SOCIOLOGY
In Our Times
THE ESSENTIALS 11E

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Sociology in Our Times: The Essentials, Eleventh Edition
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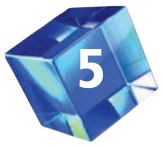

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Sociology in Global Perspective

Sociology & Social Policy

You Can Make a Difference

PREFACE

Welcome to the eleventh edition of *Sociology in Our Times: The Essentials*! This best-selling text has been extensively used for more than two decades in college and university classrooms across the United States, Canada, and other nations. However, *Sociology in Our Times: The Essentials* continues to live up to its name, remaining highly current and relevant to today's students and professors and reflecting the latest available data and new insights on what is going on in our nation and world from a sociological perspective.

The eleventh edition focuses on social change and ways in which media, particularly social media, and various other forms of technology inevitably bring about new ways of living, interacting with others, or doing some activity or task. For example, the cover of the eleventh edition portrays a 250-acre nature park called Gardens by the Bay, created from reclaimed land located in the heart of Singapore. Designed to raise the quality of life by enhancing greenery and flora in the city and creating an urban outdoor recreation space, the park is also fitted with environmental technologies to harness solar energy, while the world's largest glasshouse is designed to collect rainwater for use in irrigation and fountain displays.

Like previous editions, the eleventh edition highlights topics ranging from popular culture icons and social networking to far-more-serious issues of our times, such as the social effects of massive natural and human disasters, gun violence, political unrest, terrorism, war, and the individual and social consequences of problems such as growing inequality between the wealthiest and the poorest people and nations, persistent unemployment, migration concerns worldwide, and other persistent issues and problems.

The second decade of the twenty-first century offers unprecedented challenges and opportunities for each of us as individuals and for our larger society and world. In the United States, we can no longer take for granted the peace and economic prosperity that many—but far from all—people were able to enjoy in previous decades. However, even as some things change, others remain the same, and among the things that have not changed are the significance of education and the profound importance of understanding how and why people act the way they do. It is also important to analyze how societies grapple with issues such as economic hardship and the threat of terrorist attacks and war, and to gain a better understanding of why many of us seek stability in our social institutions—including family, religion, education, government, and media—even if we believe that some of these institutions might benefit from certain changes.

As with previous editions, the eleventh edition of *Sociology in Our Times: The Essentials* highlights the relevance of sociology to help students connect with the subject and the full spectrum of topics and issues that it encompasses. It achieves this connection by providing a meaningful, concrete context within which to learn. Specifically, it presents the stories—the *lived experiences*—of real individuals and the social issues they face while discussing a diverse array of classical and contemporary theories and examining interesting and relevant research. The first-person commentaries that begin each chapter in "Sociology & Everyday Life" show students how sociology can help them understand the important questions and social issues that not only these other individuals face but that they themselves may face as well.

Sociology in Our Times: The Essentials includes the best work of classical and established contemporary sociologists, and it weaves an inclusive treatment of *all* people—across lines of race/ethnicity, class, gender, age, ability/disability, and other social attributes—into the examination of sociology in *all* chapters. It does not water down the treatment of sociology for students! *Sociology in Our Times: The Essentials* provides students with the most relevant information about sociological thinking and helps them to consider contemporary social issues through the lens of diversity. While guiding students to appreciate how sociology can help them better understand the world, this text also encourages them to see themselves as *members of their communities* and shows them what can be done in responding to social issues. As a result, students learn how sociology is not only a collection of concepts and theories but also a field that can make a difference in their lives, their communities, and the world at large.

What's New to the Eleventh Edition?

The eleventh edition builds on the best of previous editions but places more emphasis on social change and social problems, while offering new insights, learning tools, and opportunities to apply the content of each chapter to relevant sociological issues and major concerns of the twenty-first century. As it is my goal to make each edition better than the previous one, I have revised all the chapters to reflect the latest in sociological theory and research, and have updated examples throughout. Additionally, all statistics, such as data relating to crime, demographics, health, and the economy, are the latest available at the time of this writing.

To make the text easier to read and to study for exams, I have removed the "Sociology Works!" and "Media Framing" boxes and have incorporated some of the most important information into the text itself. In addition, the feature titled "Sociology and Social Policy" has been given more emphasis in this edition because of its relevance to current events. This box focuses on important social issues (such as the high rate of suicide in the military, the right of homeless people to occupy public spaces, and the extent to which employers should be able to spy on employees) to provide a systematic examination of how social policy and law may bring about social change or impede it. Numerous new topics have also been added in "Sociology in Global Perspective," such as "Problems That People Like to Ignore: Global Diaspora and the Migrant Crisis" in Chapter 15, "Population and Urbanization."

To assist your students in learning about sociology and reflecting their knowledge on tests, I have continued to revise the learning objectives at the beginning of each chapter, provide integrated learning objective (LO) icons throughout the chapter, and offer students a study guide at the end of each chapter. The learning objectives have been carefully conceived to help the reader focus on the most crucial concepts of the chapter.

Changes by Chapter

CHAPTER 1: The Sociological Perspective and Research Process

- Updated chapter-opening lived experience to show continued linkages among social media, bullying, and suicide regarding young people in the United States
- Updated "Sociology & Everyday Life" quiz: "How Much Do You Know About Suicide?"
- Added new Figure 1.3: "Using Our Global Sociological Imagination to Understand Suicide"
- Added discussion of the contemporary relevance of Auguste Comte's focus on science in terms of this emphasis relating to sociology being a STEM discipline
- Revised and updated "Understanding Statistical Data Presentations" to provide the latest available data for students
- Updated Table 1.1, "Rates (per 100,000 U.S. Population) for Homicide, Suicide, and Firearm-Related Deaths of Youths Ages 15–19, by Gender, 2014"
- Revised and updated "Sociology and Social Policy": "Establishing Policies to Help Prevent Military Suicides"
- Updated Figure 1.14: "National Suicide Statistics at a Glance"
- Deleted "Sociology Works!" and incorporated its contents into "Sociology in Global Perspective" to emphasize the relevance of Durkheim's theory in contemporary India
- Deleted "Census Profiles"
- Deleted "Sociology in the Media"

CHAPTER 2: Culture

- Revised and updated opening lived experience about the relationship between food and cultural diversity
- Deleted "Census Profiles"
- Updated Figure 2.11: "Heterogeneity of U.S. Society" using data on religious affiliation, household income, and racial and ethnic distribution available from the U.S. Census Bureau
- Updated examples in "Popular Culture" to relate better to contemporary students
- Deleted "Sociology in Media" and expanded section on culture in the future
- Deleted "Sociology Works!" and moved some of its information into "You Can Make a Difference": "Schools as Laboratories for Getting Along"

CHAPTER 3: Socialization

- Added new opening lived experience on class attendance in higher education
- Updated and redesigned Figure 3.4: "Types of Maltreatment Among Children Under Age 18"
- Deleted "Sociology Works!"
- Deleted "Sociology and Media"
- Revised and updated "Sociology in Global Perspective": "Open Doors: Study Abroad and Global Socialization"
- Added new discussion on effects of social isolation and loneliness, particularly among older adults
- Added new final section—"Looking Ahead: Socialization, Social Change, and Your Future"—which discusses the different experiences of digital natives and digital immigrants and how this distinction affects the socialization process, particularly in higher education

CHAPTER 4: Social Structure and Interaction in Everyday Life

- Updated opening lived experience to include newer example of the ethics of dumpster diving for people who are not poor or homeless
- Updated Figure 4.4: "Causes of Family Homelessness in 25 Cities"
- Deleted "Homelessness in the Media"
- Revised data in "Who Are the Homeless?"
- Deleted "Census Profiles"
- Revised and updated "Sociology and Social Policy," adding new subtitle: "What's Going on in 'Paradise'?—Homeless Rights Versus Public Space"
- Deleted "Sociology Works!"
- Added new "You Can Make a Difference": "Offering a Helping Hand to Homeless People"

CHAPTER 5: Groups and Organizations

- Deleted "Community in the Media" and moved some of the information into the text
- Deleted "Sociology Works!" and moved some of the information into the discussion of ingroups and outgroups

- Substantially revised and updated "Sociology and Social Policy," changing the subtitle to "Technological and Social Change in the Workplace: BYOD?"
- Renamed and updated final section: "Looking Ahead: Social Change and Organizations in the Future"
- Added new "You Can Make a Difference": "Can Facebook, Twitter, and Other Social Media Make You a Better, More Helpful Person?"

CHAPTER 6: Deviance and Crime

- Added new opening lived experience about President Obama's exasperation with the lack of gun control in light of the San Bernardino, California, mass shooting and all the other shootings that have recently occurred
- Deleted "Sociology Works!" and moved some of the content into discussion about deviance
- Updated discussion and examples, where possible, throughout crime theories section
- Updated crime statistics throughout chapter
- Revised and updated all figures pertaining to crime statistics
- Deleted "Framing Violent Crime in the Media"
- Updated discussion about terrorism and crime to include recent violence in France and Dallas, Texas
- Updated statistics on the U.S. criminal justice system
- Added new "Sociology in Global Perspective": "A Wider Perspective on Gangs: Look and Listen Around the World!" to include newer research and global examples
- Updated "Sociology and Social Policy," now subtitled "The Long War Over Gun Control"
- Revised and expanded section on Internet crime

CHAPTER 7: Class and Stratification in the United States

- Updated statistics on income, poverty, health insurance, and other issues pertaining to inequality throughout the chapter.
- Updated models and figures of the U.S. class structure
- Revised Figure 7.12: "Distribution of Pretax Income in the United States, 2014"
- Revised Figure 7.13: "Mean Household Income in the United States"
- Revised Figure 7.15: "Racial Divide in Net Worth, 2013"
- Revised Figure 7.16: "Rate of Uninsurance by Household Income, 2014"
- Deleted map: "Percentage of People in Poverty in the Past 12 Months by State"
- Revised Figure 7.18: "U.S. Poverty Rates by Age, 1959–2014"
- Deleted "Sociology Works!"
- Added new Figure 7.19: "Poverty Rates by Age and Sex, 2014"
- Added "You Can Make a Difference": "Students Helping Others Through Campus Kitchen"
- Expanded and renamed final section: "Looking Ahead: U.S. Stratification in the Future"

CHAPTER 8: Global Stratification

- Revised and updated information in the "Sociology & Everyday Life" quiz: "How Much Do You Know About Global Wealth and Poverty?"
- Replaced Figure 8.1 with "Wealth and Population by Region, 2015"
- Updated "Classification of Economies by Income"
- Revised Figure 8.3 (map of "High-, Middle-, and Low-Income Economies in Global Perspective")
- Deleted "Framing Child Labor Issues in the Media"
- Revised and updated "Global Poverty and Human Development Issues" section
- Updated Figure 8.6: "Indicators of Human Development"
- Revised and updated "Sociology and Social Policy" to include new United Nations goals for 2016–2030
- Updated information on *maquiladora* plants
- Deleted "Sociology Works!" and incorporated some of the information into the main body of the text
- Added new "You Can Make a Difference": "Global Networking to Reduce World Hunger and Poverty"
- Revised and updated "Looking Ahead: Global Inequality in the Future"

CHAPTER 9: Race and Ethnicity

- Added new opening lived experience about Selma, Alabama, fifty years after the civil rights march and about recent problems in Ferguson, Missouri, involving racism and abusive policing directed at African Americans
- Updated data in the "Sociology & Everyday Life" quiz: "How Much Do You Know About Race, Ethnicity, and Sports?"
- Updated data and other information on all racial and ethnic categories
- Added new "Sociology and Social Policy": "Racist Hate Speech on Campus Versus First Amendment Right to Freedom of Speech"
- Deleted "Census Profiles"
- Deleted "Sociology in Global Perspective"
- Deleted "Sociology Works!"
- Deleted "Sociology in the Media"
- Added new information on Cuban Americans regarding changing relations with the United States
- Updated information on Middle Eastern Americans in light of recent terrorist attacks
- Changed final section to "Looking Ahead: The Future of Global Racial and Ethnic Inequality"

CHAPTER 10: Sex, Gender, and Sexuality

- Added new "Sociology & Everyday Life" opening lived experience on gender, sexual orientation, and weight issues
- Added new "Sociology & Everyday Life" quiz: "How Much Do You Know About Gender, Sexual Orientation, and Weight Bias?"

- Revised and updated discussion of LGBTQ issues, including changes to the "Intersex and Transgender Persons" section and new material on the North Carolina "bathroom law" relating to transgender persons
- Deleted "Sociology Works!"
- Deleted "Census Profiles"
- Updated section on gender and socialization
- Expanded discussion of mass media and gender socialization to include more on social media
- Deleted "Framing Gender in the Media"
- Revised and updated "Contemporary Gender Inequality," particularly "Gendered Division of Paid Work in the United States"
- Updated Figure 10.11: "The Wage Gap, 2015"
- Updated Figure 10.12: "Women's Wages as a Percentage of Men's in Each Racial–Ethnic Category"
- Updated map shown in Figure 10.13: "Women's Earnings as a Percentage of Men's Earnings by State, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, 2014"
- Added new "Sociology in Global Perspective": "Women's Body Size and the Globalization of 'Fat Stigma'"
- Added new "You Can Make a Difference": "'Love Your Body': Women's Activism on Campus and in the Community"

CHAPTER 11: Families and Intimate Relationships

- Revised chapter opening lived experience and updated the "Sociology & Everyday Life" quiz
- Revised statistics on families throughout chapter
- Added new section: "The Contemporary Family—Family Diversity in the Twenty-first Century"
- Deleted "Census Profiles"
- Updated data on cohabitation and domestic partnerships
- Deleted "Sociology Works!"
- Updated "Sociology in Global Perspective": "Wombs-for-Rent: Commercial Surrogacy in India"
- Revised Figure 11.10: "U.S. Birth Rates per 1,000 Females Ages 15–19, by Race/Ethnicity, 1990–2014"
- Deleted "Teen Pregnancy in the Media"
- Revised "Looking Ahead: Family Issues in the Future"

CHAPTER 12: Education and Religion

- Updated statistics for education and religion throughout the chapter
- Deleted "Sociology Works!"
- Added "Postmodern Theory" in education section
- Updated Figure 12.7: "Percentage Distribution of Total Public Elementary–Secondary School System Revenue, 2014–2015"
- Revised and updated Figure 12.8: "Status Dropout Rates for 16- to 24-Year-Olds, by Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Region"
- Updated discussion of school safety and violence
- Deleted "Census Profiles" and incorporated "Educational Achievement of Persons Ages 25 and Over" into the text
- Updated "Sociology and Social Policy" box to reflect increasing complications relating to church–state separation issues
- Deleted "Top 24 U.S. Denominations That Self-Identify as Christian"
- Updated Figure 12.19: "U.S. Religious Traditions' Membership"
- Revised and updated "Looking Ahead: Education and Religion in the Future"

