As children, our imaginations often run wild. When someone asks, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” almost anything seems possible—superhero, author, jet pilot, ballet dancer, movie star, secret agent, Olympic athlete, or maybe even president. As we get older, reality hits, and we usually end up narrowing our choices to something a bit more realistic. But not always.

When Sheryl Sandberg was young, her mom encouraged her to work hard so that she could be whatever she wanted to be. She took her mom’s advice, and it paid off. She earned an economics degree at Harvard, served as chief of staff at the U.S. Department of the Treasury, and worked as the vice president of global online sales and operations at Google. Now Sandberg is second in command at Facebook, a position she accepted when she was 38 years old. Hers is a classic tale of the American dream.

Yet when she reached the top, she found that very few women had successfully made the journey with her. It didn’t start out that way. In college and in her entry-level jobs, Sandberg’s peers included equal numbers of men and women. As she climbed each rung of the career ladder, men increasingly outnumbered women. One of the most staggering examples of inequity is the disparity at the very top, among corporate leaders. In fact, only 4 percent of CEOs at Fortune 500 firms are women. In her book, Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead, Sandberg (2013) explores this seemingly systematic reduction in the number of women in positions of power.
With research assistance from sociologist Marianne Cooper, Sandberg cites numerous studies to highlight two key factors that have hindered women’s performance in the workplace. First, women experience consistent patterns of discrimination. Studies repeatedly confirm that women’s contributions are not recognized or rewarded according to the same standards as are men’s. Second, Sandberg claims that women create and accept internal barriers to their success. She writes, “We hold ourselves back in ways both big and small, by lacking self-confidence, by not raising our hands, and by pulling back when we should be leaning in” (p. 8). Whether the barriers are external or internal, being a woman makes success in business and politics more challenging.

As children, anything may seem possible. But the truth is that the choices we make are shaped by the positions we occupy in society. As we will see in this chapter and throughout this book, sociology enables us to better understand how this works and what we can do about it.

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**As You READ**

- What is sociology?
- How do sociologists look at the world?
- How might someone practice sociology?

**What Is Sociology?**

We need one another. We may like to think that we can make it on our own, but our individualism is made possible by our interdependence. We praise the Olympic gold medalist for her impressive skill, dedicated training, and single-minded determination. Yet, if it hadn’t been for her mom driving her to the pool every day, for the building manager waking up at 4:00 a.m. to make sure the pool is open, for the women working overnight to make sure the locker room is clean and safe, and so many others who fade into the background in such moments of glory, she would never have had that chance to shine.

The people upon whom we depend are often unknown and invisible to us. Even though we may never meet them, we rely on farmers, truck drivers, secretaries, store clerks, custodians, software engineers, scientists, assembly-line workers, teachers, police officers, inventors, politicians, CEOs, and a whole host of others. Yet we mostly take their contributions for granted without fully appreciating the degree to which they make our lives possible. Sociologists seek to reveal the full extent of our interdependence. **Sociology** is defined as the systematic study of the relationship between the individual and society and of the consequences of difference. We will examine the various components of that definition in detail below, but at its heart is the intimate connection between self and society.

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**THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION**

At its core, sociology is about understanding the dynamic relationship between individuals who make choices and the social contexts that shape those choices. American sociologist C. Wright Mills ([1959] 2009) defined the
sociological imagination as our recognition of the interdependent relationship between who we are as individuals and the social forces that shape our lives. For example, if we choose to go to college, what factors might influence that decision? What role might age, family background, income, gender, race, ethnicity, or other social factors play in whether we go or what school we choose? Mills argued that we can use the sociological imagination as a tool to make more informed decisions about where we want to go and how we might get there. The sociological imagination, according to Mills, enables us to better understand the intersection between history and biography. When explaining why people think and act the way they do, our tendency is to turn toward individualistic explanations: he or she is wise or foolish, generous or selfish, careful or careless, and so on.

The sociological imagination calls us to also consider the role larger social forces may play. Take unemployment as an example. A person might lose his job for a variety of reasons. A worker who is foolish, selfish, and careless may get fired because he makes a lousy employee. But it’s also possible for a worker to lose his job due to factors beyond his control, regardless of how effective he may be as a worker. Unemployment levels rise and fall depending on what is happening in the larger economy. For example, when the economy nosedived in the late 2000s, unemployment rose from 4.8 percent in February 2008 to a peak of 10.1 percent in October 2010. Many wise, generous, and careful workers lost their jobs in the process. Sociology helps us consider the big picture.

To assist us in understanding the role social forces can play, Mills distinguished between private troubles and public issues. Private troubles are problems we face in our immediate relationships with particular individuals in our personal lives. Explanations for such troubles are particular to the individuals involved. For example, you lose your job because you failed to show up for work, dis obeyed direct orders from your boss, took money from the cash register, and so forth. Public issues are problems we face as a consequence of the positions we occupy within the larger social structure. Private troubles are personal problems, but public issues are social problems. If lots of people in similar positions are experiencing the same result, it likely says more about the position than the person. We can better see such patterns by analyzing rates—unemployment, divorce, poverty—which is one of the reasons using statistics is so important in sociology. Analyzing data allows us to see patterns we might otherwise miss.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PLACE

To put it simply, place matters. Our position relative to others shapes our access to resources and influences the options available to us. As individuals, we do have the power to make our own choices, but we cannot separate our individual preferences from the influence of parents, teachers, friends, coworkers, politicians, the media, and even total strangers whose decisions enable or constrain opportunities for us. Where and when we were born; our parents’ educational attainment, occupation, and income; our nationality; and other such factors all play major roles in shaping who we become.

Social class, gender, and race are positional categories of particular interest to sociologists due to the significance each has in our lives. Our social class position, for example, shapes our access to material resources. Researchers asked people how much they thought a chief executive officer (CEO) and an unskilled factory worker should earn and how much they thought they actually earned and then compared these numbers. In the United States, respondents said CEOs should earn about 7 times more than an unskilled worker, but they guessed that the real gap was 30 to 1. It turns out that the average yearly compensation for a CEO at a Standard & Poor’s (S&P) 500 company was $12 million, approximately 354 times the $35,000 an average worker receives (Kiatponsan and Norton 2014). This suggests that social class differences, such as that between a CEO and an unskilled worker, are even greater than we think.

