The Real World

An Introduction to Sociology

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Kerry Ferris
Jill Stein

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NINTH EDITION

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W. W. NORTON & COMPANY
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About the Authors

KERRY FERRIS is Associate Professor of Sociology at Northern Illinois University, where she serves as the president of United Faculty Alliance, the NIU faculty labor union. She teaches introduction to sociology, qualitative methods, mass media and popular culture, and sociology of food. She uses ethnographic methods and a symbolic interactionist approach to study celebrity as a system of social power. Her past studies have included analyses of fan–celebrity relations, celebrity sightings, celebrity stalking, red-carpet celebrity interviews, the work lives of professional celebrity impersonators, the experiences of local celebrities, and the concept of dead celebrities as social actors. Her work has been published in *Symbolic Interaction*, the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, the *Journal of Popular Culture*, and *Text & Performance Quarterly*. She is the coauthor, with Scott R. Harris, of *Stargazing: Celebrity, Fame, and Social Interaction*.

JILL STEIN is Professor of Sociology at Santa Barbara City College, which was recently named the top community college in the United States by the Aspen Institute. She teaches introduction to sociology in both face-to-face and online formats every semester. She also teaches classes on social psychology, media, culture and society, environmental sociology, and social problems. In addition, she is involved in many student success and diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) initiatives at the local and state levels. Her research has examined narrative processes in twelve-step programs, the role of popular culture in higher learning, and group culture among professional rock musicians. Her work has been published in *Symbolic Interaction, Youth & Society,* the *Journal of Culture & Society,* and *TRAILS* (Teaching Resources and Innovations Library).

Contents

Preface

Welcome to the Ninth Edition of *The Real World: An Introduction to Sociology*. We hope you will appreciate what is new not only in the textbook's fresh look and updated materials, but also in the innovative ways it goes about teaching sociology. That's exactly what we set out to do when we first embarked on the original project of writing this textbook, and it's what we continue to do here in the Ninth Edition.

The Ninth Edition was produced during a period of intense political division in American society. The current chasm between Democrats and Republicans—the "left" and the "right"—has been many decades in the making and has set citizens against one another on every hot-button issue: election integrity; civil rights; race, ethnicity, religion, and immigration; LGBTQ+ issues; abortion, gun violence, and the economy; censorship in public schools and libraries; and even what constitutes a scientific fact. This very textbook was caught up in a "book banning" controversy in spring 2023. We hope a sociological perspective can help us all process the political divisions of this historical moment.

Another social issue that reached a critical stage during the year we were preparing this edition is climate change. And while the climate crisis also divides Americans, it has become an issue that is impossible to ignore. Recent years have seen an undeniable uptick in weird, unprecedented, and catastrophic weather events—more and bigger hurricanes, unending droughts, heat waves, wildfires, "snow-pocalypses," flooding, melting glaciers, and rising ocean temperatures. Indeed, during this time period, both of us were personally affected by some of these events. And you have also likely noticed or been affected by these changes yourselves. Climate scientists agree that it is no longer possible to deny the link between human activity, climate change, and deadly and destructive weather events (Zachariah et al., 2023). In Chapter 15 especially, but also throughout the book, we aim to help you see these connections, and we hope to encourage you to use your sociological insights to help preserve life on this planet for future generations.

At the beginning, we had had years of experience in college and university classrooms, teaching introductory sociology to thousands of students from all backgrounds and walks of life; we had discovered a lot about what works and what doesn't when it comes to making sociology exciting and effective. As seasoned instructors, we had developed an approach to teaching and learning that reflected our passion for the subject and our concern with best practices in pedagogy. But we were having trouble finding a textbook that encompassed all the elements we had identified and that made such a difference in our own experience. We were tired of seeing the same old formulas found in almost every textbook. And we figured we were not alone. Other students and instructors were probably equally frustrated with repetitive formats, stodgy styles, and seemingly irrelevant or overly predictable materials. That is a great misfortune, for sociology, at its best, is a discipline that holds great value and is both intellectually stimulating and personally resonant. Although the impetus to write this textbook began as a way of answering our own needs, our goal became to create a textbook of even greater benefit to others who might also be looking for something new.

We are gratified by the response *The Real World* has received from instructors and students alike, so we are preserving many of the features that have made the textbook a success. At the same time, we have done more than just simply revise the textbook. In this edition, you will find significant new content and added features that will further enhance the teaching and learning process and keep us as close to the cutting edge as possible. Many of the original elements we developed for students and instructors appear again in these pages. As a foundation, we have maintained a writing style that we hope is accessible and interesting as well as scholarly. One of the core pedagogical strengths of this textbook is its focus on everyday life, the media, technology, and pop culture. We know that the combination of these themes is inherently appealing to students and that it relates to their lives. And because both new generations and more experienced sociology instructors might also be looking for something different, another of this book's strengths is an integrated emphasis on critical thinking and analytic skills. Rather than merely presenting or reviewing major concepts in sociology, which can often seem dry and remote, we seek to make the abstract more concrete through real-world examples and hands-on applications.

In this text we take a fresh and accessible theoretical approach appropriate to our contemporary world. While we emphasize the interactionist perspective, we cover a range of theoretical thought, including postmodernism. We also build innovative methodological exercises into each chapter, giving students the opportunity to put into practice what they are learning. We present material that is familiar and relevant to students in a way that allows them to make profound analytic connections between their individual lives and the structure of their society. We provide instructors with ways to reenergize their teaching, and we give even general education students a reason to be fascinated by and engrossed in their sociology courses. We do this by staying in touch with our students and the rapidly changing real world and by bringing our insight, experience, and intellectual rigor to bear on a new way of teaching introductory sociology.

In the book, we made some decisions about forms of expression that we hope better reflect the lived experiences of our readers. We have begun capitalizing "Black" to conform with the style of other racial and ethnic labels such as "Hispanic" and "Asian American." Since "white" does not describe a shared culture or history, we have chosen not to capitalize it. In this edition, we have also adopted more people-centered language throughout. We join other major publishing operations in making these changes. Language is a living aspect of culture and can and must change as society changes.

Whether you are a student or an instructor, you have probably seen a lot of textbooks. As authors, we have thought very carefully about how to write this textbook to make it more meaningful and effective for you. We think it is important to point out some unique features of this textbook and to tell you why they are included and what we hope you will get out of them.

Part Introductions

The sixteen chapters in this text are grouped into five parts, and each part opens with its own introductory essay. Each part introduction highlights a piece of original sociological research that encompasses the major themes that group the chapters together. The in-depth discussion of the featured book shows what the real work of academic sociologists consists of and reveals how sociological research frequently unites topics covered in separate chapters in introductory textbooks.

Opening Vignettes

Each chapter begins with an opening vignette that gives students an idea about the topics or themes they will encounter in the chapter. The vignettes are drawn from current events and everyday life, the media, arts, and popular culture. They are designed to grab your attention and stimulate your curiosity to learn more by reading the chapter that follows.

How to Read This Chapter

After the vignette, you will find a section that provides you with some goals and strategies that we believe will be useful in reading that particular chapter. We know from our experience in teaching introductory sociology that it is often worthwhile to let students know what to expect in advance so that they can better make their way through the material. Not all chapters require the same approach; we want to bring to your attention what we think is the best approach to each one, so you can keep that in mind while reading.

Learning Objectives

Each chapter also begins with a list of learning objectives that briefly introduce the main concepts you'll encounter in the chapter. We hope that the learning objectives will pique your curiosity and get you thinking about the content of the chapter. Learning objectives can help with focus and organization, and they also serve as a way for readers to check their understanding and prepare for assessment as they make their way through the chapter.

Theory in Everyday Life

Although we provide thorough coverage in Chapter 1, we find that students often benefit from additional help with understanding the mechanics of social theory and how to apply it to various real-world phenomena. These boxes in every chapter break down the major theoretical approaches and illustrate how each perspective might be used to analyze a particular real-world case study. This serves as a simple, practical model for students to then make their own applications and analyses.

Bolded In-Text Terms

As a student of sociology, you will be learning many new concepts and terms. Throughout each chapter, you will see a number of words or phrases in bold type. You may already recognize some of these from their more common vernacular use. But it is important to pay special attention to the way that they are used sociologically. For this reason, you will find definitions in the margins of each page, where you can refer to them as you read. You should consider these bolded words and phrases your conceptual "tools" for doing sociology. As you progress through the chapters in this textbook, you will be collecting the contents of a tool kit that you can use to better understand yourself and the world around you. The bolded terms can also be found in the Glossary at the back of the book.

Relevance Boxes

In each chapter you will find Relevance Boxes with three different themes: On the Job, In Relationships, and In the Future. Relevance Boxes allow students to see the practical implications and personal value of sociology in their lives. On the Job explores the ways different people use sociological training or insights in a variety of work settings. In Relationships looks at how sociology can help us better understand our friendships, intimate partnerships, and family relations. In the Future provides a glimpse into emerging trends in a rapidly changing society, and what students might expect to encounter on the horizon. We include these boxes to show how taking this course could bear fruit in your life (and in the lives of others) beyond just fulfilling your college requirements.

Data Workshops

Data Workshops are designed to give students the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in the practice of sociology while they are learning. We think this is one of the most fun parts of being a sociologist. Each chapter features two Data Workshops, one on "Analyzing Everyday Life" and one on "Analyzing Media and Pop Culture." Students will use one of the research methods covered in Chapter 2 to deal with actual data from the real world—whether it's data they collect themselves or raw data provided from another source. The Data Workshops lead students through the process of analyzing data using the related conceptual tools they have just acquired in the chapter.

Global Perspective Boxes

Although this textbook focuses primarily on contemporary American society, we believe that in this time of increasing globalization, it is also important to look at other societies around the world. Global Perspective boxes throughout the book highlight some of the differences and similarities between the United States and other cultures. This feature will help students develop the ability to see comparative and analogous patterns across cultures, which is one of the key functions of a sociological perspective.

Images and Graphics

We think that it is crucial to include not only written information but also images and graphics in the textbook. This kind of presentation is increasingly common and students are likely to encounter complex information in graphical form in many of their textbooks. We want to help students gain in visual literacy as they are exposed to a variety of materials and learn in different ways. We also know that students share our interest in media, technology, and popular culture, and we want to show the connections between real life and sociological thinking. For these reasons, you will find many kinds of images and graphics in each chapter. These are not just decorations; they are an integral part of the text, so please study these as carefully as you would the rest of the printed page.

Closing Comments

Each chapter ends with closing comments that wrap up the discussion and give some final thoughts about the important themes that have been covered. This gives us a chance not so much to summarize or reiterate but to reflect, in a slightly different way, on what we have discussed, as well as to point to the future. We hope that the closing comments will give you something to think about, or even talk about with others, long after you've finished reading the chapter.

End-of-Chapter Materials

Additional materials at the end of each chapter will enhance the learning process. The "Applying What You've Learned" review at the end of each chapter features thoughtful application questions and suggestions for further reading and viewing, including articles from the popular press, journal articles, books, blog posts, and films. These discussion questions and suggested materials are designed both to encourage students to apply what they've learned from the chapter to their own lives and to provide opportunities for further exploration.

In our experience, the most important thing for students to take away from an introductory sociology class is a sociological perspective—not just a storehouse of facts, which will inevitably fade over time. Sociology promises a new way of looking at and thinking about the social world, which can serve students in good stead no matter what they find themselves doing in the future. We hope that this textbook delivers on that promise, making introductory sociology an intellectually stimulating and personally relevant enterprise for professors and students, in the classroom as well as outside it.

Norton Teaching and Learning Tools

digital.wwnorton.com/realworld9

The Real World, Ninth Edition, is supported by a robust set of teaching and learning tools, including a regularly updated test bank, streaming video clips, lecture and art PowerPoint slides, and Resources for Your LMS that make it easy to add high-quality Norton digital resources to an online, hybrid, or face-to-face course.

Norton Illumine Ebook

Norton's high-quality content shines brighter through engaging and motivational features that illuminate core concepts for all students in a supportive, accessible, and low-stakes environment. Embedded Theory in Everyday Life interactives, streaming video, and Dynamic Data Figures engage students with applications and explorations of important course content. Check Your Understanding questions with rich answer-specific feedback motivate students and build confidence in their learning. The active reading experience includes the ability to highlight, take notes, search, read offline, and more. Instructors can embed their own content into the text and promote student accountability through easy-to-use assignment tools in their LMS.

InQuizitive

InQuizitive is Norton's easy-to-use adaptive learning tool that personalizes the learning experience for students and helps them master key sociological concepts and theories. When completed as a pre-lecture assignment, InQuizitive ensures that students come to class better

prepared, giving instructors more time for meaningful discussions, activities, and Data Workshops.

Online Data Workshops

These online workshops have students go out into the real world to get hands-on experience with the methods of sociological research, whether it's participant observation research, survey research, or an interview study.

Everyday Sociology Blog everydaysociologyblog.com

Designed for a general audience, this exciting and unique online forum encourages visitors to actively explore sociology's relevance to pop culture, media, and everyday life. Moderated by Karen Sternheimer (University of Southern California), who was recognized for her work on the blog with the American Sociological Association's Distinguished Contributions to Teaching Award, the blog features postings on topical subjects and video interviews with well-known sociologists, as well as contributions from special guests during the academic year.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the many people who helped make this textbook possible. To everyone at W. W. Norton, we believe that you are absolutely the best publisher in the business and that we are fortunate to get to work with you. Thank you, Roby Harrington, for signing us. Our deep appreciation goes out to Steve Dunn for believing in us and playing such a critical role in shaping the original vision of this project. Thank you for showing us we could do this and for your substantial support throughout. We would like to acknowledge Melea Seward for her efforts during the early drafts of the book. Her innovative approach and enthusiasm were much appreciated. We owe much gratitude to Karl Bakeman for his tremendous talent, work, and dedication on our behalf. His vision and leadership have been an inspiration, and a central reason for the success of this book. We feel so lucky to be a part of your team. This edition marks the fifth with our tremendously gifted editor Sasha Levitt, who continues to bring phenomenally great ideas, energy, and enthusiasm to the project as well as a special talent for supporting us as authors. We appreciate how much you invested in joining us in this work. This edition is all the better because of your exceptional generosity, creativity, and determination.

We have many others to thank as well. We are especially grateful to our project editor, Diane Cipollone; production manager, Karen Romano; and assistant editors, Aidan Windorf and Quinn Campbell, for managing the countless details involved in creating this book. Jane Miller and Thomas Persano showed wonderful creativity in the photo research that they did for *The Real World*. Media editor Eileen Connell, associate media editor Alexandra Park, and media assistant editor Caleb Wertz developed the best teaching and learning tools in sociology. Design director Rubina Yeh, illustrator Alex Eben Meyer, and designer Jillian Burr deserve special thanks for creating the beautiful design and art for the book. And we are very appreciative of the exceptional Norton "travelers"; it is through their efforts that this book has gotten out into the world.

In the course of our creating the Ninth Edition, many instructors offered advice and comments on particular chapters, or in some cases, large sections of the text. We are deeply indebted to them.

Wesley C. Abercrombie, Midlands Technical College

Tennille Nicole Allen, Lewis University

Diana Ayers-Darling, Mohawk Valley Community College

Sadia Babar, Three Rivers Community College

Eric Bjorklund, Arizona State University

Maggie Bohm-Jordan, University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point

Jessica Brown, Houston Community College

Nina Brown, Community College of Baltimore County

Robyn Brown, Cape Fear Community College

Paul E. Calarco Jr., Hudson Valley Community College

Carlos J. Castro, Clark College

Matthew Cazessus, Greenville Technical College

Tonja Conerly, San Jacinto College

LaTasha K. Cooper, Bunker Hill Community College

Susan DeLoach, Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College

Rosemary Diaz, Westchester Community College

Maureen Ellis-Davis, Bergen Community College

Tabitha Epperson-Graham, Pensacola State College

Jonathan Felden, Wake Technical Community College

Dana Fennell, University of Southern Mississippi

Tammie J. Foltz, Des Moines Area Community College

Erin Hatton, University at Buffalo

Tiffany Hoard, Jackson State University

Portia Hopkins, Lee College

Brandon Jackson, Purdue University

David R. Jones, Holmes Community College

Ann Marie Kinnell, University of Southern Mississippi

Megan Klein, Oakton Community College

Camelia-Manuela Lataianu, Bergen Community College

Skyler Lauderdale, Pellissippi State Community College

Olena Leipnik, Sam Houston State University

Phil S. Lewis, Hudson Valley Community College

Diane W. Lindley, University of Mississippi

Belinda B. Lindsay, Prince George's Community College

Laurie C. Linhart, Des Moines Area Community College

Ying Ma, Austin Peay State University

Andrew Mannheimer, Clemson University

Laszlo Marcus, County College of Morris

Shane McInnis, Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College

Lisa Muñoz, Hawkeye Community College

Max Nash, Tyler Junior College

Mark Perry, University of Arkansas–Pulaski Technical College

Anna Piela, Oakton Community College

Dina Radeljas, Mohawk Valley Community College

Michael Ramirez, Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi

Kimberly A. Reed, Elgin Community College

Don Rittner, Westchester Community College

Ovetta D. Robinson-Heyward, Midlands Technical College

Leila Rogers, Horry-Georgetown Technical College

Peter R. Sawyer, Hudson Valley Community College

Carol Schmid, Guilford Technical Community College

Charles Selengut, County College of Morris

Chad Sexton, Ocean County College

Terri Slonaker, San Antonio College

Gerald D. Titchener, Des Moines Area Community College

Doug Valentine, University of Missouri

Jerrol David Weatherly, Coastal Carolina Community College

Arthur Weiner, Westchester Community College

Tamarra West, San Jacinto Community College

Jessica White-Magellan, San Diego City College and University of San Diego

Amy Wong, San Diego State University

Andrew A. Zekeri, Tuskegee University

We would also like to thank the research assistants who worked with us on earlier editions of this project: Laurica Brown, Nathaniel Burke, Whitney Bush, Kate Grimaldi, Lauren Gunther, Mary Ingram, Ja'Nean Palacios, and Karl Thulin. Very special thanks to Neil Dryden, and also to Natasha Chen Christiansen, whose thoughtful contributions to multiple editions of the text have proved invaluable.

We wish to especially thank the late Al Ferris for his wise and generous counsel in helping us establish our corporate identity and at every juncture along the way. Thanks to Kevin Ebenhoch for his friendly and efficient services. We would like to thank our families and friends whose encouragement and support helped sustain us through the length of this project and beyond. Kerry would like to thank Greg Wennerdahl, whose support and confidence in this project has been a source of strength through both joy and struggle. And to my favorite reader, E.J. Ferris-Wennerdahl: May you always approach life's challenges with wonder, hope, and a sense of endless possibility.

We recognize that our successes come not only as a result of our own hard work, and not only with the assistance of our support network, but also because of the positions we occupy in a stratified society. We self-identify as women, which means that we have experienced some of the obstacles that sexism presents, but we are also cisgender and heterosexual, so we have not faced the kind of prejudice that others may endure. While people from both of our ethnic backgrounds have been subject to discrimination in the United States and elsewhere, we are

both white and white-appearing, which is a privileged status in our society. We have benefited from the middle-class and upper-middle-class environments in which we were raised, and the high educational attainment of three out of four of our parents. Our immigrant ancestors arrived in the United States over a century ago, and our families have spoken English for two or more generations. We have certainly experienced difficulties over the course of our lives and careers and have faced obstacles that sometimes felt insurmountable, but only some of those difficulties stemmed from our positionality. While the sociological perspective helps us see and understand what the social world looks like outside the status positions we ourselves occupy, it is important to recognize that we do write from those positions, and to engage in critical self-reflection about what that means. The Ninth Edition of the text was written on Barbareño Chumash and Hocąk Winnebago land.