CHAPTER 13: Politics and the Economy in Global Perspective

- Added new opening lived experience with President Obama addressing journalists and explaining the importance of the media in a free society
- Deleted "Sociology Works!"
- Revised and updated discussion of the U.S. political process and political parties
- Updated "Discontent with the Current Political System and Parties" to include the primaries in the 2016 presidential race
- Deleted discussion of the Tea Party and the Green Party to focus instead on current disagreements within the Republican and Democratic parties
- Revised and updated Figure 13.10: "The 'Typical' Federal Civilian Employee"
- Deleted "Census Profiles"
- Updated Table 13.1: "Revenues of the World's 20 Largest Public and Private Corporations (2014)"
- Updated Table 13.2: "The Music Industry's Big Three"
- Updated Figure 13.13: "The General Motors Board of Directors"
- Added new "Sociology in Global Perspective": "Lopsided Job Market in China: A Mismatch Between Workers and Jobs"
- Revised and updated discussion of unemployment with latest available data
- Updated information on labor unions and worker activism
- Added new "You Can Make a Difference": "Keeping an Eye on the Media"
- Revised "Looking Ahead: Politics and the Global Economy in the Future"

CHAPTER 14: Health, Health Care, and Disability

- Updated information and statistics on illness and health care throughout chapter
- Deleted "Health Issues in the Media"
- Updated discussion on medicinal and recreational use of marijuana and changes in state laws pertaining to illegal drug use
- Updated Figure 14.8: "Chlamydia—Rates by Age and Sex, United States, 2014"
- Updated Figure 14.9: "Prevalence of Self-Reported Adult Obesity in the United States, 2014"
- Revised and updated information on the Affordable Care Act and its implementation
- Updated statistics on private health insurance

- Redesigned and updated Figure 14.13: "Uninsured Children Under 19 Years of Age by Household Income, Poverty Status, Age, Race, Race and Hispanic Origin, and Nativity, 2014"
- Deleted "Sociology Works!"
- Revised discussion on mental disorders and mental illness, and renamed section
- Deleted "Census Profiles"
- Updated "Looking Ahead: Health Care in the Future"

CHAPTER 15: Population and Urbanization

- Revised Figure 15.1: "Growth in the World's Population, 2015"
- Updated statistics on fertility, mortality, and migration
- Deleted "Sociology in the Media"
- Added new "Sociology in Global Perspective": "Problems That People Like to Ignore: Global Diaspora and the Migrant Crisis"
- Deleted "Sociology Works!"
- Updated Figure 15.14: "The World's Fifteen Largest Agglomerations"
- Revised and updated "Looking Ahead: Population and Urbanization in the Future"

CHAPTER 16: Collective Behavior, Social Movements, and Social Change

- Added new opening lived experience that focuses on divestment demands by college students and others as a way to deal with environmental issues
- Revised Table 16.1: "Top 15 Policy Priorities of the U.S. Public, 2015"
- Revised discussion of revolutionary movements to include more on movements based on international terrorist groups such as ISIS (ISIL)
- Deleted "Sociology Works!"
- Revised and updated "Looking Ahead: Social Change in the Future"

Overview of the Text's Contents

Sociology in Our Times: The Essentials, eleventh edition, contains sixteen high-interest, up-to-date, clearly organized chapters to introduce students to the best of sociological thinking. The length of the text makes full coverage of the book possible in the time typically allocated to the introductory course so that all students are purchasing a book that their instructors will have the time and desire to cover in its entirety.

Sociology in Our Times: The Essentials is divided into five parts.

Part 1 establishes the foundation for studying society and social life. **Chapter 1** introduces students to the sociological imagination and traces the development of sociological thinking. The chapter sets forth the major theoretical perspectives used by sociologists in analyzing compelling social issues and shows students how sociologists conduct research. This chapter provides a thorough description of both quantitative and qualitative methods of sociological research, and shows how these approaches have been used from the era of Emile Durkheim to the present to study social concerns such as suicide. In **Chapter 2** culture is spotlighted as either a stabilizing force or a force that can generate discord, conflict, and even violence in societies. Cultural diversity is discussed as a contemporary issue, and unique coverage is given to popular culture and leisure and to divergent perspectives on popular culture. **Chapter 3** looks at the positive and negative aspects of socialization, including a lived experience of learning the socialization cues of medical school. This chapter presents an innovative analysis of gender and racial–ethnic socialization, and issues associated with recent immigration.

Part 2 examines social groups and social control. **Chapter 4** applies the sociological imagination to an examination of society, social structure, and social interaction, using homelessness as a sustained example of the dynamic interplay of structure and interaction in society. Unique to this chapter are discussions of the sociology of emotions and of personal space as viewed through the lenses of race, class, gender, and age.

Chapter 5 analyzes groups and organizations, including innovative forms of social organization and ways in which organizational structures may differentially affect people based on race, class, gender, and age. **Chapter 6** examines how deviance and crime emerge in societies, using diverse theoretical approaches to describe the nature of deviance, crime, and the criminal justice system. Key issues are dramatized for students through an analysis of recent mass shootings and the consequences of violence on individuals and society.

Part 3 focuses on social differences and social inequality, looking at issues of class, race/ethnicity, and sex/gender, while also touching on issues relating to social inequality based on age. **Chapter 7** focuses on class and stratification in the United States, analyzing the causes and consequences of inequality and poverty, including a discussion of the ideology and accessibility of the American Dream. **Chapter 8** addresses the issue of global stratification and examines differences in wealth and poverty in rich and poor nations around the world. Explanations for these differences are discussed.

The focus of **Chapter 9** is race and ethnicity, including an illustration of the historical relationship (or lack of it) between sports and upward mobility by persons from diverse racial–ethnic groups. A thorough analysis of prejudice, discrimination, theoretical perspectives, and the experiences of diverse racial and ethnic groups is presented, along with global racial and ethnic issues. **Chapter 10** examines sex, gender, and sexuality, with special emphasis on gender stratification in historical perspective. Linkages between gender socialization and contemporary gender inequality are described and illustrated by lived experiences and perspectives on body image.

Part 4 offers a systematic discussion of social institutions, building students' awareness of the importance of

these foundational elements of society and showing how a problem in one often has a significant influence on others. Families and intimate relationships are explored in **Chapter 11**, which includes both U.S. and global perspectives on family relationships, a view of families throughout the life course, and a discussion of diversity in contemporary U.S. families. Education and religion are presented in **Chapter 12**, which highlights important sociological theories pertaining to these social institutions and integrates the theme of the influence of religion on education and life. In the process, the chapter highlights issues of race, class, and gender inequalities in current U.S. education. The chapter also provides a thorough discussion of religion in global perspective, including a survey of world religions and an analysis of how religious beliefs affect other aspects of social life. Current trends in U.S. religion are explored, including various sociological explanations of why people look to religion to find purpose and meaning in life.

Chapter 13 discusses the intertwining nature of politics, economy, and media in global perspective, highlighting the international context in which contemporary political and economic systems operate. The chapter emphasizes the part that social media are increasingly playing in politics and the economy throughout the world.

Chapter 14 analyzes health, health care, and disability from both U.S. and global perspectives. Among the topics included are social epidemiology, lifestyle factors influencing health and illness, health care organization in the United States and other nations, social implications of advanced medical technology, and holistic and alternative medicine. This chapter is unique in that it contains a thorough discussion of the sociological perspectives on disability and of social inequalities based on disability. The Affordable Care Act and its ramifications are explored in detail.

Part 5 surveys social dynamics and social change. **Chapter 15** examines population and urbanization, looking at demography, global population change, and the process and consequences of urbanization. Special attention is given to race- and class-based segregation in urban areas and the crisis in health care in central cities. **Chapter 16** concludes the text with an innovative analysis of collective behavior, social movements, and social change. The need for persistence in social movements, such as the continuing work of environmental activists over the past sixty years, is used as an example to help students grasp the importance of collective behavior and social movements in producing social change.

Distinctive, Classroom-Tested Features

The following special features are specifically designed to demonstrate the relevance of sociology in our lives, as well as to support students' learning. As the preceding overview of the book's contents shows, these features appear throughout the text, some in every chapter and others in selected chapters.

Unparalleled Coverage of and Attention to Diversity

From its first edition, I have striven to integrate diversity in numerous ways throughout this book. The individuals portrayed and discussed in each chapter accurately mirror the diversity in society itself. As a result, this text speaks to a wide variety of students and captures their interest by taking into account their concerns and perspectives. Moreover, the research used includes the best work of classical and established contemporary sociologists—including many white women and people of color—and it weaves an inclusive treatment of *all* people into the examination of sociology in *all* chapters. Therefore, this text helps students consider the significance of the interlocking nature of individuals' class, race, and gender (and, increasingly, age) in all aspects of social life.

Personal Narratives That Highlight Issues and Serve as Chapter-Length Examples

Authentic first-person commentaries appear in the "Sociology & Everyday Life" features that open each chapter and personalize the issue that unifies the chapter's coverage. These lived experiences provide opportunities for students to examine social life beyond their own experiences and for instructors to systematically incorporate into lectures and discussions an array of interesting and relevant topics that help demonstrate to students the value of applying sociology to their everyday lives. New topics include "Class Attendance in Higher Education," "When Gender, Sexual Orientation, and Weight Bias Collide," and "Collective Behavior and Environmental Issues."

Focus on the Relationship Between Sociology and Everyday Life

Each chapter has a brief quiz in the opening "Sociology & Everyday Life" feature that relates the sociological perspective to the pressing social issues presented in the vignette. (Answers are provided at the end of the chapter.)

Emphasis on the Importance of a Global Perspective

The global implications of all topics are examined throughout each chapter and in the "Sociology in Global Perspective" features, which highlight our interconnected world and reveal how the sociological imagination extends beyond national borders.

Emphasis on Social and Global Change

The eleventh edition also strives to relate the importance of social and global change in its many forms and how this change affects not only our everyday lives but also our communities and the entire nation and world.

Applying the Sociological Imagination to Social Policy

The "Sociology and Social Policy" features in selected chapters help students understand the connection between law and social policy issues in society.

Focus on Making a Difference

Designed to help students learn how to become involved in their communities, the "You Can Make a Difference" features look at ways in which students can address, on a personal level, social issues and problems raised by the chapter themes.

Effective Study Aids

In addition to basic reading and study aids such as learning objectives, key terms, and a running glossary, *Sociology in Our Times* includes the following pedagogical aids to aid students' mastery of the course's content:

- **Concept Quick Review.** These tables categorize and contrast the major theories or perspectives on the specific topics presented in a chapter.
- **Questions for Critical Thinking.** Each chapter concludes with a set of questions to encourage students to reflect on important issues, to develop their own critical-thinking skills, and to highlight how ideas presented in one chapter often build on those developed previously.
- **Feature-Concluding Reflect & Analyze Questions.** From activating prior knowledge related to concepts and themes to highlighting main ideas and reinforcing diverse perspectives, this text's questions encourage students to reflect on issues and to analyze content rather than to simply memorize and recall course content.
- **End-of-Chapter Summaries in Question-and-Answer Format.** Chapter summaries provide a built-in review for students by reexamining material covered in the chapter in an easy-to-read question-and-answer format to review, highlight, and reinforce the most important concepts and issues discussed in each chapter.

Comprehensive Supplements Package

Products for Blended and Online Courses

MindTap™: The Personal Learning Experience *MindTap Sociology for Kendall's Sociology in Our Times: The Essentials,* eleventh edition, from Cengage Learning, represents a new approach to a highly personalized, online learning platform. A fully online learning solution, MindTap combines all of a student's learning tools—readings, multimedia, activities, and assessments—into a "Learning Path" that guides the student through the introduction to sociology course. Instructors personalize the experience by customizing the presentation of these learning tools to their students, even seamlessly introducing their own content into the Learning Path via apps that integrate into the MindTap platform. Learn more at **www.cengage.com/mindtap**.

MindTap for Kendall's *Sociology in Our Times: The Essentials,* eleventh edition, is easy to use and saves instructors time by allowing them to do the following:

- Seamlessly deliver appropriate content and technology assets from a number of providers to students, as needed.
- Break course content down into movable objects to promote personalization, encourage interactivity, and ensure student engagement.
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I invite you to send your comments and suggestions about this book to me in care of:

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SOCIOLOGY
In Our Times

The Sociological Perspective and Research Process

1

Richard G. Bingham II/Alamy Stock Photo

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. **Define** sociology and explain how it can contribute to our understanding of social life.
2. **Identify** what is meant by the sociological imagination.
3. **Describe** the historical context in which sociological thinking developed.
4. **Identify** reasons why many early social thinkers were concerned with social change.
5. **Compare and contrast** functionalist, conflict, symbolic interactionist, and postmodern perspectives on social life in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.
6. **Explain** why sociological research is necessary and how it challenges our commonsense beliefs about pressing social issues such as suicide.
7. **Distinguish** between quantitative research and qualitative research, and identify the steps in each method.
8. **Describe** survey research and briefly discuss three types of surveys.
9. **Compare and contrast** research methods used in surveys, secondary analysis of existing data, field research, and experiments.
10. **Discuss** ethical issues in research and identify professional codes that protect research participants.

SOCIOLOGY & *Everyday Life*

The Sociology of Suicide Trends Today

Instagram Posts:

"Molak's an ape. The monkey looking human gets his woman stolen."

"Put um inna coffin. Put em 6 feet under."

David Molak's Girlfriend's Post:

". . . I don't think this is funny. . . . STOP ALL OF YOU."

—After a 16-year-old San Antonio student committed suicide, a local television station obtained these screenshots from a private Instagram account that revealed David Molak had been the target of prolonged cyberbullying by students at his previous high school even after he began attending another school and his girlfriend tried to get other people to stop their behavior (Mendoza, 2016).

Zuma Press

Cliff Molak visits the grave of his brother David, who commited suicide after being cyberbullied.

"Why are you alive?"

"You're ugly."

"You should die."

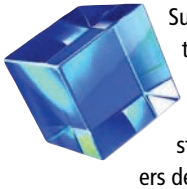
"Why don't you go kill yourself."

"Can u die please?"

—After more than a year of receiving online bullying comments like these, Rebecca Ann Sedwick, a 12-year-old Tampa, Florida, girl, jumped to her death from a concrete silo tower at an abandoned cement plant. After her death, law enforcement officials stated that she was "absolutely terrorized on social media" (Alvarez, 2013), while psychologists pointed out that she had been a victim of the "cool to be cruel" cyberculture (Ng, 2013).

"You think you want to die, but in reality you just want to be saved."

—Hanna Smith posted a picture of this statement written in a spiral notebook to her Facebook page less than 24 hours prior to killing herself (Dolan and Robinson, 2013).



Suicides committed by young people who have been the victims of online bullying deeply touch the lives of their families, friends, and others who have not even met them. Although we will never know the full story of what happened to David Molak and the others described, these tragic occurrences bring us to larger sociological questions: Why does anyone commit suicide? Is suicide purely an individual phenomenon, or is it related to our social interactions and the social environment and society in which we live? How have technologies such as smartphones and social media affected our communication—both positively and negatively—with others?

