TENTH EDITION

Understanding
Social Problems

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UNDERSTANDING
Social Problems

10e

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For our grandchildren: Lana, Juno, and Sky

They give us hope.

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Preface

Understanding Social Problems is intended for use in college-level sociology courses. We recognize that many students enrolled in undergraduate sociology classes are not sociology majors. Thus, we have designed our text with the aim of inspiring students—no matter what their academic major or future life path may be—to care about social problems. In addition to providing a sound theoretical and research basis for sociology majors, *Understanding Social Problems* also speaks to students who are headed for careers in business, psychology, health care, social work, criminal justice, and the nonprofit sector, as well as to those pursuing degrees in education, fine arts and the humanities, or to those who are "undecided." Social problems, after all, affect each and every one of us, directly or indirectly. And everyone—whether a leader in business or politics, a stay-at-home parent, or a student—can become more mindful of how his or her actions, or inactions, perpetuate or alleviate social problems. We hope that *Understanding Social Problems* plants seeds of social awareness that will grow no matter what academic, occupational, and life path students choose.

New to This Edition

The tenth edition of *Understanding Social Problems* features expanded coverage of Native Americans, women in the military, LGBT issues, prescription drug abuse, "fracking," climate deniers, terrorism, and human rights issues. Learning objectives are now presented at the beginning of each chapter to guide student learning. Other pedagogical features that students and professors have found useful have been retained, including a running glossary, list of key terms, chapter reviews, and *Test Yourself* sections. Most of the opening vignettes in the tenth edition are new, as are many of the *What Do You Think?* questions, which are designed to engage students in critical thinking and stimulate classroom discussion. Many of the boxed chapter features (*The Human Side, Self and Society, Social Problems Research Up Close*, and *Animals and Society*) have been updated or replaced with new content. Finally, the tenth edition has new or updated research, data, tables, figures, and photos in each chapter, as well as new and revised material, detailed as follows.

Chapter 1 ("Thinking about Social Problems") now includes the results of a global survey on social problems around the world, including a table with rankings of the "greatest problems in the world" by region. This revised chapter also features an updated *Self and Society* and *Social Problems Research Up Close*, as well as new data from Gallup Polls, the Pew Research Center, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Chapter 2 ("Physical and Mental Health and Health Care") begins with a new opening vignette about the Ebola epidemic. A new *Social Problems Research Up Close* feature asks, "Are Americans the Healthiest Population in the World?" There is a new table on "Successful People with Mental Illness." New topics include peer-to-peer mental health support groups on campus, food deserts, Indian Health Service, Military Health Service, and the male health disadvantage. Updated topics include the Affordable Health Care Act, medical debt, and complementary and alternative health care. A new *What Do You Think?* question asks readers if they agree with the 2014 Supreme Court ruling that craft store chain Hobby Lobby and other closely held for-profit companies may choose not to pay for coverage of birth control in their workers' health plans if the company's owner has religious objections.

Chapter 3 ("Alcohol and Other Drugs") begins with a new opening vignette, followed by a new *Social Problems Research Up Close* feature on the portrayal of cigarette smoking in popular movies. The chapter has been reorganized for this edition: Misuse of prescription drugs has been added to the section on "Frequently Used Legal Drugs"; and sections on "Tobacco Advertising," "Alternative Nicotine Delivery Systems," "Prevention" of alcohol, tobacco and prescription drug abuse, and "Synthetic Marijuana" have also been added. The "Health Costs of Drug Use" section is now divided into legal and illegal drugs, as are the strategies for action.

There are numerous new topics including the dramatic increase in teenagers' use of heroin and prescription drugs, the modification of the D.A.R.E. curriculum, e-cigarette use, the impact of heavy drinking on others in the home, the impact of alcohol consumption combined with other drugs on driving, drug overdoses, a cost–benefit analysis of drug courts, Internet drug sales and e-pharmacies, the sociological risk factors in drug use, the MPOWER program of the World Health Organization, and pro-tobacco and anti-tobacco social forces on tobacco use.

Chapter 4 ("Crime and Social Control") contains a new opening vignette, a new section on technology and crime, and two new features. The *Social Problems Research Up Close* examines the role of race in criminal justice policies, and the *Self and Society* assesses students' fear of criminal victimization. New crime and social control topics include a discussion of Agnew's General Strain Theory; incarceration as racism; public perceptions of black criminals; General Motors, Honda, and Takata as corporate criminals; gangs and schools; police shootings of unarmed minorities; the safety gender gap; the socioemotional impact of violent crime; aging and crime; the difficulty in assessing crime prevention and recidivism; recent crime legislation; social forces leading to and away from "get tough" crime policies; and federal reforms and the "Smart on Crime Initiative."