We are grateful to colleagues who have served as mentors in our intellectual development and as inspiration to a life of writing. And finally, we offer our thanks to all the students we have had the privilege to work with over the years. Getting to share the sociological imagination with you makes it all worthwhile.

Kerry Ferris

Jill Stein

Changes in the Ninth Edition

As with previous editions, all chapters were updated in the Ninth Edition, but the chapters on socialization and interaction, race and ethnicity, and health, as well as the chapter that covers populations, cities, and the environment, received the most substantive updates. Where possible, data have been updated to ensure we're providing the most current picture of society. We love to use examples pulled from the media, pop culture, and everyday life when discussing key sociological concepts and theories; many of these examples, from the emergence of South Korea as a cultural powerhouse to battles over gender-affirming care to the rise of book bans, have been updated in the Ninth Edition to ensure *The Real World* remains the most relevant textbook for today's students.

In Chapter 1 (Sociology and the Real World), we updated the discussion of reality TV shows as well as the On the Job feature. In Chapter 2 (Studying Social Life), we now discuss the results of a recent Pew Research Center survey on time use in American families during the pandemic in the section on survey research. We also added a new discussion of the differences between cross-sectional surveys and longitudinal surveys. The section on codes of ethics in the social sciences has been expanded to cover relationships to funding sources and the importance of transparency. The section on digital ethnography in the In the Future box on emerging methods now uses the example of an ethnography of online celebrations conducted during the pandemic. In the chapter on culture, we now discuss recent disputes over the content of K–12 education, including the uptick in book bans, in the section on culture wars. We also added a new discussion of the Korean wave, using examples such as the popularity of *Parasite* and *Squid Game* as well as K-Pop and K-beauty products, in the section on cultural diffusion, imperialism, and leveling. The In the Future box on online radicalization now highlights the 2022 mass shooting at a Buffalo grocery store. Chapter 4 (Socialization, Interaction, and the Self) includes a new discussion of impression management in online interaction that highlights research on how college students organize their social media personae. We also added a new section titled "Postmodern Theories of the Self," which brings in new research by Randall Collins on what happens when people are largely unable to interact face-to-face, as was the case during the pandemic. The section on schools as an agent of socialization now discusses Florida's "Don't Say Gay" bill as well as book bannings by school boards. We also added a discussion of the impact of social media, specifically Instagram, on users' mental and physical health in the section on media as an agent of socialization. Finally, we now use the example of NCAA student-athletes when talking about role conflict.

In Chapter 5, on groups, we revisited the discussion of Granvetter's study on the strength of weak ties and we also added a discussion of a 2022 study by a group of scholars from MIT using 20 million LinkedIn profiles that confirmed Granvetter's findings. The discussion of virtual communities now includes coverage of the "metaverse." Data on social media usage in the Analyzing Media and Pop Culture Data Workshop have been updated. When talking about bureaucracies, we added Adobe as an example of an enlightened bureaucracy, highlighting the company's decision to eliminate formal performance reviews. The In Relationships box now uses LinkedIn as an example of a company that has conducted experiments on users. In Chapter 6 (Deviance), we point to rappers such as Young Thug and Kid Cudi donning skirts

and dresses when introducing the concept of deviance. We also discuss Ye's antisemitic and racist behavior—and the ensuing backlash—in the section on functionalism to demonstrate how deviance can help society clarify its moral boundaries. The section on conflict theory now explores how people living in poverty are disadvantaged in a capitalist system, drawing on research by Desmond and Wilmer. We also use the example of bans on gender-affirming care when talking about the process of social control. The popular TV shows *Breaking Bad* and *Better Call Saul* are now used to explain the concepts of primary and secondary deviance. When discussing the concept of in-group orientation, we point to Lizzo and her show *Watch Out for the Big Grrrls*. Data throughout the section on the study of crime have been updated. Finally, we added a new section, "Trends in Criminal Justice," that explores both the rise of private prisons as well as the shift toward community-oriented policing (COP). In the In Relationships box, data on cyberbullying have been updated.

We updated the opener for Chapter 7 (Social Class) on students' experiences of food and housing insecurity based on the newest version of the "Real College" surveys from the HOPE Center for College, Community, and Justice at Temple University. In the section on modern-day slavery, we now discuss the controversy over FIFA holding the 2022 World Cup in Qatar and the country's use of migrant labor to build and staff the facilities for the Games. Data on human trafficking have been updated. In the section on Work and Income, we now discuss the staggering growth of CEO pay and its role in increasing income inequality in the United States as well as the impact of the pandemic on low-income workers. Data throughout the section on poverty have been updated. We also thoroughly updated the discussion on support for a government social safety net to help the poor based on reports from the Pew Research Center. A reworked and retitled section, "Explaining Poverty," now contrasts individualistic explanations for poverty with structural explanations for poverty, which explores new research by Mark Rank and his colleagues.

In Chapter 8 (Race and Ethnicity as Lived Experience), we clarified and expanded the discussion of situational and symbolic ethnicity, using *The Mandalorian* actors Rosario Dawson and Giancarlo Esposito as examples. In the section on white privilege and color-blind racism, we expanded the coverage of Du Bois and added a discussion of Jennifer Mueller's research on racial privilege. We updated the discussion of affirmative action based on the recent Supreme Court decisions involving Harvard University and the University of North Carolina. We also expanded the discussion of antiracist allies, providing more suggestions for ways people can work toward change in their own spheres of influence. In the section on conflict theory, we added a discussion of Robert P. Jones's 2021 book *White Too Long: The Legacy of the White Supremacy in American Christianity*. We expanded the discussion of critical race theory, drawing on the work of Victor Ray and his 2022 book *On Critical Race Theory: Why It Matters and Why You Should Care*. We then turn back to Ray when discussing the social construction of race. When discussing racial passing, we now highlight Angela S. Garcia's research on "legal passing." Data throughout the section on race, ethnicity, and life chances have been updated. We also added a discussion of the impact of mass incarceration on American families, particularly Black families. The section on intersectionality now includes a substantive discussion of Shannon Malone Gonzalez's in-depth interview research of Black mothers and the advice they give to their children about the risks of interacting with law enforcement officers and how that advice differs not just based on the gender of the child but also the social class of the parents. Finally, we updated the Global Perspective box to provide a more current picture of the crisis at the Southern border.

In Chapter 9, on gender and sexuality, we expanded the section on the media, which now includes a discussion of social media use during Covid as well as the impact of social media on girls' sense of self. Data throughout the section on gender, sexuality, and life chances section have been updated. We reworked the Data Workshop on Analyzing Everyday Life to incorporate the experiences of same-sex and queer couples. Finally, we revamped and expanded the discussion of the third wave of feminism, adding coverage of Black feminism and transnational feminism. In Chapter 10, the discussion of the American political system now includes a dedicated section on the three branches of government. We updated the coverage of felon disenfranchisement based on the newest report from the Sentencing Project. We thoroughly revised the section of social media and politics, adding a new discussion of filter bubbles on alternative sites such as Parler, Gettr, and Truth Social. In the section on education, we expanded the discussion of dual enrolment programs to account for their tremendous growth in recent years. We now mention the 2022 Supreme Court decision supporting a football coach's right to pray on the field during games when discussing whether the United States is a secular society. We updated the In the Future box, which now introduces readers to the faces of the 118th Congress. And finally, we now end the chapter with a discussion of the current controversies surrounding transgender athletes in school sports.

Chapter 11 (The Economy and Work) includes an updated discussion of wealth inequality in the section on capitalism. We now use the example of "quiet quitting" when talking about individual resistance to bureaucracy. Data on union membership and work stoppages have been updated. We also added a discussion of the recent organizing efforts at Starbucks stores across the country. In Chapter 12 on families we expanded the discussion of online dating based on recent reports on the topic by the Pew Research Center, and also added an accompanying figure with data on online dating usage by gender, age, and sexual orientation; this section also now discusses the recent book *The Dating Divide: Race and Desire in the Age of Online Romance*. Data and public opinion on cohabitation have been updated in the section on unmarried life. The section on single and solo parenting now highlights the research of Christina Cross on Black families. Data on the graying of the U.S. population have been updated in the "Aging in the Family" section. We also updated the discussion of intimate partner violence with the most recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The In the Future box now highlights recent research that found that doulas can help reduce racial disparities in maternal outcomes.

In Chapter 13 on leisure and media we added a mention of gamers and how they can interact with other players in virtual spaces when discussing the digitization of leisure. In the section on conglomeration, we highlight the failed merger of publishing giants Penguin Random House and Simon & Schuster. We updated and expanded the section on the regulation of internet content, adding more coverage of social media, including recent attempts to ban TikTok. Data on leisure time and spending on entertainment have all been updated. We also added a new discussion of influencers in the leisure and relationships section, highlighting data from the Pew Research Center as well as research by Brooke Erin Duffy. Chapter 14 on health and illness now introduces the term *social determinants of health*, which was added as a key term. Data throughout, on the top diseases, AIDS, and life expectancy, have all been updated. In the "Issues in Medicine and Health Care" section, we added a brand-new section, titled "Youth in Crisis," that tackles both the adolescent mental health crisis, drawing on research by Jean Twenge, as well as the battle over gender-affirming care for children and adolescents. We also updated the In the Future box on opioid addiction, adding more coverage of the rise of

fentanyl. Finally, we revamped the In Relationships feature on autism, which now discusses neurodivergence and the neurodiversity movement and contrasts the medical model of disability with the social model.

Chapter 15 (Populations, Cities, and the Environment) starts with a new opener on eco-anxiety and eco-grief, which refer to feelings of worry and despair about the future of the planet. Data throughout the demography section, on global fertility rates, mortality rates, and migration, have all been updated. We expanded the discussion of key population trends, particularly the coverage of the graying of the U.S. population and the implications of that trend. The "Trends in Urbanization" section now includes a discussion of Robert Park and Ernest Burgess's concentric zone, or ecological, model of cities. The section on environmental problems has been substantially revised to provide an up-to-date picture of the climate crisis, including current coverage of the decline of biodiversity and the problem of food waste. We also highlight the recent water crisis in Jackson, Mississippi, when talking about the country's aging water infrastructure. We cover recent legislation passed by the Biden Administration to address the climate crisis. Public opinion on the climate crisis has been updated based on recent reports from the Pew Research Center. Finally, in the section on environmental justice, we now cover the landmark climate change lawsuit *Held v. Montana*. In Chapter 16 (Social Change), we added a discussion of the protests in Iran and in cities across the country after the death of Jina Mahsa Amini, a twenty-two-year-old Kurdish woman who was arrested by the morality police for improperly wearing her hijab. In the section on technology and social change, we use ChatGPT as an example of a technological advance with unanticipated consequences. The discussion of the most popular shows and movies worldwide has been updated. In the On the Job feature, we added data from the American Sociological Association on graduates with bachelor's degrees in sociology.

A new Norton Illumine Ebook for the Ninth Edition uses interactives, video, and other rich multimedia to teach core sociological concepts and theories in ways that support students' varied learning styles. Embedded Check Your Understanding questions with rich answer-specific feedback tied to learning objectives allow students to assess their comprehension after reading short sections of text, a practice backed by learning science. New Theory in Everyday Life interactives, based on the popular in-text tables, provide additional help understanding key sociological perspectives, walking readers through a case study and assessing their understanding with multiple-choice and drag-and-drop questions. The Norton Illumine Ebook also features new Dynamic Data Figures, which give readers the opportunity to engage with key data sets; accompanying Check Your Understanding questions after select figures ensure students aren't skipping over important figures and graphs. At the end of every chapter, a short Sociology in Practice video clip elucidates a key concept from the chapter or helps students apply what they've learned by seeing a chapter concept "in practice."

PART I
Thinking Sociologically and Doing Sociology

Tressie worked as a recruiter at a for-profit technical college. It was a sales job, and she was selling a piece of the American Dream—education—to students for whom it might be otherwise out of reach. But she soon realized that the school she worked at exploited its mostly female and nonwhite students, encouraging them to take out loans too big to pay back and misleading them about their job prospects after graduation. Her work ended up providing data for her doctoral research at Emory University, and she is now recognized as an expert on inequality and for-profit education. She later went on to write a best-selling book of personal essays about her experiences as a Black woman in American life and academia.

Victor was a gang member who dropped out of school when he was fourteen and learned to steal cars, landing him in juvenile detention. If not for the intervention of one extraordinarily dedicated high school teacher who held on to her high expectations for him, Victor's life story might not have turned out so well. He went on to earn a doctorate in ethnic studies, examining the street life he had once known.

Matthew worked as a wildland firefighter in the rugged backcountry of northern Arizona where he grew up, earning money in this dangerous profession to help put himself through college. Like many of his fellow firefighters, he came from a rural, working-class background where the practical skills he acquired proved useful in the context of this risky, sometimes even

deadly, job. He drew upon this experience when writing his first book, *On the Fireline: Living and Dying with Wildland Firefighters*. Matthew was likewise inspired by another event from his past—losing his childhood home to foreclosure. The anger and humiliation he felt at the time later drove him to study issues surrounding housing. When he was a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin, he moved into a trailer park in Milwaukee to better understand how evictions exacerbate poverty.

What do these people have in common? They are all prominent American sociology professors. You may not have heard of them (yet), but they have each made an exceptional impact on their profession.

Tressie McMillan Cottom

Victor Rios

Matthew Desmond

Tressie McMillan Cottom is a professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a faculty associate at Harvard's Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society. She has appeared on *The Daily Show*, among other shows, and testified before Congress on student loan debt. As a regular columnist for *The New York Times*, she offers a sociological perspective on culture, politics, and the economics of everyday life. A professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara, Victor Rios is a sought-after author and speaker. His sometimes-autobiographical research on race, law enforcement, and social control led him to found a program for what he calls "at-promise" youth (Rios feels strongly that the label "at-risk" is damaging to students). Matthew Desmond is a sociology professor at Princeton University. *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, his powerful firsthand account of deep poverty and homelessness in America, earned widespread acclaim, including a Pulitzer Prize. In 2017, he founded the Eviction Lab with the aim of collecting national data on evictions to better understand residential instability in the United States.

McMillan Cottom, Rios, and Desmond each have a unique story about how they ended up in sociology and built a career in academia. It was not obvious from the beginning that any of them would be academic superstars; they each faced a different set of obstacles to success but were somehow motivated to keep on. Perhaps it was because they had been deeply touched by something happening in the real world, something that was also relevant to their own lives. It inspired in them a passion for pursuing a question, an issue, or a cause that was meaningful to them. They have each made important connections between their personal lives and their professional careers. In turn, their work extends beyond academia, making a collective contribution to the lives of individuals and even to society as a whole.

Their paths to sociology were very different, and they have each taught and researched different topics. Despite these differences, they share a way of looking at the world. Sociologists have a unique viewpoint called the "sociological perspective." In fact, we hope that you will acquire your own version of the sociological perspective over the course of this term. Then you will share something in common with these and other sociology professors, including your own.

McMillan Cottom, Rios, and Desmond also hold in common their commitment to sociological theories and concepts. This means that their ideas—and the questions they ask and answer—are guided by the established traditions of sociological thought. They may build on those traditions or criticize them, but every sociologist engages in a theoretical dialogue that links centuries and generations. You will become part of this dialogue as you learn more about sociological theory.

Finally, McMillan Cottom, Rios, Desmond, and others like them conduct their research using specific sociological methods. Whether quantitative or qualitative, these means of gathering and analyzing data are distinctive to sociology, and every sociologist develops research projects using the methods best suited to the questions they want to answer.

Each sociologist's personal journey affects their professional legacy, and knowing something about an author's life helps students understand the author's work. A person's values, experiences, and family context all shape their interests and objectives—and this is as true of eminent sociologists as it will be for you.

In the first part of this book, we will introduce you to the discipline of sociology and its theoretical traditions (Chapter 1) and to the work of sociology and its research methodologies (Chapter 2). This section is your opportunity to get to know sociology—its perspectives, theories, and research practices.

Perhaps someday your intellectual autobiography will be added to those of McMillan Cottom, Rios, and Desmond—and your story will start by opening this book.

CHAPTER 1
Sociology and the Real World

A shiny black SUV pulls up in front of your home or workplace and suddenly you are under the spell of the Fab Five: Antoni, Bobby, Jonathan, Karamo, and Tan—a quintet of gay men skilled in culture, fashion, grooming, design, and cuisine. Their mission each week: to save a different sad sack from themselves. The Fab Five are there to get the nominees a much-needed pedicure, tweak their pasta salad recipe, redecorate their living room, take them to trapeze class, get them into a slimming pair of jeans, shave off that stubbly beard, perfect their "smoky eye," and teach them how to overcome their fears or be a better parent. They have great chemistry and always succeed, raising champagne glasses in their hip loft at the end of each episode.

Each week, two contestants, one man and one woman, total strangers and completely naked, are dropped deep into the wilderness with almost no supplies to see if they can survive together for twenty-one days. In journeys across six continents, in such places as the Australian outback, the jungles of Belize, and the savannah of Namibia, these pairs of contestants are tested both physically and mentally, forced to discover what they're truly made of. Will they "tap out" and ask to leave the competition early, or will they have the fortitude to prevail through whatever hardships their journey delivers? And perhaps most importantly, can these strangers forge the working partnership so essential to the act of survival, or will pride, fear, or some other human weakness undermine their success?

A group of single women and a group of single men live separately in luxurious, dormitory-style quarters, and interact only with a wall of opaque glass between them. All the women get a chance to meet all the men, and then they have ten days to choose a mate and agree to an engagement—all without ever seeing one another in person. Once engaged, they are finally allowed to see each other and must work together quickly to prepare for a wedding in three weeks. The couples fly off to a Mexican resort, return to meet their future in-laws, and plan the wedding together, all in quick succession. After thirty-eight days, they arrive at the altar to reveal to their assembled family and friends whether they will go through with the planned nuptials. How many couples will ultimately take the plunge?

Is any of this real? Yes—kind of. It's "reality television," specifically Netflix's *Queer Eye*, Discovery's *Naked and Afraid*, and Netflix's *Love Is Blind*. And there's a lot more where those came from. *The Amazing Race, RuPaul's Drag Race, Alone,* and *The Great British Baking Show*—as well as the show that started it all in 1992, MTV's *The Real World*—are just a few of the more popular shows.

Some of the shows claim to follow real people through their everyday lives or on the job, while others impose bizarre conditions on participants, subject them to stylized competitions and gross-out stunts, or make their dreams come true. Millions tune in every week to see real people eat bugs, get fired, suffer romantic rejection, reveal their poor parenting, get branded as

fat or ugly, cry over their misfortunes, or get voted out of the house or off the island—mortifying themselves on camera for the possibility of success, money, or fame.

Why are we so interested in these people? Because people are interesting! Because we are people too. No matter how different we are from the folks on reality TV, we are part of the same society, and for that reason we are curious about how they live. We compare their lives with ours, wonder how common or unusual they or we are, and marvel that we are all part of the same, real world. We, too, may want to win competitions, date an attractive person, find a high-profile job, feel pretty or handsome, be part of an exclusive group, or have a lovely home and family. We may even want to be on a reality show ourselves. If any of this resonates with you, then you've already got a jump start on sociology—it's all about people too.

How to Read This Chapter

You are embarking on a fascinating journey as you learn to see, think, and analyze yourself and the world around you from a sociological perspective. The tools presented here will help you build a foundation for new knowledge and insights into social life.

We will also share the story of the historical and intellectual development of the discipline of sociology. We want to show you how the ideas that shape sociology are linked and introduce you to the interesting people who came up with those ideas. Too often, theorists seem to be talking heads, icons of social analysis who experience neither life-altering calamities nor shifting professional fortunes. We want to overcome that perception. We believe that our individual experiences and historical contexts shape our thoughts and the professional worlds we choose to join. This is as true for Karl Marx as it is for Kerry Ferris, as true for Jane Addams as it is for Jill Stein—it's true for all of us; your own experiences and cultural and historical contexts will shape your ideas and work. In fact, someday, someone may write a chapter about you!