As you are well aware, social media use among teens and college students continues to grow rapidly. You are engulfed by smartphones, tablets, and computers. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other Internet-based social networking sites are taken for granted. You enjoy the positive effects of social media, but the digital age may also produce harmful outcomes, particularly when some people harass others, causing psychological and physical harm and sometimes even bullying them into suicide.

Although suicide may seem like a "downer" for your study of sociology, I have chosen this topic because it is one of the first social issues that early sociologists studied. These thinkers believed that identifying the *social causes* of such behavior sets sociology apart from psychology, philosophy, and other areas of inquiry.

In this chapter we examine how sociological theories and research can help you understand social life, including seemingly individualistic acts such as committing suicide. You will see how sociological theory and research methods might be used to answer complex questions, and you will wrestle with some of the difficulties that sociologists experience as they study human behavior. Before reading on, test your knowledge about suicide by taking the "Sociology and Everyday Life" quiz. ■

Define sociology and explain how it can contribute to our understanding of social life.

Putting Social Life into Perspective

Sociology is the systematic study of human society and social interaction. It is a *systematic* study because sociologists apply both theoretical perspectives and research methods (or

How Much Do You Know About Suicide?

TRUE	FALSE		
T	F	1	After cancer and heart disease, suicide accounts for more years of life lost than any other cause of death in the United States.
T	F	2	Young people between the ages of 15 and 24 have the highest suicide rate in the United States.
T	F	3	White males account for about 65 percent of all U.S. suicides.
T	F	4	Although females are more likely to attempt suicide, males are more likely to complete suicide (take their own life).
T	F	5	Each year about 500,000 suicide deaths occur worldwide.
T	F	6	Firearms are the most commonly used method of suicide among males and females.
T	F	7	Alcohol intoxication is present in nearly one-fourth of all suicide deaths in the United States.
T	F	8	Studies show that for people between the ages of 18 and 22, those who are attending college full time are less likely to attempt suicide or receive medical attention as a result of a suicide attempt than persons in the same age category who are not full-time college students.

Answers can be found at the end of the chapter.

orderly approaches) to examinations of social behavior. Sociologists study human societies and their social interactions in order to develop theories of how human behavior is shaped by group life and how, in turn, group life is affected by individuals.

Why Should You Study Sociology?

Sociology helps you gain a better understanding of yourself and the social world. It enables you to see how the groups to which you belong and the society in which you live largely shape behavior. A ***society*** is a large social grouping that shares the same geographical territory and is subject to the same political authority and dominant cultural expectations, such as the United States, Mexico, or Nigeria. Many changes are occurring in the twenty-first century. Many societies have not only dominant cultural groupings and expectations but also many smaller groupings that have their own unique cultural identities. Migration and interdependence have shifted the meaning of *society* in the twenty-first century.

Examining the world order helps us understand that each of us is affected by *global interdependence*—a relationship in which the lives of all people are closely intertwined and any one nation's problems are part of a larger global problem. Environmental problems are an example: People throughout the world share the same biosphere. When environmental degradation, such as removing natural resources or polluting the air and water, takes place in one region, it may have an adverse effect on people around the globe.

You can make use of sociology on a more personal level. Sociology enables us to move beyond established

sociology
the systematic study of human society and social interaction.

society
a large social grouping that shares the same geographical territory and is subject to the same political authority and dominant cultural expectations.

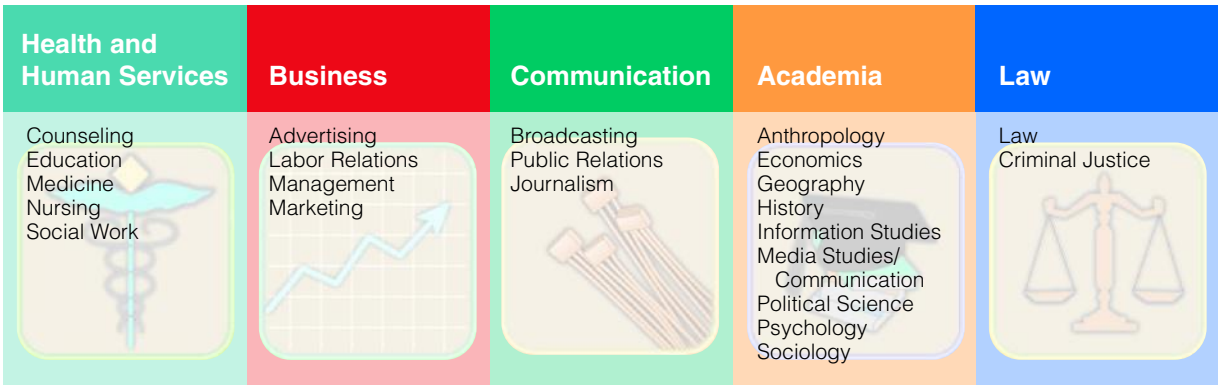


FIGURE 1.1 Fields That Use Social Science Research

In many careers, including jobs in health and human services, business, communication, academia, and law, the ability to analyze social science research is an important need.

Source: Based on Katzer, Cook, and Crouch, 1991.

ways of thinking, thus allowing us to gain new insights into ourselves and to develop a greater awareness of the connection between our own "world" and that of other people. According to the sociologist Peter Berger (1963: 23), sociological inquiry helps us see that "things are not what they seem." Sociology provides new ways of approaching social problems and making decisions in everyday life. For this reason, people with knowledge of sociology are employed in a variety of fields that apply sociological insights to everyday life (see • Figure 1.1).

Sociology promotes understanding and tolerance by enabling each of us to look beyond intuition, common sense, and our personal experiences. Many of us rely on intuition or common sense gained from personal experience to help us understand our daily lives and other people's behavior. *Commonsense knowledge* guides ordinary conduct in everyday life. However, many commonsense notions are actually myths. A *myth* is a popular but false notion that may be used, either intentionally or unintentionally, to perpetuate certain beliefs or "theories" even in the light of conclusive evidence to the contrary.

By contrast, sociologists strive to use scientific standards, not popular myths or hearsay, in studying society and social interaction. They use systematic research techniques and are accountable to the scientific community for their methods and the presentation of their findings. Whereas some sociologists argue that sociology must be completely value free—free from distorting subjective (personal or emotional) bias—others do not think that total objectivity is an attainable or desirable goal when studying human behavior. However, all sociologists attempt to discover patterns or commonalities in human behavior. When they study suicide, for example, they look for recurring patterns of behavior in individuals and groups. Consequently, we seek the multiple causes and effects of social issues and analyze the impact of the problem not only from the standpoint of the people directly involved but also from the standpoint of the effects of such behavior on all people.

LO2 **Identify** what is meant by the sociological imagination.

The Sociological Imagination

Do you wonder how your daily life compares to what other people are doing? Our interest in Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other social media sites reflects how fascinated we are by what other people are thinking and doing. But how can you really link your personal life with what is going on with other people in the larger social world? You can make an important linkage known as the sociological imagination.

Sociological reasoning is often referred to as the ***sociological imagination***—the ability to see the relationship between individual experiences and the larger society (Mills, 1959b). The sociological imagination is important to each of us because having this awareness enables us to understand the link between our personal experiences and the social contexts in which they occur. Each of us lives in a society, and we live out a biography within some historical setting. Throughout your life, you contribute to the shaping of society and to its history, even as you are made by society and the historical events that take place during your lifetime. The sociological imagination will enable you to grasp the relationship between history at the societal level and your own biography at the individual level. It also helps you distinguish between personal troubles and social (or public) issues. *Personal troubles* are private problems that affect individuals and the networks of people with whom they regularly associate. As a result, individuals within their immediate social settings must solve those problems. For example, one person being unemployed may be a personal trouble. *Public issues* are problems that affect large numbers of people and often require solutions at the societal level. Widespread unemployment as a result of economic changes such as plant closings is an example of a public issue. The sociological imagination helps us place seemingly personal troubles, such as losing one's job or feeling like committing suicide, into a larger social context, where we

SOCIOLOGY in *Global Perspective*

Durkheim's Classical Study of Suicide Applied to Twenty-First-Century Young People in India

> The bond attaching [people] to life slackens because the bond which attaches [them] to society is itself slack.
> —Emile Durkheim, *Suicide* (1964b/1897)

Although this statement described social conditions accompanying the high rates of suicide found in late-nineteenth-century France, Durkheim's words ring true today as we look at contemporary suicide rates for young people in cities such as New Delhi, India. Suicide rates in India are highest in the 15–29 age category and are especially high among those living in the wealthier and more educated regions of the nation (NDTV.com, 2012; *Lancet*, 2012).

Doesn't this seem unlikely? Many people think rural farmers facing poor harvests and high debt would have the greatest risk of suicide; however, this has not proven true in India. At first glance, we might think that economic success and a good education would provide insurance against suicide because of the greater happiness and job satisfaction among individuals in cities such as New Delhi, as these individuals have gained new opportunities and higher salaries in recent years. However, this economic boom—including the more open markets of India in the past 20 years—has not only created new opportunities for people; these changes have also contributed to rapid urbanization and weakened social ties. The result? Intensified job anxiety, higher expectations, and more pressure for individual achievement. Social bonds have been weakened or dissolved as people move away from their families and their community. Ironically, newer technologies such as cell phones and social networking sites have contributed to the breakdown of traditional family units as communication has become more impersonal and fragmented.

In addition, life in the cities moves at a much faster pace than in the rural areas, and many individuals experience loneliness, sleep disorders, family discord, and major health risks such as heart disease and depression (Mahapatra, 2007). In the words of Ramachandra Guha (2004), a historian residing in India, Durkheim's sociology of suicide remains highly relevant to finding new answers to this challenging problem: "The rash of suicides in city and village is a qualitatively new development in our history. We sense that tragedies are as much social as they are individual. But we know very little of what lies behind them. What we now await, in sum, is an Indian Durkheim."

Durkheim's words about suicide still ring true today in India, where suicide rates for young people in cities such as New Delhi are high, particularly among those in the 15–29 age category. Why might an economic boom not only create new opportunities but also intensify social problems such as high rates of suicide when social change is linked to rapid urbanization and weakening social ties?

REFLECT & ANALYZE

How does sociology help us examine seemingly private acts such as suicide within a larger social context? Why are some people more inclined to commit suicide if they are not part of a strong social fabric and have, at the same time, high job anxiety and intensive pressure to achieve?

can distinguish whether and how personal troubles may be related to public issues. Let's compare the two perspectives by looking at suicide.

Suicide as a Personal Trouble Have you ever heard someone say, "They have no one to blame but themselves" regarding some problem? In everyday life, we often blame other people for "creating" their own problems. Although individual behavior can contribute to social problems, our individual experiences are often largely beyond our own control. They are determined by society as a whole—by its historical development and its organization. In everyday life we often blame individuals for creating or contributing to their own problems. If a person commits suicide, many people consider it to be strictly the result of that individual's

sociological imagination
C. Wright Mills's term for the ability to see the relationship between individual experiences and the larger society.

own personal problems, not the social world in which the person lived.

Suicide as a Public Issue If we use the sociological imagination to look at the problem of suicide, however, we can see that it is often a public issue—a societal problem. Early sociologist Emile Durkheim refused to accept commonsense explanations of suicide. In what is probably the first sociological study to use scientific research methods, he related suicide to the issue of cohesiveness (or lack of it) in society instead of viewing suicide as an isolated act that could be understood only by studying individual personalities or inherited tendencies. In *Suicide* (1964b/1897), Durkheim documented his contention that a high suicide rate indicated large-scale societal problems.

The Importance of a Global Sociological Imagination

How is it possible to think globally when you live in one location and have been taught to think a certain way? Although we live in one country and rely heavily on Western sociological theory and research, we can access the world beyond the United States and learn to develop a more comprehensive *global* approach for the future. One way we can do this is to reach beyond studies that have focused primarily on the United States to look at the important challenges we face in a rapidly changing world and develop a more comprehensive *global* approach for the future (see • Figure 1.2). These issues range from political and economic instability to environmental concerns, natural disasters, and terrorism. We can also examine the ways in which nations are not on equal footing when it comes to economics and politics.

The world's ***high-income countries*** are nations with highly industrialized economies; technologically advanced industrial, administrative, and service occupations; and relatively high levels of national and personal income. Examples include the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and the countries of Western Europe.

As compared with other nations of the world, many high-income nations have a high standard of living and a lower death rate because of advances in nutrition and medical technology. However, not everyone living in a so-called high-income country has these advantages.

FIGURE 1.2 The World's Economies in the Early Twenty-First Century

High-income, middle-income, and low-income countries.

Photos, left to right: John Berry/Syracuse Newspapers/The Image Works; Gable/Alamy Stock Photo; Philipbigg/Alamy Stock Photo

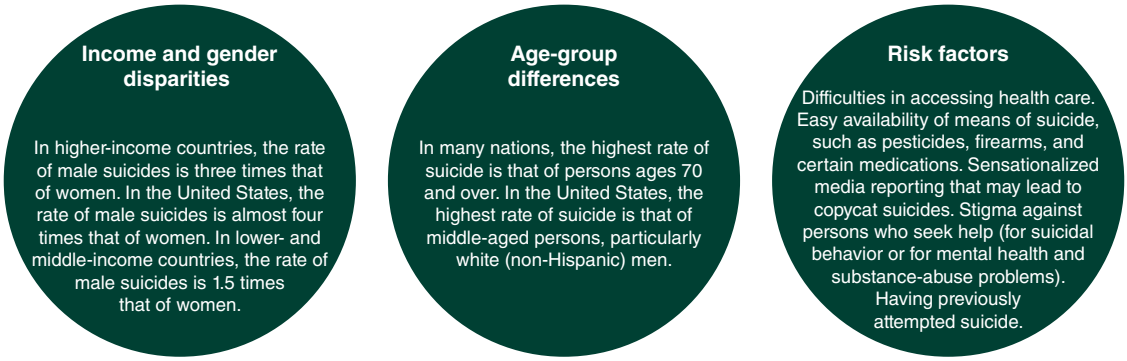


FIGURE 1.3 Using Our Global Sociological Imagination to Understand Suicide

Sources: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2015a; World Health Organization, 2015a.

In contrast, ***middle-income countries*** are nations with industrializing economies, particularly in urban areas, and moderate levels of national and personal income. Examples of middle-income countries include the nations of Eastern Europe and many Latin American countries.

Low-income countries are primarily agrarian nations with little industrialization and low levels of national and personal income. Examples of low-income countries include many of the nations of Africa and Asia, particularly India and the People's Republic of China, where people typically work the land and are among the poorest in the world. However, generalizations are difficult to make because there are wide differences in income and standards of living within many nations (see Chapter 8, "Global Stratification").