Turning to gender, sociologists find a persistent wage gap between men and women. For example, when hackers attacked Sony Pictures and posted thousands of company documents and emails, it turned out that both Jennifer Lawrence (who had already won an Academy Award for her role in Silver Linings Playbook and had just starred in the blockbuster film The Hunger Games: Catching Fire)
and Amy Adams (who had previously been nominated for four Academy Awards) were being paid significantly less for their roles in *American Hustle* than their three male counterparts Christian Bale, Jeremy Renner, and Bradley Cooper, whose record of accomplishment was not as great (Kohn 2014). This pattern of unequal pay mirrors the overall wage gap in the United States. When comparing average earnings for full-time, year-round workers, women earn 78¢ for every $1 men earn (DeNavas-Walt and Proctor 2014:6). Race and ethnicity also shape likely outcomes. Being born into a White family in the United States significantly increases your odds of having access to money. In a study on the distribution of wealth, researchers found that median wealth for White households was 13 times greater than that for African American households and 10 times greater than Hispanic households (Kochhar and Fry 2014).

Place is important because it shapes how we think, act, and even feel. For example, when computer giant Hewlett-Packard was trying to figure out ways to get more women into upper-level management positions, it found that women applied for promotion only when they thought they met 100 percent of the qualifications for the position while men applied when they believed they met 60 percent (Kay and Shipman 2014). In a 2014 national survey, when asked how they would rate Barack Obama’s presidency, 81 percent of African Americans and 61 percent of Whites said he was a success, compared to 29 percent of Whites (The Washington Post 2014). When it comes to analyzing such patterns our tendency is to take sides, but the interesting sociological question is why such significant differences form in the first place.

**THE IRONY OF MODERN SOCIETY**

Because the positions we occupy relative to each other are so important, understanding the relationships between them is a central task for sociologists. In our everyday lives, we take for granted the structure that these relationships provide for us. We tend not to realize how dependent we are on others. But suppose you had to do something as seemingly simple as making a hamburger and had to do so without relying on any knowledge, skills, tools, or resources obtained from anyone else. Without an interdependent network of people performing myriad small tasks that we take for granted, we would be hard-pressed to provide for our most basic needs. A hamburger can serve as a symbol of our society’s shared knowledge and skills.

How hard can it be to make a hamburger from scratch? Considering the ingredients, which seem fairly simple, there are any number of ways to proceed. Let’s begin with the burger itself. First, you need to find a cow. How difficult can that be? Well, you can’t buy one from a farmer because doing so means relying on resources from others. You can’t go out to the country (getting there itself might present something of a challenge) and steal one from a farm (which implies a farmer, which means dependence on another person). So you need to find a wild cow.

Assuming you do find a wild cow, you then have to kill it. Perhaps you might bash it with a large rock or stampede it off a cliff. Next, you need to butcher it, but cowhide is tough. Imagine what it takes to produce a metal knife (finding ore, smelting, forging, tempering, and so on). Perhaps a sharp rock will do. Assuming you came up with a cutting tool, you now have a chunk of raw cow meat. Given that it’s hamburger we’re after (though you might be ready to settle for steak at this point), next you need to grind the meat. You might use a couple of those rocks to pulverize the meat into something of a meat mash, although a meat grinder would work better if only it weren’t so hard to make one. In any event, at last you have a raw hamburger patty.

Now you need to cook it. Where will you get the fire? Perhaps you could strike two rocks together in hopes of creating a spark, or maybe rub two sticks together. Perhaps it would be easiest to wait around for lightning to strike a nearby tree. However you might accomplish it, after you get fire, you still have to cook the meat. No frying pans are available, so either you make one or perhaps cook it on that handy rock you used to kill the cow. Or you could

**SOC THINK**

What do you see as your biggest accomplishment in life so far? What people in your life were most directly responsible for helping make it happen? Given that we rely on others who are often unknown and invisible to us, what other people made indirect but essential contributions to your success?
just put the meat on a stick that you cut down and whittled with the knife you made (or was that a “sharp” stone?) and roast it over the fire.

Assuming you are successful, you now have a cooked hamburger patty. But, of course, you aren’t done yet. There are still many other steps that need to be completed. You need to bake a bun, which involves figuring out how to come up with flour, water, salt, oil, sugar, yeast, and an oven. What about condiments such as ketchup, mustard, pickles, and onions? What if at the end of all that you decide to make it a cheeseburger? Did you remember to milk the cow first?

Making something that seems so simple, that we take for granted, that we can get for a dollar at McDonald’s, turns out to be quite complicated. The knowledge and skill to acquire and prepare all the ingredients in a hamburger are beyond the capacity of most individuals. Yet if we eat a burger, we think nothing of it. When you think about it—when you apply the sociological imagination—a hamburger is a miracle. It’s miraculous, not in a supernatural sense but as a symbol pointing to the astonishing complexity and taken-for-grantedness of our human interdependence and to the knowledge we share collectively without even realizing it. Of course, this is true not just for hamburgers but for virtually any product we use. It could be a veggieburger, a book, a desk, a shirt, a car, a house, or a computer. The irony of modern society is that we depend on one another now more than ever, but we realize it less. We embrace individualism, yet we lack the basic skills for self-sufficiency. Sociology provides us with the tools necessary to more fully understand and appreciate our interdependence.

**DEFINING SOCIOLOGY**

Sociologists are committed to investigating, describing, and explaining such interrelationships. A more detailed breakdown of the four components of the definition of sociology helps reveal how they go about doing so.

**Systematic Study** Sociologists are engaged with the world, collecting empirical data through systematic research. Relying on such data means that sociologists draw their conclusions about society based on experiences or observations rather than beliefs or the authority of others. If they want to understand why the average age for first marriage keeps rising or why people commit crimes, they must gather data from those involved in these activities and base their conclusions upon that information.

Sociological research historically has involved both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection. Quantitative approaches emphasize counting things and analyzing them mathematically or statistically in order to uncover relationships between variables. The most common way to collect this type of data is through surveys. In contrast, qualitative approaches focus on listening to and observing people and allowing them to interpret what is happening in their own lives. The most common way to collect this type of data is through participant observation, in which the researcher interacts with those she or he studies. In practice, sociologists often draw on both techniques in conducting their research. We will investigate these research techniques, along with others, in more detail in Chapter 2.

**The Individual** Although sociology is most commonly associated with the study of groups, there is no such thing as a group apart from the individuals who compose it. As individuals we are constantly choosing what to do next. Most of the time, we follow guidelines for behavior we have learned from others, but we have the ability to reject those guidelines at any time. A term sociologists use to describe this capacity is **agency**, meaning the freedom individuals have to choose and to act. In professional sports, for example, we use the term free agent to describe a player who has the power to negotiate with whatever team he or she wishes. We, too, have such freedom. We could choose not to go to class, not to go to work, not to get out of bed in the morning, not to obey traffic signals, not to respond when spoken to, not to read the next sentence in this book, and on and on.