As authors and teachers, we encourage you to develop some basic study techniques that will assist you in your success as a new student to sociology (and perhaps beyond). You may want to highlight portions of the text or take notes while you read. Mark passages that you don't understand, or keep a list of questions about any aspect of the chapter. Don't hesitate to discuss those questions with your instructor or fellow students; those dialogues can be one of the most gratifying parts of the learning process. Finally, we recommend that you attend class regularly —whether you're in a face-to-face classroom or online—as there is really no substitute for the shared experience of learning sociology with others.

We are excited to join you on this journey of discovery. Though you may know a lot about social life already, we hope to introduce you to even more—about yourself and the world around you—and to provide valuable tools for the future. We wouldn't want you to miss a thing. So here is where we start.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Define sociology and contrast it with the other social sciences.
- Explain what it means to think sociologically as well as ways you can cultivate this way of thinking.
- Contrast micro- and macrosociology.
- Summarize the contributions of the early theorists of sociology, including Comte, Martineau, and Spencer.
- Describe the main tenets of the macrosociological theories of structural functionalism, conflict theory, and Weberian theory.
- Describe the main tenets of symbolic interactionism as well as the contributions of its early practitioners.
- Explain how postmodernism and midrange theory are responses to changes in the social world as well as within sociology.

WHAT IS SOCIOLOGY?

Even among those working in the field, there is some debate about defining sociology. A look at the term's Latin and Greek roots, *socius* and *logos*, suggests that sociology means the study of society, which is a good place to start. A slightly more elaborate definition might be the systematic or scientific study of human society and social behavior. This could include almost any level within the structure of society, from large-scale institutions and mass culture to small groups and relationships between individuals.

Another definition comes from Howard Becker (1986), who suggests that sociology can best be understood as the study of people "doing things together." This version reminds us that neither society nor the individual exists in isolation and that humans are essentially social beings. Not only is our survival contingent on the fact that we live in various groups (families, neighborhoods, dorms), but also our sense of self derives from our membership in society. In turn, the accumulated activities that people do together create the patterns and structures we call society. So sociologists want to understand how humans affect society, as well as how society affects humans.

One way to better understand sociology is to contrast it with other social sciences, disciplines that examine the human or social world, much as the natural sciences examine the natural or physical world. These include anthropology, psychology, economics, political science, and sometimes history, geography, and communication studies. Each has its own particular focus on the social world. In some ways, sociology's territory overlaps with other social sciences, even while maintaining its own approach.

Like history, sociology compares the past and the present in order to understand both; unlike history, sociology is more likely to focus on contemporary society. Sociology is interested in societies at all levels of development, while anthropology is more likely to concentrate on traditional or small, indigenous cultures. Sociology looks at a range of social institutions, unlike economics or political science, which each focuses on a single institution. Like geography, sociology considers the relationship of people to places, though geography is more concerned with the places themselves. And like communication studies, sociology examines human communication—at both the social and the interpersonal levels, rather than one or the other. Finally, sociology looks at the individual in relationship to external social forces, whereas psychology specializes in internal states of mind. As you can begin to see, sociology covers a huge intellectual territory, making it exceptional among the social sciences in taking a comprehensive, integrative approach to understanding human life (Figure 1.1).

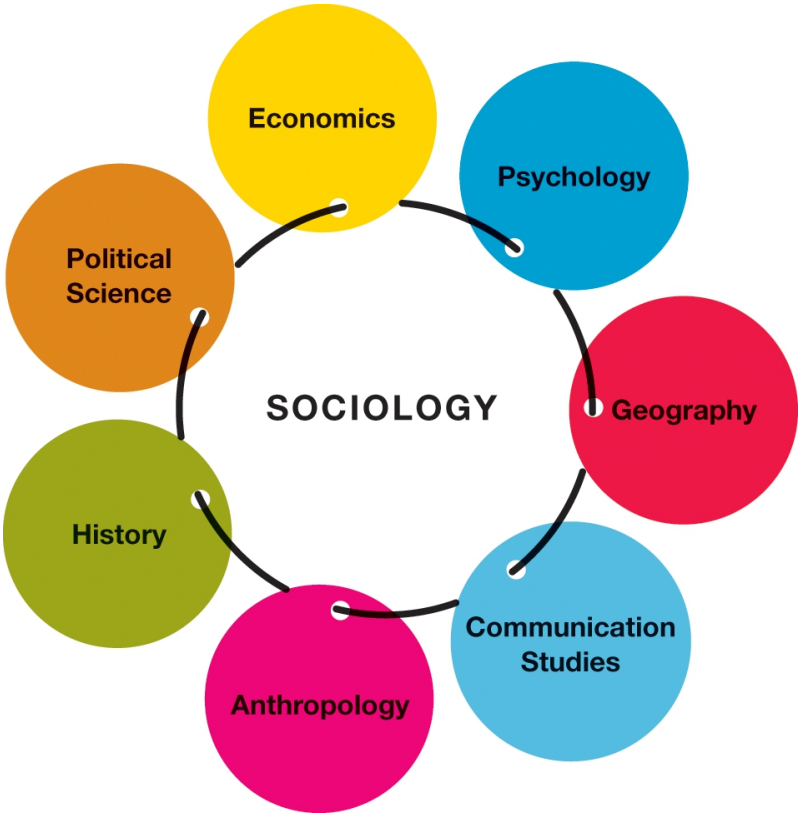


FIGURE 1.1 Sociology and the Social Sciences

Sociology overlaps with other social sciences, but much of the territory it covers is unique.

Glossary

SOCIOLOGY
: the systematic or scientific study of human society and social behavior, from large-scale institutions and mass culture to small groups and individual interactions

SOCIETY
: a group of people who shape their lives in aggregated and patterned ways that distinguish their group from others

SOCIAL SCIENCES
: the disciplines that use the scientific method to examine the social world

HOW TO THINK LIKE A SOCIOLOGIST

How do sociologists go about understanding human life in society? The first step is to develop what we call the sociological perspective, which is also referred to as taking a sociological approach or thinking sociologically. In any case, it means looking at the world in a unique way and seeing it in a whole new light. You may be naturally inclined to think sociologically, but, for many, the following practices are helpful.

Practical vs. Scientific Knowledge

You already possess many of the skills of an astute analyst of social life, but you take your knowledge for granted because you gained it as an everyday actor. In this course, you will build a new identity: social analyst. These are two very different ways of experiencing the same social world.

Everyday actors approach their social world with what is referred to as "reciped," or practical, knowledge (Schutz 1962), which allows them to get along in their everyday life. However, practical knowledge is not necessarily as coherent, clear, and consistent as it could be. For example, you are probably very skilled at using a smartphone. It brings you into daily contact with friends and family, puts you in touch with the pizza delivery guy, and allows you to register for classes and find out your grades at the end of the term. But you probably can't explain how it works in a technical way; you know only how it works for you in a practical, everyday way. This is the important feature of the everyday actor's knowledge: It is practical, not scientific.

To acquire knowledge about the social world that is systematic, comprehensive, coherent, clear, and consistent, you'll need to take a different approach. The social analyst has to "place in question everything that seems unquestionable" to the everyday actor (Schutz 1962, p. 96). In other words, the social analyst takes the perspective of a stranger in the social world; a social analyst tries to verify what the everyday actor might just accept as truth. For instance, people tend to believe that women are more talkative than men. This might seem so evident, in fact, as not to be worth investigating. The social analyst, however, *would* investigate and deliver a more complex conclusion than you might think.

There are strengths and weaknesses in both approaches: The analyst sees with clarity what the actor glosses over, but the actor understands implicitly what the analyst labors to grasp. Once you've learned more about the theories and methods that come next, you'll be able to combine the virtues of both analyst and actor. The result will be a more profound and comprehensive understanding of the social world.

Beginner's Mind

One technique for gaining a sociological perspective comes from Bernard McGrane (1994), who promotes a shift in thinking borrowed from the Zen Buddhist tradition. McGrane suggests that we practice what is called beginner's mind—the opposite of expert's mind, which is so filled with facts, projections, assumptions, opinions, and explanations that it can't learn anything new. If we would like to better understand the world around us, we must unlearn what we already know. Beginner's mind approaches the world without knowing in advance what it will find; it is open and receptive to experience.

Perhaps our greatest obstacle to making new discoveries is our habitual ways of thinking. "Discovery," McGrane says, "is not the seeing of a new thing—but rather a new way of seeing things" (1994, p. 3). One way to achieve this kind of awareness is to practice being present in the moment. You might have tried this already if you've done any training in what is called "mindfulness." The problem is that we are often preoccupied with thoughts and feelings that prevent us from fully participating in reality. If we can find some inner stillness and stop our normal mental chatter, McGrane says, then there is a possibility for true learning to occur. It is in this quiet space that a personal "paradigm shift" (a new model for understanding self and society) can take place.

DATA WORKSHOP

Analyzing Everyday Life

Doing Nothing

Zen sociologist Bernard McGrane suggests that we actually "do" sociology, rather than just study it. His book *The Un-TV and the 10 MPH Car* (1994) features exercises designed to help students experience the mundane, routine, and everyday level of society in a new way. This Data Workshop is an adaptation of one of his experiments. You will be practicing beginner's mind, one of the ways to gain a sociological perspective, or to think like a sociologist.

Step 1: Conducting the Experiment

This exercise requires that you stand in a relatively busy public space (a shopping center, street corner, park, or campus quad) and literally do nothing for ten minutes. That means just standing there and being unoccupied. Don't wait for someone, take a break, sightsee, or otherwise engage in a normal kind of activity. Also don't daydream or think about the past or the future; don't entertain yourself with plans or internal dialogues. Don't whistle, hum, fidget, look in your bag, play with your phone, take notes, or do anything else that might distract you from just being there and doing nothing. Do, however, observe the reactions of others to you, and pay attention to your own thoughts and feelings during these ten minutes.

Step 2: Taking Notes about the Experience

Immediately after conducting the experiment, write some informal notes about what happened or did not happen. These notes can be loosely structured (with sentence fragments or bullet points), and they should be casual and written in the first person. Discuss the experience and its meaning to you in as much detail as possible. Include a description of other people's reactions as well as your own thoughts and feelings before, during, and after the experiment.

This exercise may seem deceptively simple at first, but the subtle change from "doing something" to "doing nothing" makes everything different. It helps turn the ordinary world into a strange place. It makes you more aware of your own sense of self (or lack thereof) and how identity is constructed through interaction. You may find it challenging to put aside the mental and physical activities that you normally engage in to pass the time. And you may feel uncomfortable standing in a public place when other people can't quite figure out who you are and what you're doing. Finally, you will no longer be able to take for granted how the meaning of a situation is being defined or interpreted. Divested of your role as an everyday actor, you'll learn how the most mundane activities (like just standing around) can become major objects of sociological inquiry.

There are two options for completing this Data Workshop:

PREP-PAIR-SHARE

Complete the exercise and bring your written notes to class. Partner with another student and take turns presenting your findings. Discuss the ways in which your experiences were similar or different. What was it like to "do" sociology? Did you see things in a new way? What was the most interesting part about conducting the experiment?

DO-IT-YOURSELF

Complete the exercise and write a two- to three-page essay based on the main concepts and prompts from this Data Workshop. Describe your experience and the results of your research. How did the experiment help you learn to think more like a sociologist? You may want to include snippets of your informal written notes to illustrate your points. Attach the informal notes to your finished essay.

Doing Nothing How does standing in a crowded place and doing nothing change how you experience the ordinary world?

IN RELATIONSHIPS

It's Official: Men Talk More Than Women

The practice of sociology may seem to be about just a bunch of common sense. But this is true only part of the time. Some of what you learn may indeed seem familiar and may confirm some of the conclusions you've made about it. Drawing on the personal knowledge you have accumulated in life will be a valuable asset as a starting place, but it can also be a stumbling block to deeper understanding. There are times that the things that "everyone knows" turn out not to be true, or at least not as simple as we might have thought.

Take, for instance, the widely held belief that women talk more than men. Experience seems to confirm that this is true, obviously! Women are chatty, and a lot of men, if not the strong silent type, definitely have trouble getting a word in edgewise. And women have a hard time getting men to talk when they want them to; sometimes, to get a man to tell you what he's thinking, you have to drag it out of him. While you may recognize this description of the different genders and may be able to relate with your own anecdote of such an encounter (or perhaps many such encounters), your casual assumptions about who talks more may need some revising. Numerous sociological studies that analyze conversational dynamics show that, despite stereotypes to the contrary, it's actually men who are slightly more talkative (Leaper and Ayres 2007). How could that be?

Well, it depends on the context. Men are more talkative with their wives and with strangers. Women are more talkative with their children and with college classmates. With close friends and families, men and women are equally talkative. Studies have also shown other, perhaps

more easily predictable, gender differences. For example, men use speech that is more assertive (they want to persuade others), whereas women use speech that is more affiliative (they are more focused on connecting with others). Sociologists have long noted that men are also more dominant in conversations, cutting off and interrupting women more often (Anderson and Leaper 1998; Hancock and Rubin 2015; Kollock, Blumstein, and Schwartz 1985; Zimmerman and West 1975).

"Mansplaining" is another way that men assert their dominance in conversations (Solnit 2008). The word is rather new, but the idea has been around for decades (Manne 2020). Mansplaining is the tendency, especially for men, to explain things in a condescending or patronizing way, with the presumption that the one doing the explaining knows more than the listener (even when this is clearly not the case). Men are more likely to "mansplain" in conversations with women, reinforcing gender stereotypes about who has more power and, in these cases, more knowledge. Perhaps because so many people have been on the receiving end of mansplaining, the word has gained acceptance into the current lexicon as well as the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Steinmetz 2014). There are also words for it in French (*mecspliquer*), German (*herrklären*), and even Icelandic (*hrútskýring*). It has become a useful label for a widely recognized behavior. Of course, it's not only men who engage in mansplaining to women; sometimes men mansplain to other men, and sometimes women do it to men or to each other (McClintock 2016).

These findings seem to defy what has been considered a biological fact, that the female brain is wired to be more verbal. But because who talks more varies by situation, the evidence seems to indicate that language and conversational differences are influenced more by social forces than biological forces, including power dynamics. So despite how it might feel from your own personal experience, sociology has debunked some common myths about women and men, requiring us to rethink simplistic gender stereotypes.

This is why doing sociology is in some regards a radical undertaking. It requires of us a willingness to suspend our own preconceptions, assumptions, and beliefs about the way things are. As sociologists, we need to learn to question everything, especially our own taken-for-granted notions about others and ourselves. Once these notions have been set aside, even temporarily, we gain a fresh perspective with which to uncover and discover aspects of social life we hadn't noticed before. We are then able to reinterpret our previous understanding of the world, perhaps challenging, or possibly confirming, what we thought we already knew.

"I'm speaking" During the vice presidential debate, former vice president Mike Pence interrupted then-senator Kamala Harris ten times, more than twice as often as Harris interrupted him.

Culture Shock

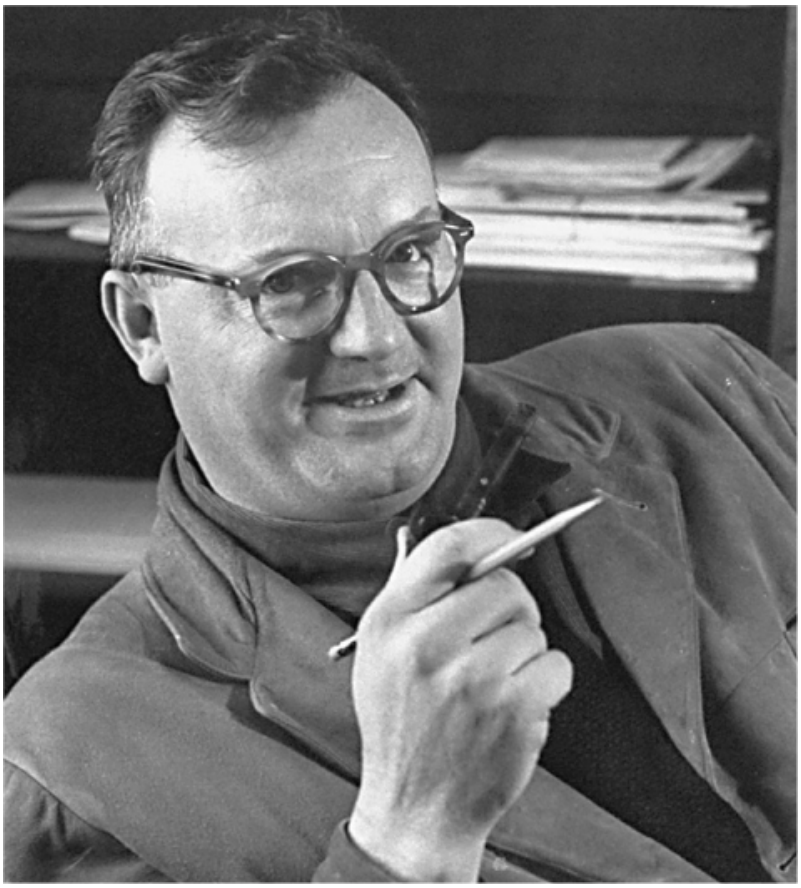
Peter Berger (1963) describes the kind of person who becomes a sociologist: someone with a passionate interest in the world of human affairs, someone who is intense, curious, and daring in the pursuit of knowledge. "People who like to avoid shocking discoveries . . . should stay away from sociology," he warns (p. 24). The sociologist cares about the issues of ultimate importance to humanity, as well as the most mundane occurrences of everyday existence.

Another way to gain a sociological perspective is to attempt to create in ourselves a sense of culture shock. Anthropologists use the term to describe the experience of visiting a foreign culture. The first encounters with the local natives and their way of life can seem so strange to us that they produce a kind of disorientation and doubt about our ability to make sense of things. Putting all judgment aside for the moment, this state of mind can be very useful. For it is at this point, when we so completely lack an understanding of our surroundings, that we are truly able to perceive what is right in front of our eyes.

As sociologists, we try to create this effect without necessarily displacing ourselves geographically: We become curious and eager visitors to our own lives. We often find that what is familiar to us, if viewed from an outsider's perspective, is just as exotic as some foreign culture, only we've forgotten this is true because it's our own and we know it so well. To better understand this state of mind, you might imagine what it would be like to return home after being shipwrecked and living alone on a desert island. Or, if you've traveled abroad

or moved away to attend college or for a job, perhaps it's something you've already experienced but didn't know what to call.

The Sociological Imagination



C. Wright Mills

One of the classic statements about the sociological perspective comes from C. Wright Mills (1916–1962), who describes a quality of mind that all great social analysts seem to possess: the sociological imagination. By this, he means the ability to understand "the intersection between biography and history," or the interplay of the micro world of the self and individual psychology and the macro world of larger social forces; this is sociology's task and its "promise" (Mills 1959).

We normally think of our own problems as a private matter of character, chance, or circumstance, and we overlook the fact that these may be caused in part by, or at least occur within, a specific cultural and historical context. For example, if you can't find a job, you may feel that it's because you don't have the right skills, educational background, or experience. But it may also be the result of problems in the larger economy such as outsourcing, downsizing, restrictive policies, changing technologies, or migration patterns. In other words, your individual unemployment may be part of a larger social and historical phenomenon.

Most of the time, we use psychological rather than sociological arguments to explain the way things are. For instance, if someone is carrying a lot of credit card debt, psychological reasoning might focus on the person's lack of self-control or inability to delay gratification. Sociological reasoning, however, might focus on the impact of cultural norms that promote a lifestyle beyond most people's means or on economic changes that require more Americans to rely on credit cards because their wages have not kept up with inflation.