If we look at the problem of suicide from a global perspective, we find that it is a major concern: Worldwide, more than 800,000 people die by suicide every year. In addition, many more people attempt suicide. Based on what you have read above about high-, middle-, and low-income countries, it is important for us to think about the fact that about 75 percent of global suicides occur in low- and middle-income nations. Risk factors are shown in • Figure 1.3.

Throughout this text we will continue to develop our sociological imaginations by examining social life in the United States and other nations. The future of our nation is deeply intertwined with the future of all other nations of the world on economic, political, environmental, and humanitarian levels.

Whatever your race/ethnicity, class, sex, or age, are you able to include in your thinking the perspectives of people who are quite different from you in experiences and points of view? Before you answer this question, a few definitions are in order. *Race* is a term used by many people to specify groups of people distinguished by physical characteristics such as skin color. *Ethnicity* refers to the cultural heritage or identity of a group and is based on factors such as language or country of origin. *Class* is the relative location of a person or group within the larger society, based on wealth, power, prestige, or other valued resources. *Sex* refers to the biological and anatomical differences between females and males. By contrast, *gender* refers to the meanings, beliefs, and practices associated with sex differences, referred to as *femininity* and *masculinity*. Although these terms sound very precise, they often do not have a precise meaning and are, instead, social constructions that people use to justify social inequalities. When we refer to something as a "social construction," we mean that race, ethnicity, class, and gender do not really indicate anything apart from the social meaning that people in a given society confer on them. However, the result is that we may—either intentionally or unintentionally—privilege some categories of people over others who are placed in disadvantaged or subordinate positions. In sum, a "social construction of reality" occurs when large numbers of people act and respond as if these categories exist in reality rather than having been socially created.

LO3 **Describe** the historical context in which sociological thinking developed.

The Development of Sociological Thinking

Throughout history, social philosophers and religious authorities have made countless observations about human behavior. However, the idea of observing how people lived, finding out what they thought, and doing so in a systematic manner that could be verified did not take hold until the nineteenth century and the social upheaval brought about by industrialization and urbanization.

high-income countries
nations with highly industrialized economies; technologically advanced industrial, administrative, and service occupations; and relatively high levels of national and personal income.

middle-income countries
nations with industrializing economies, particularly in urban areas, and moderate levels of national and personal income.

low-income countries
primarily agrarian nations with little industrialization and low levels of national and personal income.

Everett Collection/Newscom

FIGURE 1.4 As the Industrial Revolution swept through the United States beginning in the nineteenth century, children being employed in factories became increasingly common. Social thinkers soon began to explore such new social problems brought about by industrialization.

Industrialization is the process by which societies are transformed from dependence on agriculture and handmade products to an emphasis on manufacturing and related industries. This process occurred first during the Industrial Revolution in Britain between 1760 and 1850, and was soon repeated throughout Western Europe. By the mid-nineteenth century, industrialization was well under way in the United States. Massive economic, technological, and social changes occurred as machine technology and the factory system shifted the economic base of these nations from agriculture to manufacturing: textiles, iron smelting, and related industries. Many people who had labored on the land were forced to leave their tightly knit rural communities and sacrifice well-defined social relationships to seek employment as factory workers in the emerging cities, which became the centers of industrial work.

Urbanization is the process by which an increasing proportion of a population lives in cities rather than in rural areas. Although cities existed long before the Industrial Revolution, the development of the factory system led to a rapid increase in both the number of cities and the size of their populations. People from very diverse backgrounds worked together in the same factory (see • Figure 1.4). At the same time, many people shifted from being *producers* to being *consumers*. For example, families living in the cities had to buy food with their wages because they could no longer grow their own crops to eat or barter for other resources. Similarly, people had to pay rent for their lodging because they could no longer exchange their services for shelter.

These living and working conditions led to the development of new social problems: inadequate housing, crowding, unsanitary conditions, poverty, pollution, and crime. Wages were so low that entire families—including very young children—were forced to work, often under hazardous conditions and with no job security. As these conditions became more visible, a new breed of social thinkers tried to understand why and how society was changing.

The Origins of Sociology as We Know It

At the same time that urban problems were growing worse, natural scientists had been using reason, or rational thinking, to discover the laws of physics and the movement of the planets. Social thinkers started to believe that by applying the methods developed by the natural sciences, they might discover the laws of human behavior and apply these laws to solve social problems. Historically, the time was ripe because the Age of Enlightenment had produced a belief in reason and humanity's ability to perfect itself.

Early Thinkers: A Concern with Social Order and Stability

Early social thinkers—such as Auguste Comte, Harriet Martineau, Herbert Spencer, and Emile Durkheim—were interested in analyzing social order and stability, and many of their ideas have had a dramatic and long-lasting influence on modern sociology.

Auguste Comte (1798–1857) (oil on canvas), Etex, Louis Jules (1810–1889)/Temple de la Religion de l'Humanite, Paris, France/ The Bridgeman Art Library

Auguste Comte The French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798–1857) coined the term *sociology* from the Latin *socius* ("social, being with others") and the Greek *logos* ("study of") to describe a new science that would engage in the study of society. Even though he never actually conducted sociological research, Comte is considered by some to be the "founder of sociology." Comte's theory that societies contain *social statics* (forces for social order and stability) and *social dynamics* (forces for conflict and change) has been used throughout the history of sociology.

Comte stressed that the methods of the natural sciences should be applied to the objective study of society. He sought to unlock the secrets of society so that intellectuals like him could become the new secular (as contrasted with religious) "high priests" of society. For Comte, the best policies involved order and authority. He envisioned that a new consensus would emerge on social issues and that the new science of sociology would play a significant part in the reorganization of society.

Comte's philosophy became known as ***positivism***—a belief that the world can best be understood through scientific inquiry. He believed that positivism had two dimensions: (1) methodological—the application of scientific knowledge to both physical and social phenomena, and (2) social and political—the use of such knowledge to

predict the likely results of different policies so that the best one might be chosen.

Social analysts have praised Comte for his advocacy of sociology and for his insights regarding linkages between the social structural elements of society (such as family, religion, and government) and social thinking in specific historical periods.

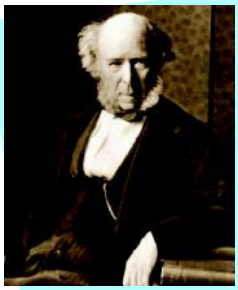
Today, sociology is recognized as a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) discipline that is actively involved in the American Academy for the Advancement of Science, the largest general science organization worldwide. Sociology is also a core part of applied science and has been incorporated into the MCAT (Medical College Admissions Test), an exam that includes questions on basic sociology as well as other social and behavioral sciences (Hillsman, 2015). The advocacy of Comte and other early social thinkers about the scientific contributions of sociology continues into the twenty-first century, many years beyond their initial endeavors.


Spencer Arnold/Getty Images

Harriet Martineau Comte's works were made more accessible for a wide variety of scholars through the efforts of the British sociologist Harriet Martineau (1802–1876). Until fairly recently, Martineau received no recognition in the field of sociology, partly because she was a woman in a male-dominated discipline and society. Not only did she translate and condense Comte's works, but she was also an active sociologist in her own right. Martineau studied the social customs of Britain and the United States, analyzing the consequences of industrialization and capitalism. In *Society in America* (1962/1837), she examined religion, politics, child rearing, slavery, and immigration, paying special attention to social distinctions based on class, race, and gender. Her works explore the status of women, children, and "sufferers" (persons who are considered to be criminal, mentally ill, handicapped, poor, or alcoholic).

Martineau was also an advocate of social change, encouraging greater racial and gender equality. She was also committed to creating a science of society that would be grounded in empirical observations and widely accessible to people. She argued that sociologists should be impartial in their assessment of society but that it is entirely appropriate to compare the existing state of society with the principles on which it was founded. Martineau believed that a better society would emerge if women and men were treated equally, enlightened reform occurred, and cooperation existed among people in all social classes (but led by the middle class).

Herbert Spencer Unlike Comte, who was strongly influenced by the upheavals of the French Revolution, the British social theorist Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) was born in a more peaceful and optimistic period in his country's history. Spencer's major contribution to sociology was an evolutionary perspective on social order and social change. Evolutionary theory helps to explain how organic and/or social change occurs in societies. According to Spencer's Theory of General Evolution, society, like a biological organism, has various interdependent parts (such as the family, the economy, and the government) that work to ensure the stability and survival of the entire society.


Hulton Archive/Getty Images

Spencer believed that societies develop through a process of "struggle" (for existence) and "fitness" (for survival), which he referred to as the "survival of the fittest." Because this phrase is often attributed to Charles Darwin, Spencer's view of society is known as ***social Darwinism***—the belief that those species of animals, including human beings, best adapted to their environment survive and prosper, whereas those poorly adapted die out. Spencer equated this process of *natural selection* with progress because only the "fittest" members of society would survive the competition.

Critics believe that Spencer's ideas are flawed because societies are not the same as biological systems; people are able to create and transform the environment in which they live. Moreover, the notion of the survival of the fittest can easily be used to justify class, racial–ethnic, and gender inequalities.


Bettmann/Getty Images

Emile Durkheim French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) stressed that people are the product of their social environment and that behavior cannot be understood fully in terms of *individual* biological and psychological traits. He believed that the limits of human potential are *socially* based, not *biologically* based.

In his work *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1964a/1895), Durkheim set forth one of his most important contributions to sociology: the idea that societies are built on social facts. ***Social facts*** are patterned ways of acting, thinking, and

industrialization
the process by which societies are transformed from dependence on agriculture and handmade products to an emphasis on manufacturing and related industries.

urbanization
the process by which an increasing proportion of a population lives in cities rather than in rural areas.

positivism
a belief that the world can best be understood through scientific inquiry.

social Darwinism
Herbert Spencer's belief that those species of animals, including human beings, best adapted to their environment survive and prosper, whereas those poorly adapted die out.

social facts
Emile Durkheim's term for patterned ways of acting, thinking, and feeling that exist outside any one individual but that exert social control over each person.

feeling that exist outside any one individual but that exert social control over each person. Durkheim believed that social facts must be explained by other social facts—by reference to the social structure rather than to individual attributes.

Durkheim observed that rapid social change and a more specialized division of labor produce *strains* in society. These strains lead to a breakdown in traditional organization, values, and authority and to a dramatic increase in ***anomie***—a condition in which social control becomes ineffective as a result of the loss of shared values and of a sense of purpose in society. According to Durkheim, anomie is most likely to occur during a period of rapid social change. In *Suicide* (1964b/1897), he explored the relationship between anomic social conditions and suicide, a concept that remains important in the twenty-first century. For example, studies of high rates of suicide in India have found that young people living in large cities are more prone to suicide than those living in rural areas. Why is this true? Researchers have concluded that social bonds among people, particularly younger individuals, have become weakened or even dissolved after they moved away from their families and communities to find better jobs and earn higher incomes in cities. Are similar problems likely in the United States? Why or why not?

Durkheim's contributions to sociology are so significant that he is considered to be one of the crucial figures in its development as an academic area of study. He is one of the founding figures in the functionalist theoretical tradition, but he also made important contributions to other perspectives, particularly symbolic interactionism. Later in this chapter, we look at these theoretical approaches.

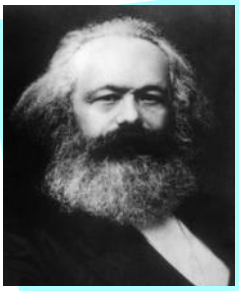
Although critics acknowledge Durkheim's important contributions, some argue that his emphasis on societal stability, or the "problem of order"—how society can establish and maintain social stability and cohesiveness—obscured the *subjective meanings* that individuals give to religion, work, and suicide. From this view, overemphasis on *structure* and the determining power of "society" resulted in a corresponding neglect of *agency* (the beliefs and actions of the actors involved) in much of Durkheim's theorizing.

LO4 **Identify** reasons why many early social thinkers were concerned with social change.

Differing Views on the Status Quo: Stability or Change?

Together with Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Georg Simmel, Durkheim established the direction of modern sociology. We will look first at Marx's and Weber's divergent thoughts about conflict and social change in societies and then at Georg Simmel's microlevel analysis of society.

Karl Marx In sharp contrast to Durkheim's focus on the stability of society, German economist and philosopher Karl Marx (1818–1883) stressed that history is a continuous clash between conflicting ideas and forces. He believed that conflict—especially class conflict—is necessary in order to produce social change and a better society. For Marx, the most important changes are economic. He concluded that the capitalist economic system was responsible for the overwhelming poverty that he observed in London at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution (Marx and Engels, 1967/1848).


Everett Historical/Shutterstock.com

In the Marxian framework, *class conflict* is the struggle between the capitalist class and the working class. The capitalist class, or *bourgeoisie,* is those who own and control the means of production—the tools, land, factories, and money for investment that form the economic basis of a society. The working class, or *proletariat,* is those who must sell their labor because they have no other means to earn a livelihood. From Marx's viewpoint, the capitalist class controls and exploits the masses of struggling workers by paying less than the value of their labor. This exploitation results in workers' *alienation*—a feeling of powerlessness and estrangement from other people and from themselves. Marx predicted that the working class would become aware of its exploitation, overthrow the capitalists, and establish a free and classless society.

Marx is regarded as one of the most profound sociological thinkers; however, his social and economic analyses have also inspired heated debates among generations of social scientists. Central to his view was the belief that society should not just be studied but should also be changed, because the status quo involved the oppression of most of the population by a small group of wealthy people. Those who believe that sociology should be value free (see below) are uncomfortable with Marx's advocacy of what some perceive to be radical social change. As well, scholars who examine society through the lens of race, gender, and class believe that his analysis places too much emphasis on class relations.

Max Weber German social scientist Max Weber (pronounced VAY-ber) (1864–1920) was also concerned about the changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Although he disagreed with Marx's idea that economics is *the* central force in social change, Weber acknowledged that economic interests are important in shaping human action. Even so, he thought that economic systems were heavily influenced by other factors in a society.


Hulton Archive/staff/Getty Images

Unlike many early analysts who believed that values could not be separated from the research process, Weber emphasized that sociology should be *value free*—research should be done scientifically, excluding the researcher's

personal values and economic interests. However, Weber realized that social behavior cannot be analyzed by purely objective criteria. Although he recognized that sociologists cannot be totally value free, Weber stressed that they should employ *verstehen* (German for "understanding" or "insight") to gain the ability to see the world as others see it. In contemporary sociology, Weber's idea is incorporated into the concept of the sociological imagination (discussed earlier in this chapter).

Weber was also concerned that large-scale organizations (bureaucracies) were becoming increasingly oriented toward routine administration and a specialized division of labor, which he believed were destructive to human vitality and freedom. According to Weber, rational bureaucracy, rather than class struggle, is the most significant factor in determining the social relations between people in industrial societies. From this view, bureaucratic domination can be used to maintain powerful (capitalist) interests. As discussed in Chapter 5 ("Groups and Organizations"), Weber's work on bureaucracy has had a far-reaching impact.