As we saw with the significance of place, the positions we occupy relative to others shape the choices we make. In the NBA, LeBron James chose to go from the Miami Heat to the Cleveland Cavaliers. Signing with the NFL’s Green Bay Packers or Major League Baseball’s Chicago Cubs was not really an option. Having access to varieties of resources, we choose among an array of options with knowledge of various possible outcomes. We usually follow “paths of least resistance”—the accepted and expected actions and beliefs—but the choice of whether to continue to follow them is ours each and every second of our lives (A. Johnson 1997).

**Society** The study of society is at the heart of sociology. Although we will spend most of this book describing various aspects of society, we can begin by thinking of it as our social environment. Society consists of persistent patterns of relationships and social networks within which we operate. The social structure it provides is analogous...
Since the founding of sociology, sociologists have been concerned with the impact our social location has on our opportunities or lack thereof. As noted earlier, differential outcomes that result from class, gender, and race have been of particular interest to sociologists.

The analysis of social power deserves particular attention because it shapes how and why we think and act as we do. The simple fact is that those who have access to and control over valued material, social, and cultural resources have different options available to them than do those without such access and control. One of the main tasks of sociology is to investigate and reveal levels of social inequality—a condition in which members of society have differing amounts of wealth, prestige, or power. That is why the definition of sociology draws particular attention to the consequences of difference.

In combination, these four aspects of sociology help us understand the things that influence our beliefs and actions. Coming to terms with the reality that our choices are constrained by the positions we occupy can seem depressing, but sociology actually empowers us by providing a more complete picture of the worlds within which we live. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1998a) put it this way: “Sociology teaches how groups function and how to make use of the laws governing the way they function so as to try to circumvent them” (p. 57). In other words, understanding the ways in which our thoughts and actions are determined enhances our freedom to make more effective and informed choices.

social inequality A condition in which members of society have differing amounts of wealth, prestige, or power.

The Consequences of Difference The final part of the definition of sociology involves the consequences of difference. Sociology does more than just describe our structure, culture, and interaction; it also looks at how economic, social, and cultural resources are distributed and at the implications of these patterns in terms of the opportunities and obstacles they create for individuals and groups.
Note: The unemployment rate includes people 16 years and older who are available for work but do not have a job and who have actively looked for work within the previous four weeks.


**SOCIETY AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES**

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

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

These social science disciplines have a common focus on the social behavior of people, yet each has a particular orientation. Anthropologists usually study past cultures and preindustrial societies that continue today, as well as the origins of humans. Economists explore the ways in which people produce and exchange goods and services. Historians are concerned with the peoples and events of the past and their significance for us today. Psychologists investigate personality and individual behavior. Political scientists study international relations, the workings of government, and the exercise of power and authority. Sociologists, as we have already seen, study the influence that society
has on people’s attitudes and behavior and the ways in which people interact and shape society.

Let’s consider how different social sciences might approach the global economic crisis that began in late 2008. Historians would compare recent events to those that occurred in previous crises, such as the Great Depression of the 1930s. Economists would conduct research on the financial impact of the current crisis for individuals, nations, and the world as a whole. Psychologists would study the behavior and reactions of individuals to assess the emotional trauma such crises cause. And political scientists would analyze the stances taken by political leaders and their governments’ responses to the crisis.

What approach would sociologists take? Following Mills’s lead, they would analyze the economic downturn as a public issue. This necessitates gathering data about how this crisis affected people differently depending upon the social positions they occupied. As the “U.S. Employment Trends” map and graphs demonstrate, a person’s geographic location, age, gender, race, and ethnicity all influenced his or her likelihood of experiencing unemployment. Unemployment was more likely in the Southeast and West than in the Midwest. The level for young people was, and continues to be, substantially higher than for those who are older. Men experienced a more significant jump in joblessness than did women. Rates for African Americans and Latinos were, and are, significantly higher than those for Whites. Sociology teaches us that our social location matters. Understanding how different groups are affected helps policy makers decide which actions to take to address the crisis. A singular or universal solution to such a problem is unlikely to be effective in addressing the different needs of the various groups.

Sociologists would take a similar approach when studying episodes of extreme violence. On April 15, 2013, two bombs exploded near the finish line of the Boston Marathon. More than 170 people were injured, and three people were killed, including eight-year-old Martin Richard. Whenever such events occur, our first question is often “why?” And our initial answer is usually that the perpetrator must have been crazy or brainwashed. Sociologists seek to explain these events by analyzing the underlying factors that give rise to such extreme actions.

They explore issues such as the role the media plays in reporting breaking news events, the impact religion has on shaping actions, the politics of immigration or gun control, the consequences of masculinity, and the adequacy of the nation’s mental health care system (Force 2011; Glassner 2010; Sharp 2011).

**SOCIOLOGY AND COMMON SENSE**

At times all of us practice some form of the sociological imagination, weighing the balance between individual and society. So what’s the difference between sociology and common sense—the knowledge we get from our experiences and conversations, from what we read, from what we see on television, and so forth? Commonsense knowledge, although sometimes accurate, is not always reliable because it rests on commonly held beliefs rather than on systematic analysis of facts (Watts 2011).

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

Similarly, “common sense” tells us that in the United States today, military marriages are more likely to end in separation or divorce than in the past owing to the strain of long deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet a study released in 2007 shows no significant increase in the divorce rate among U.S. soldiers over the past decade. In fact, the rate of marital dissolution among members of the military is comparable to that of nonmilitary families. Interestingly, this is not the first study to disprove the widely held notion that military service strains the marital bond. Two generations earlier, during the Vietnam War era, researchers came to the same conclusion (Call and Teachman 1991; Karney and Crown 2007).

Like other social scientists, sociologists do not accept something as fact just because “everyone knows it.” At times, the findings of sociologists may seem like common sense because they deal with familiar facets of everyday life. The difference is that such findings have been tested by researchers, analyzed in relation to other data, and evaluated in light of what is known by sociologists in the form of sociological theory.

>> **What Is Sociological Theory?**

Sociology, like all sciences, involves a conversation between theory and research. We gather data through systematic research, and we seek to describe and explain what we find using theories. A theory is a set of statements that seeks to explain problems, actions, or behavior.
Theories represent our attempts to make the best possible sense of the world around us. They often start out general and vague, but over time and informed by research, theories provide richer, more complete interpretations of the worlds in which we live. We will look first at theory before turning to methods in Chapter 2.