Chapter 5 ("Family Problems") opens with a new vignette about the domestic violence case of Janay and Ray Rice. We added several new topics, including polyamory and poly families, grandfamilies, gray divorces, relationship literacy education, intentional communities, and the "Period of Purple Crying." The updated and reorganized section on "Strategies for Action" includes a new section on "Strategies to Strengthen Families" and focuses on expanding definitions of family. There is also a new discussion of Child Protective Services. The revised chapter includes updated global data on child abuse, updated statistics on domestic violence, new Census Bureau data on interethnic and interracial marriages and relationships, and new Pew Research data on U.S. marriage and family patterns and values. A new *Social Problems Research Up Close* feature presents research on "The Polyamorists Next Door."

Chapter 6 ("Economic Inequality, Wealth, and Poverty") opens with a new vignette about a dog, Cosmo, who enjoys a higher standard of living than many poor people. This revised chapter includes new data on inequality within the top 1 percent, inequality in the global distribution of household wealth, inequality in the United States, and updated census data on poverty and poverty thresholds. New topics include wage theft, corporate tax inversion, plutocracy, and the marriage opportunity gap. New figures display average U.S. family wealth and distribution of U.S. wealth, and a new table presents the United Nations' 17 sustainable development goals. A new *What Do You Think?* question asks why wage theft gets so little attention in the media compared with other types of theft.

Chapter 7 ("Work and Unemployment") opens with a new vignette about unsafe working conditions in Bangladesh's garment industry. New topics in this revised chapter include communism, full employment, frictional unemployment, and "right-to-work" laws. We have added new research on work-related stressors and health and a new table on common work-related stressors, and new research on life satisfaction among union members compared with nonunion members. This chapter frames employment-related concerns as human rights issues and presents examples of how and why these human rights are being violated in workplaces around the world.

Chapter 8 ("Problems in Education") has been significantly revised with a new opening vignette, and all new chapter features. The *Self and Society* asks students to assess the importance of various aspects of their high school experiences in securing a job, and

The Human Side recounts the story of a former teacher who describes why she left the profession. The *Social Problems Research Up Close,* using a national sample, examines the process that leads students to drop out of high school. New *What Do You Think?* topics include the worldwide availability of *Sesame Street,* the desirability of same-sex classrooms, the case of a black college student suing his white roommates, and the future of teacher tenure. The section on "Crime, Violence, and School Discipline" is now reorganized into four areas: "Crime and Violence against Students," "Crime and Violence against Teachers," "School Discipline," and "Bullying."

New topics include comparisons of student outcomes by socioeconomic status in China and the United States, a longitudinal study of students from first grade to young adulthood, the social costs of dropouts, the impact of a disadvantaged school environment on teacher effectiveness, the diversity gap, "degrees of inequality" in higher education, for-profit online colleges and universities, merit-based versus need-based financial aid, "separate but unequal" college admissions, Parents' Revolution and the Network for Public Education, and the UNC scandal.

Chapter 9 ("Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration") opens with a new vignette about the anti–Columbus Day movement. This chapter features a new *The Human Side* feature: "A Cherokee Citizen's View of Andrew Jackson." There is a new section and table on racial microaggressions, and a new section on implicit prejudice. Other new topics include colorism, "sundown towns," and state laws banning Sharia law. The revised chapter includes updated U.S. Census data on Hispanic, racial, and foreign-born U.S. populations, new FBI data on hate crimes, and an updated section on white power music. New *What Do You Think?* questions ask (1) about views toward Rachel Dolezal's choice to identify as black, (2) if black racism toward whites is equivalent to white racism toward blacks, (3) what students think about the phrase "Black lives matter," and (4) if Barack Obama would have been elected president if he had darker skin color.

Chapter 10 ("Gender Inequality") features a new *The Human Side*—a suicide note written by a transgender teen—and a new *Self and Society* on whether men, women, or both make strong financial and political leaders. There is also a new subsection on same-sex education under "The School Experience and Cultural Sexisms" heading.