The sociological imagination searches for the link between micro and macro levels of analysis. We must look for how larger social forces, such as race, class, gender, religion, economics, or politics, are involved in creating the context of a person's life. Mills's characterization of sociology as the intersection between biography and history reminds us that the process works in both directions: Although larger social forces influence individual lives, individual lives can affect society as well.

One of the most important benefits of using the sociological imagination is access to a world beyond our own immediate sphere, where we can discover radically different ways of experiencing life and interpreting reality. It can help us appreciate alternative viewpoints and understand how they may have come about. This, in turn, helps us better understand how we developed our own values, beliefs, and attitudes.

Sociology asks us to see our familiar world in a new way, and doing so means we may need to abandon, or at least reevaluate, our opinions about that world and our place in it. It is tempting to believe that our opinions are widely held, that our worldview is the best or, at least, most common. Taking a sociological perspective forces us to see fallacies in our way of thinking. Because other individuals are different from us—belonging to different social groups, participating in different social institutions, living in different cities or countries, listening to different songs, watching different TV shows, engaging in different religious practices—they may look at the world very differently than we do. But a sociological perspective also allows us to see the other side of this equation: In cases where we assume that others are different from us, we may be surprised to find that their approach to their everyday world is quite similar to ours.

Glossary

SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE
: a way of looking at the world through a sociological lens

BEGINNER'S MIND
: approaching the world without preconceptions in order to see things in a new way

CULTURE SHOCK
: a sense of disorientation that occurs when entering a radically new social or cultural environment

SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION
: a quality of the mind that allows us to understand the relationship between our individual circumstances and larger social forces

LEVELS OF ANALYSIS: MICRO- AND MACROSOCIOLOGY

Consider a photographer with state-of-the-art equipment. The photographer can view their subject through either a zoom lens or a wide-angle lens. Through the zoom lens, the photographer sees intricate details about the subject's appearance; through the wide-angle lens, they get the "big picture" and a sense of the broader context in which the subject is located. Both views are valuable in understanding the subject, and both result in photographs of the same thing.

Sociological perspectives are like the photographer's lenses, giving us different ways of looking at a common subject (Newman 2000). Sociologists can take a microsociological (zoom lens) perspective, a macrosociological (wide-angle lens) perspective, or any number of perspectives located on the continuum between the two (Figure 1.2).

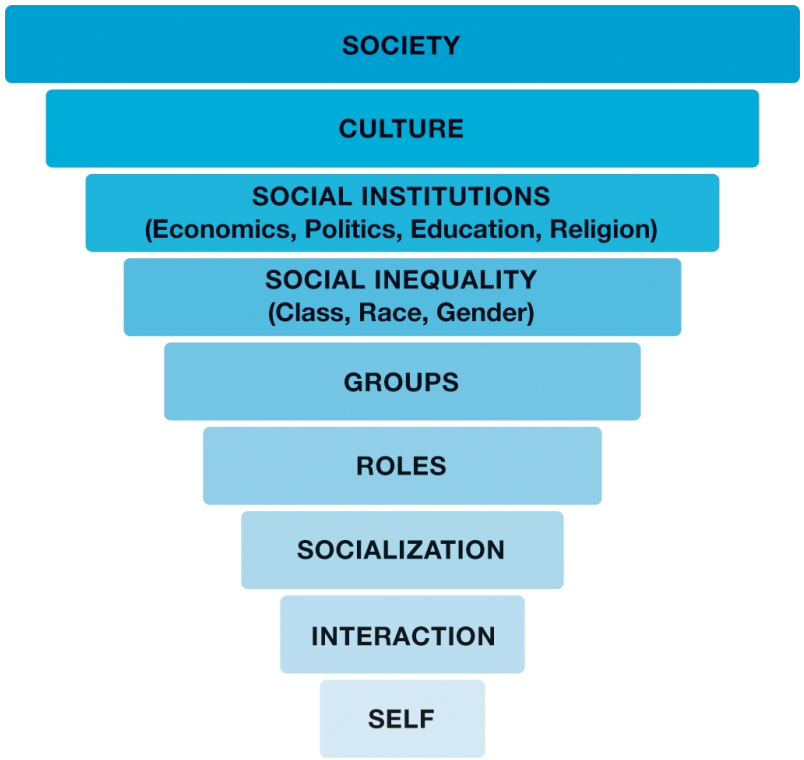


FIGURE 1.2 The Macro-Micro Continuum

Sociology covers a wide range of topics at different levels of analysis.

Microsociology concentrates on the interactions between individuals and the ways in which those interactions construct the larger patterns, processes, and institutions of society. As the word indicates ("micro" means small), microsociology looks at the smallest building blocks of society in order to understand its large-scale structure. A classic example of research that takes a micro approach is Victoria Leto DeFrancisco's article "The Sounds of Silence: How Men Silence Women in Marital Relations" (1991). Like many scholars who had observed the feminist movements of the 1960s and '70s, DeFrancisco was concerned with issues of power and domination in male–female relationships: Are men more powerful than women in our society? If so, how is this power created and maintained in everyday interactions? In her research, DeFrancisco recorded and analyzed heterosexual couples' everyday conversations in their homes. She found some real differences in the conversational strategies of men and women and some surprising results about gender, power, and silence in everyday talk.

One conversation took place in the living room, where a woman was having a difficult time engaging her husband in a discussion about an encounter she had had while shopping. He failed to respond for long stretches of time, sometimes staying quiet for four and even eight seconds at a time and only rarely uttering an "mm-hmm" or an "aahh" to fill the gap. The husband even walked outside twice while the wife was speaking! But she persisted, trying to keep control of the conversation and maintain her right to continue.

IN THE FUTURE

C. Wright Mills and the Sociological Imagination

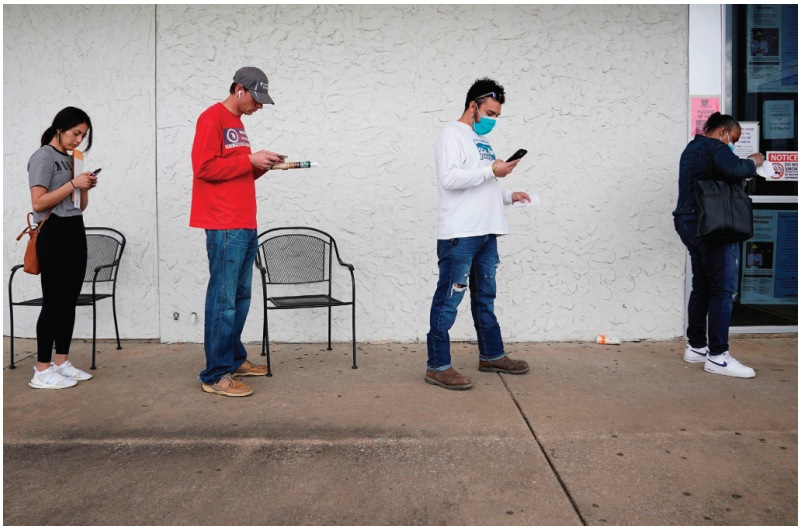
The "sociological imagination" is a term that seemingly every sociology student encounters. It was first introduced by C. Wright Mills in his 1959 book of the same name, and over time it has become an enduring cornerstone of the discipline. It captures the spirit of inquiry, the quality of mind, and the guiding principles that all sociologists should embrace. Mills was sometimes critical of sociology as a discipline, so he offered himself as a "public intellectual," one who could speak beyond the confines of academia and address some of the most pressing social issues of the time. Mills was convinced that sociology had something to offer everyone, not just academics.

Mills highlighted the distinction between "personal troubles" and "public issues" as "an essential tool of the sociological imagination and a feature of all classic work in social science" (Mills 1959, p. 8). He explained that almost any feature of an individual's daily life can be better understood if this distinction is applied to it. Unemployment, war, marriage, and housing are all experienced as personal troubles, but to be fully understood, they must also be seen as manifestations of long-standing institutions and larger social structures. As Mills pointed out, "In so far as an economy is so arranged that slumps occur, the problem of unemployment becomes incapable of personal solution" (Mills 1959, p. 10). This lesson was driven home again during the Covid-19 pandemic. In March 2020, as infections and deaths were rising around the world, a series of society-wide shutdowns were put in place to keep people safe and slow the spread of the virus. Suddenly, millions of Americans were out of work, particularly low-wage workers in industries such as leisure and hospitality, travel and transportation, and

construction (Terrell 2021). The unemployment rate skyrocketed to nearly 15 percent—the highest level since the Great Depression. For the many millions of people thrown out of work, unemployment was experienced as a personal trouble; people could no longer pay rent, buy food, or access health care. However, these personal troubles can be understood only when they are viewed as a public issue—a global crisis beyond the control of any individual.

In even more fundamental ways, Mills believed that people are shaped by the connections between "the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history" (Mills 1959, p. 4). These connections could influence the most personal features of someone's life, shaping the very kind of people "they are becoming" (p. 4). In her book *Unbearable Weight* (1995), Susan Bordo describes how anorexia came to be recognized as a national mental health problem. In 1973, psychiatrists still considered anorexia quite rare, so why is there so much awareness about eating disorders now? Anorexia and bulimia are experienced in intensely personal ways, and eating disorders are usually explained in purely psychological terms. But Bordo, thinking about them sociologically, argues that cultural factors help create eating disorders. Contemporary culture's obsession with bodies that are "slim, tight, and young" (p. 140) shapes individual psychologies. Eating disorders, then, are symptoms of a troubled culture as well as a troubled individual. This is not to deny that personal and psychological factors are important, but it is a reminder that social and cultural factors create the environment that makes it possible to experience problems such as eating disorders in the first place.

Today you may be a student in an introductory sociology class; every year, more than 25,000 students will receive bachelor's degrees in sociology (U.S. Department of Education 2022). Whether or not you end up majoring in sociology, C. Wright Mills wanted everyone to develop and sharpen a sociological imagination. In fact, that is the goal we share in writing this textbook. How might the sociological imagination be useful to you in the future?



Personal Troubles and Public Issues High unemployment rates during the Covid-19 pandemic were both a personal trouble and a public issue.

DeFrancisco recorded many more conversations between couples and saw this pattern over and over: men using silence to suppress women's talk. DeFrancisco noted that when men withhold what are called "supportive responses" ("mm-hmm," "oh," "a-ha," etc.), they are violating a firmly held rule of conversational structure. Supportive responses help storytellers continue speaking by acknowledging that they are being heard and understood. Without supportive responses from men, women must work harder to keep a conversation going, which also makes it more likely that they will be silenced by their partner's lack of response. Thus, in her micro-level analysis of conversation, DeFrancisco was able to see how macro-level ("macro" means large) phenomena such as gender and power are manifested in everyday interactions.

Macrosociology approaches the study of society from the opposite direction, by looking at large-scale social structures to determine how they affect the lives of groups and individuals. If we want to stick to the topic of gender inequality, we can find plenty of examples of research projects that take a macro approach; many deal with the workplace. Despite the gains made in recent years, the U.S. labor market is still predominantly sex segregated—that is, men and women are concentrated in different occupations. Sociologist Christine Williams found that although women in male-dominated fields experience limits on their advancement, dubbed the "glass ceiling" effect, men in female-dominated occupations experience unusually rapid rates of upward mobility—what she called the "glass escalator" (Williams 1992, 1995, 2013). Here, then, we see a macro approach to the topic of gender and power: Large-scale features of social structure (patterns of occupational sex segregation) create the constraints within which individuals and groups (women and men in the workplace) experience successes or failures in their everyday lives.

Levels of Analysis These two views of the New York Public Library represent different levels of analysis in sociology. Microsociology zooms in to focus on individuals, their interactions, and groups in order to understand their contribution to larger social structures. In contrast, macrosociology pulls back to examine large-scale social processes and their effects on individuals and groups.

As you can see, these two perspectives make different assumptions about how society works: The micro perspective assumes that society's larger structures are shaped through individual interactions, while the macro perspective assumes that society's larger structures shape those individual interactions. It is useful to think of these perspectives as being on a continuum with each other; while some sociologists adhere to radically micro or exclusively macro perspectives, most are somewhere in between. The next part of this chapter explores some specific theoretical traditions within sociology and shows you where each falls along this continuum.

Glossary

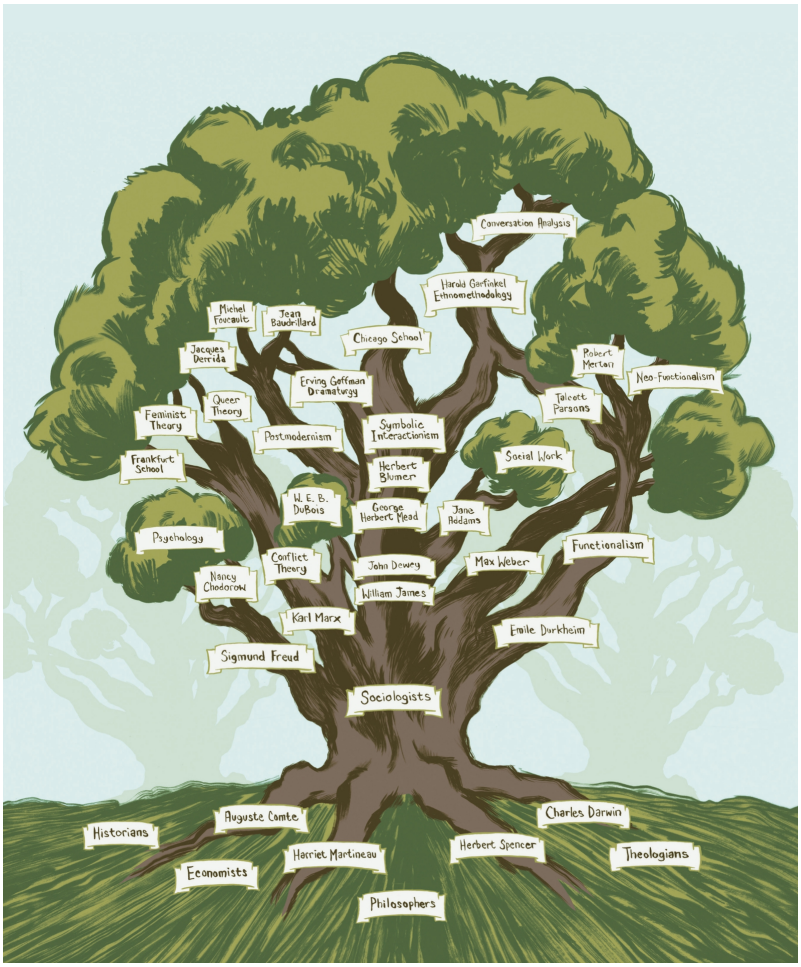
MICROSOCIOLOGY
: the level of analysis that studies face-to-face and small-group interactions in order to understand how they affect the larger patterns and structures of society

MACROSOCIOLOGY
: the level of analysis that studies large-scale social structures in order to determine how they affect the lives of groups and individuals

SOCIOLOGY'S FAMILY TREE

Great thinkers have been trying to understand the world and our place in it since the beginning of time. Some have done this by developing theories: abstract propositions about how things are, as well as how they should be. Sometimes we also refer to theories as "approaches," "schools of thought," "paradigms," or "perspectives." Social theories, then, are guiding principles or abstract models that attempt to explain and predict the social world.

As we embark on the discussion of theory, it may be useful to think of sociology as having a "family tree" made up of real people who were living in a particular time and place and who were related along various intertwining lines to other members of the same larger family tree. First, we will examine sociology's early historical roots. Then, as we follow the growth of the discipline, we will identify its major branches and trace the relationships among their offshoots and the other "limbs" that make up the entire family tree. Finally, we will examine some of the newest theoretical approaches and members of the family tree and consider the possible future of sociological theory.



Sociology's Roots

The earliest Western social theorists focused on establishing society as an appropriate object of scientific scrutiny, which was itself a revolutionary concept. These early theorists were not sociologists (since the discipline didn't yet exist) but rather people from a variety of backgrounds—philosophers, theologians, economists, historians, journalists—who were trying to look at society in a new way. In doing so, they laid the groundwork not only for the discipline as a whole, but also for the different schools of thought that are still shaping sociology today.

Auguste Comte

AUGUSTE COMTE (1798–1857)

was the first to provide a program for the scientific study of society, or a "social physics," as he labeled it. Comte, a French scientist, developed a theory of the progress of human thinking from its early theological and metaphysical stages toward a final "positive," or scientific, stage. Positivism seeks to identify laws that describe the behavior of a particular reality, such as the

laws of mathematics and physics, in which people gain knowledge of the world directly through their senses. Having grown up in the aftermath of the French Revolution and its lingering political instability, Comte felt that society needed positivist guidance toward both social progress and social order. After studying at an elite science and technology college, where he was introduced to the newly discovered scientific method, he began to imagine a way of applying the methodology to social affairs. His ideas, featured in *Introduction to Positive Philosophy* (1842), became the foundation of a scientific discipline that would describe the laws of social phenomena and help control social life; he called it "sociology."

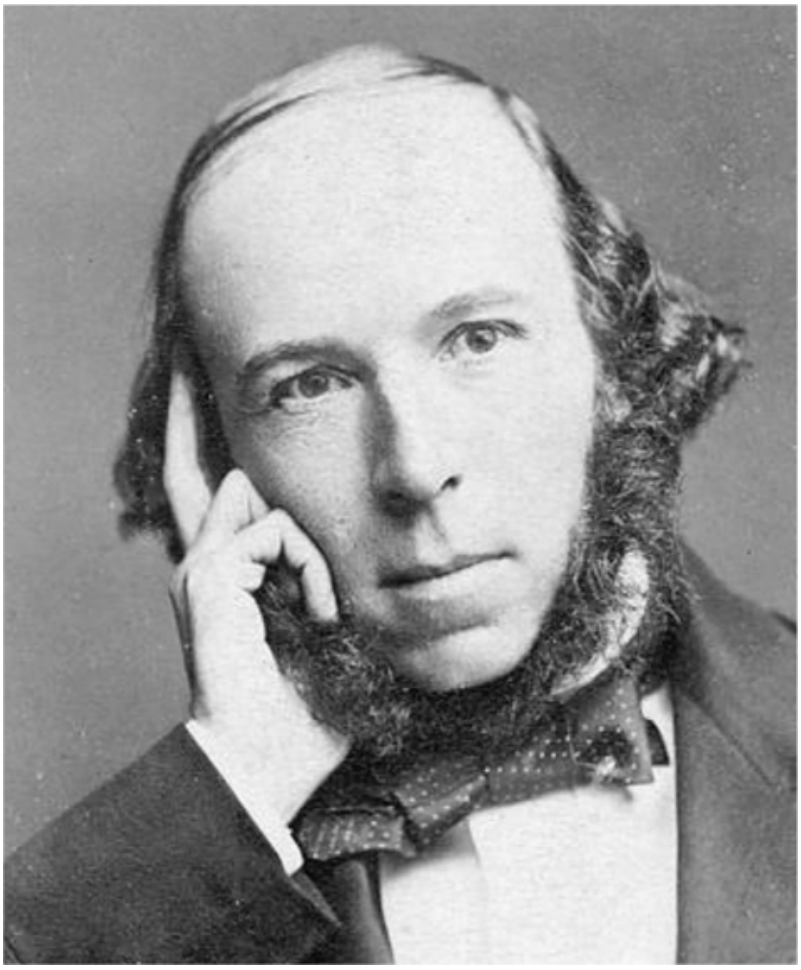
Although Comte is remembered today mainly for coining the term, he played a significant role in the development of sociology as a discipline. His efforts to distinguish appropriate methods and topics for sociologists provided the kernel of a discipline. Other social thinkers advanced his work: Harriet Martineau and Herbert Spencer in England and Émile Durkheim in France.