Weber also provided important insights on the process of rationalization, bureaucracy, religion, and many other topics. In his writings, Weber was more aware of women's issues than many of the scholars of his day. Perhaps his awareness at least partially resulted from the fact that his wife, Marianne Weber, was an important figure in the women's movement in Germany.

Bill Reitzel/Plush Studios/Blend Images/Getty Images

FIGURE 1.5 According to the sociologist Georg Simmel, society is a web of patterned interactions among people. If we focus on the behavior of individuals only, we miss the underlying forms that make up the "geometry of social life."

Georg Simmel At about the same time that Durkheim was developing the field of sociology in France, the German sociologist Georg Simmel (pronounced ZIM-mel) (1858–1918) was theorizing about the importance of social change in his own country and elsewhere. Simmel was also focusing on how society is a web of patterned interactions among people (• Figure 1.5). In *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (1950/1902–1917), he described how social interactions are different based on the size of the social group. According to Simmel, interaction patterns differ between a *dyad* (a social group with two members) and a *triad* (a group with three members) because the presence of an additional person often changes the dynamics of communication and the overall interaction process. Simmel also developed *formal sociology,* an approach that focuses attention on the universal social forms that underlie social interaction. He referred to these forms as the "geometry of social life."

INTERFOTO/Personalities/Alamy Stock Photo

Like the other social thinkers of his day, Simmel analyzed the impact of industrialization and urbanization on people's lives. He concluded that class conflict was becoming more pronounced in modern industrial societies. He also linked the increase in individualism, as opposed to concern for the group, to the fact that people now had many cross-cutting "social spheres"—membership in a number of organizations and voluntary associations—rather than the singular community ties of the past.

Simmel's contributions to sociology are significant. He wrote more than thirty books and numerous essays on diverse topics, leading some critics to state that his work is fragmentary and piecemeal. However, his thinking has influenced a wide array of sociologists, including the members of the "Chicago School" in the United States.

The Origins of Sociology in the United States

From Western Europe, sociology spread in the 1890s to the United States, where it thrived as a result of the intellectual climate and the rapid rate of social change. The first departments of sociology in the United States were located

anomie
Emile Durkheim's term for a condition in which social control becomes ineffective as a result of the loss of shared values and of a sense of purpose in society.

at the University of Chicago and at Atlanta University, then an African American school.

The Chicago School The first department of sociology in the United States was established at the University of Chicago, where the faculty was instrumental in starting the American Sociological Society (now known as the American Sociological Association). Robert E. Park (1864–1944), a member of the Chicago faculty, asserted that urbanization has a disintegrating influence on social life by producing an increase in the crime rate and in racial and class antagonisms that contribute to the segregation and isolation of neighborhoods (Ross, 1991). George Herbert Mead (1863–1931), another member of the faculty at Chicago, founded the symbolic interaction perspective, which is discussed later in this chapter.


AP Photo

Jane Addams Jane Addams (1860–1935) is one of the best-known early women sociologists in the United States because she founded Hull House, one of the most famous settlement houses, in an impoverished area of Chicago. Throughout her career, she was actively engaged in sociological endeavors: She lectured at numerous colleges, was a charter member of the American Sociological Society, and published a number of articles and books. Addams was one of the authors of *Hull-House Maps and Papers,* a groundbreaking book that used a methodological technique employed by sociologists for the next forty years. She was also awarded a Nobel Prize for her assistance to the underprivileged. In recent years, Addams has received greater recognition from contemporary sociologists because of her role as an early theorist of social change who influenced later feminist theorists and activists.


Bain News Service/Library of Congress/ LC-B2-1369-16

W. E. B. Du Bois and Atlanta University The second department of sociology in the United States was founded by W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963) at Atlanta University. He created a laboratory of sociology, instituted a program of systematic research, founded and conducted regular sociological conferences on research, founded two journals, and established a record of valuable publications. His classic work, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (1967/1899), was based on his research into Philadelphia's African American community and stressed the strengths and weaknesses of a community wrestling with overwhelming social problems. Du Bois was one of the first scholars to note that a dual heritage creates conflict for people of color. He called this duality *double-consciousness*—the identity conflict of being both a black and an American. Du Bois pointed out that although people in this country espouse such values as democracy, freedom, and equality, they also accept racism and group discrimination. African Americans are the victims of these conflicting values and the actions that result from them. The influence of Du Bois continues to grow in contemporary studies of inequality, social justice, and the need for change in racial/ethnic and class relations in the United States and worldwide.

LO5 **Compare and contrast** functionalist, conflict, symbolic interactionist, and postmodern perspectives on social life in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Theoretical Perspectives in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

Given the many and varied ideas and trends that influenced the development of sociology, how do contemporary sociologists view society? Some see it as basically a stable and ongoing entity; others view it in terms of many groups competing for scarce resources; still others describe it based on the everyday, routine interactions among individuals. Each of these views represents a method of examining the same phenomena. Each is based on general ideas about how social life is organized and represents an effort to link specific observations in a meaningful way. Each uses a ***theory***—a set of logically interrelated statements that attempts to describe, explain, and (occasionally) predict social events. Each theory helps interpret reality in a distinct way by providing a framework in which observations may be logically ordered. Sociologists refer to this theoretical framework as a *perspective*—an overall approach to or viewpoint on some subject. Three major theoretical perspectives have been predominant in U.S. sociology in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: the functionalist, conflict, and symbolic interactionist perspectives. Other perspectives, such as postmodernism, have also emerged and gained acceptance among some social thinkers. Before turning to the specifics of these perspectives, we should note that some theorists and theories do not fit neatly into any of these perspectives. Although the categories may be viewed as oversimplified by some people, most of us organize our thinking into categories and find it easier for us to compare and contrast ideas if we have a basic outline of key characteristics associated with each approach.

Functionalist Perspectives

Also known as *functionalism* and *structural functionalism,* ***functionalist perspectives*** are based on the assumption that society is a stable, orderly system. This stable system is characterized by *societal consensus,* whereby the majority of members share a common set of values, beliefs, and

S-F/Shutterstock.com

FIGURE 1.6 Shopping malls are a reflection of a consumer society. A manifest function of a shopping mall is to sell goods and services to shoppers; however, a latent function may be to provide a communal area in which people can visit friends and enjoy an event.

behavioral expectations. According to this perspective, a society is composed of interrelated parts, each of which serves a function and (ideally) contributes to the overall stability of the society. Societies develop social structures, institutions that persist because they play a part in helping society survive. These institutions include the family, education, government, religion, and the economy. If anything adverse happens to one of these institutions or parts, all other parts are affected, and the system no longer functions properly.

Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton Talcott Parsons (1902–1979), perhaps the most influential contemporary advocate of the functionalist perspective, stressed that all societies must meet social needs in order to survive. Parsons (1955) suggested, for example, that a division of labor (distinct, specialized functions) between husband and wife is essential for family stability and social order. The husband/father performs the *instrumental tasks,* which involve leadership and decision-making responsibilities in the home and employment outside the home to support the family. The wife/mother is responsible for the *expressive tasks,* including housework, caring for the children, and providing emotional support for the entire family. Parsons believed that other institutions, including school, church, and government, must function to assist the family and that all institutions must work together to preserve the system over time (Parsons, 1955).

Pictorial Parade/Getty Images

Functionalism was refined further by Robert K. Merton (pictured; 1910–2003), who distinguished between manifest and latent functions of social institutions. ***Manifest functions*** are intended and/or overtly recognized by the participants in a social unit. In contrast, ***latent functions*** are unintended functions that are hidden and remain unacknowledged by participants (• Figure 1.6). For example, a manifest function of education is the transmission of knowledge and skills from one generation to the next; a

theory
a set of logically interrelated statements that attempts to describe, explain, and (occasionally) predict social events.

functionalist perspectives
the sociological approach that views society as a stable, orderly system.

manifest functions
functions that are intended and/or overtly recognized by the participants in a social unit.

latent functions
unintended functions that are hidden and remain unacknowledged by participants.

latent function is the establishment of social relations and networks. Merton noted that all features of a social system may not be functional at all times; *dysfunctions* are the undesirable consequences of any element of a society. A dysfunction of education in the United States is the perpetuation of gender, racial, and class inequalities. Such dysfunctions may threaten the capacity of a society to adapt and survive.

Applying a Functionalist Perspective to Suicide

Functionalism emphasizes the importance to a society of shared moral values and strong social bonds. It also highlights the significance of social support from others. When rapid social change or other disruptive conditions occur, moral values may erode, and people may become more uncertain about how to act and about whether or not their life has meaning. Social disruption and war are events that produce such feelings of anomie and suicidal ideation—suicidal thoughts or an unusual preoccupation with suicide.

One study that examined the functions of social support in reducing or preventing suicidal ideation in Air Force personnel during U.S. combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan found that all forms of social support were not equally important in protecting individuals against suicidal thoughts or actions. One form of social support is belonging, or companionship support, where we feel like we belong or fit in with others. Tangible support involves material issues, such as having someone willing to lend money or provide assistance with specific tasks. Appraisal support refers to someone providing useful information that helps us evaluate our situation and provide emotional validation for our thoughts and feelings. Esteem support involves having other people show a concern for our well-being or express confidence in us and our ability to overcome the problems we face. Of these four types of social support, the researchers found that esteem support was the most important factor in whether the Air Force personnel in their study had experienced severe suicidal ideation (Bryan and Hernandez, 2013).

Conflict Perspectives

According to ***conflict perspectives***, groups in society are engaged in a continuous power struggle for control of scarce resources. Conflict may take the form of politics, litigation, negotiations, or family discussions about financial matters. Simmel, Marx, and Weber contributed significantly to this perspective by focusing on the inevitability of clashes between social groups. Today, advocates of the conflict perspective view social life as a continuous power struggle among competing social groups.

Max Weber and C. Wright Mills

As previously discussed, Karl Marx focused on the exploitation and oppression of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie. Max Weber recognized the importance of economic conditions in producing inequality and conflict in society, but he added *power* and *prestige* as other sources of inequality. Weber (1968/1922) defined *power* as the ability of a person within a social relationship to carry out his or her own will despite resistance from others, and *prestige* as a positive or negative social estimation of honor (Weber, 1968/1922) (• Figure 1.7).

C. Wright Mills (1916–1962), a key figure in the development of contemporary conflict theory, encouraged sociologists to get involved in social reform. Mills encouraged everyone to look beneath everyday events in order to observe the major resource and power inequalities that exist in society. He believed that the most important decisions in the United States are made largely behind the scenes by the *power elite*—a small clique of top corporate, political, and military officials. Mills's power elite theory is discussed in Chapter 13 ("Politics and the Economy in Global Perspective").

The conflict perspective is not one unified theory but one with several branches. One branch is the neo-Marxist approach, which views struggle between the classes as inevitable and as a prime source of social change. A second branch focuses on racial–ethnic inequalities and the continued exploitation of members of some racial–ethnic groups. A third branch is the feminist perspective, which focuses on gender issues.

Graylock/ABACAUSA.COM/Newscom

FIGURE 1.7 As one of the wealthiest and most-beloved entertainers in the world, Oprah Winfrey is an example of Max Weber's concept of prestige—a positive estimate of honor.

The Feminist Approach A feminist theoretical approach (or "feminism") directs attention to women's experiences and the importance of gender as an element of social structure. This approach is based on a belief in the equality of women and men and the idea that all people should be equally valued and have equal rights. According to feminist theorists, we live in a *patriarchy,* a system in which men dominate women and in which things that are considered to be "male" or "masculine" are more highly valued than those considered to be "female" or "feminine." The feminist perspective assumes that gender is socially created and that change is essential in order for people to achieve their human potential without limits based on gender. Some feminists argue that women's subordination can end only after the patriarchal system becomes obsolete. However, feminism is not one single, unified approach; there are several feminist perspectives, which are discussed in Chapter 10 ("Sex, Gender, and Sexuality").

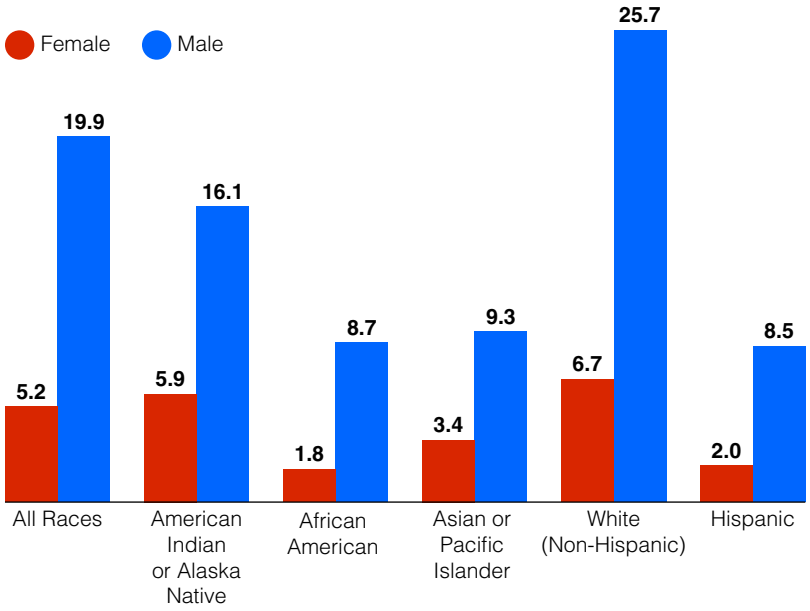


FIGURE 1.8 Suicide Rates by Race and Sex
Rates are for U.S. suicides and indicate the number of deaths by suicide for every 100,000 people by race and sex.

Applying Conflict Perspectives to Suicide How might we use a conflict approach to explain suicide?

Social Class Although many other factors may be present, social-class pressures may affect rates of suicide among young people from lower-income families when they perceive that they have few educational or employment opportunities and little hope for the future. However, class-based inequality alone cannot explain suicides among young people.

Gender In North America, females are more likely to *attempt* suicide, whereas males are more likely to actually take their own life. Despite the fact that women's suicidal behavior has traditionally been attributed to problems in their interpersonal relationships, feminist analysts believe that we must examine social structural pressures on young women and how these may contribute to their behavior—for example, cultural assumptions about women and what their multiple roles should be in the family, education, and the workplace.

Race/Ethnicity Racial and ethnic subordination may be a factor in some suicides. (• Figure 1.8 displays U.S. suicides in terms of race and sex.) This fact is most glaringly reflected in the extremely high rate of suicide among Native Americans, who constitute about 1 percent of the U.S. population. On reservations in the northern plains (in states such as North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Montana, Wyoming, and Utah), parts of the Southwest, and in Alaska, Native American teens and young adults have suicide rates that are more than three times as high as those for other youths in the United States. Although some research has focused on individualistic reasons why young Native Americans commit suicide, sociologists focus on the effects of social inequalities and racial–ethnic discrimination on suicidal behavior. For example, many Native American young people reside in homes and communities characterized by extreme poverty, hunger, alcoholism, substance abuse, and family violence (Woodard, 2012).