New topics and terms include the "missing girls" of China, vulnerable employment, family well-being and the gender pay gap, attributional gender bias, reinforcement of gender stereotypes in same sex classrooms, gender role content analyses of the 10 most popular programs on Cartoon Network and of 120 children's films from 11 countries, income differentials, Freeman and Freeman's *Stressed Sex: Uncovering the Truth about Men, Women, and Mental Health*, human trafficking of women and girls, A Voice for Men, the Paycheck Fairness Act, and the Workplace Advancement Act.

Chapter 11 ("Sexual Orientation and the Struggle for Equality") has been significantly revised in light of the recent Supreme Court decision legalizing gay marriage in the United States. A new section, "The Consequences of Anti-LGBT Bias," has also been added that includes topics on the relationship between LGBT status and (1) physical and mental health; (2) substance abuse; (3) economic inequality, poverty, and homelessness; and (4) aging and retirement. There is also a new opening vignette, and two new features. The *Self and Society* assess student attitudes toward gay and lesbian issues and *The Human Side*, "I Needed to Do Something . . .," an essay by Tim Cook, CEO of Apple, on why he felt he had to come out to the public.

New topics and terms include estimates of the U.S. LGBT population and the number of LGBT married couples; results of public opinion polls; the *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision and reactions to it; the backlash against LGBT rights successes; religious freedom laws and the corporate response; societal beliefs about the origin of sexual orientation; banning sexual orientation change efforts; social forces that led to greater social support for LGBT individuals; demographic differences between same- and different-sex couples; gay fathers' connectivity between emotional and cognitive parts of their brains; the American Sociological Association's amicus curiae brief; "corrective rape" of lesbians; LGBT higher rates of depression, suicide, poverty, homelessness, and physical illness; dissenting opinions in *Obergefell*; the social costs of continued homonegativity; the "gay stimulus package"; the First Amendment Defense Act; children's response to learning a

parent is gay; and the self-fulfilling prophecy of stereotypical gay men and women's appearances.

Chapter 12 ("Population Growth and Aging") includes a new *The Human Side* feature describing one woman's decision (with her husband) to remain childfree. This revised chapter includes updated information about Social Security and updated figures, tables, and data from the Population Reference Bureau. A new *What Do You Think?* question asks if professors should retire after a certain age.

Chapter 13 ("Environmental Problems") begins with a new vignette about the 2015 Indian heat wave. A new *Social Problems Research Up Close* feature, "The Climate Deception Dossiers," presents documentation of how the fossil fuel industry has deceived the public on issues related to global warming and climate change. The revised chapter also includes new sections on climate deniers, fracking, environmental migrants, and hunters and anglers as environmentalists. A new *The Human Side* feature, written specifically for this text, is titled, "Fracking Stories Told by Someone Who Isn't Gagged." There is also a new figure on "The Cycle of Fracking Denial." New topics include charismatic megafauna, NIMBY ("Not in My Backyard"), the landmark Dutch court ruling that orders the government to step up efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and the 2015 Senate vote that climate change is real. The section on religion and environmentalism has been updated, including the addition of Pope Francis's call to action on climate change and environmental protection. This revised chapter also mentions the Permanent People's Tribunal consideration of whether fracking violates human rights, and also discusses how state officials and employees in Florida were ordered to not use the terms *global warming* or *climate change*. A new *What Do You Think?* feature asks students what Pope Francis's statement "There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself" means to them.

Chapter 14 ("Science and Technology") begins with a new opening vignette on medical technology. There are also two new features and two updated features. *The Human Side* concerns the consequences, for one young woman, of being denied an abortion, and the *Social Problems Research Up Close* examines gender differences, or lack thereof, in Internet use. Both the *Self and Society* and *Animals and Society* features have been updated. New topics or terms include the increased use of "digital agents" for blue- and white-collar jobs, technology corporate lawsuits, the Internet of Things (IoT), use of social media in political unrest, the growth of genetically modified (GM) organisms, GM foods and their consequences, wearable technology, the use of nanotechnology in "nano-foods," new state restrictions on abortion, genetic cloning, reproductive cloning, and therapeutic cloning, the expansion of cybersecurity breaches and Internet vulnerability, cyberattack threats to global security, automation of language and reasoning skills, the FCC's right to regulate net neutrality (no blocking, no throttling, no paid prioritization), slowness rage, the deep or dark web, Silk Road, Acxiom—the "cookie" collecting company, reform of the NSA's surveillance program, and the Marketplace Fairness Act. New *What Do You Think?* topics include the impact of self-driving cars, restrictions on privately owned drones, "right to forget" Internet laws, social groups on Mars, and sexism, racism, and diversity in the gaming community.