Harriet Martineau

HARRIET MARTINEAU (1802–1876)

was born in England to progressive parents who made sure their daughter was well educated. She became a journalist and political economist, proclaiming views that were radical for her time: She endorsed labor unions, the abolition of slavery, and women's suffrage.

In 1835, Martineau traveled to the United States to judge the new democracy on its own terms rather than by European standards. But she was disappointed: By condoning slavery and denying full citizenship rights to women and Black people, the American experiment was, in her eyes, flawed and hypocritical. She wrote two books describing her observations, *Society in America* (1837) and *Retrospect of Western Travel* (1838), both critical of American leadership and culture. By holding the United States to its own publicly stated democratic standards, rather than seeing the country from an ethnocentric British perspective, she was a precursor to the naturalistic sociologists who would establish the discipline in America. In 1853, Martineau made perhaps her most important contribution to sociology: She translated Comte's *Introduction to Positive Philosophy* into English, making his ideas accessible in England and America.



Herbert Spencer

HERBERT SPENCER (1820–1903)

was primarily responsible for the establishment of sociology in Britain and America. Although Spencer did not receive academic training, he grew up in a highly individualistic family and was encouraged to think and learn on his own. His interests leaned heavily toward physical science and, instead of attending college, Spencer chose to become a railway engineer. When railway work dried up, he turned to journalism and eventually worked for a major periodical in London. There he became acquainted with leading English academics and began to publish his own thoughts in book form.

In 1862, Spencer drew up a list of what he called "first principles" (in a book by that name), and near the top of the list was the notion of evolution driven by natural selection. Charles Darwin is the best-known proponent of the theory, but the idea of evolution was in wide circulation before Darwin made it famous. Spencer proposed that societies, like biological organisms, evolve through time by adapting to changing conditions, with less successful adaptations falling by the wayside. He coined the phrase "survival of the fittest," and his social philosophy is sometimes known as social Darwinism. In the late 1800s, Spencer's work, including *The Study of Sociology* (1873) and *The Principles of Sociology* (1897), was virtually synonymous with sociology in the English-speaking world. The scope and volume of his writing served to announce sociology as a serious discipline and laid the groundwork for the next generation of theorists, whose observations of large-scale social change would bring a new viewpoint to social theory.

Glossary

THEORIES
: abstract propositions that explain the social world and make predictions about the future

PARADIGM
: a set of assumptions, theories, and perspectives that makes up a way of understanding social reality

SOCIAL DARWINISM
: the application of the theory of evolution and the notion of "survival of the fittest" to the study of society

MACROSOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Theorists in late nineteenth-century Europe were living during extraordinary times. They were attempting to explain social order, social change, and social inequality while the world around them changed as a result of the Industrial Revolution. At the same time, they were witnessing political upheaval and the birth of democracy brought about by the French and American Revolutions. These were changes on the grandest of scales in the macro order of society. Frequently referred to as classical sociology, the theories that arose during this period reflect the broad subject matter of a sweeping era.

Structural Functionalism

Structural functionalism, or functionalist theory, was the dominant theoretical perspective within sociology well into the mid-twentieth century. New (or neo-) functionalists continue to apply their own vision of the theory to study a wide variety of social phenomena today.

Émile Durkheim

FOUNDER AND KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) is the central figure in functionalist theory. He was born into a close-knit and deeply religious Jewish family who instilled in him a strong sense of morality (not just as an abstract concept but as a concrete influence on social relations) and a strong work ethic. After witnessing the ravages of the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871), he hoped that applied science could stabilize and revitalize France in the aftermath of its devastating defeat. He did not believe that traditional, abstract moral philosophy was effective in increasing understanding and bringing about social change, so he turned instead to the concrete science of sociology as represented in Comte's work.

In his first major study, *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893), Durkheim stated that solidarity, or unity, was present in all types of societies but that different types of societies created different types of social bonds. He suggested that people in a simple agricultural society were bound together by mechanical solidarity—that is, on the basis of shared

traditions, beliefs, and experiences. In industrial societies, where factory work was becoming increasingly specialized, organic solidarity prevailed: People's bonds were based on the tasks they performed, interdependence, and individual rights. Both types of solidarity have interpersonal bonds—just with different qualities.

Durkheim believed that even the most individualistic actions have sociological explanations and set out to establish a scientific methodology for studying these actions. He chose for his case study the most individualistic of actions—suicide—and used statistical data to show that suicides were related to social factors such as religious affiliation, marital status, and employment. Explaining a particular suicide by focusing exclusively on the victim's psychological makeup neglected the impact of social bonds. According to Durkheim in his now-classic study *Suicide* (1897), even the darkest depression has its roots in an individual's connections to the social world, or rather their lack of connection. Durkheim theorized that suicide is one result of anomie, a sense of disconnection brought about by the changing conditions of modern life. The more firmly anchored people are to family, religion, and the workplace, the less anomie they are likely to experience.

In his final major study, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), Durkheim suggested that religion was a powerful source of social solidarity because it reinforced collective bonds and shared moral values. He believed that society could be understood by examining the most basic forms of religion. Durkheim's study of the Indigenous peoples of Australia led him to a universal definition of religion: Though religious traditions might differ, any form of religion is unified in its definition of what is considered to be sacred and profane. Every person who follows a particular set of beliefs and practices will "unite into one single moral community" (Durkheim 1912/1995, p. 44).

Durkheim's attempt to establish sociology as an important, independent academic discipline was enormously successful. He not only made significant contributions to the existing literature but also demonstrated the effectiveness of using scientific, empirical methods to study "social reality," essentially validating Comte's proposal from half a century earlier. Durkheim became the first professor of social science in France, at the University of Bordeaux in 1887, and later won a similar appointment at the Sorbonne in Paris, the very heart of French academic life. Today, Durkheim's eminence in the social sciences is as strong as ever, and his ideas are still applied and extended by contemporary theorists.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Eurocentrism and Sociological Theory

You might get the impression from this chapter that the major sociological theorists were all either European or American. In fact, some ideas central to sociological theory were proposed in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East centuries before Marx, Weber, and Durkheim were even born, but we give these Western thinkers all the credit. Why?

Both the social world and social theory are often Eurocentric: They tend to privilege Europe and the West over other cultures. This means that hierarchies of global power, in which superpowers such as the United States and former colonial rulers such as Britain and France dominate, are replicated in academic disciplines like sociology. Scholars who work against inequality and exploitation should note this distressing irony.

One influential non-Western thinker was Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), an Arab Muslim philosopher and politician who lived in fourteenth century North Africa. His coining of the term *as sabiyah*, or "social cohesion," precedes Durkheim's work on the same subject by more than 500 years, and his argument that larger social and historical forces shape individual lives predates Mills's insight about sociology as "the intersection of biography and history" by almost 600 years! Yet Khaldun is rarely credited for proposing sociology as a discipline—*ilm alumran*, he called it, or "the science of civilization." This honor is reserved for French scholar Auguste Comte, working centuries later in the West.

Ibn Khaldun

Also overlooked in conventional histories of sociology are Indian scholar Benoy Sarkar (1887–1949), Filipino activist and poet José Rizal (1861–1896), and Japanese folklorist Kunio

Yanagita (1875–1962)—all of whom applied sociological insights to the problems of their nations. Sarkar explored India's religious divisions, Rizal analyzed the Philippines' fight for independence from Spain, and Yanagita used qualitative methods to explore Japan's culture and its long-standing isolationism. They have received virtually no notice for their achievements outside their own countries (Alatas and Sinha 2001).

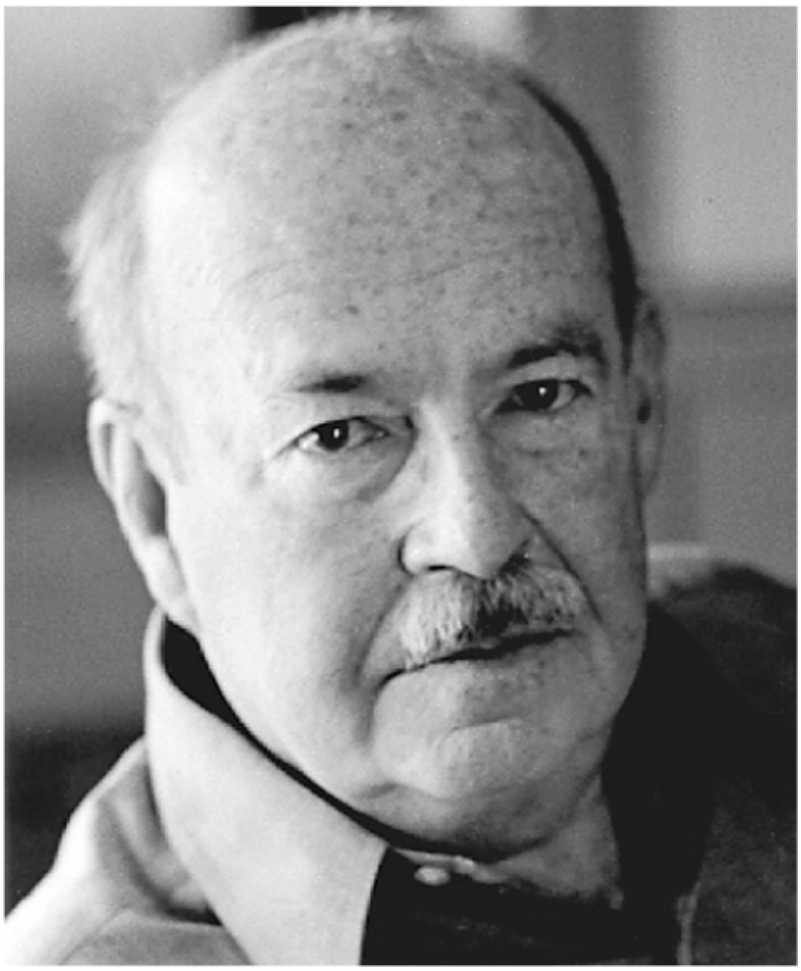
Filipino sociologist Clarence Batan (2004) argues that Western theorists like Marx, Weber, and Durkheim may inspire non-Western scholars but that their theories arose in response to specific social problems that were particular to Western societies. Non-Western societies face different issues, including the legacy of colonialism imposed by the Western countries from which those classical sociological theories sprang. Batan calls for sociologists in non-Western countries to respond to the needs of their societies by developing new theoretical frameworks that take postcolonial realities into account. Batan himself, along with other contemporary non-Western sociologists, works toward this goal every day in his research and teaching. Shouldn't your sociology professors do the same?

ORIGINAL PRINCIPLES

The origins of structural functionalism can be traced back to the roots of sociology. Auguste Comte proposed that society itself could and should be studied. Herbert Spencer added the idea that societies are living organisms that grow and evolve, just like other species on the planet. As the discipline of biology might study the physical organism of the human body, the discipline of sociology could study social organisms in the world of human development. Durkheim integrated and advanced these insights into a comprehensive theory for understanding the nature of society.

There are two main principles of functionalism. First, society is conceived as a stable, ordered system made up of interrelated parts, or structures. Second, each structure has a function that contributes to the continued stability or equilibrium of the unified whole. Structures are identified as social institutions such as the family, the educational system, politics, the economy, and religion. They meet society's needs by performing different functions, and every function is necessary to maintain social order and stability. Any disorganization or dysfunction in a structure leads to change and a new equilibrium; if one structure is transformed, the others must also adjust. For example, if families fail to discipline children, then schools, churches, and the courts must pick up the slack.

It may seem contradictory that a theory concerned with order and stability would emerge in a discipline that arose in a period of rapid social change. But it is important to remember that change had previously occurred much more slowly and that one response to rapid social change is to try to understand what has come before—stability, order, and equilibrium.



Talcott Parsons

OFFSHOOTS

Structural functionalism was the dominant theoretical perspective in Europe for much of the early twentieth century. It was exported and updated by American functionalists, who increased its popularity and helped spread its reach well into the 1960s. For example, Talcott Parsons (1902–1979) elaborated on the theory and applied it to modern society, specifying some of the functions that social structures might fulfill in contemporary life. A healthy society must provide a means for people to adapt to their environment; for example, families, schools, and religious institutions work together to socialize children. A functional society includes opportunities for success—for example, it promotes education to help its members pursue and realize their goals. For society to survive, there must be social cohesion; for example, shared religious and moral values.

Robert Merton

Another modern American functionalist, Robert Merton (1910–2003), delineated the theory even further, identifying manifest and latent functions for different social structures. Manifest functions are the obvious, intended functions of a social structure, while latent functions are the less obvious, perhaps unintended functions. For example, the manifest functions of education are to prepare future members of society by teaching them how to read and write and by instructing them on society's system of norms, values, and laws. However, education has a latent function as well, which is to keep kids busy and out of trouble eight hours a day, five days a week, for twelve years (or longer). Do not doubt that this is also an important contribution to social order!

ADVANTAGES AND CRITIQUES

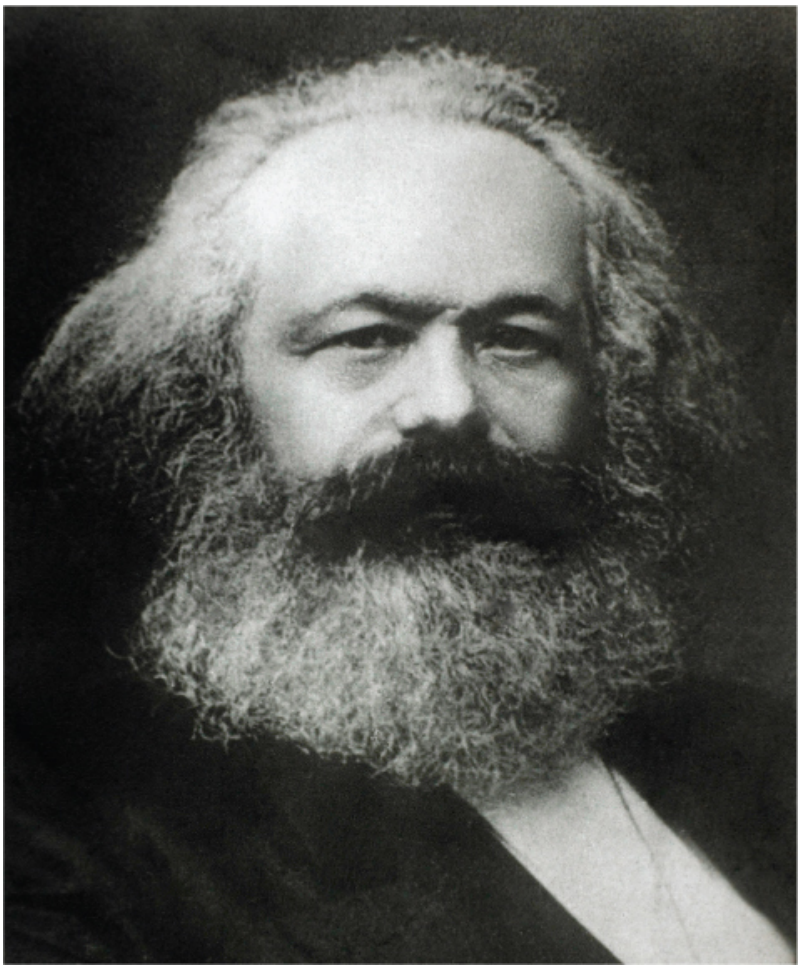
One of the great advantages of functionalism is its inclusion of all social institutions. Functionalism attempts to provide a universal social theory, a way of explaining society in one comprehensive model. Part of functionalism's appeal may also lie in its ability to bring order to a potentially disorderly world. Were it not for some of the volcanic social upheavals of recent history—the civil rights, antiwar, and women's liberation movements are not easily explained

using this model—functionalist theory might still reign supreme in American sociology. Functionalism, generally preoccupied with stability, takes the position that only dysfunction can create social change. This conservative bias is part of a larger problem with the theory: Functionalism provides little insight into social processes because its model of society is static rather than dynamic. Its focus on the macro level also means that functionalism has less interest in explaining independent human action; there is no apparent approach to the lives of individuals except as part of social institutions.

Functionalism's explanations of social inequality are especially unsatisfying: If poverty, racism, and sexism exist, they must serve a function for society; they must be necessary and inevitable. This view is problematic for many. Sociologist Herbert Gans, in a critical essay (1971), reviewed the functions of poverty for society. People who are poor, for example, do our "dirty work," filling the menial, low-wage jobs that are necessary to keep society running smoothly but that others refuse to do. Poor people provide a market for used and off-price goods and keep thrift stores and social welfare agencies in business. They have symbolic value as well, allowing those higher in the social hierarchy to feel compassion toward the "deserving" poor and to feel threatened by the "undeserving" poor, who are often seen as dangerous social deviants. Ultimately, the circular reasoning that characterizes functionalist thought turns out to be its biggest problem: The mere persistence of an institution should not be seen as an adequate explanation for its existence.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory is the second major school of thought in sociology. Like structural functionalism, it's a macro-level approach to understanding social life that dates to mid-nineteenth century Europe. Conflict theory posits that social inequality is the basic characteristic of society. By focusing on inequality, conflict theory helped address some of the critiques of structural functionalism.



Karl Marx

FOUNDER AND KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

The work of Karl Marx (1818–1883), a German political economist, was the inspiration for conflict theory, so the terms "conflict theory" and "Marxism" are sometimes used interchangeably in the social sciences. Marx's ideas have become better known to the world as the basis for communism, a political system some countries claim to have adopted (Cuba and North Korea, for example), though these systems are actually totalitarian dictatorships; they bear no resemblance to Marx's ideal society. This misunderstanding has led many to a narrow belief that Marx was nothing more than a misguided agitator who helped cause more than a century of political turmoil. It is important to recognize that Marx would not have supported the ways political leaders used his ideas decades later. Sociologists have found that Marx's theory continues to provide a powerful tool for understanding social phenomena. The idea that conflict between social groups is central to the workings of society and serves as the engine of social change is one of the most vital perspectives in sociology today.

Marx grew up in a modernizing, industrializing, yet politically and religiously conservative monarchy; this, plus the fact that his was a restless, argumentative personality, accounts in

great part for his social theory. For most of his life, he led an economically fragile existence. He managed to maintain a tenuous middle-class lifestyle, but only with financial support from his close friend and chief intellectual collaborator Friedrich Engels, who studied the conditions of the English working class. Marx's own circumstances may have sparked his interest in social inequality, or the uneven and often unfair distribution of resources (in this case, wealth) in society, but he never experienced firsthand the particular burdens and difficulties of the working class.

The Industrial Revolution was a time of rapid social change, when large numbers of people were moving from an agricultural life in rural areas to manufacturing jobs in urban areas. Technological advances and a wage-based economy promised an age of prosperity and abundance, but they created new kinds of poverty, crime, and disease. Marx believed that most of those problems were a result of capitalism, the emerging economic system based on the private for-profit operation of industry. He proposed a radical alternative to the inherent inequalities of this system in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), perhaps his most famous book.

In industrial society, the forces of capitalism were creating distinct social and economic classes, exacerbating the disparities between the wealthy and the poor. Marx felt that this would inevitably lead to class struggle between those who owned the means of production (anything that could create more wealth: money, property, factories, other types of businesses) and those who worked for them. He argued that the most important factor in social life was whether someone was a worker, and thus a member of the proletariat, or an owner, and thus a member of the bourgeoisie. Everything of value in society resulted from human labor, which was the proletariat's most valuable asset. Yet workers suffered from what Marx called alienation because they were unable to directly benefit from the fruits of their own labor. Workers were paid wages, but it was the factory owners who grew rich as a result of their toil.