FORMULATING SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

We can better understand how theories develop in sociology by following the logic French sociologist Émile Durkheim employed more than a century ago when sociology was just emerging as a social science. At the time, there were no sociology departments in universities and no academic positions for sociologists. Durkheim wanted to establish sociology’s legitimacy as a distinct discipline. His theory was that social forces shape individual action, contradicting the dominant theories that biology, the individual’s psyche, or God were the primary causes for our behaviors. In an attempt to create space for sociology as a discipline, he argued that factors above the level of the individual but within the domain of human society shape our actions.

Durkheim set out to prove that social facts exist and affect what we do. He described social facts as consisting of “manners of acting, thinking, and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him” ([1895] 1982:52). In other words, our choices are both enabled and constrained by social facts. But a social fact is kind of like gravity. We can’t really see it or measure it directly, but we can observe its effects. Proving the power of social facts depends on demonstrating the impact they have on the choices we make.

To make the strongest case possible, Durkheim chose to study what he saw as the ultimate individual choice: suicide.

He theorized that people commit suicide because they lack the social connections and obligations to prevent them from taking their own life. His hypothesis was as follows: “Suicide varies inversely with the degree of integration of the social groups of which the individual forms a part” ([1897] 1951:209). Durkheim chose religious affiliation as an indicator of social integration, arguing that Protestants are less socially integrated than Roman Catholics. He claimed that Catholicism is a traditional faith with a hierarchical system of authority in which variation in belief (on such topics as birth control, abortion, and women priests) is not up to the individual. Protestantism, in contrast, gives individual believers more power to interpret the Bible for themselves. As a result, when disagreement arises, Protestants feel freer to form new churches. Whereas there is only one Roman Catholic Church, Protestantism includes Baptist, Methodist, Reformed, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and many other denominations. Protestants’ increased individual autonomy reflects reduced levels of social integration, leading Durkheim to predict that Protestants would be more likely to commit suicide than Catholics.

TESTING SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

To test his theory, Durkheim gathered data from different countries to see if suicide rates varied. Looking at France, England, and Denmark, he found that England had 67 reported suicides per million inhabitants, France had 135 per million, and Denmark had 277 per million. Durkheim concluded that Denmark’s comparatively high suicide rate was due to the fact that Denmark was a more Protestant nation than either France or England. In other words, it was the social makeup of these nations that shaped their suicide rates. More recent research focusing on individual rather than national rates continues to find this same relationship.

In extending his analysis to look at other indicators of social integration, Durkheim continued to obtain results that confirmed his underlying theory: the unmarried had much higher rates of suicide than married people; and people without children were more likely to take their lives than people with children. In addition, there were higher rates in times of economic instability and recession than in times of prosperity. Durkheim concluded that his theory was correct: the suicide rate of a society reflects the extent to which people are or are not integrated into the group life of the society. Durkheim presented his results in his landmark work *Suicide*, published in 1897.

APPLYING SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

Built into Durkheim’s theory is the presupposition that we find meaning in life through our relationships with others. The more interconnected and interdependent we are, the less likely we are to kill ourselves. Attempting to summarize the significance of our attachment to society, Durkheim put it this way: “The individual alone is not a sufficient end for his activity. He is too little. . . . When, therefore, we
Durkheim tested this theory by investigating suicide as one such individual choice—perhaps the most individual of all choices—and demonstrated that the likelihood of committing suicide varied based on group membership. Analysis of more recent data shows that suicide rates continue to vary based on social position. Durkheim concluded that if social facts are at work in this most extreme example of individual choice, they similarly shape all other individual choices. He argued that if social facts have such power in our lives, there should be a discipline dedicated to their study. As a result, Durkheim established Europe’s first department of sociology at the University of Bordeaux in 1895.

Going GLOBAL

What Makes a Country Happy?

Looking on the bright side of life, happiness rates also vary from country to country. The five nations that score highest according to the World Happiness Report are Denmark, Norway, Switzerland, Netherlands, and Sweden. The bottom five are Rwanda, Burundi, Central African Republic, Benin, and Togo. The United States ranks 17th out of 156 nations (Helliwell, Layard, and Sachs 2013). The index considers indicators of both subjective well-being ("Were you happy yesterday?") and life satisfaction ("Are you happy with your life as a whole?").

The Development of Sociology

Given the complexity of human life, sociologists have developed a wide range of theories in which they describe and explain the diversity of social behavior. Sometimes their theories can be grand in scope, seeking to encompass the “big picture”; other times they can be more personal, intimate, and immediate. Although we spend most of the rest of this book investigating the insights sociological theories provide, here we will briefly address just five questions sociologists have frequently asked. These questions represent significant doors sociologists have opened to provide additional tools for the sociological imagination. The questions are these: How is social order maintained? How do power and inequality shape outcomes?
Suicide Rates

Suicide Rate by Gender

- **Female**: 5.4
- **Male**: 20.4

Suicide Rate Based on Age

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Rate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>35–44</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45–54</td>
<td>20.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>55–64</td>
<td>18.0</td>
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<td>65–74</td>
<td>14.0</td>
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<td>75–84</td>
<td>16.8</td>
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<td>85+</td>
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Suicide Rate for Race/Ethnicity

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<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Rate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic, all races</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, non-Hispanic</td>
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</table>

Note: Rates are per 100,000, not percentages. Data are from 2012.
Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2014.

SOC THINK

If Durkheim is correct and the level of social integration influences the likelihood of suicide, why do rates vary for the groups listed in the “Suicide Rates” figure? Why is the rate for men almost four times higher than that for women? Why is the rate for non-Hispanic Whites higher than that for any other racial/ethnic groups? Why is there a midlife suicide peak? Why do rates vary by state and region? What might these patterns suggest about the social integration of people in these categories?

How does interaction shape our worlds? How does group membership (especially class, race, and gender) influence opportunity? How should sociologists respond?

HOW IS SOCIAL ORDER MAINTAINED?

The discipline of sociology grew up in the midst of significant social upheaval. The advent of the Industrial Revolution and urbanization in the early 19th century led to changes in patterns of government, thought, work, and everyday life. Aristocracy was on the decline while democracy was spreading; people were moving from a primary reliance on religious explanations to more scientific ones; and the world of the village and farm was rapidly giving way to life in the city and factory. It was in this context that French sociologist and philosopher Auguste Comte (1798–1857), in hopes of emulating what natural scientists did for nature, sought to establish a science of society that would reveal the basic “laws of society.” Comte believed that knowing these laws would help us understand two key principles that he referred to as “social statics”—the principles by which societies hold together and order is maintained—and “social dynamics”—the factors that bring about change and that shape the nature and direction of that change. Sociologists would then use their knowledge of these laws to help lead us toward the good society, balancing the needs for social order with positive social change. To give this new discipline a name, Comte coined the term *sociology*—which literally means “the study of the processes of companionship” (Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner 2006:367).