Chapter 15 ("Conflict, War, and Terrorism") begins with a new opening vignette. There is a new *The Human Side* on the refugee crisis, and a new *Self and Society* feature on "National Defense and the U.S. Military." The "Economics of Military Spending" has new subsections on weapons sales and the cost of war. Feminist theories of war and an expanded section on women in the military are now standalone headings. Reorganization of the chapter also includes adding two new sections ("Guantánamo Detention Center" and "Weapons of Mass Destruction") under the "America's Response to Terrorism" heading.

New topics of discussion include the use of unoccupied aerial vehicles (drones), the direct and indirect costs of violence, the devastation of Afghanistan and Syrian society, refugees and asylum seekers, women in the military, "rally around the flag," gender norming, occupationally specific standards validation, conflict minerals, civil war in Yemen, Charlie Hebdo and the terrorist attacks in Paris and Garland, Texas, Boko Haram, the evolution and funding of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), public attitudes toward the use of ground troops in the Middle East, the Charleston, South Carolina,

killings, the grievance models of terrorism, micro-aggression psychological models of terrorists, ecocide, the nuclear weapons agreement with Iran, and the public's national priorities by political party.

Features and Pedagogical Aids

We have integrated a number of features and pedagogical aids into the text to help students learn to think about social problems from a sociological perspective. Our mission is to help students think critically about social problems and their implications, and to increase their awareness of how social problems relate to their personal lives.

Boxed Features

Animals and Society. Several chapters contain a feature called *Animals and Society,* which examines issues, problems, policies, and/or programs concerning animals within the context of the social problem discussed in that chapter. For example, Chapter 5 ("Family Problems") includes an *Animals and Society* feature that examines "Pets and Domestic Violence," and in Chapter 14 ("Science and Technology"), the *Animals and Society* feature discusses "The Use of Animals in Scientific Research."

Self and Society. Each chapter includes a *Self and Society* feature designed to help students assess their own attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, or behaviors regarding some aspect of the social problem under discussion. In Chapter 5 ("Family Problems"), for example, the "Abusive Behavior Inventory" invites students to assess the frequency of various abusive behaviors in their own relationships. The *Self and Society* feature in Chapter 3 ("Alcohol and Other Drugs") allows students to measure the consequences of their own drinking behavior and compare it to respondents in a national sample, and students can assess their fear of criminal victimization in Chapter 4 ("Crime and Social Control").

The Human Side. Each chapter includes a boxed feature that describes personal experiences and views of individuals who have been directly affected by social problems. *The Human Side* feature in Chapter 4 ("Crime and Social Control"), for example, describes the horrific consequences of being a victim of rape, and *The Human Side* feature in Chapter 9 ("Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration") presents a Cherokee citizen's view of Andrew Jackson. In Chapter 10 ("Gender Inequality"), *The Human Side* features a suicide note from a transgender teenager.

Social Problems Research Up Close. This feature, found in every chapter, presents examples of social science research, summarizing the sampling and methods involved in data collection, and presenting findings and conclusions of the research study. Examples of *Social Problems Research Up Close* topics include job loss in midlife, polyamorists and poly families, gender and Internet use, tactics used by the fossil fuel industry to deceive the public about global warming and climate change, two-faced racism, and mental illness and suicide among U.S. veterans.

In-Text Learning Aids

Learning Objectives. We have developed a set of learning objectives that are presented at the beginning of each chapter. The learning objectives are designed to help students focus on key concepts, theories, and terms as they read each chapter.

Vignettes. Each chapter begins with a vignette designed to engage students and draw them into the chapter by illustrating the current relevance of the topic under discussion. For example, Chapter 5 ("Family Problems") begins with the domestic violence incident involving football player Ray Rice and his wife Janay Rice. Chapter 9 ("Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration") opens with details concerning the anti–Columbus Day movement and Chapter 15 ("Conflict, War, and Terrorism") describes an ISIS training camp for young boys.

Key Terms and Glossary. Important terms and concepts are highlighted in the text where they first appear. To reemphasize the importance of these words, they are listed at the end of every chapter and are included in the glossary at the end of the text.

Running Glossary. This tenth edition continues the running glossary that highlights the key terms in every chapter by putting the key terms and their definitions in the text margins.

