: scientific sociology, interpretative sociology, and critical sociology? How does each position offer a critique of the others?
10. The text discusses how sociologists operationalize the concept of social class. How would you operationalize important concepts such as intelligence, aggressiveness, femininity, or level of commitment to religion?
11. Discuss the links between the three methodological approaches to sociology and the three theoretical approaches?
12. Suppose you are a sociologist studying alleged police brutality. Construct two arguments, one proposing that you ought to be as objective as possible in your work and let others use your results as they may choose, and the other suggesting that, while striving for accuracy, you should take a stand against any injustices which your research may uncover. Which position do you find more convincing? Why?
13. What are ways that gender can shape sociological research?
14. To a young researcher, what are the advantages of using the method of participant observation? What are the disadvantages?
15. Do you think Zimbardo’s Stanford County Prison experiment was ethical, or should he have been prevented from conducting this study? Defend your position.
16. Explain how you would develop a representative sample of students on your campus in order to conduct some survey research.
17. What are the advantages and disadvantages of both open-ended and closed-ended questions in survey research?
18. Develop several criticisms of the research methods employed in Lois Benjamin’s study of elite African–Americans.
19. What are major steps that together make up the ideal experiment? What type of question leads a research to choose this method? Point to several limitations of experimental research.