English-speaking scholars learned of Comte’s works largely through translations by the English sociologist Harriet Martineau (1802–1876). Seeking to systematize the research essential to conducting a science of society, Martineau ([1838] 1989) wrote the first book on sociological methods. She was also a pathbreaking theorist in
Harriet Martineau ([1838] 1989) argued that we could learn a lot about a culture by analyzing the ideas, images, and themes reflected in their popular songs. She wrote, “The Songs of every nation must always be the most familiar and truly popular part of its poetry. . . . They present also the most prevalent feelings on subjects of the highest popular interest. If it were not so, they would not have been popular songs.” What might we learn about American culture based on analysis of the lyrics of the current top-10 songs? What themes, ideas, images, and expectations are prevalent? (Lists are available at “The Billboard Hot 100” or www.top10songs.com.)

Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) emphasized the significance of social order. As we saw in his analysis of suicide, he saw society as a real, external force existing above the level of the individual and exerting its influence on individual behavior. Durkheim was particularly concerned about what happens when the influence of society declines, resulting in weakened social integration. He theorized that an increase in the division of labor, a defining characteristic of modern societies, meant that individuals shared fewer common experiences, ideas, and values. As workers became much more specialized in their tasks, they were at greater risk of what Durkheim called anomie—a weak sense of social solidarity due to a lack of agreed-upon rules to guide behavior. Anomie increases the likelihood of loneliness, isolation, and despair. Inspired by Comte’s vision, Durkheim sought to establish sociology as a science to study these processes.

**HOW DO POWER AND INEQUALITY SHAPE OUTCOMES?**

Karl Marx (1818–1883) took a different approach. He emphasized the role that power and control over resources played in how social order is established and maintained. Marx viewed our creative capacity to transform raw materials into products—for example, to take clay and make a pot, or cut down a tree and make a desk—as the key factor distinguishing humans from other animals (whose behavior is ruled by their instincts). For Marx, human history is the progressive unfolding of human creativity in the form of new technology through which we establish our relationship to the natural world and with each other. Unfortunately, for most of human history, we lacked sufficient technology to provide enough material goods (such as food, clothes, and shelter) to meet everyone’s needs, so not all people had enough.

Social inequality for Marx, then, is determined by ownership, or lack thereof, of key material resources. The ruling class is defined by its ownership and control of the means of production—the tools and resources necessary for that transformation to happen. Members of the working class, in contrast, own only their capacity to transform raw materials into products, which requires access to the means of production controlled by the ruling class. Whereas Durkheim...
was concerned with anomie, Marx was concerned with alienation, by which he meant loss of control over our creative human capacity to produce, separation from the products we make, and isolation from our fellow workers. We will consider Marx’s work as it relates to capitalism as an economic system in more detail in a later chapter. His influence on sociological theory, however, extends beyond social class to an analysis of additional forms of inequality, such as how gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, and age influence individual opportunity.

Seeking to expand sociological theory further, Max Weber (1864–1920; pronounced “VAY-ber”) offered a more general theory of power that was less wedded to capitalism and ownership of the means of production. Weber argued that, although social class and its associated control over material resources may determine who has power in most instances, these are not the only possible foundations for power. Other sources he identified include social status, in which people defer to others out of respect for their social position or prestige, and organizational resources, in which members of a group gain power through their ability to organize to accomplish some specific goal by maximizing their available resources. Weber argued that these social resources draw their power from people’s willingness to obey the authority of another person, which in turn is based on their perception of the legitimacy of that person’s right to rule.

HOW DOES INTERACTION SHAPE OUR WORLDS?

Much of the work of Durkheim, Marx, and Weber involves macrosociology, which concentrates on large-scale phenomena or entire civilizations. This top-down approach focuses on society as a whole and how broad social forces shape our lives. A later school of sociologists turned away from this approach in favor of microsociology, which stresses the study of small groups and the analysis of our everyday experiences and interactions. Our interactions with others have a profound effect on us. Parents, siblings, friends, teachers, classmates, coworkers, and even total strangers influence how we talk, act, think, and feel. Through such interactions we learn what is appropriate and inappropriate, responding accordingly. To describe this process, sociologist W. I. Thomas established what has come to be known in sociology as the Thomas theorem: “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas and Thomas 1928:571–572). Or, more simply, how we see the world shapes what we do. We act on the basis of perception, and our perception is a consequence of the interactions we have had with others.

To better understand the processes at work, sociologist Erving Goffman recommended studying everyday interactions as if we are all actors on a stage seeking to successfully put on a performance. In his dramaturgical approach (see Chapter 4), we all play roles, follow scripts, use props, work together, and seek to win over our audiences. The parts of ourselves that we project vary based on the roles that we perform. As a student in a class, we may project a serious image; at a party, we may want to look relaxed and friendly. The immediate context of our everyday interactions shapes who we are, what we think, and how we act.
HOW DOES GROUP MEMBERSHIP INFLUENCE OPPORTUNITY?
Over time, sociologists came to more fully understand and appreciate the consequences that group membership, especially class, race, and gender, has for opportunity. Black sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963; pronounced “dew BOYS”) combined an emphasis on the analysis of the everyday lived experience with a commitment to investigating power and inequality based on race. He was critical of those who relied on common sense or on all-too-brief investigations, arguing that a researcher has to be more than just a “car-window sociologist” because true understanding demands more than “the few leisure hours of a holiday trip to unravel the snarl of centuries” (Du Bois [1903] 1994:94). Through engaged and sustained research on the lives of African Americans, Du Bois documented their relatively low status in Philadelphia and Atlanta. His research revealed the social processes that contributed to the maintenance of racial separation, which extended beyond material differences to include social separation, which he referred to as the “color line.”