Symbolic Interactionist Perspectives

The conflict and functionalist perspectives have been criticized for focusing primarily on macrolevel analysis. A ***macrolevel analysis*** examines whole societies, large-scale social structures, and social systems instead of looking at important social dynamics in individuals' lives. Our third perspective, symbolic interactionism, fills this void by examining people's day-to-day interactions and their behavior in groups. Thus, symbolic interactionist approaches are based on a ***microlevel analysis***, which focuses on small groups rather than large-scale social structures.

We can trace the origins of this perspective to the Chicago School, especially George Herbert Mead and the sociologist Herbert Blumer (1900–1986), who is credited

conflict perspectives
the sociological approach that views groups in society as engaged in a continuous power struggle for control of scarce resources.

macrolevel analysis
an approach that examines whole societies, large-scale social structures, and social systems instead of looking at important social dynamics in individuals' lives.

microlevel analysis
an approach that focuses on small groups rather than large-scale social structures.

with coining the term *symbolic interactionism.* According to ***symbolic interactionist perspectives***, society is the sum of the interactions of individuals and groups. Theorists using this perspective focus on the process of *interaction*—defined as immediate reciprocally oriented communication between two or more people—and the part that symbols play in communication. A *symbol* is anything that meaningfully represents something else. Examples include signs, gestures, written language, and shared values. Symbolic interaction occurs when people communicate through the use of symbols—for example, a ring to indicate a couple's engagement. But symbolic communication occurs in a variety of forms, including facial gestures, posture, tone of voice, and other symbolic gestures (such as a handshake or a clenched fist).

Symbols are instrumental in helping people derive meanings from social interactions. In social encounters, each person's interpretation or definition of a given situation becomes a *subjective reality* from that person's viewpoint. We often assume that what we consider to be "reality" is shared by others; however, this assumption is often incorrect. Subjective reality is acquired and shared through agreed-upon symbols, especially language. If a person shouts "Fire!" in a crowded movie theater, for example, that language produces the same response (attempting to escape) in all of those who hear and understand it. When people in a group do not share the same meaning for a given symbol, however, confusion results: People who do not know the meaning of the word *fire* will not know what the commotion is about. How people *interpret* the messages they receive and the situations they encounter becomes their subjective reality and may strongly influence their behavior.

Applying Symbolic Interactionist Perspectives to Suicide Social analysts applying a symbolic interactionist framework to the study of suicide focus on a microlevel analysis of the people's face-to-face interactions and the roles they play in society. We define situations according to our own subjective reality. From this point of view, a suicide attempt may be a way of garnering attention—a call for help—rather than wanting to end one's life. People may attempt to communicate in such desperate ways because other forms of communication have failed.

Postmodern Perspectives

According to ***postmodern perspectives***, existing theories have been unsuccessful in explaining social life in contemporary societies that are characterized by postindustrialization, consumerism, and global communications. Postmodern social theorists reject the theoretical perspectives we have previously discussed, as well as how those theories were created.

Postmodern theories are based on the assumption that large-scale and rapid social change, globalization, and technology are central features in the postmodern era. Moreover, these conditions tend to have a harmful effect on people because they often result in ambiguity and chaos. One evident change is a significant decline in the influence of social institutions such as the family, religion, and education on people's lives. Those who live in postmodern societies typically pursue individual freedom and do not want the structural constraints that are imposed by social institutions. As social inequality and class differences increase, people are exposed to higher levels of stress that produce depression, fear, and ambivalence. Problems such as these are found in nations throughout the world.

Postmodern (or "postindustrial") societies are characterized by an *information explosion* and an economy in which large numbers of people either provide or apply information, or are employed in professional occupations (such as attorneys and physicians) or service jobs (such as fast-food servers and health care workers). There is a corresponding *rise of a consumer society* and the emergence of a *global village* in which people around the world instantly communicate with one another.

Jean Baudrillard, a well-known French social theorist, has extensively explored how the shift from production of goods to consumption of information, services, and products has created a new form of social control. According to Baudrillard's approach, capitalists strive to control people's shopping habits, much like the output of factory workers in industrial economies, to enhance their profits and to keep everyday people from rebelling against social inequality (1998/1970). How does this work? When consumers are encouraged to purchase more than they need or can afford, they often sink deeper in debt and must keep working to meet their monthly payments. Consumption comes to be based on factors such as our "wants" and our need to distinguish ourselves from others. We will return to Baudrillard's general ideas on postmodern societies in Chapter 2 ("Culture").

Postmodern theory opens up broad new avenues of inquiry by challenging existing perspectives and questioning current belief systems. However, postmodern theory has also been criticized for raising more questions than it answers.

Applying Postmodern Perspectives to Suicide Although most postmodern social theorists have not addressed suicide as a social issue, some sociologists believe that postmodern theory can help us because it reminds us that social life is made up of real people with self-identities and lived experiences to share with others. Behind the groups, organizations, classes, and political parties that social scientists study are human beings who participate in the social construction of everyday life.

Looked at from this perspective, the relationship between suicide and race is important to consider. Although youths across ethnic categories share certain risk factors for suicide, young African American and Native American males appear to be at greater risk for suicide because people in this statistical category lack educational and employment opportunities. This problem is combined with other

CONCEPT *Quick Review* 1

The Major Theoretical Perspectives

Perspective	Analysis Level	View of Society
Functionalist	Macrolevel	Society is composed of interrelated parts that work together to maintain stability within society. This stability is threatened by dysfunctional acts and institutions.
Conflict	Macrolevel	Society is characterized by social inequality; social life is a struggle for scarce resources. Social arrangements benefit some groups at the expense of others.
Symbolic Interactionist	Microlevel	Society is the sum of the interactions of people and groups. Behavior is learned in interaction with other people; how people define a situation becomes the foundation for how they behave.
Postmodernist	Macrolevel/ Microlevel	Societies characterized by post-industrialization, consumerism, and global communication bring into question existing assumptions about social life and the nature of reality.

concerns, such as the systemic oppression that persons of color have experienced throughout U.S. history. In other words, the personal biographies of individuals are intertwined with the social worlds that they and others have helped create.

Each of the four sociological perspectives we have examined involves different assumptions. Consequently, each leads us to ask different questions and to view the world somewhat differently. (Concept Quick Review 1 summarizes all four of these perspectives.) Throughout this book, we will be using these perspectives as lenses through which to view our social world.

LO6 **Explain** why sociological research is necessary and how it challenges our commonsense beliefs about pressing social issues such as suicide.

The Sociological Research Process

Most of us rely on our own experiences and personal knowledge to help us form ideas about what happens in everyday life and how the social world works. However, there are many occasions when this personal knowledge is not enough. This is why sociologists and other social scientists learn to question ordinary assumptions and to use specific research methods to find out more about the social world.

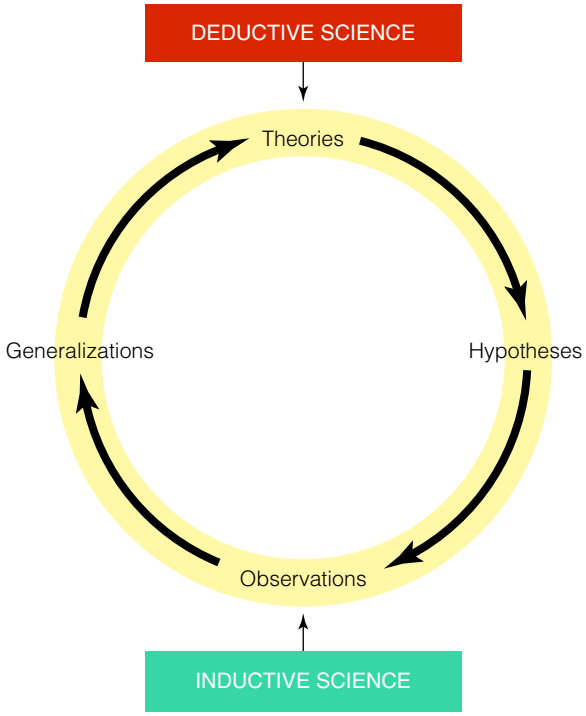


FIGURE 1.9 The Theory and Research Cycle
The theory and research cycle can be compared to a relay race; although all participants do not necessarily start or stop at the same point, they share a common goal—to examine all levels of social life.

Research is the process of systematically collecting information for the purpose of testing an existing theory or generating a new one. What is the relationship between sociological theory and research? This relationship has been referred to as a continuous cycle, as shown in • Figure 1.9 (Wallace, 1971).

Not all sociologists conduct research in the same manner. Some researchers primarily engage in quantitative research, whereas others engage in qualitative research. With ***quantitative research***, the goal is scientific objectivity, and the focus is on data that can be measured numerically.

symbolic interactionist perspectives
the sociological approach that views society as the sum of the interactions of individuals and groups.

postmodern perspectives
the sociological approach that attempts to explain social life in contemporary societies that are characterized by postindustrialization, consumerism, and global communication.

quantitative research
sociological research methods that are based on the goal of scientific objectivity and that focus on data that can be measured numerically.

Quantitative research typically emphasizes complex statistical techniques. Most sociological studies on suicide have used quantitative research. They have compared rates of suicide with almost every conceivable variable, including age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, and even sports participation. For example, in one quantitative study, researchers found that Latinos/as (Hispanics) consistently had lower suicide rates than whites (non-Hispanics), particularly when they remained strongly attached to others in their own culture. Latinos/as who maintained shared belief systems, rituals, and social networks of friends and relatives that provided them with strong communities and intense feelings of group solidarity were much less likely to commit suicide, much as Durkheim had predicted (Wadsworth and Kubrin, 2007). However, the study also found that just as cultural assimilation (adopting another culture and leaving one's own culture behind) increases the rate of suicide for Hispanics, having higher income and social standing decreases the rate of suicide (Wadsworth and Kubrin, 2007). In quantitative research, these data are reported in a series of tables that summarize the findings of the researchers. ("Understanding Statistical Data Presentations" explains how to read numerical tables and how to interpret the data and draw conclusions.)

With ***qualitative research***, interpretive descriptions (words) rather than statistics (numbers) are used to analyze underlying meanings and patterns of social relationships. An example of qualitative research is a study in which the researchers systematically analyzed the contents of suicide notes to look for recurring themes (such as feelings of despair or failure) to determine if any patterns could be found that would help in understanding why people kill themselves (Leenaars, 1988).

Distinguish between quantitative research and qualitative research, and identify the steps in each method.

The Quantitative Research Model

Research models are tailored to the specific problem being investigated and the focus of the researcher. Both quantitative research and qualitative research contribute to our knowledge of society and human social interaction, and involve a series of steps, as shown in • Figure 1.10. We will now trace the steps in the "conventional" research model, which focuses on quantitative research. Then we will describe an alternative model that emphasizes qualitative research.

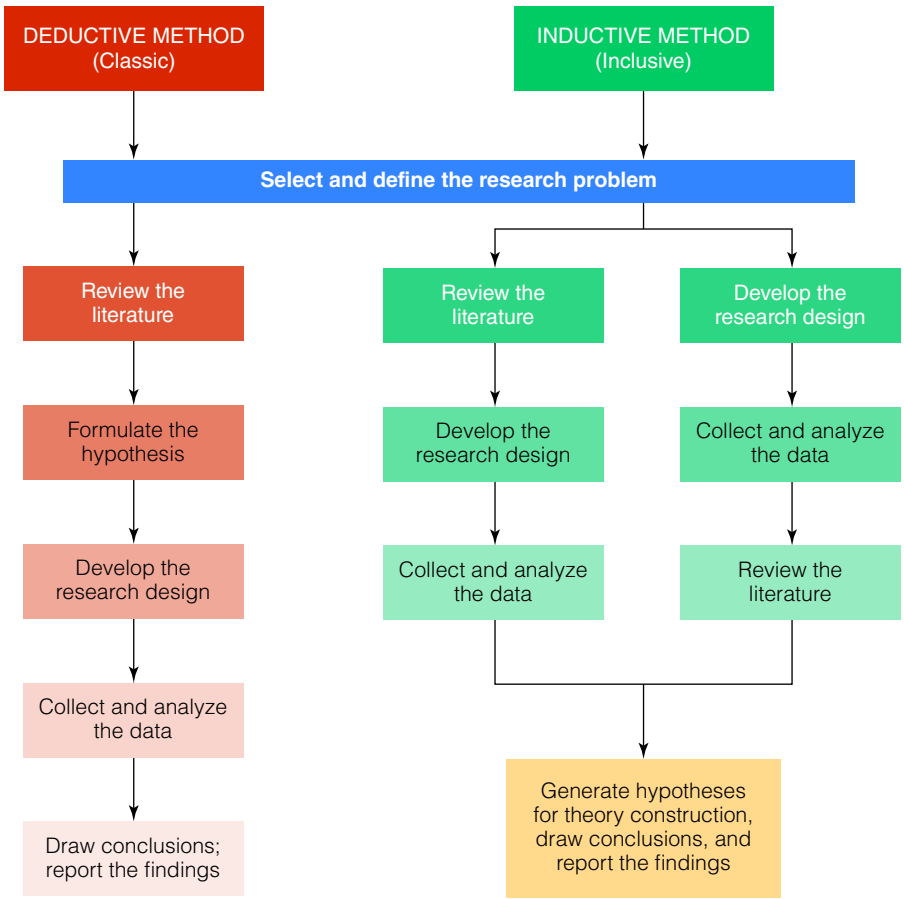


FIGURE 1.10 Steps in Sociological Research

UNDERSTANDING Statistical Data Presentations

Are young males or females more likely to die violently? How do homicide, suicide, and firearm death rates (per 100,000 population) compare for males and females ages 15 to 19 in the United States? Sociologists use statistical tables as a concise way to present data in a relatively small space; • Table 1.1 gives an example. To understand a table, follow these steps:

1. *Read the title.* From the title, "Rates (per 100,000 U.S. Population) for Homicide, Suicide, and Firearm-Related Deaths of Youths Ages 15–19, by Gender, 2014," we learn that the table shows relationships between two variables: gender and three causes of violent deaths among young people in a specific age category.
2. *Check the source and other explanatory notes.* In this case, the sources are the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015b ("Web-Based Injury Statistics and Query and Reporting System [WISQARS]"), which makes it possible for researchers to put in online inquiries for specific information from the CDC's database, and Child Trends Data Bank (2015b). This data bank is a nonprofit research and policy center that researches issues pertaining to children and young people. The explanatory note in this table states that firearm deaths, which constitute a majority of teen homicides and suicides, may also include *accidental* deaths that are firearm related. This distinction is made in Table 1.1 because it is possible for "Firearm-Related Death" to occur accidentally. However, firearms were the method of death in 88 percent of teen homicides and 41 percent of teen suicides in 2014.
3. *Read the headings for each column and each row.* The main column headings in Table 1.1 are "Method," "Males," and "Females." The columns present information (usually numbers) arranged vertically. The rows present information horizontally. Here, the row headings indicate homicide, suicide, and firearm-related death. Based on the explanation above regarding "Firearm-Related Death," we know that some overlap exists between the first two categories—homicide and suicide—and the third, deaths that are firearm related.
4. *Examine and compare the data.* To examine the data, determine what units of measurement have been used. In Table 1.1 the figures are rates per 100,000 males or females in a specific age category. For example, the suicide rate is 13.0 per 100,000 population of males between the ages of 15 and 19 as compared with only 4.2 per 100,000 population of females in the same age category.