What Do You Think? Sections. Each chapter contains multiple sections called *What Do You Think?* These sections invite students to use critical thinking skills to answer questions about issues related to the chapter content. For example, one *What Do You Think?* question in Chapter 4 ("Crime and Social Control") asks students, "What perpetuates the myth of the male-only serial killer?" and a *What Do You Think?* question in Chapter 11 ("Sexual Orientation and the Struggle for Equality") asks, "Should gay men and women who are subjected to violence in their home country be eligible for political asylum in the United States?"

Understanding [Specific Social Problem] Sections. All too often, students, faced with contradictory theories and research results walk away from social problems courses without any real understanding of their causes and consequences. To address this problem, chapter sections titled "Understanding [specific social problem]" cap the body of each chapter just before the chapter summaries. Unlike the chapter summaries, these sections sum up the present state of knowledge and theory on the chapter topic and convey the urgency for rectifying the problems discussed in the chapter.

Supplements

The tenth edition of *Understanding Social Problems* comes with a full complement of supplements designed for both faculty and students.

Supplements for Instructors

Online Instructor's Resource Manual. This supplement offers instructors learning objectives, key terms, lecture outlines, student projects, classroom activities, Internet exercises, and video suggestions.

Online Test Bank. Test items include multiple-choice and true-false questions with answers and text references, as well as short-answer and essay questions for each chapter.

Cengage Learning Testing Powered by Cognero. The Test Bank is also available through Cognero, a flexible, online system that allows instructors to author, edit, and manage test bank content as well as create multiple test versions in an instant. Instructors can deliver tests from their school's learning management system, classroom, office, or home.

Online PowerPoints. These vibrant, Microsoft® PowerPoint® lecture slides for each chapter assist instructors with lectures by providing concept coverage using images, figures, and tables directly from the textbook.

Products for Blended and Online Courses

MindTap™: The Personal Learning Experience

MindTap for *Understanding Social Problems* enhanced 10ᵗʰ edition from Cengage, 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, and multimedia activities—into a "Learning Path" that guides the student through the social problems course. Four new highly interactive activities challenge students to

think critically by exploring, analyzing, and creating content, while developing their sociological lenses through personal, local, and global issues.

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- Track students' use, activities, and comprehension in real-time which provides opportunities for early intervention to influence progress and outcomes. Grades are visible and archived so students and instructors always have access to current standings in the class.

- Assess knowledge throughout each section: after readings and in automatically graded activities and assignments.

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Learn more at **www.cengage.com/mindtap.**

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> " Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."
>
> **DR. SEUSS**
> The Lorax

1

Thinking about Social Problems

Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will be able to . . .

1 Define a social problem.

2 Discuss the elements of the social structure and culture of society.

3 Understand the connections between private troubles and public issues, and how they relate to the sociological imagination.

4 Summarize structural functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism and their respective theories of social problems.

5 Describe the stages in conducting a research study.

Donald Trump's greater emphasis on economic issues may be why he won the 2016 presidential election (Kotino 2016). Trump appealed to voters in traditionally manufacturing states and in agricultural areas where workers were concerned about low wages, the trade balance, the future of fracking, and the loss of manufacturing jobs to other countries.

IN A JUNE 2016 Gallup Poll, a random sample of Americans was asked, "What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?" Leading problems included economic issues (i.e., wages, unemployment, the gap between the rich and poor, etc.), which were the clear majority of responses, and noneconomic issues such as immigration, distrust of government, health care, race relations, education, and poverty (Gallup 2016). Moreover, a recent survey indicates that just 28 percent of Americans are satisfied "with the way things are going in the United States"—a number significantly lower than a decade ago when 42 percent of Americans were satisfied with the direction of the country (Gallup 2017).

We should not, however, confine our concerns to social problems in the United States. Globalization requires an understanding of the interrelationship between countries and regions around the world. Although some social problems are clearly global in nature, others appear to only impact the nation in which they occur. The economy, for example, is often discussed in terms of the U.S. job growth, the U.S. inflation rate, or American's consumer confidence. And yet, in 2015, when China's stock market plunged, the NYSE recorded its steepest losses since the recession of 2008. Nonetheless, whether measured by travel patterns, languages spoken, or student study abroad, Americans have shown little interest in other countries. Calling this "unfamiliarity with the world" a crisis, Ungar (2015) comments that the "continued ignorance of, or indifference toward, how other people see the world is a concrete threat to our own security and safety (p. 1).