Similarly, feminist scholarship has broadened our understanding of social behavior by extending the analysis beyond the male point of view that dominated classic sociology. An early example of this perspective can be seen in the life and writings of Ida Wells-Barnett (1862–1931). Carrying on a tradition begun with Martineau, Wells-Barnett argued that societies can be judged based on whether the principles they claim to believe in match their actions. Wells-Barnett found that when it came to the principles of equality and opportunity for women and African Americans, America came up short. Part of the task for the sociologist, then, is to bring to light such inconsistencies that may otherwise go largely unnoticed. This is something Wells-Barnett sought to do in her groundbreaking publications in the 1890s on the practice of lynching African Americans, as well as with her advocacy of women’s rights, especially the struggle to win the vote for women. Like feminist theorists who succeeded her, Wells-Barnett used her analysis of society as a means of resisting oppression. In her case, she researched what it meant to be African American, a woman in the United States, and a Black woman in the United States (Wells-Barnett [1928] 1970).

HOW SHOULD SOCIOLOGISTS RESPOND?
Throughout sociology’s history, a recurring theme has been the idea that sociological theory and research should contribute to positive social change. In the early 1900s many leading sociologists in the United States saw themselves as social reformers dedicated to systematically studying and then improving a corrupt society. They were genuinely concerned about the lives of immigrants in the nation’s growing cities, whether those immigrants came from Europe or from the rural American South. Early female sociologists, in particular, often took active roles in poor urban areas as leaders of community centers known as settlement houses. For example, Jane Addams (1860–1935), an early member of the American Sociological Society, cofounded the famous Chicago settlement, Hull House, which provided social, educational, and cultural programs for recent immigrants. Addams and other pioneering female sociologists commonly combined intellectual inquiry, social service work, and political activism—all with the goal of assisting the underprivileged and creating a more egalitarian society. Working with Ida Wells-Barnett, Addams successfully prevented racial segregation in the Chicago public schools, and her efforts to establish a juvenile court system and a women’s trade union reflect the practical focus of her work (Addams 1910, 1930; Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley 1998).

This commitment to positive social change was not unique to Addams and her colleagues. From the very beginning to the present, sociologists have recognized an obligation to go beyond explaining how the world works and become actively engaged in making the world a better place. In the words of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, “I have come to believe that those who have the good fortune to be able to devote their lives to the study of the social world cannot stand aside, neutral and indifferent, from the struggles in which the future of that world is at stake” (1998a:11). For some this has meant releasing the results of their research to the public so that we might make more informed decisions;

Did You Know?
. . . First Lady Michelle Obama received a bachelor of arts degree in sociology from Princeton University in 1985. She used that degree as a stepping-stone to law school at Harvard.

Photo: © Mike Segar/Reuters/Corbis.
The Department of Science of Education and Sociology at the Sorbonne in Paris, along with his political connections and appointments, to shape French educational policy and practice. Du Bois cofounded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, better known as the NAACP. In fact, one of the dominant reasons students choose to major in sociology is that they want to make a difference, and sociology provides a pathway to do just that.

>> Three Sociological Perspectives

The answers to the five questions that sociologists ask provide us with a glimpse of the mosaic of sociological theories that have developed over time as sociologists consider the complexity of human behavior. Some theorists focus on society as a whole; others concentrate on individual interactions. Some are particularly concerned with inequality; others focus on maintaining social cohesion. Some approaches seem to overlap; others seem at odds with one another. But, regardless of their stance, all theorists share a common commitment to provide us with greater understanding of why we think and act the way we do. Each theory, whether broad or narrow, offers a way of seeing that allows us to perceive things we might have otherwise missed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View of society</th>
<th>Functionalist</th>
<th>Conflict</th>
<th>Interactionist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stable, well integrated</td>
<td>Characterized by tension and struggle between groups</td>
<td>Active in influencing and affecting everyday social interaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macro</td>
<td>Macro</td>
<td>Micro, as a way of understanding the larger macro phenomena</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key concepts</td>
<td>Social integration, Institutions, Anomie, Inequality, Capitalism, Stratification, Symbols, Nonverbal communication, Face-to-face interaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View of the individual</td>
<td>People are socialized to perform societal functions</td>
<td>People are shaped by power, coercion, and authority</td>
<td>People manipulate symbols and create their social worlds through interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View of the social order</td>
<td>Maintained through cooperation and consensus</td>
<td>Maintained through force and coercion</td>
<td>Maintained by shared understanding of everyday behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View of social change</td>
<td>Predictable, reinforcing</td>
<td>Change takes place all the time and may have positive consequences</td>
<td>Reflected in people's social positions and their communications with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>Public punishments reinforce the social order</td>
<td>Laws enforce the positions of those in power</td>
<td>People respect laws or disobey them based on their own past experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When I took “Soc101” in college, it took me a long time to understand the sociological imagination. I still remember feeling overwhelmed by all the concepts, facts, and figures. Eventually, as we studied the impact of the media and the power of inheritance, things began to fall into place; I took another course and was hooked. As you begin your study of sociology, my advice is to stay focused on how our individual choices are shaped by our social positions and access to resources. How do our circumstances influence how we understand ourselves and others? I hope that after encountering sociology, you will come away with a new way of seeing, equipped to act in new and more informed ways.

for others it has meant active engagement in establishing social policy or assisting in the lives of others. For example, Durkheim, who considered an educated citizenry essential to democratic success, used his appointment to
To simplify the rich array of sociological theories (especially for someone new to sociology), sociologists have classified various theories into three major theoretical perspectives or paradigms: functionalist, conflict, and interactionist. Each perspective offers a different set of lenses, focusing our attention in slightly different ways. Or, to put it another way, it is like three different people standing on the edge of a circle looking in at the same thing but each seeing it from a different point of view, able to recognize things that others might not even see.

According to the functionalist perspective, society is like a living organism with its various parts working together (or functioning) for the good of the whole. Functionalists posit that society and its parts are structured to provide social order and maintain stability. Aspects of society that appear dysfunctional, seemingly contributing to a decrease in social order or integration, will either wither away over time or contribute some hidden benefits that researchers seek to reveal. Durkheim’s research into social order and its challenges, especially within modern societies, is a classic example of the functionalist perspective. Durkheim assumed that, over time, society would progress toward greater order as it came to terms with apparent threats or challenges.

Whereas the functionalist perspective emphasizes consensus and cooperation, the conflict perspective focuses on power and the allocation of valued resources in society. According to conflict theorists, social order cannot be fully understood apart from an analysis of how the status quo is established and maintained by those who control key resources. Such resources include material resources (such as money, land, and property), social resources (such as family connections, social networks, and prestige), and cultural resources (such as education, beliefs, knowledge, and taste). The existing social structure helps maintain the privileges of some groups and keep others in inferior positions. Marx’s work on inequality, social class, and alienation provides a classic example of the conflict perspective.