TABLE 1.1

Rates (per 100,000 U.S. Population) for Homicide, Suicide, and Firearm-Related Deaths of Youths Ages 15–19, by Gender, 2014

Method	Males	Females
Homicide	11.1	1.9
Suicide	13.0	4.2
Firearm-Related Death[a]	17.2	2.3

[a]Firearm deaths, which constitute a majority of teen homicides and suicides, also include accidental deaths that are firearm related.

Sources: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015b; and Child Trends Data Bank, 2015b.

5. *Draw conclusions.* By looking for patterns, some conclusions can be drawn from Table 1.1:
   a. *Determining differences by gender.* Males between the ages of 15 and 19 are about three times more likely than females to die from suicide (13.0 compared with 4.2 per 100,000 in 2014). Males in this age category are about six times more likely to die from homicide (11.1 compared with 1.9 per 100,000). And even more noteworthy, males are about eight times more likely to die from any firearm-related incident (either intentional or unintentional) than females of this age. As shown in Table 1.1, 17.2 per 100,000 males ages 15–19 died by firearms in 2014, compared with 2.3 per 100,000 females in that same age category.
   b. *Drawing appropriate conclusions.* Males between the ages of 15 and 19 are much more likely than females in their age category to die violently, and many of those deaths are firearm related. Although not indicated in this table, it is important to note that differences by race and Hispanic origin are also significant. In 2014 the homicide rate for African American male teens was 45.6 per 100,000, more than 20 times higher than the rate for white male teens. The highest rate of suicide for males in the 15–19 age category was among Native American males, at 20 per 100,000. For more information, visit the Child Trends Data Bank website.

1. *Select and define the research problem.* Sometimes, a specific experience such as knowing someone who committed suicide can trigger your interest in a topic. Other times, you might select topics to fill gaps or challenge misconceptions in existing research or to test a specific theory (Babbie, 2016). Emile Durkheim selected suicide because he wanted to demonstrate the importance of *society* in situations that might appear to be arbitrary acts by individuals. Suicide was a suitable topic because it was widely believed that suicide was a uniquely individualistic act. However, Durkheim emphasized that *suicide rates* provide better explanations for suicide than do *individual* acts of suicide. He reasoned that if suicide were purely an individual act, then the rate of suicide (the number of people who kill themselves in a given year) should be the same for every group regardless of culture and social structure. Moreover, Durkheim wanted to know

qualitative research
sociological research methods that use interpretive descriptions (words) rather than statistics (numbers) to analyze underlying meanings and patterns of social relationships.

why there were different rates of suicide—whether factors such as religion, marital status, sex, and age had an effect on social cohesion.

2. *Review previous research.* Before beginning the research, it is important to analyze what others have written about the topic. You should determine where gaps exist and note mistakes to avoid. When Durkheim began his study, very little sociological literature existed to review; however, he studied the works of several moral philosophers, including Henry Morselli (1975/1881).

3. *Formulate the hypothesis* (if applicable). You may formulate a ***hypothesis***—a statement of the expected relationship between two or more variables.

A ***variable*** is any concept with measurable traits or characteristics that can change or vary from one person, time, situation, or society to another. The most fundamental relationship in a hypothesis is between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables (see • Figure 1.11). The ***independent variable*** is presumed to be the cause of the relationship; the ***dependent variable*** is assumed to be caused by the independent variable(s) (Babbie, 2016). Durkheim's hypothesis stated that the rate of suicide varies *inversely* with the degree of social integration. In other words, a low degree of social integration (the independent variable) may "cause" or "be related to" a high rate of suicide (the dependent variable).

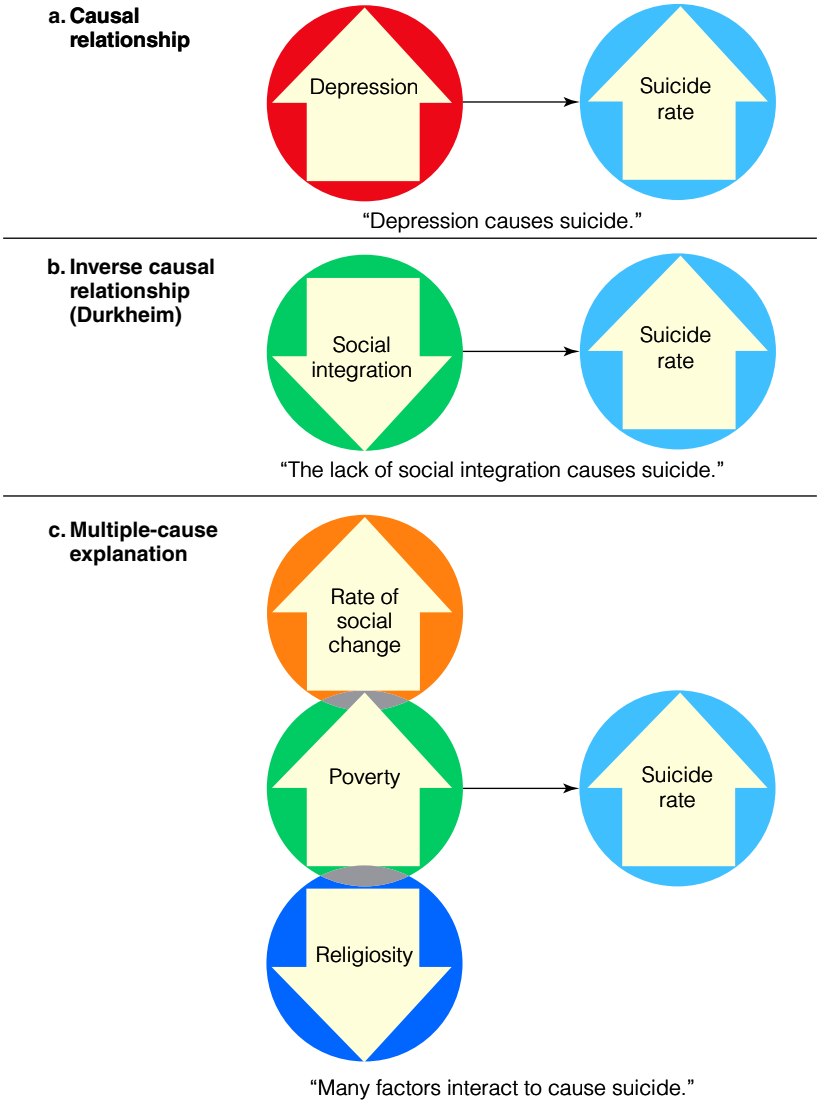


FIGURE 1.11 Hypothesized Relationships Between Variables
A causal hypothesis connects one or more independent (causal) variables with a dependent (affected) variable. The diagram illustrates three hypotheses about the causes of suicide. To test these hypotheses, social scientists would need to operationalize the variables (define them in measurable terms) and then investigate whether the data support the proposed explanation.

Not all social research uses hypotheses. If you plan to conduct an explanatory study (showing a cause-and-effect relationship), you will likely want to formulate one or more hypotheses to test theories. If you plan to conduct a descriptive study, however, you will be less likely to do so because you may desire only to describe social reality or provide facts.

4. *Develop the research design.* You must determine the unit of analysis to be used in the study. A *unit of analysis* is *what* or *whom* is being studied (Babbie, 2016). In social science research, individuals, social groups (such as families, cities, or geographic regions), organizations (such as clubs, labor unions, or political parties), and social artifacts (such as books, paintings, or weddings) may be units of analysis. As mentioned, Durkheim's unit of analysis was social groups, not individuals.

5. *Collect and analyze the data.* You must decide what population will be observed or questioned and then carefully select a sample. A *sample* is the people who are selected from the population to be studied; the sample should accurately represent the larger population. A *representative sample* is a selection from a larger population that has the essential characteristics of the total population. For example, if you interviewed five students selected haphazardly from your sociology class, they would not be representative of your school's student body. By contrast, if you selected five students from the student body by a random sample, they would be closer to being representative (although a random sample of five students would be too small to yield much useful data).

   Validity and reliability may be problems in research. ***Validity*** is the extent to which a study or research instrument accurately measures what it is supposed to measure. A recurring issue in studies that analyze the relationship between religious beliefs and suicide is whether "church membership" is a valid indicator of a person's religious beliefs. In fact, one person may be very religious yet not belong to a specific church, whereas another person may be a member of a church yet not hold very deep religious beliefs. ***Reliability*** is the extent to which a study or research instrument yields consistent results when applied to different individuals at one time or to the same individuals over time. Sociologists have found that different interviewers get different answers from the people being interviewed. For example, how might the interviewers themselves influence interviews with college students who have contemplated suicide?

   Once you have collected your data, the data must be analyzed. *Analysis* is the process through which data are organized so that comparisons can be made and conclusions drawn. Sociologists use many techniques to analyze data. For his study of suicide, Durkheim collected data from vital statistics for approximately 26,000 suicides. He classified them separately according to age, sex, marital status, presence or absence of children in the family, religion, geographic location, calendar date, method of suicide, and a number of other variables. As Durkheim analyzed his data, four distinct categories of suicide emerged: egoistic, altruistic, anomic, and fatalistic. *Egoistic suicide* occurs among people who are isolated from any social group. For example, Durkheim concluded that suicide rates were relatively high in Protestant countries in Europe because Protestants believed in individualism and were more loosely tied to the church than were Catholics. Single people had proportionately higher suicide rates than married persons because they had a low degree of social integration, which contributed to their loneliness. In contrast, *altruistic suicide* occurs among individuals who are excessively integrated into society. An example is military leaders who kill themselves after defeat in battle because they have so strongly identified themselves with their cause that they believe they cannot live with defeat. Today, other factors such as extended periods of military service or lengthy wars may also contribute to relatively high rates of suicide among U.S. military personnel (see "Sociology and Social Policy"). According to Durkheim, people are more likely to commit suicide when social cohesion is either very weak or very strong, and/or when nations experience rapid social change.

6. *Draw conclusions and report the findings.* After analyzing the data, your first step in drawing conclusions is to return to your hypothesis or research objective to clarify how the data relate both to the hypothesis and to the larger issues being addressed. At this stage, you note the limitations of the study, such as problems with the sample, the influence of variables over which you had no control, or variables that your study was unable to measure.

hypothesis
a statement of the expected relationship between two or more variables.

variable
any concept with measurable traits or characteristics that can change or vary from one person, time, situation, or society to another.

independent variable
in an experiment, the variable assumed to be the cause of the relationship between variables.

dependent variable
in an experiment, the variable assumed to be caused by the independent variable(s).

validity
the extent to which a study or research instrument accurately measures what it is supposed to measure.

reliability
the extent to which a study or research instrument yields consistent results when applied to different individuals at one time or to the same individuals over time.

Reporting the findings is the final stage. The report generally includes a review of each step taken in the research process in order to make the study available for *replication*—the repetition of the investigation in substantially the same way that it was originally conducted. Social scientists generally present their findings in papers at professional meetings and publish them in technical journals and books. In reporting his findings in *Suicide* (1964b/1897), Durkheim concluded that the suicide rate of a group is a social fact that cannot be explained in terms of the personality traits of individuals. Instead, his findings suggested that social conditions in a society are a more significant influence on rates of suicide.

We have traced the steps in the "conventional" research process (based on deduction and quantitative research). But what steps might be taken in an alternative approach based on induction and qualitative research?

A Qualitative Research Model

Although the same underlying logic is involved in both quantitative and qualitative sociological research, the *styles* of these two models are very different. Qualitative research is more likely to be used when the research question does not easily lend itself to numbers and statistical methods. As compared to a quantitative model, a qualitative approach often involves a different type of research question and a smaller number of cases. Researchers using a qualitative approach may engage in *problem formulation* to clarify the research question and to formulate questions of concern and interest to people participating in the research.

In a qualitative approach, reviewing the literature and developing the research design often happen simultaneously. Typically, the next step is collecting and analyzing data to assess the validity of the starting proposition. Data gathering is the foundation of the research. Researchers pursuing a qualitative approach tend to gather data in natural settings, such as where the person lives or works, rather than in a laboratory or other research setting. Data collection and analysis frequently occur concurrently, and the analysis draws heavily on the language of the persons studied, not the researcher. Additional review of the literature may occur later in the process after data have been gathered and further insights are needed to help describe, explain, or make predictions from the data that have been analyzed. Finally, the researchers draw conclusions from their research and report their findings to others.

How would qualitative research work for the study of suicide? One Canadian study examined suicide among twenty-two older men who had previously experienced depression, and the study found important relationships between societal expectations about masculinity, depression, and suicide (Oliffe et al., 2011). To find out more about linkages between depression and suicide, researchers interviewed the men to learn more about how cumulative losses had contributed to their depression and lack of desire to live. The loss of social bonds, through deaths of family members and friends, was a major factor in their depression and thoughts about suicide. Other factors that contributed to their depression and suicidal tendencies were feelings that they were a failure as a breadwinner and/or beliefs that they had other shortcomings that their older age prevented them from overcoming. However, the qualitative study revealed that many of the participants would not commit suicide because of the stigma associated with this act and their guilt about the pain this act would bring to their family and friends (Oliffe et al., 2011).

From qualitative studies such as this one, we learn information that we might not find when using quantitative research. We find answers to questions such as "why" people might or might not engage in a specific behavior. Qualitative and quantitative research methods are often used in combination with each other in a research design to provide a more holistic view of the social world.

Describe survey research and briefly discuss three types of surveys.

Research Methods

How do sociologists know which research method to use? Are some approaches best for a particular problem? ***Research methods*** are specific strategies or techniques for systematically conducting research. We will look at four of these methods: survey research, secondary analysis of existing data, field research, and experiments.

Survey Research

A ***survey*** is a poll in which the researcher gathers facts or attempts to determine the relationships among facts. Surveys are the most widely used research method in the social sciences because they make it possible to study things that are not directly observable—such as people's attitudes and beliefs—and to describe a population too large to observe directly (Babbie, 2016) (• Figure 1.12). Researchers frequently select a representative sample from a larger population to answer questions about attitudes, opinions, or behavior. *Respondents* are people who provide data for analysis through interviews or questionnaires. The Gallup and Harris polls are among the most widely known large-scale surveys; however, government agencies such as the U.S. Census Bureau conduct a variety of surveys as well.