The powerful few in the bourgeoisie not only were wealthy but also enjoyed social privilege and power. They were able to protect their interests, preserve their positions, and pass along their advantages to their heirs. The proletariat were often so absorbed in making a living that they were less apt to protest the conditions that led to their oppression. But eventually, Marx believed, the oppression would become unbearable, and the proletariat would rise up against the bourgeoisie, abolishing capitalism for good. He envisioned in capitalism's place a classless society with no private ownership in which each person contributed to and benefited from the public good. Freed from oppressive conditions, individuals would then be able to pursue higher interests such as art and education and eventually live in a more egalitarian, utopian society. But in order to achieve such a state, the oppressed must first recognize how the current system worked against them.

In 1849, Marx withdrew from political activity in order to concentrate on writing *Das Kapital* (edited by Engels and published in 1890). The multivolume work provided a thorough exposition of his program for social change, which later became the foundation of political systems such as communism and socialism. Because Marx held such radical beliefs, his ideas were not immediately embraced by sociologists in general. It was not until the 1960s, when conflict theory became a dominant perspective, that Marx was truly received as a giant of sociology.

ORIGINAL PRINCIPLES

Conflict theory proposes that conflict and tension are basic facts of social life and suggests that people have disagreements over goals and values and are involved in struggles over both resources and power. The theory thus focuses on the processes of dominance, competition, upheaval, and social change.

Conflict theory takes a materialist view of society (focused on labor practices and economic reality) and extends it to other social inequalities. Marx maintained that economic productivity is related to other processes in society, including political and intellectual life. The wealthy and powerful bourgeoisie control major social institutions, reinforcing the class structure so that the state, education, religion, and even the family are organized to represent their interests. Conflict theory takes a critical stance toward existing social arrangements and attempts to expose their inner workings.

Because the ideology, or belief system, that permeates society arises from the values of the ruling class, beliefs that seem to be widely held are actually a kind of justification that helps rationalize and explain the status quo. Most people readily accept the prevailing ideology, despite its failure to represent the reality of their lives. Marx referred to this acceptance as false consciousness, a denial of the truth that allows for the perpetuation of the inequalities inherent in the class structure. For example, he is often quoted as saying, "Religion is the opiate of the masses." This is not a criticism of religion so much as a criticism of the use of religion to create false consciousness in the working class. Encouraged in their piety, the proletariat focus on the happiness promised in the afterlife rather than on deprivations suffered in this world. Indeed, heaven is seen as a reward for patiently suffering those deprivations. How does this serve the interests of the ruling class? By keeping the working class from demanding better conditions in this life.

Conflict theory sees the transformation of society over time as inevitable. Marx argued that the only way to change the status quo is for the masses to attain class consciousness, or revolutionary consciousness. This can happen only when people recognize how society works and challenge those in power. He believed that social change would occur when there was enough tension and conflict.

OFFSHOOTS

Marx's work has been reinterpreted and applied in various ways, and conflict theory has evolved within the greater intellectual community. Despite Marx's single-minded focus on economic exploitation and transformation, his ideas have helped inspire theorists interested in all forms of power and inequality.

One of the most widely adopted forms of modern Marxism is called critical theory (also sometimes referred to as the Frankfurt School or neo-Marxism). From the 1930s to the 1960s, critical theory was arguably at the cutting edge of social theory. Critical theorists were among the first to see the importance of mass communications and popular culture as powerful ideological tools in capitalist societies. They coined the term "culture industries" to refer to these increasingly important social institutions, which came to dominate and permeate social

life (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979). They also criticized the growing consumerism associated with the spread of capitalism, believing that it could ultimately lead to a decline in personal freedom and the decay of democracy (Marcuse 1964/1991). Critical theory influenced several generations of radical thinkers throughout Europe and the United States, inspiring the cultural studies movement and the postmodernists, who were considered the cutting edge of social theory in the 1980s and ’90s (Habermas 1984, 1987).

Other modern perspectives have taken conflict theory’s insights on economic inequality and adapted them to the study of contemporary inequalities of race, gender, and sexuality (Collins 2019; Crenshaw et al. 1996; Matsuda et al. 1993). Beginning with the pioneering work of W.E.B. Du Bois, sociology started to focus on inequalities of race and ethnicity, inspiring important studies about the causes and consequences of prejudice and discrimination and helping propel momentous social changes resulting from the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Critical race theory, which emerged out of legal scholarship in the 1970s and ‘80s, is concerned with the relationship among race, racism, and power. This controversial theory argues that racism is deeply embedded in American institutions, including our laws. This institutional racism serves to both perpetuate white privilege and marginalize people of color. Adherents of critical race theory are dedicated not just to studying race—and how it intersects with other identities such as sex and class—but also actively working to end racial oppression (Bonilla-Silva 2015; Delgado and Stefancic 2012; Ray 2022). We will return to critical race theory in more detail in Chapter 8.

bell hooks Feminist theorists such as bell hooks consider the intersection of gender and race.

Feminist theory developed alongside the twentieth century women’s rights movement. By applying assumptions about gender inequality to various social institutions—the family, education, the economy, or the media—feminist theory allows for a new way of understanding those institutions and the changing role of gender in contemporary society. Theorists such as Judith Butler (1999), bell hooks (2003), Catharine MacKinnon (2005), and Roxane Gay (2014) link gender with inequality in other social hierarchies—race and ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation—and argue that gender and power are inextricably intertwined in our society.

The gay and lesbian rights movement that gained momentum in the 1970s and ’80s inspired a new set of theoretical and conceptual tools for social scientists: queer theory. Queer theory proposes that categories of sexuality—homo, hetero, bi, pan—should be viewed as “social constructs” (Seidman 2003, Ward 2020). It asserts that no sexual category is fundamentally deviant or normal; we create such definitions, so we can change them as well. Indeed, some queer theorists argue that strict categories themselves are no longer relevant and that more fluid notions of identity should replace conventional dichotomies such as gay/straight (Garber 1997). We will return to both feminist and queer theories in more detail in Chapter 9.

ADVANTAGES AND CRITIQUES

One of Karl Marx’s great contributions to the social sciences is the principle of praxis, or practical action: Intellectuals should act on what they believe. Marx wished not only to describe the world but also to change it. Indeed, Marxist ideas have been important in achieving change through many twentieth century social movements, including civil rights, antiwar, women’s rights, gay rights, animal rights, environmentalism, and multiculturalism. If these groups had not protested the status quo, we might never have addressed some of the century’s social problems. Conflict theory is useful in understanding not only macro-level social issues (such as systematic discrimination against minority groups) but also micro-level personal interactions (such as those between bosses and employees).

Conflict theory stands in sharp contrast to structural functionalism. Conflict theory argues that a social arrangement’s existence does not mean that it’s beneficial; it may merely represent the interests of those in power. The theory challenges the status quo and emphasizes the need for social upheaval. In focusing on tension and conflict, however, conflict theory can often ignore those parts of society that are truly orderly, stable, and enduring. Although society certainly has its share of disagreements, there are also shared values and common beliefs that hold it together. Conflict theory can be criticized for overlooking these less controversial dimensions of social reality.

Weberian Theory

Max Weber (1864–1920) was another important European macrosociological theorist during the Industrial Revolution. His work forms another large branch of sociology’s family tree, and his ideas continue to inspire in their current application, yet he is not always included among the three *major* branches of the discipline. Weberian theory is not a minor branch of sociology, nor is it considered merely an offshoot of one of the other major branches of the tree. It draws from a background shared by the other macro theorists but forms its own independent limb.

Max Weber

Weber grew up in the German city of Berlin. Both his parents were Protestants and descendants of victims of religious persecution. Weber, though not religious himself, exhibited the relentless work ethic held in high regard by devout Protestants. Although he was sickly and withdrawn as a young man, work served as a way for him to rebel against his father and the leisure classes in general. He studied law and history and worked as a lawyer while establishing his credentials for a university teaching position.

Weber rapidly established himself as a prominent member of the German intellectual scene. He might have continued in this manner had it not been for a disastrous visit from his parents in 1897, during which Weber fought bitterly with his father and threw him out of the house. When his father died a month later, Weber suffered a nervous breakdown that left him unable to work for several years. The strain of these events and years of incessant labor had apparently caught up with him. He eventually recovered and resumed his intense scholarship, but the breakdown left Weber disillusioned with the strict academic regimen.

Weber subsequently expressed a pessimistic view of social forces, such as the work ethic, that shaped modern life. Like other social theorists of his time, Weber was interested in the shift from a more traditional society to a modern industrial one. Perhaps his most overriding

concern was with the process of rationalization, or the application of economic logic to all spheres of human activity. In *Economy and Society* (1921), Weber proposed that modern industrialized societies were characterized by efficient, goal-oriented, rule-governed bureaucracies. He believed that individual behavior was increasingly driven by such bureaucratic goals, which had become more important motivational factors than traditions, values, or emotions. Weber's classic sociological discussion of the origins of the capitalist system, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904–1905), concluded with the image of people trapped by their industrious way of life in what he called an iron cage of bureaucratic rules. He believed that contemporary life was filled with disenchantment (similar to Durkheim's concept of anomie and Marx's concept of alienation) as the inevitable result of the dehumanizing features of the bureaucracies that dominated the modern social landscape.

Weber's insights into the nature of society continue to inspire sociologists today. For instance, George Ritzer (1996, 2013) has applied Weber's theories of bureaucracy and rationalization to the fast-food industry and has warned about "McDonaldization" creeping into other aspects of contemporary life, such as education and law enforcement. More recently, Ritzer has applied Weberian theory to the forces of globalization, demonstrating how the principles of McDonaldization have been exported and adopted across the globe (Ritzer and Ryan 2007).

The key concepts we have touched on here will be expanded as we apply Weberian theory to a variety of topics in upcoming chapters. In addition to making some of the most important contributions to theory within the discipline, Weber was also influential in improving research methods by suggesting that researchers avoid imposing their own opinions on their scientific analysis; we'll examine these ideas more closely in Chapter 2.

Weber's work served as a bridge between early social theory, which focused primarily on the macro level of society, and subsequent theories that focused more intently on the micro level. He was interested in how individual motivation led to certain social actions and how those actions helped shape society as a whole. Unlike Marx and Durkheim, Weber was cautious about attributing any reality to social institutions or forces independent of individual action and meaningful thought. He invoked the German term *verstehen* ("empathic understanding") to describe how a social scientist should study human action: that is, with a kind of scientific empathy for actors' experiences, intentions, and actions. In this way, Weber helped lay the groundwork for the third grand theory in sociology.

Glossary

STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALISM
: a paradigm based on the assumption that society is a unified whole that functions because of the contributions of its separate structures

SOLIDARITY
: the degree of integration or unity within a particular society; the extent to which individuals feel connected to other members of their group

MECHANICAL SOLIDARITY
: the type of social bonds present in premodern, agrarian societies, in which shared traditions and beliefs created a sense of social cohesion

ORGANIC SOLIDARITY

the type of social bonds present in modern societies, based on difference, interdependence, and individual rights

ANOMIE
"normlessness"; term used to describe the alienation and loss of purpose that result from weaker social bonds and an increased pace of change

SACRED
the holy, divine, or supernatural

PROFANE
the ordinary, mundane, or everyday

EMPIRICAL
based on scientific experimentation or observation

STRUCTURE
a social institution that is relatively stable over time and that meets the needs of a society by performing functions necessary to maintain social order and stability

DYSFUNCTION
a disturbance to or undesirable consequence of some aspect of the social system

MANIFEST FUNCTIONS
the obvious, intended functions of a social structure for the social system

LATENT FUNCTIONS
the less obvious, perhaps unintended functions of a social structure

CONFLICT THEORY
a paradigm that sees social conflict as the basis of society and social change and that emphasizes a materialist view of society, a critical view of the status quo, and a dynamic model of historical change

SOCIAL INEQUALITY
the unequal distribution of wealth, power, or prestige among members of a society

EUROCENTRIC
the tendency to favor European or Western histories, cultures, and values over those of non-Western societies

MEANS OF PRODUCTION
anything that can create wealth: money, property, factories, and other types of businesses, and the infrastructure necessary to run them

PROLETARIAT
workers; those who have no means of production of their own and so are reduced to selling their labor power in order to live

BOURGEOISIE
owners; the class of modern capitalists who own the means of production and employ wage laborers

ALIENATION
decreasing importance of social ties and community and the corresponding increase in impersonal associations and instrumental logic; also, according to Marx, the sense of dissatisfaction the modern worker feels as a result of producing goods that are owned and controlled by someone else

FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS
a denial of the truth on the part of the oppressed when they fail to recognize that the interests of the ruling class are embedded in the dominant ideology

CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

the recognition of social inequality on the part of the oppressed, leading to revolutionary action

CRITICAL THEORY
: a contemporary form of conflict theory that criticizes many different systems and ideologies of domination and oppression

CRITICAL RACE THEORY
: the study of the relationships among race, racism, and power

FEMINIST THEORY
: a theoretical approach that looks at gender inequities in society and the way that gender structures the social world

QUEER THEORY
: social theory about gender and sexual identity; emphasizes the importance of difference and rejects ideas of innate identities or restrictive categories

PRAXIS
: the application of theory to practical action in an effort to improve aspects of society

RATIONALIZATION
: the application of economic logic to human activity; the use of formal rules and regulations in order to maximize efficiency without consideration of subjective or individual concerns

IRON CAGE
: Max Weber's pessimistic description of modern life, in which we are caught in bureaucratic structures that control our lives through rigid rules and rationalization

BUREAUCRACY
: a type of secondary group designed to perform tasks efficiently, characterized by specialization, technical competence, hierarchy, written rules, impersonality, and formal written communication

VERSTEHEN
: "empathic understanding"; Weber's term to describe good social research, which tries to understand the meanings that individuals attach to various aspects of social reality

MICROSOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

As the twentieth century dawned and the careers of the macro theorists such as Durkheim, Marx, and Weber matured, political, cultural, and academic power began to shift from Europe. As manifested by the waves of emigrants leaving the Old World for the New World, America was seen as the land of opportunity, both material and intellectual. So it was in the twentieth century, and increasingly in the United States, that the discipline of sociology continued to develop and the ideas of its third major school of thought began to coalesce.

ON THE JOB

Famous Sociology Majors

Sociology continues to be a popular major at colleges and universities in the United States and in countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2022), over a half million bachelor of arts degrees in sociology were awarded in the United States between 1990 and 2022. Clearly, there are many reasons students are enthusiastic about the subject. What may be less clear is how to turn this passion into a paycheck. Students considering majoring in the subject often ask, "What can I do with a degree in sociology?" Their parents may be asking the same question.

Students interested in academic careers can pursue graduate degrees and become professors and researchers—real practicing sociologists. But most sociology majors will not necessarily become sociologists with a capital "*S*." Their studies have prepared them to be valuable, accomplished participants in a variety of fields, including law and government, business administration, social welfare, public health, education, counseling and human resources, advertising and marketing, public relations and the media, and the nonprofit sector. A major in sociology, in other words, can lead almost anywhere. And while the roster of former sociology majors contains names both well known and unsung—from President Ronald Reagan, Pulitzer and Nobel Prize–winning author Saul Bellow, and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. to the public defender giving legal aid to low-income clients and the health care professional bringing wellness programs into large corporations—we will focus here on three important Americans you may not have associated with sociology.

Our first profile is of Michelle Robinson Obama (b. 1964), the first African American First Lady of the United States. Michelle Obama has become one of the most recognizable and widely admired sociology majors in the world, using her role as First Lady to fight childhood obesity, help working mothers and military families, and encourage public service. Born and raised in working-class Chicago, she can trace her ancestry to enslaved people on both sides of her family tree. Her father worked for the city's water department but saw both of his children graduate from Princeton University and go on to successful professional careers. After obtaining her BA in sociology—her senior thesis dealt with alienation experienced by African American students in an Ivy League institution—she earned her law degree at Harvard, worked

at a prestigious law firm in Chicago, and then served in the mayor's office. In addition to law and politics, her choice of majors was a critical stepping stone on her way to success.

Our next sociology major is Kalpen Modi (b. 1977), who served as an associate director with the White House Office of Public Engagement (OPE) in 2009. In this role, he acted as a liaison to young Americans, the arts, and Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. He also served on the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities. This may come as a surprise to those who know him as the actor Kal Penn, most famous for his role as the wisecracking, easygoing stoner Kumar in the *Harold and Kumar* film series or as Kevin on *How I Met Your Mother*. As an actor, Penn has been critical of the racial and ethnic stereotypes often associated with playing a person of South Asian descent. At one point, he nearly turned down a recurring role as a terrorist on the TV drama *24* because he didn't want to reinforce the negative "connection between media images and people's thought processes" (Yuan 2007). While it might be easy to make similar claims against *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle*, one of his co-stars defended the film by arguing that it "approached the level of sociology, albeit scatological, sexually obsessed sociology," as "it probed questions of ethnic identity, conformism and family expectations versus personal satisfaction" (Garvin 2008, p. M1). In his new docuseries, *Getting Warmer with Kal Penn*, the actor turns his attention—and sense of humor—to the climate crisis, traveling the globe to explore bold new solutions to global warming. Penn continues to juggle politics with acting, reflecting a deep commitment to sociological ideals and a desire to use his influence to help build more positive media portrayals of minorities.

Our last sociology major is the poet and activist Amanda Gorman (b. 1998), who rose to fame with her breakout performance at President Biden's inauguration. Gorman, who graduated from Harvard in 2020 with a degree in sociology, was the first person to be named National Youth Poet Laureate. She was asked to recite an original poem at the inauguration after Jill Biden saw a video of one of her performances. In the weeks leading up to the inauguration, she struggled to put pen to paper. But on January 6, 2021, after watching pro-Trump rioters storm the Capitol, she stayed up late and finally finished "The Hill We Climb." The poem, which references the violence of January 6, was inspired by the words of historic leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. (another sociology major) and Abraham Lincoln, as well as the Broadway musical *Hamilton*. It's also very sociological in nature: Throughout the poem, Gorman reflects on the intersection between history and biography and the way social forces shape our lives. In a nod to her own personal biography, she highlights that her ancestors were enslaved and that she was raised by a single mother. Even more importantly, though, she highlights how people can shape their societies in turn. Biden's inauguration is not the only presidential inauguration this sociology major hopes to attend: She plans to run for president in 2036.

Regardless of whether you go any further in this discipline—or if you end up working in politics, the arts, or public service—the most important thing to take away from an introductory sociology class is a sociological perspective. Sociology promises a new way of looking at, thinking about, and taking action in the world around us, which will serve you well no matter where you find yourself in the future.

Michelle Obama

Kal Penn

Amanda Gorman

Symbolic Interactionism

Sociology's third grand theory, symbolic interactionism (or interactionist theory), proved its greatest influence through much of the 1900s. It is America's unique contribution to the discipline and an answer to many of the criticisms of other paradigms. Symbolic interactionism helps us explain both our individual personalities and the ways in which we are all linked together; it allows us to understand the processes by which social order and social change are constructed. As a theoretical perspective, it is vital, versatile, and still evolving.