Finally, whereas functionalist and conflict theorists both analyze large-scale, society-wide patterns of behavior, theorists who take the interactionist perspective generalize about everyday forms of social interaction in order to explain society as a whole. For interactionists, society is the product of our everyday interactions (with parents, friends, teachers, or strangers) through which we establish shared meanings and thus construct order. Because society is dependent on this ongoing construction, society is fluid and subject to change. Goffman’s dramaturgical approach is an example of the interactionist perspective.

The three-perspectives model has the advantage of providing us with conceptual hooks that allow us to recall some of the key concerns and issues sociologists have raised. A disadvantage, however, is that it gives the illusion that these three are discrete categories with fundamentally different and incompatible ways of looking at the world. In practice, research rooted in one perspective almost inevitably draws on or addresses insights from the other two.

>> Practicing Sociology

One of the questions that students frequently ask about sociology is “What can I do with it?” This query often comes from students who really like sociology, and might want to pursue it further, but are uncertain about where it leads. The good news is that there are many ways people can practice sociology.

PERSONAL SOCIOLOGY

We don’t have to become professional sociologists to practice what we have learned. The sociological imagination can help all of us better understand our beliefs and actions and make more informed choices. We can all practice personal sociology by recognizing the impact our individual position has on who we are and how we think and act, and of taking responsibility for the impacts our actions have on others.
ACADEMIC SOCIOLOGY

Many students opt to take their sociology education further, and the number of U.S. college students who have graduated with a degree in sociology has risen steadily (see figure below). The American Sociological Association (ASA) conducted research on recent sociology graduates and discovered that the top reasons for choosing sociology as a major are because students found the sociological concepts interesting, sociology helped them understand the impact society has on individuals, they particularly enjoyed their first sociology course, sociology helped them understand themselves better, and they wanted to make a difference in the world (Spalter-Roth et al. 2012). As part of their sociology education, sociology majors cultivate a variety of skills, such as developing evidence-based arguments, evaluating research methods, writing a research report understandable to nonsociologists, using computer resources including statistical software to organize and analyze data, and identifying ethical issues in research. Sociology graduates who later use these skills in their jobs express the highest levels of job satisfaction (Spalter-Roth and Van Vooren 2008a, 2008b).

The jobs that sociology majors find shortly after graduation, according to the ASA study, are in a range of fields. The most common occupational category is social services. Examples of jobs include caseworker for abused and neglected children, manager for a not-for-profit organization, case manager for HIV-positive individuals, and child advocate. Researchers also found that graduates were employed in a variety of other positions, including teacher, librarian, paralegal, immigration specialist, office manager, quality assurance manager, crime scene investigator, police officer, probation officer, marketing consultant, research assistant, program evaluator, statistician, and editor (Spalter-Roth and Van Vooren 2008a).

According to the ASA study, of sociology majors who pursued graduate school degrees, only about one-quarter did so in sociology. Instead, most used their sociology major as a stepping-stone to graduate study in social work, education, law, psychology, engineering, and business management (Spalter-Roth and Van Vooren 2009:9). Overall, 51.9 percent of the majors completed a graduate degree within four years of college graduation. Of those who pursued advanced degrees in sociology, the majority enrolled in some form of an applied sociology program (Spalter-Roth and Van Vooren 2010).

SOC THINK

How much responsibility do individuals have to make things better for society?
APPLIED AND CLINICAL SOCIOLOGY

Applied sociology is the use of the discipline of sociology with the specific intent of yielding practical applications for human behavior and organizations. Often, the goal of such work is to assist in resolving a social problem. For example, in the past 40 years, eight presidents of the United States have established commissions to delve into major societal concerns facing our nation. Sociologists are often asked to apply their expertise to studying such issues as violence, pornography, crime, immigration, and population.

One example of applied sociology involves the growing interest in the ways in which nationally recognized social problems manifest themselves locally. Sociologist Greg Scott and his colleagues sought to better understand the connection between illicit drug use and the spread of HIV/AIDS. By combining a variety of methods, including interviews and observation, with photo and video documentation, researchers found that across all drug users, HIV/AIDS transmission is highest among users of crystal methamphetamine. Meth users are also most likely to engage in risky sexual behavior and to have partners who do so. Fortunately, of all drug users, meth users are the ones most closely connected to treatment programs, which allows them to receive substance abuse education and treatment from their health care providers. Their cases, brought to the forefront by Scott and his team, highlight the need for public health officials to identify other individuals who engage in high-risk sexual behavior and to get them into appropriate treatment programs (G. Scott 2005).

The growing popularity of applied sociology has led to the rise of the specialty of clinical sociology. Whereas applied sociology may involve simply evaluating social issues, clinical sociology is dedicated to facilitating change by altering organizations (as in family therapy) or restructuring social institutions (as in the reorganization of a medical center). Louis Wirth (1931) wrote about clinical sociology more than 75 years ago, but the term itself has become popular only in recent years. The Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology was founded in 1978 to promote the application of sociological knowledge in interventions for individual and social change. This professional group has developed a procedure for certifying clinical sociologists—much as physical therapists or psychologists are certified.

Applied sociologists generally leave it to others to act on their evaluations, but clinical sociologists take direct responsibility for implementation and view those with whom they work as their clients. This specialty has become increasingly attractive to graduate students in sociology because it offers an opportunity to apply intellectual learning in practical ways. A competitive job market in the academic world has made such alternative career routes appealing.

Where Are They Now?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational categories of recent sociology majors</th>
<th>Graduate school programs of recent sociology majors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social services 26.5%</td>
<td>Sociology 22.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative, clerical support 15.8%</td>
<td>Social work 16.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management 14.4%</td>
<td>Education 11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (includes PR and IT) 10.2%</td>
<td>Law 10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales, marketing 10.1%</td>
<td>Other social sciences 9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services 8.3%</td>
<td>Psychology/counseling 8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education 8.1%</td>
<td>Engineering 7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research 5.7%</td>
<td>Other 5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business/management 4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public policy/affairs 3.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentage based on sociology majors attending graduate school 18 months after graduation.
Source: Spalter-Roth and Van Vooren 2009. Photo: © Stockbyte/PunchStock RF
The Ties That Bind

Pick an object you own—maybe a pencil, a pair of shoes, or a cell phone—and trace its history. Include a diagram or map of all the people and processes it took for it to come into your possession. What is it made of? Where did all its components come from? Who contributed to its production? After it was made, who was involved in getting it into your hands? What story does it tell?