Unlike many polls that use various methods of gaining a representative sample of the larger population, the Census Bureau attempts to gain information from all persons in the United States. The decennial census occurs every ten years, in the years ending in "0." The purpose of this census is to count the population and housing units of the entire nation. The population count determines how seats

Establishing Policies to Help Prevent Military Suicides

- **First, the good news:** The number of suicides among active-duty U.S. military troops was down in the first four months of 2015, as compared to the same time period in 2013 and 2014.
- **Now, the bad news:** For all of 2014, a total of 532 personnel killed themselves, including 273 active-duty members. Although overall military suicide rates were down in the first four months of 2015, the U.S. Army had an *increase* in the number of suicides over previous years.

Suicide is a problem nationwide, but it is a special problem in the military. Despite new policies and increased efforts to reduce military suicides through prevention programs and other mental health initiatives, it has been difficult to permanently reduce the number of suicides. According to one military official, "We think that we are seeing a societal problem [in regard to suicides by military personnel], and frankly the Army is the canary in the mine shaft here" (qtd. in Roberts, 2011).

Shocked by relatively high rates of both suicide and suicide attempts among military service members, the U.S. Department of Defense and the executive branch of the U.S. government have encouraged all branches of the military to learn more about the sociological causes of suicide and to develop comprehensive suicide-prevention initiatives to help reduce the problem and support military service members around the globe. A 2012 executive order, "Improving Access to Mental Health for Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families," set forth initiatives designed to improve mental health resources and intervention tools, such as increasing the number of crisis lines, peer-to-peer counselors, and mental health professionals available to service members and veterans. More recently, Facebook has become a tool for helping with posttraumatic stress, depression, and mental illness. The Durkheim Project (named for sociologist Emile Durkheim) combines Facebook, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Veterans Affairs in an effort to help veterans in distress. Those who voluntarily install an app on their digital devices get help from other military personnel if they post messages containing expressions of hopelessness, sleeplessness, or isolation (see the Durkheim Project website).

Clearly, a variety of sociological issues are central in dealing with suicidal ideation and behavior in the military. In the words of a U.S. Army (2012: 51) report, "Each potential suicide or attempted suicide is different with respect to contributing factors and triggering events. Each victim responds differently to pre-suicide stressors based on protective factors such as personal resilience, coping skills, and whether or not they are help-seeking. . . ."

Fabrizio Bensch/Reuters

What unique social conditions do military personnel face that might contribute to suicide or other conditions such as depression and alcoholism?

Studies are being conducted to gain a better understanding of why suicides are happening and what might be done to prevent this pressing problem. Although no single cause can be identified for suicide, factors such as financial worries, relationship issues, legal trouble, substance abuse, medical problems, and posttraumatic stress are all thought to be associated with suicidal behavior among military personnel. Perhaps greater awareness and new social policies being implemented by the military will help reduce this problem in the future.

REFLECT & ANALYZE

How might lengthy deployments away from home contribute to suicidal behavior among troops? Why do some military personnel commit suicide after they return home?

in the U.S. House of Representatives are apportioned; however, census figures are also used in formulating public policy and in planning and decision making in the private sector. The Census Bureau attempts to survey the *entire* U.S. population by using two forms—a "short form" of questions asked of all respondents, and a "long form" that contains

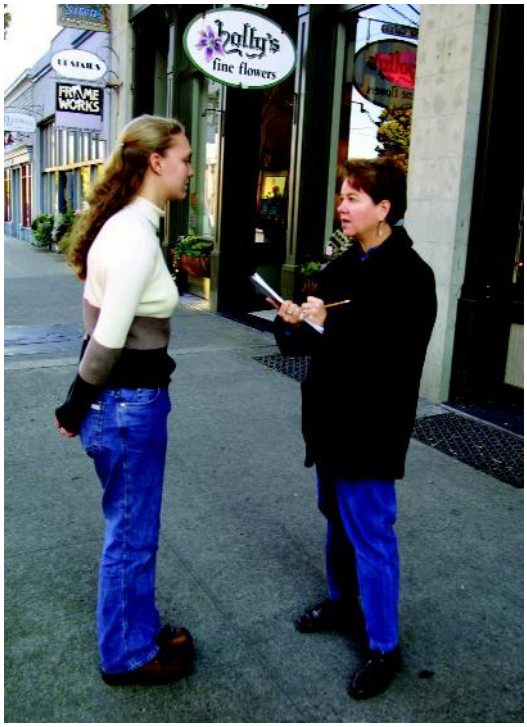
research methods
specific strategies or techniques for systematically conducting research.

survey
a poll in which the researcher gathers facts or attempts to determine the relationships among facts.

additional questions asked of a *representative sample* of about one in six respondents. Statistics from the Census Bureau provide information that sociologists use in their research.

Types of Surveys Survey data are collected by using self-administered questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, and telephone or computer surveys. A ***questionnaire*** is a printed research instrument containing a series of items to which subjects respond. Items are often in the form of statements with which the respondent is asked to "agree" or "disagree." Questionnaires may be administered by interviewers in face-to-face encounters or by telephone, but the most commonly used technique is the *self-administered questionnaire,* which is either mailed to the respondent's home or administered to groups of respondents gathered at the same place at the same time. For example, in a now-classic study of suicide, race, and religion, the sociologist Kevin E. Early (1992) used survey data collected through questionnaires to test his hypothesis that suicide rates are lower among African Americans than among white Americans because of the influence of black churches. Data from questionnaires filled out by members of six African American churches in Florida supported Early's hypothesis that the church buffers some African Americans against harsh social forces—such as racism—that might otherwise lead to suicide.

Survey data may also be collected by interviews. An ***interview*** is a data-collection encounter in which an interviewer asks the respondent questions and records the answers. Survey research often uses *structured interviews,* in which the interviewer asks questions from a standardized questionnaire. Structured interviews tend to produce uniform or replicable data that can be elicited time after time by different interviews. For example, in addition to surveying congregation members, Early (1992) conducted interviews with pastors of African American churches to determine the pastors' opinions about the extent to which African American churches reinforce values and beliefs that discourage suicide.



Paul Conklin/PhotoEdit

FIGURE 1.12 Conducting surveys and polls is an important means of gathering data from respondents. Some surveys take place on street corners; increasingly, however, such surveys are done by telephone, Internet, and other means.

Interviews have specific advantages such as being more effective in dealing with complicated issues and providing an opportunity for face-to-face communication between the interviewer and the respondent. Although interviews provide a wide variety of useful information, a major disadvantage is the cost and time involved in conducting the interviews and analyzing the results.

A quicker method of administering questionnaires is the *telephone* or *computer survey.* Telephone and computer surveys give greater control over data collection and provide greater personal safety for respondents and researchers than do personal encounters (• Figure 1.13). In *computer-assisted telephone interviewing* (sometimes called CATI), the interviewer uses a computer to dial random telephone numbers, reads the


Masterfile

FIGURE 1.13 Computer-assisted telephone interviewing is an easy and cost-efficient method of conducting research. However, the widespread use of answering machines, voice mail, and caller ID may make this form of research more difficult in the twenty-first century.

questions shown on the video monitor to the respondent, and then types the responses into the computer terminal. The answers are immediately stored in the central computer, which automatically prepares them for data analysis. However, the respondent must answer the phone before the interview can take place, and many people screen their phone calls. In the past few years, online survey research has increased dramatically as software packages and online survey services have made this type of research easier to conduct. Online research makes it possible to study virtual communities, online relationships, and other types of computer-mediated communications networks around the world.

Survey research is useful in describing the characteristics of a large population without having to interview each person in that population. In recent years, computer technology has enhanced researchers' ability to do *multivariate analysis*—research involving more than two independent variables. For example, to assess the influence of religion on suicidal behavior among African Americans, a researcher might look at the effects of age, sex, income level, and other variables all at once to determine which of these independent variables influences suicide the most or least and how influential each variable is relative to the others. However, a weakness of survey research is the use of standardized questions; this approach tends to force respondents into categories in which they may or may not belong. Moreover, survey research relies on self-reported information, and some people may be less than truthful, particularly on emotionally charged issues such as suicide.

Compare and contrast research methods used in surveys, secondary analysis of existing data, field research, and experiments.

Secondary Analysis of Existing Data

In ***secondary analysis***, researchers use existing material and analyze data that were originally collected by others. Existing data sources include public records, official reports of organizations or government agencies, and *raw data* collected by other researchers. For example, Durkheim used vital statistics (death records) that were originally collected for other purposes to examine the relationship among variables such as age, marital status, and the circumstances surrounding the person's suicide. Today, many researchers studying suicide use data compiled by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. For example, look at • Figure 1.14, "National Suicide Statistics at a Glance," based on data compiled by the CDC, and try to develop several plausible sociological explanations for why suicide rates are the highest in the western and northwestern regions of the United States. Patterns of high suicide rates are also reported among some counties in the central Midwest, the South, and Central Florida. Can you provide an explanation of why rates might be higher in these areas?

Secondary analysis also includes ***content analysis***—the systematic examination of cultural artifacts or various forms of communication to extract thematic data and draw conclusions about social life. Among the materials studied are written records (such as books, diaries, poems, and graffiti), narratives and visual texts (such as movies, television programs, advertisements, and greeting cards), and material culture (such as music, art, and even garbage). In content analysis, researchers look for regular patterns, such as the frequency of suicide as a topic on television talk shows. They may also examine subject matter to determine how it has been represented, such as how the mass media frame presentations of suicide.

One strength of secondary analysis is that data are readily available and inexpensive. Another is that because the researcher often does not collect the data personally, the chances of bias may be reduced. In addition, the use of existing sources makes it possible to analyze longitudinal data (things that take place over a period of time or at several different points in time) to provide a historical context within which to locate original research. However, secondary analysis has inherent problems. For one thing, the researcher does not always know if the data are incomplete, unauthentic, or inaccurate.

Field Research

Field research is the study of social life in its natural setting: observing and interviewing people where they live, work, and play. Some kinds of behavior can be best studied by "being there"; a fuller understanding can be developed through observations, face-to-face discussions, and participation in events. Researchers use these methods to generate qualitative data: observations that are best described verbally rather than numerically.

Sociologists who are interested in observing social interaction as it occurs may use ***participant observation***—the process of collecting systematic observations while

questionnaire
a printed research instrument containing a series of items to which subjects respond.

interview
a data-collection encounter in which an interviewer asks the respondent questions and records the answers.

secondary analysis
a research method in which researchers use existing material and analyze data that were originally collected by others.

content analysis
the systematic examination of cultural artifacts or various forms of communication to extract thematic data and draw conclusions about social life.

participant observation
a research method in which researchers collect systematic observations while being part of the activities of the group being studied.

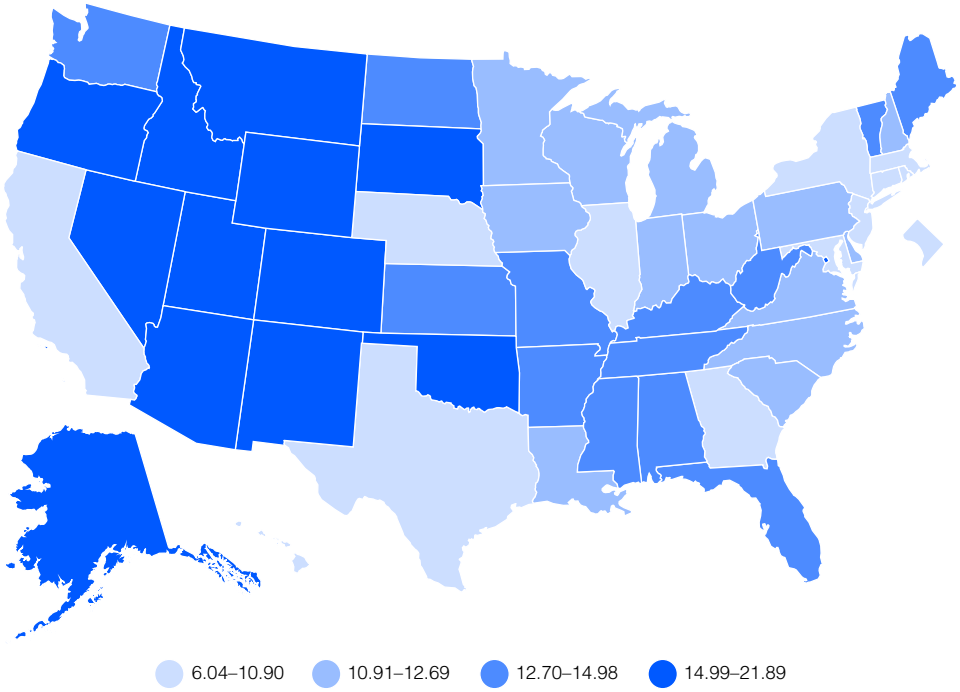


FIGURE 1.14 National Suicide Statistics at a Glance
Suicide rate per 100,000 population by state for all races and ethnicities, both sexes, and all ages, 2004–2010, United States.
Source: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC Data Sources, 2015.

being part of the activities of the group that the researcher is studying. Participant observation generates more "inside" information than simply asking questions or observing from the outside. For example, to learn more about how coroners make a ruling of "suicide" in connection with a death and to analyze what (if any) effect such a ruling has on the accuracy of "official" suicide statistics, the sociologist Steve Taylor (1982) engaged in participant observation at a coroner's office over a six-month period. As he followed a number of cases from the initial report of death through the various stages of investigation, Taylor learned that it was important to "be around" so that he could listen to discussions and ask the coroners questions because intuition and guesswork play a large part in some decisions to rule a death as a suicide.

Another approach to field research is ***ethnography***—a detailed study of the life and activities of a group of people by researchers who may live with that group over a period of years. Unlike participant observation, ethnographic studies usually take place over a longer period of time. For example, the sociologist Alice Goffman (2014) spent six years living in a high-crime, drug-ridden Philadelphia neighborhood before writing her book *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City* (• Figure 1.15 and • Figure 1.16). She interviewed a wide array of people, including many young African American men who had been caught up in a web of drug dealing and surveillance by law enforcement officers. Based on her extensive ethnographic research, Goffman was able to describe in great detail how generations of young men had been sacrificed in the drug war and how the blighting of neighborhoods contributed to the problems of young people who had few opportunities for the future. It is important to note that Goffman's work received not only extensive media coverage and praise from some reviewers but also criticism from others who believed that she had exploited her subjects, that she had possibly run afoul of the law in some activities with her research subjects, and that there were ethical issues with her overall research (Lewis-Kraus, 2016).

Experiments

An ***experiment*** is a carefully designed situation in which the researcher studies the impact of certain variables on subjects' attitudes or behavior. Experiments are designed to create "real-life" situations, ideally under controlled circumstances, in which the influence of different variables can be modified and measured. Conventional experiments require that subjects be divided into two groups: an experimental group and a control group. The ***experimental group*** contains the subjects who are exposed to an independent variable (the experimental condition) to study its effect on them. The ***control group*** contains the subjects who are not exposed to the independent variable. For example, the sociologist Arturo Biblarz and