FOUNDER AND KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

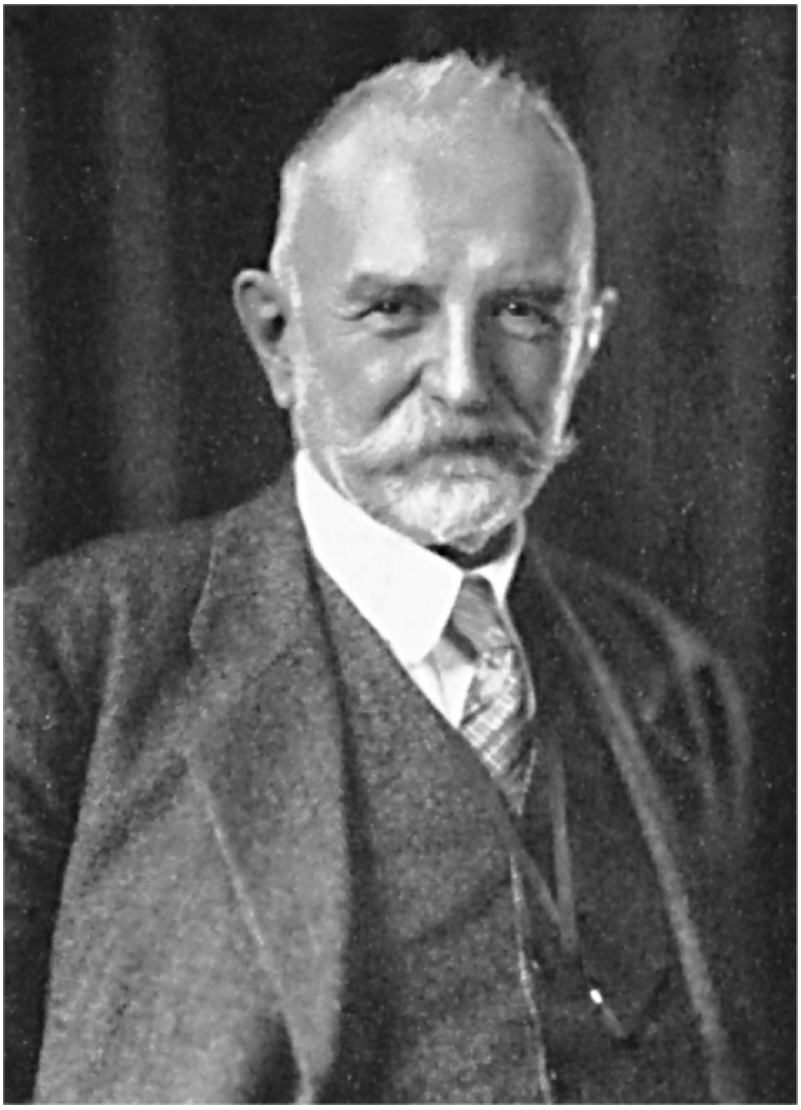
Symbolic interactionism is derived largely from the teachings of George Herbert Mead (1863–1931). But there were many others involved in the development of this particular school of thought, and it is worthwhile to examine the social context in which they lived and worked.

At the start of the twentieth century, sociology was still something of an import from the European intellectual scene, and American practitioners had just begun developing their own ideas regarding the nature and workings of society. The University of Chicago in the 1920s provided a stimulating intellectual setting for a handful of academics who built on one another's work and advanced what became known as the first new major branch within the discipline. Since there were so few social theorists in the country, the head of the department, Albion Small, a philosopher by training, recruited professors from various eastern colleges who had often studied other disciplines such as theology and psychology. The fledgling sociology department grew to include such influential members as Robert Park, W. I. Thomas,

Charles Horton Cooley, and later George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer. This group, the theories they developed together, and the way they went about studying the social world are frequently referred to (either individually or collectively) as the Chicago School of sociology.

Chicago was in many ways a frontier city in the early twentieth century. Rapidly transformed by industrialization, immigration, and ethnic diversity, Chicago became a unique laboratory in which to practice a new type of sociology that differed both theoretically and methodologically from the European models. Instead of doing comparative and historical work like the macro theorists before them, the members of the Chicago School went out into the city to conduct interviews and collect observational data. Their studies were particularly inspired by Max Weber's concept of *verstehen* as the proper attitude to adopt in the field. Their focus was on the micro level of everyday interactions (such as race relations in urban neighborhoods) as the building blocks of larger social phenomena (such as racial inequality).

The new school of thought was strongly influenced by a philosophical perspective called pragmatism, developed largely by William James and John Dewey, which was gaining acceptance among American social theorists in the early 1900s. To James, pragmatism meant seeking the truth of an idea by evaluating its usefulness in everyday life; in other words, if it works, it's true! He thought that living in the world involved making practical adaptations to whatever we encountered; if those adaptations made our lives run more smoothly, then the ideas behind them must be both useful and true. James's ideas inspired educational psychologist and philosopher John Dewey, who also grappled with pragmatism's main questions: How do we adapt to our environments? How do we acquire the knowledge that allows us to act in our everyday lives? Unlike the social Darwinists, pragmatists implied that the process of adaptation is essentially immediate and that it involves conscious thought. George Herbert Mead would be the one who eventually pulled these ideas (and others, too) together into a theory meant to address questions about the relationship between thought and action, the individual and society.

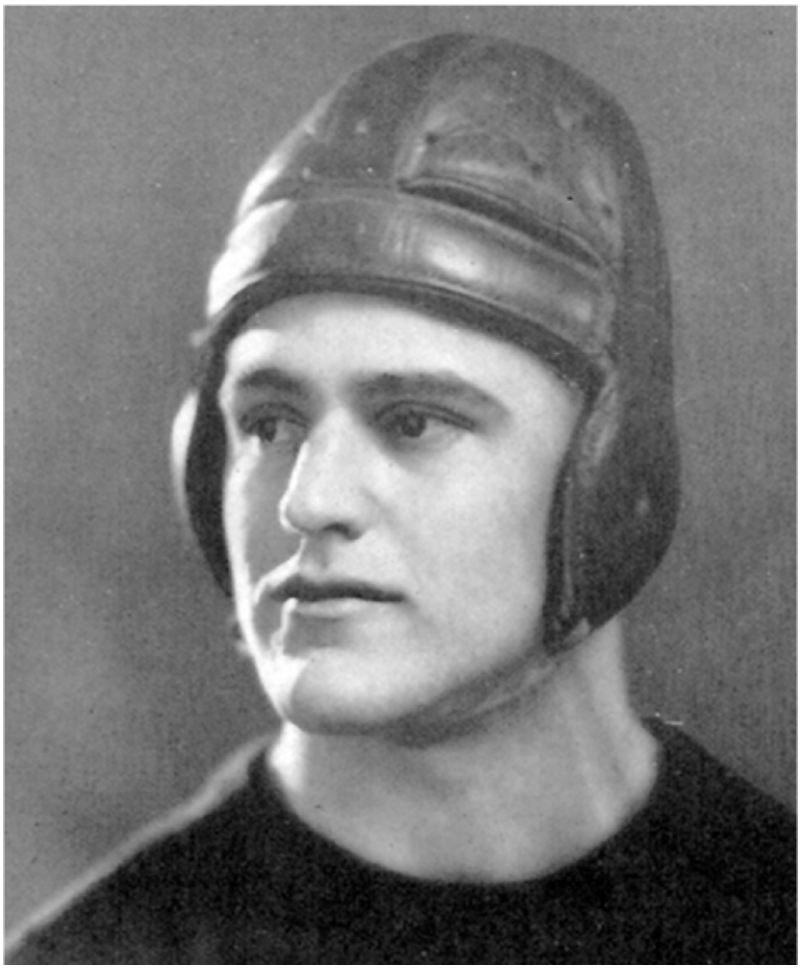


George Herbert Mead

Mead came from a progressive family and grew up in the Midwest and Northeast during the late 1800s. Mead attended college at Oberlin and Harvard and did his graduate studies in psychology at the universities of Leipzig and Berlin in Germany. Before he became a full-time professor of psychology at the University of Michigan and later the University of Chicago, Mead waited tables and did railroad surveying and construction work. He was also a tutor to William James's family in Cambridge, Massachusetts; since his later theories were influenced by James, we can only wonder exactly who was tutoring whom in this arrangement! Mead's background and training uniquely positioned him to bridge the gap between sociology and psychology and to address the links between the individual and society.

Mead proposed that both human development and the meanings we assign to everyday objects and events are fundamentally social processes; they require the interaction of multiple individuals. And what is crucial to the development of self and society is language, the means by which we communicate with one another. For Mead, there is no mind without language, and

language itself is a product of social interactions (1934, pp. 191–192). According to Mead, the most important human behaviors consist of linguistic "gestures," such as words and facial expressions. People develop the ability to engage in conversation using these gestures; further, both society and individual selves are constructed through this kind of symbolic communication. Mead argued that we use language to "name ourselves, think about ourselves, talk to ourselves, and feel proud or ashamed of ourselves" and that "we can act toward ourselves in all the ways we can act toward others" (Hewitt 2000, p. 10). He was curious about how the mind develops but did not believe that it develops separately from its social environment. For Mead, then, society and self are created through communicative acts such as speech and gestures; the individual personality is shaped by society, and vice versa.



Herbert Blumer

Herbert Blumer (1900–1987), a graduate student and later a professor at the University of Chicago, was closely associated with Mead and was largely credited with continuing Mead's life's work. Blumer appealed for researchers to get "down and dirty" with the dynamics of social life. He also published a clear and compelling series of works based on Mead's fundamental ideas. After Mead's death in 1931, Blumer gave Mead's theory the name it now goes by: symbolic interactionism. Thus, Mead and Blumer became the somewhat unwitting founders of a much larger theoretical perspective. Blumer's long career at the University of

Chicago and later at the University of California, Berkeley, ensured the training of many future scholars and secured the inclusion of symbolic interactionism as one of the major schools of thought within the discipline.

Despite its geographical location in a city full of real-world inequality (or perhaps because of it), the Chicago School of sociology had very few women or people of color among its membership. Take W.E.B. Du Bois and Jane Addams, for example: These two scholars were neither students nor faculty members at the University of Chicago, although both are often associated with Chicago School perspectives, values, and methods. Both led the way for other minorities and women to become influential scholars in the discipline of sociology.

W.E.B. Du Bois

William Edward Burghardt (W.E.B.) Du Bois (1868–1963) was a notable pioneer in the study of race relations as a professor of sociology at Atlanta University and one of the most influential African American leaders of his time. After becoming the first African American to earn a PhD from Harvard University, Du Bois did groundbreaking research on the history of the slave trade, post–Civil War Reconstruction, the problems of urban ghetto life, and the nature of Black American society. Du Bois was so brilliant and prolific that it is often said that

all subsequent studies of race and racial inequality in America depend to some degree on his work.

Throughout his life, Du Bois was involved in various forms of social activism. He was an indispensable forerunner in the civil rights movement; among his many civic and political achievements, Du Bois was a founding member, in 1909, of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), an organization committed to the cause of ending racism and racial injustice. Because of his antiracist, antipoverty, and antiwar activism, Du Bois was targeted by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and Senator Joseph McCarthy as a communist. However, he did not become a member of the Communist Party until he was ninety-three years old, and then only did so as a form of political protest against the persecution of its members by the U.S. government. Eventually, Du Bois became disillusioned by the persistent injustices of American society and emigrated to Ghana, where he died at ninety-five, one year before the historic Civil Rights Act of 1964 was signed into law.

Jane Addams

Jane Addams (1860–1935) was another pioneer in the field of sociology, whose numerous accomplishments range from the halls of academia to the forefront of social activism. Though she never officially joined the faculty because she feared it would curtail her political activism,

Addams did teach extension courses at the University of Chicago and was among a handful of women teaching in American universities at the time. Though not a mother herself, Addams believed that women have a special kind of responsibility for solving social problems because they are trained to care for others. She was one of the first proponents of applied sociology—addressing the most pressing problems of her day through hands-on work with the people and places that were the subject of her research. This practical approach is perhaps best demonstrated by Hull House, the Chicago community center she established in 1889 to offer shelter, medical care, legal advice, training, and education to new immigrants, single mothers, and people in poverty. As a result of her commitment to delivering support and services where they were most needed, Addams is often considered the founder of what is now a separate field outside the discipline: social work. Addams also helped found two important organizations that continue to fight for freedom and equality today: the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and, along with W.E.B. Du Bois, the NAACP. She served as the president of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and in 1931 became the first American woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.

ORIGINAL PRINCIPLES

For symbolic interactionists, society is produced and reproduced through our interactions with each other by means of language and our interpretations of that language. Symbolic interactionism sees face-to-face interaction as the building block of everything else in society, because it is through interaction that we create a meaningful social reality.

Here are the three basic tenets of symbolic interactionism, as laid out by Blumer (1969, p. 2). First, we act toward things on the basis of their meanings. For example, a tree can provide a shady place to rest, or it can be an obstacle to building a road or home; each of these meanings suggests a different set of actions. This is as true for physical objects like trees as it is for people (like mothers or cops), institutions (church or school), beliefs (honesty or equality), or any social activity. Second, meanings are not inherent; rather, they are negotiated through interaction with others. That is, whether the tree is an obstacle or an oasis is not an intrinsic quality of the tree itself but rather something that people must figure out among themselves. The same tree can mean one thing to one person and something else to another. And third, meanings can change or be modified through interaction. For example, the contractor who sees the tree as an obstacle might be persuaded to spare it by the neighbor who appreciates its shade. Now the tree means the same thing to both of them: It is something to protect and build around rather than to condemn and bulldoze.

Symbolic interactionism proposes that social facts exist only because we create and re-create them through our interactions; this gives the theory wide explanatory power and a versatility that allows it to address any sociological issue. Although symbolic interactionism is focused on how self and society develop through interaction with others, it is useful in explaining and analyzing a wide variety of specific social issues, from inequalities of race and gender to the group dynamics of families or co-workers.

OFFSHOOTS

Symbolic interactionism opened the door for innovative sociologists who focused on social acts (such as face-to-face interaction) rather than social facts (such as vast bureaucratic institutions). They were able to extend the field in a variety of ways, allowing new perspectives to come under the umbrella of symbolic interactionism.

Erving Goffman

Erving Goffman (1922–1982) furthered symbolic interactionist conceptions of the self in a seemingly radical way, indicating that the self is essentially "on loan" to us from society; it is created through interaction with others and hence ever changing within various social contexts. For example, you may want to make a different kind of impression on a first date than you do on a job interview or when you face an opponent in a game of poker. Goffman used the theatrical metaphor of dramaturgy to describe the ways in which we engage in a strategic presentation of ourselves to others. In this way, he elaborated on Mead's ideas in a specific fashion, utilizing a wide range of data to help support his arguments.

Harold Garfinkel, the founder of ethnomethodology (the study of "folk methods," or everyday analysis of interaction), maintains that as members of society we must acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to act practically in our everyday lives (Garfinkel 1967). He argues that

much of this knowledge remains in the background, "seen but unnoticed," and that we assume that others have the same knowledge we do when we interact with them. These assumptions allow us to make meaning out of even seemingly troublesome or ambiguous events; but such shared understandings can also be quite precarious, and there is a good deal of work required to sustain them, even as we are unaware that we are doing so.

Conversation analysis, pioneered by sociologists at the University of California, Los Angeles, is also related to symbolic interactionism. It is based on the ethnomethodological idea that as everyday actors we are constantly analyzing and giving meaning to our social world (Clayman 2002; Heritage and Clayman 2010; Schegloff 1986, 1999, 2007). Conversation analysts are convinced that the best place to look for the social processes of meaning production is in naturally occurring conversation and that the best way to get at the meanings an everyday actor gives to the things others say and do is to look closely at how the actor responds. Conversation analysts therefore use highly technical methods to scrutinize each conversational turn closely, operating on the assumption that any larger social phenomenon is constructed step-by-step through interaction.

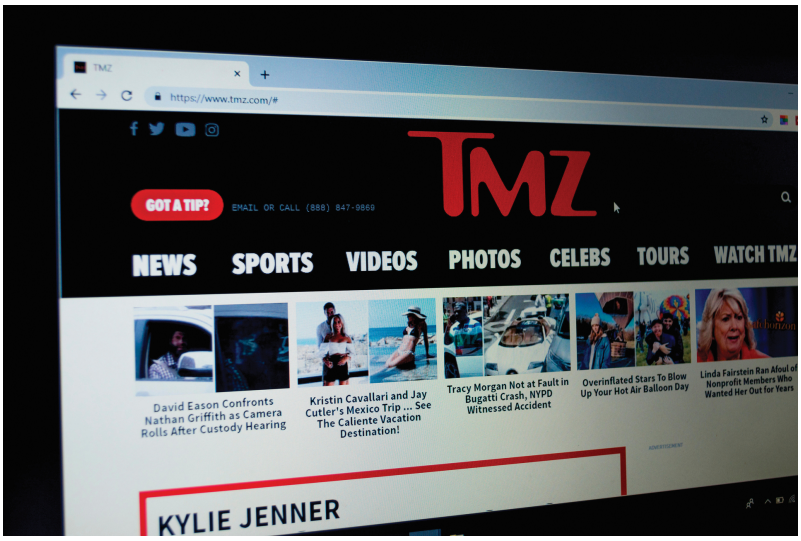
ADVANTAGES AND CRITIQUES

As society changes, so must the discipline that studies it, and symbolic interactionism has invigorated sociology in ways that are linked to the past and looking toward the future. The founding of symbolic interactionism provided a new and different way of looking at the world. It is "the only perspective that assumes an active, expressive model of the human actor and that treats the individual and the social at the same level of analysis" (O'Brien and Kollock 1997, p. 39). Therein lies much of its power and its appeal.

As a new school of thought focusing on the micro level of society, symbolic interactionism was not always met with immediate approval by the academy. Over time, symbolic interactionism has been integrated relatively seamlessly into sociology, and its fundamental precepts have become widely accepted. During the second half of the twentieth century, the scope of symbolic interactionism widened, its topics multiplied, and its theoretical linkages became more varied. In fact, there was some concern that symbolic interactionism was expanding so much that it risked erupting into something else entirely (Fine 1993). One of symbolic interactionism's most enduring contributions is in the area of research methods. Practices such as ethnography and conversation analysis are data rich, technically complex, and empirically well grounded (Katz 1997; Schegloff 1999), giving us new insights into perennial questions about social life.

As a relative newcomer to the field of social theory, symbolic interactionism was dubbed "the loyal opposition" (Mullins 1973) by those who saw it solely as a reaction or as merely a supplement to the more dominant macrosociological theories that preceded it. Gary Fine sums up the critiques in this way: Symbolic interactionism is "apolitical (and hence, supportive of the status quo), unscientific (hence, little more than tenured journalism), hostile to the classical questions of macrosociology (hence, limited to social psychology), and astructural (hence, fundamentally nonsociological)" (1993, p. 65). Critics argue that the scope of symbolic interactionism is limited, that it cannot address the most important sociological issues, and that its authority is restricted to the study of face-to-face interaction.

Each of these critiques has been answered over the years. Ultimately, some critics have seen the usefulness of an interactionist perspective and have even begun incorporating it into more macro work. Even in the hotly contested micro-versus-macro debate, a kind of détente has been established, recognizing that all levels of analysis are necessary for sociological understanding and that interactionist theories and methods are critical for a full picture of social life.



Celebrity Gossip and Society Founded in 2005, TMZ is a leading purveyor of celebrity and entertainment news.

DATA WORKSHOP

Analyzing Media and Pop Culture

Theories of Celebrity Gossip

TMZ, which debuted in 2005, has become one of the most popular celebrity gossip websites in the world. It is consistently among the top 100 sites (of any kind) in the United States, with upward of 25 million unique visitors a month. TMZ provides users with up-to-the-minute pop culture news, publishing hundreds of posts each day that expose the real and rumored doings of celebrities. It has become the go-to site anytime a celebrity gets arrested, dies, goes to rehab, cheats, or behaves badly in some other way.

TMZ, along with other celebrity gossip outlets such as PerezHilton, ONTD, Radar Online, Dlisted, and PopSugar, have radically transformed the way that celebrities and other public

figures are covered in the media. These sites are providing more coverage than ever and at greater speed. Stories that used to take at least a week to appear in pre-digital-era print magazines such as *People* or *Us Weekly* can now be posted online nearly instantaneously. That sometimes puts gossip sites on the forefront of breaking news. For instance, TMZ was the first outlet to report the news of the helicopter crash that killed Kobe Bryant and his daughter Gianna in 2020.