SOCIOLOGY IS A VERB

The Ties That Bind

Pick an object you own—maybe a pencil, a pair of shoes, or a cell phone—and trace its history. Include a diagram or map of all the people and processes it took for it to come into your possession. What is it made of? Where did all its components come from? Who contributed to its production? After it was made, who was involved in getting it into your hands? What story does it tell?

>> Sociology Is a Verb

Regardless of the level at which it is practiced, sociology is about more than the knowledge gained or career attained. It consists of a body of knowledge along with techniques for gaining more; we will spend much of this book covering those sociological foundations. It can open doors to interesting and challenging careers in a variety of fields. But it is also a way of engaging with the world around us and understanding its complexity and interconnections in new ways. This vantage point can be especially important given the world we live in today.

SOCOC THINK

Consider the obstacles to cross-cultural interaction on college campuses. Why might people be unwilling to interact with others who have alternative cultural practices? How might it perpetuate inequality?

Though the expression has become something of a cliche, it truly is a small world after all. Social, cultural, political, and economic events around the world—including such things as the global financial meltdown or terrorist attacks—have a profound effect on how we think and what we do. The process of globalization—the worldwide integration of government policies, cultures, social movements, and financial markets through trade and the exchange of ideas—shows no signs of stopping. The sociological imagination provides us with the tools necessary to more effectively respond to these challenges.

College and university campuses often provide a microcosm of this trend. Students, faculty, staff, and administrators with radically different values, political views, customs, experiences, and expectations are drawn together from around the world into a relatively confined space. If the resulting interactions are to be meaningful, positive, and respectful, we must seek out ways to better understand factors that shape them. Conflicts with roommates, classmates, and professors are often chalked up to personality clashes and other individual attributes, but they cannot be fully understood or dealt with apart from coming to terms with the ways our social backgrounds have shaped how we think, act, and feel. For each of us, the social positions we occupy shape the opportunities and obstacles we face. We must learn to see the implications of this reality both for ourselves and for others. This self-knowledge necessitates a more complete appreciation of the intersection of history and biography in all of our lives.

Using the sociological imagination in our everyday lives enables us to understand others from their perspective and even understand ourselves through their eyes. By opening our eyes to patterns and practices that are often invisible to us, we can make more informed decisions about which pathways we choose to follow. We can also take greater responsibility for the impact that our choices have on others. Sociology provides us with tools to better understand, interpret, and respond to the world around us. Sociology is a verb; it’s something you do—it’s a way of life.
I. What is sociology?
   • Sociology is a way of seeing that joins theory and research to investigate the relationship between the individual and society and the impact unequal distribution of resources has on opportunity.

II. How do sociologists look at the world?
   • Sociologists developed theories to provide windows into our lives, including three primary perspectives: functionalist (emphasizing social order), conflict (focusing on inequality), and interactionist (highlighting the significance of our everyday relationships and exchanges).

III. How might someone practice sociology?
   • Sociology can provide a pathway to a career in a related applied, clinical, or academic context. But more than that, we can practice sociology in our everyday lives by utilizing the sociological imagination to better understand ourselves and others.
Society is like a living organism with its various parts working together for the good of the whole. The parts of society are structured to maintain stability and social order. Society influences individual behavior and thus helps maintain social integration through shared experiences.

Society represents a struggle over resources. Those who control valued resources have greater power to get their way.

Valued resources include material (money, land, property), social (status, prestige, authority), and cultural (knowledge, beliefs, taste) resources.

The existing social structure helps maintain the privileges of some groups while keeping others in subservient positions.

Society is the product of our everyday interactions by which we establish shared meanings and construct social order.

By generalizing from our everyday forms of social interaction (on the micro level), we can explain society as a whole.

The self exists in relationship with others and we come to perceive who we are and what our reality is through our interactions.

MAKE THE CONNECTION

After reviewing the chapter, answer the following questions:

1. Why might having multiple theoretical perspectives help us when we practice the sociological imagination?
2. How might each perspective differ in how it looks at what it takes to produce something (such as a hamburger, a house, a book, and so on)?
3. How might each perspective approach the study of unemployment? Of suicide?
4. How does each perspective enable you to see the way you participate in sports, either as a fan or as an athlete, in a different light?
1. Sociology is
   a. the analysis of individual motivations and internal struggles.
   b. concerned with predicting what particular individuals do or do not do.
   c. the systematic study of the relationship between the individual and society and of the consequences of difference.
   d. the integration of government policies, cultures, social movements, and financial markets through trade and the exchange of ideas.

2. According to C. Wright Mills, the sociological imagination focuses on the intersection between
   a. natural science and social science.
   b. power and access to resources.
   c. theory and research.
   d. history and biography.

3. What is the primary sociological lesson we learn from the hamburger-as-a-miracle example?
   a. We take our interdependence and the knowledge we collectively share for granted.
   b. An individual could easily survive on his or her own without assistance from others.
   c. Modern technology makes it difficult for us to provide for our individual needs.
   d. Interdependence is no longer necessary because we can provide for our needs through modern technology.

4. In their attempts to describe the relationship between sociology and common sense, sociologists argue that
   a. common sense provides time-tested answers that are reliable most of the time, whereas sociological facts change all the time.
   b. sociology depends on systematic analysis through research, whereas common sense does not.
   c. sociology cannot assess or test the truthfulness of commonsense claims.
   d. there is no significant difference between the two.

5. Émile Durkheim’s research on suicide found that
   a. Catholics had much higher suicide rates than Protestants.
   b. the more socially integrated someone is the less likely he or she is to commit suicide.
   c. married people are more likely to take their lives than single people.
   d. suicide is a solitary act, unrelated to group life.

6. Karl Marx argued that in order to understand social order we must include analysis of
   a. anomie.
   b. ownership of the means of production.
   c. the sociological imagination.
   d. microsociology.

7. Which sociologist made a major contribution to society through his in-depth studies of urban life, including both Blacks and Whites?
   a. W. E. B. Du Bois
   b. Émile Durkheim
   c. Auguste Comte
   d. Erving Goffman

8. What is the sociological term for the weak sense of social solidarity that arises due to a lack of agreed-upon rules to guide behavior?
   a. suicide
   b. alienation
   c. anomie
   d. agency

9. Thinking of society as a living organism in which each part of the organism contributes to its survival is a reflection of which theoretical perspective?
   a. the functionalist perspective
   b. the conflict perspective
   c. the Marxist perspective
   d. the interactionist perspective

10. The career path with the specific intent of altering social relationships or restructuring organizations is known as
    a. dramaturgical sociology.
    b. applied sociology.
    c. academic sociology.
    d. clinical sociology.