It's not just the volume or speed of delivery that's different; celebrity gossip sites are changing the substance of the coverage as well. Print magazines or mainstream television programs such as *Entertainment Tonight* or *E! News* used to provide mostly flattering coverage of celebrities. They were unwilling to report too many negative stories because they relied on the goodwill of celebrities to gain access into their lives. This tends to remain the rule in entertainment news, where there is still no shortage of promotional puff pieces and lightweight fare without much bite.

Gossip sites such as TMZ and others often take a harsher, more critical stance toward their subjects. They've also started engaging in investigative journalism practices, something that was formerly reserved for the mainstream news media. And they're covering a wider range of "celebrities" that regularly includes professional athletes as well as business executives and even political figures.

Whatever your opinion of tabloid news, which many people regard as just mean, stupid, or shallow, you don't have to enjoy celebrity gossip to see its sociological relevance. For this Data Workshop, we'd like you to immerse yourself in the celebrity gossip site of your choice. Pick three stories to work with. Scrutinize the pictures, read the headlines and text carefully, and review the reader comments. Then consider how you might answer the following questions according to each of sociology's three major schools of thought:

1. Structural Functionalism

What is the function (or functions) of celebrity gossip for society? What purpose(s) does it serve, and how does it help society maintain stability and order? Discuss how notions of the sacred and profane are characterized. Are there manifest and latent functions of celebrity gossip? And are there any dysfunctions in it?

2. Conflict Theory

What forms of inequality are revealed in celebrity gossip? In particular, what does it have to say about class, race, gender, sexuality, body size, or other inequalities? Whose interests are being served and who gets exploited? Who suffers and who benefits from celebrity gossip?

3. Symbolic Interactionism

What does celebrity gossip mean to society as a whole? What does it mean to individual members of society? Can gossip have different meanings for different individuals or groups of individuals? How do those meanings get constructed in interaction? And how does celebrity gossip shape and influence our everyday lives?

There are two options for completing this Data Workshop:

PREP-PAIR-SHARE

Select three stories to analyze in class. Consider how each of the three sets of questions might be applied. Jot down your thoughts and make note of particular images and text. Get together in groups of two or three, and talk about your findings. How does each sociological theory fit with your examples? What new insights were provided by each perspective?

DO-IT-YOURSELF

Select the material you will analyze, and answer each of the three sets of questions in a three-page essay. Discuss the main principles of the three theoretical perspectives and explain how each can be applied. You will want to include specific examples from your chosen stories to illustrate your points. Did the theories overlap at all, or did they contradict each other? Was there any one theory you felt did a better or worse job of explaining celebrity gossip? Attach the stories to your paper.

Glossary

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM
: a paradigm that sees interaction and meaning as central to society and assumes that meanings are not inherent but are created through interaction

CHICAGO SCHOOL
: a type of sociology practiced at the University of Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s that centered on urban settings and field research methods

PRAGMATISM
: a perspective that assumes organisms (including humans) make practical adaptations to their environments; humans do this through cognition, interpretation, and interaction

DRAMATURGY
: an approach pioneered by Erving Goffman in which social life is analyzed in terms of its similarities to theatrical performance

ETHNOMETHODOLOGY
: the study of "folk methods" and background knowledge that sustain a shared sense of reality in everyday interactions

CONVERSATION ANALYSIS
: a sociological approach that looks at how we create meaning in naturally occurring conversation, often by taping conversations and examining their transcripts

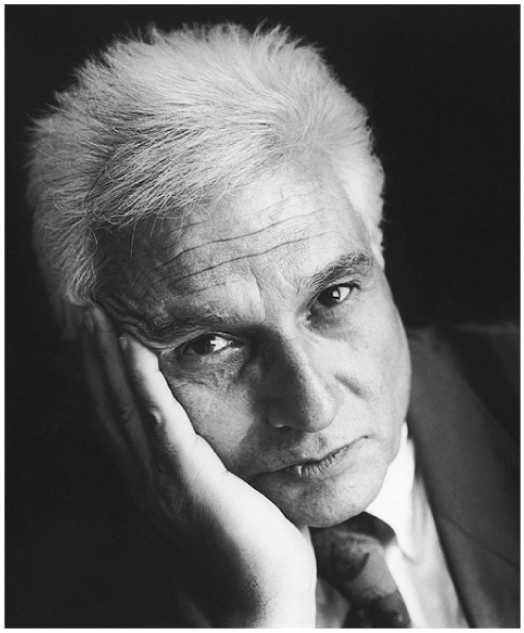
NEW THEORETICAL APPROACHES

Because the three major schools of thought and their offshoots all have weaknesses as well as strengths, they will probably never fully explain the totality of social phenomena, even when taken together. And because society itself is always changing, there are always new phenomena to explain. So new perspectives will, and indeed must, continue to arise. In this section, we will consider two more contemporary approaches: postmodernism and midrange theory. Both approaches grew out of the deep groundwork established by the other major schools of thought within sociology, while also expanding beyond the confines of the discipline for inspiration. Each is a response to conditions both in the fast-changing social world around us and within the ongoing intellectual dialogues taking place among those continuing to study our times and ourselves.

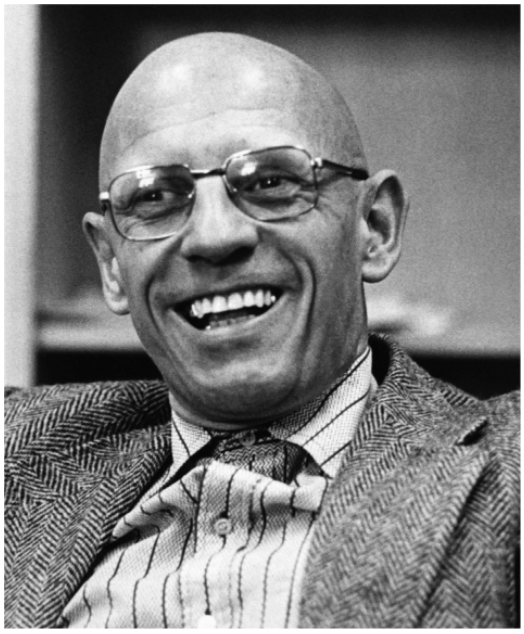
Postmodern Theory

In the late twentieth century, some social thinkers looked at the proliferation of theories and data and began to question whether we could ever know society or ourselves with any certainty. What is truth, and who has the right to claim it? Or, for that matter, what is reality, and how can it be known? In an era of increasing doubt and cynicism, has meaning become meaningless? Postmodernism, a theory that encompasses a wide range of areas—from art and architecture, to music and film, to communications and technology—addresses these and other questions.

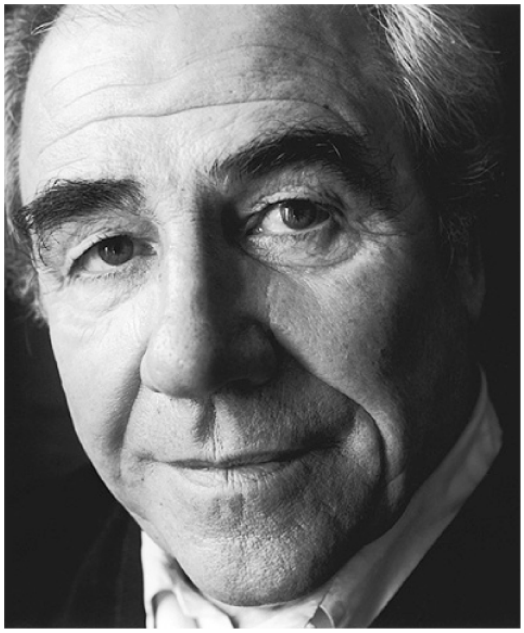
The postmodern perspective developed primarily out of the French intellectual scene in the second half of the twentieth century and is still associated with three of its most important proponents. It's probably worth noting that postmodernists themselves don't really like that label, but nonetheless Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007), and Michel Foucault (1926–1984) are the major figures most often included in the group.



Jacques Derrida



Michel Foucault



Jean Baudrillard

In order to understand postmodernism, we first need to juxtapose it with modernism, the movement against which it reacted. Modernism is both a historical period and an ideological stance that began with the eighteenth century Enlightenment, or Age of Reason. Modernist thought values scientific knowledge, a linear (or timeline-like) view of history, and a belief in the universality of human nature. In postmodernism, on the other hand, there are no absolutes —no claims to truth, reason, right, order, or stability. Everything is therefore relative— fragmented, temporary, and contingent. Postmodernists believe that certainty is illusory and prefer to play with the possibilities created by fluidity, complexity, multidimensionality, and even nonsense. They propose that there are no universal human truths from which we can interpret the meaning of existence. On one hand, postmodernism can be celebrated as a liberating influence that rescues us from the stifling effects of rationality and tradition. On the other hand, it can be condemned as a detrimental influence that imprisons us in a world of relativity, nihilism, and chaos.

Postmodernists are also critical of what they call "grand narratives," overarching stories and theories that justify dominant beliefs and give a (false) sense of order and coherence to the world. Postmodernists are interested in deconstruction, or taking apart and examining these stories and theories. For example, they claim that "factual" accounts of history are no more accurate than those that might be found in fiction. They prefer the notion of mini-narratives, or small-scale stories, that describe individual or group practices rather than narratives that attempt to be universal or global. These mini-narratives can then be combined in a variety of ways, creating a collage of meaning.

One way of understanding what postmodernism looks like is to examine how it has crept into our popular culture. Hip-hop is an example of a postmodern art form. It is a hybrid that borrows from other established genres, from rhythm-and-blues to rock and reggae. Hip-hop

also takes samples from existing songs, mixes these with new musical tracks, and overlays it all with rap lyrics, resulting in a unique new sound. Mash-ups are another postmodern twist in music. Take, for instance, *The Grey Album* by DJ Danger Mouse, which uses tracks from the Beatles' classic *White Album* and combines them with Jay-Z's *The Black Album* to create something wholly new yet borrowed.

Sociologists are quick to criticize postmodernism for discarding the scientific method and the knowledge they believe it has generated. Social leaders with a conservative agenda have been suspicious of the postmodern impulse to dismiss moral standards. While it is clear that many people criticize postmodernism, a much larger number are probably oblivious to it, which in itself may be more damning than any other response.

Although it is not a widely practiced perspective, postmodernism has nevertheless gained supporters. Those who challenge the status quo, whether in the arts, politics, or the academy, find attractive postmodernism's ability to embrace a multiplicity of powerful and promising alternatives. At the very least, postmodernism allows us to question scientific ideals of clarity and coherence, revealing inherent shortcomings and weaknesses in our current arguments and providing a way toward a deeper, more nuanced understanding of social life. As one of the most contemporary of the theoretical perspectives, postmodernism corresponds to the Information Age and feels natural and intuitive for many students whose lives are immersed in this world. By focusing on individuals and small-scale activities in which change happens on a local, limited basis, postmodernism offers an alternative to such cultural trends as consumerism and globalization. However unwelcome the theory might be to some critics, it is likely that the postmodern shifts we have seen in society (in music and films, for example) will continue.

TABLE 1.1 Theory in Everyday Life

Perspective	**Approach to Sociology**	**Case Study: College Admissions in the United States**
Structural Functionalism	Assumes that society is a unified whole that functions because of the contributions of its separate structures.	Those who are admitted to four-year institutions are worthy and well qualified, whereas those who are not admitted do not deserve to be. There are other places for them besides the university, such as community colleges or vocational schools.

Perspective	Approach to Sociology	Case Study: College Admissions in the United States
Conflict Theory	Sees social conflict as the basis of society and social change and emphasizes a materialist view of society, a critical view of the status quo, and a dynamic model of historical change.	Admissions decisions may be made on the basis of criteria other than grades and scores. For example, some applicants may get in because their parents are major university donors, whereas others may get in because of their talents in sports or music. Community colleges, with open enrollments for all, are more egalitarian.
Symbolic Interactionism	Asserts that interaction and meaning are central to society and assumes that meanings are not inherent but are created through interaction.	University admissions processes are all about self-presentation and meaning-making in interaction. How do applicants present themselves to impress the admissions committee? How does the admissions committee develop an understanding of the kind of applicant it's looking for? How do applicants decide where to apply, and how do they interpret their acceptances and rejections?
Postmodernism	Suggests that social reality is diverse, pluralistic, and constantly in flux.	An acceptance at a four-year institution doesn't mean you're smart, and a rejection doesn't mean you're stupid; what college you go to, if any, doesn't define you. Be careful of any "facts" you may be presented with, as they are illusory and contingent.

Midrange Theory

The second new theoretical approach is midrange theory. It shares some views with postmodernism, especially in its preference for mini-narratives over sweeping statements or "grand theories" made by the classical social theorists. Durkheim, Marx, and Weber all

developed their ideas during a period dominated by what Robert Merton calls "total sociological systems" (1996, p. 46), which provided an overarching, comprehensive explanation of society as a whole.

Merton feared that an uncritical reverence for classical theory and an excessive attachment to tradition could impede the flow of new ideas and was just as likely to hold sociology back as to advance it. Because classical theories sought to develop large-scale theoretical systems that applied to the most macro level of society, they were often extremely difficult to test or research in any practical way. As one critic lamented, too "many sociological products can—effectively and unfortunately—be considered both bad science and bad literature" (Boudon 1991, p. 522).

To counter this tendency, Merton proposed that sociologists focus more on "theories of the middle range." Midrange (or middle range) theory is not a theory of something in particular, but rather a style of theorizing. It is an attempt not so much to make the elusive micro-macro link, but to strike a balance somewhere between those polarities, shifting both the sights and the process of doing sociology. Work in this vein concentrates on incorporating research questions and empirical data into smaller-scale theories that eventually build into a more comprehensive body of sociological theory. Midrange theories are those "that lie between the minor but necessary working hypotheses that evolve in abundance during day-to-day research and the all-inclusive systematic efforts to develop a unified theory that will explain" the whole social world (Merton 1996, p. 41).

Since the 1990s and 2000s, a host of sociologists have taken up the call to midrange theory, from Annette Lareau's study of the impact of parents' social class on the lives of their children (2011), to Dalton Conley's work on racial identity (2000) and his examination of what constitutes leisure in the digital age (2009), to Peter Bearman's research on public health issues such as the rise of "vaccine refusers" (2010). Midrange theory connects specific research projects that generate empirical data with larger-scale theories about social structure. It aims to build knowledge cumulatively while offering a way to make sociology more effective as a science rather than just a way of thinking. With more sociologists appreciating such a stance, midrange theory is helping to push the discipline forward into the sociology of the future.

Glossary

POSTMODERNISM
: a paradigm that suggests that social reality is diverse, pluralistic, and constantly in flux

MODERNISM
: a paradigm that places trust in the power of science and technology to create progress, solve problems, and improve life

MIDRANGE THEORY
: an approach that integrates empiricism and grand theory

Closing Comments

Many of you will have already started a sociological journey, although likely a casual or personal one . . . until now. The popularity of reality TV, whether *Love Island* or *Shark Tank* or *The Real Housewives of* _____ (fill in the blank), speaks to our fascination with the everyday lives of other people. As students of sociology, we are interested in everyday life because we are excited to understand more about how its patterns and processes create our larger social reality. As we become better social analysts, using strategies to set aside any blinding preconceptions or distracting conclusions, we can become better acquainted with some of the fundamental tools that can turn our natural curiosity into scientific inquiry. A sociological perspective allows us to grasp the connection between our individual experiences and the forces and structures of society. As Bernard McGrane says, "Sociology is both dangerous and liberating" (1994, p. 10), as much because of what we can learn about ourselves as because of what we can learn about the world around us.

As a discipline, sociology possesses some of the qualities of the society it seeks to understand: It is broad, complex, and ever changing. This can make mastering sociology a rather unwieldy business, as much for the students and teachers who grapple with it in the classroom as for the experts out working in the field. We want you to become familiar with the members of sociology's family tree from its varied historical roots to the tips of its offshoots that might one day become important future branches. Because we have no single acknowledged universal sociological theory that satisfactorily explains all social phenomena (despite claims otherwise by some theorists), new theories can be developed all the time. Social theory tries to explain what is happening in, to, and around us. For any and every possible new, different, or important phenomenon—from the most mundane personal experience to questions of ultimate global significance—sociologists will attempt to explain it, understand it, analyze it, and predict its future. By looking at the development of the discipline, we are reminded that the contemporary grows out of the classical, and that older theories inspire and provoke newer ones. Theorists past and present remain engaged in a continual and evolving dialogue through their ideas and their work, and until such time as society is completely explained, the branches of sociology's family tree will continue to grow in remarkable ways.

We know this chapter covered a lot of ground. It's okay if it didn't all sink in. We will revisit many of these concepts and theories in later chapters. We hope you will treat this chapter as a first introduction to key sociological concepts, figures, and theories and that you will return to it for reference as you delve further into the text.

SOCIOLOGY IN PRACTICE

APPLYING WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED

Let's Talk More

1. The sociological theorists in this chapter are almost all white males from Europe or the United States, evidence of Eurocentric, racist, and sexist bias in sociology. Do your classes in other disciplines have these same deficiencies?
2. Think about the last time you returned home from a long trip. Did ordinary, everyday things seem strange or unfamiliar? How could culture shock help you be a better sociologist?
3. What does it mean to possess a sociological imagination? Think of your favorite food. What historical events had to happen and what social institutions have to function in order for this food to be available?

Let's Explore More

1. **Film** Zemeckis, Robert, dir. *Cast Away*. 2000.
2. **Article** Irwin, Neil. "What If Sociologists Had as Much Influence as Economists?" *The New York Times*. March 17, 2017.
3. **Blog Post** Sternheimer, Karen. "Biography and History Intersecting: Thinking Critically about Individualism." *Everyday Sociology* (blog). Aug. 16, 2021.

CHAPTER 2
Studying Social Life: Sociological Research Methods

Humorist Dave Barry, the Pulitzer Prize–winning columnist and author, has written many entertaining articles as a reporter and social commentator. Some of his thoughts on college, however, seem particularly appropriate for this chapter. In one of his most popular essays, Barry advises students not to choose a major that involves "known facts" and "right answers" but rather to pick a subject in which "nobody really understands what anybody else is talking about, and which involves virtually no actual facts" (Barry 1987, p. 203). For example, sociology:

> For sheer lack of intelligibility, sociology is far and away the number-one subject. I sat through hundreds of hours of sociology courses, and read gobs of sociology writing, and I never once heard or read a coherent statement. This is because sociologists want to be considered scientists, so they spend most of their time translating simple, obvious observations into scientific-sounding code. If you plan to major in sociology, you'll have to learn to do the same thing. For example, suppose you have observed that children cry when they fall down. You should write: "Methodological observation of the sociometrical behavior tendencies of prematurated isolates indicates that a causal relationship exists between groundward tropism and lachrimatory, or 'crying' behavior forms." If you can keep this up for fifty or sixty pages, you will get a large government grant.

Although Barry exaggerates a bit, if there weren't some truth to what he is saying, his joke would be meaningless. While sociologists draw much of their inspiration from the natural (or "hard") sciences (such as chemistry and biology) and try to study society in a scientific way, many people still think of sociology as "unscientific" or a "soft" science. In response, some sociologists may try too hard to sound scientific and incorporate complicated terminology in their writing.

It is possible, of course, to conduct research and write about it in a clear, straightforward, and even elegant way, as the best sociologists have demonstrated. Contrary to Barry's humorous claims, sociology can be both scientific and comprehensible. So let's turn now to a discussion of how sociologists conduct their research, which includes the methods of gathering information and conveying that information to others. For the record, Dave Barry went to Haverford College near Philadelphia, where he majored in English.