Problems related to poverty, inadequate education, crime and violence, oppression of minorities, environmental destruction, and war and terrorism as well as many other social issues are both national and international concerns. Such problems present both a threat and a challenge to our national and global society. The primary goal of this textbook is to facilitate increased awareness and understanding of problematic social conditions in U.S. society and throughout the world.

Although the topics covered in this book vary widely, all chapters share common objectives: to explain how social problems are created and maintained; to indicate how they affect individuals, social groups, and societies as a whole; and to examine programs and policies for change. We begin by looking at the nature of social problems.

What Is a Social Problem?

There is no universal, constant, or absolute definition of what constitutes a social problem. Rather, social problems are defined by a combination of objective and subjective criteria that vary across societies, among individuals and groups within a society, and across historical time periods.

Objective and Subjective Elements of Social Problems

Although social problems take many forms, they all share two important elements: an objective social condition and a subjective interpretation of that social condition. The **objective element of a social problem** refers to the existence of a social condition. We become aware of social conditions through our own life experience, through the media, and through education. We see the homeless, hear gunfire in the streets, and see battered women in hospital emergency rooms. We read about employees losing their jobs as businesses downsize and factories close. In television news reports, we see the anguished faces of parents whose children have been killed by violent youths.

The **subjective element of a social problem** refers to the belief that a particular social condition is harmful to society or to a segment of society and that it should and can be changed. We know that crime, drug addiction, poverty, racism, violence, and pollution exist. These social conditions are not considered social problems, however, unless at least a segment of society believes that these conditions diminish the quality of human life.

By combining these objective and subjective elements, we arrive at the following definition: A **social problem** is a social condition that a segment of society views as harmful to members of society, and is in need of remedy.

Variability in Definitions of Social Problems

Individuals and groups frequently disagree about what constitutes a social problem. For example, some Americans view gun control as a necessary means of reducing gun violence whereas others believe that gun control is a threat to civil rights and individual liberties. Similarly, some Americans view the availability of abortion as a social problem, whereas others view restrictions on abortion as a social problem.

Definitions of social problems vary not only within societies but also across societies and geographic regions. Table 1.1 graphically portrays responses to a global survey (40 countries, $N = 45,435$) concerning the most pressing social problems in the world. Note that in the more advanced regions of Europe and the United States, as well as in the Middle East and Asia/Pacific, well over half the respondents selected the terrorist group ISIS as the most dangerous world problem, while in Africa and Latin America, global climate change is viewed as the most important issue facing the world. Across regions, global climate change and global economic instability were considered the most important social problems in the world (Carle 2015).

> Some Americans view gun control as a necessary means of reducing gun violence whereas others believe that gun control is a threat to civil rights and individual liberties.

TABLE 1.1 Top Five Problems in The World, 2015 (40 countries, $N = 45,435$)

Regions	Global climate change	Global economic instability	ISIS	Iran's nuclear program	Cyberattacks
Middle East	35%	33%	54%	29%	22%
Europe	42	40	70	42	35
Asia/Pacific	41	35	45	29	35
Latin America	61	54	33	33	33
Africa	59	50	38	29	30
U.S.	42	51	68	62	59

■ Top Choice
*Not asked in Russia.
NOTE: Regional medians, Russia and Ukraine not included in Europe median.
SOURCE: Carle 2015.

objective element of a social problem Awareness of social conditions through one's own life experiences and through reports in the media.

subjective element of a social problem The belief that a particular social condition is harmful to society, or to a segment of society, and that it should and can be changed.

social problem A social condition that a segment of society views as harmful to members of society and in need of remedy.

What constitutes a social problem also varies by historical time periods. For example, before the 19th century, a husband's legal right and marital obligation was to discipline and control his wife through the use of physical force. Today, the use of physical force is regarded as a social problem rather than a marital right.

Lastly, social problems change over time not only because *definitions* of conditions change, as in the example of the use of force in marriage, but also because the *conditions* themselves change. The use of cell phones while driving was not considered a social problem in the 1990s, as cell phone technology was just beginning to become popular. Now, with most U.S. adults having a cell phone, the issue of "distracted driving" has become a national problem. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA 2016), in 2014, over 3,000 people were killed and 430,000 injured in traffic accidents involving distracted drivers. The average time a distracted driver is not paying attention is five seconds. At 55 mph it's like driving the length of a football field blindfolded.

WHAT do you THINK?

Many drivers see using mobile phones while driving as risky when other drivers do it, but view their own mobile phone use while driving as safe (NHTSA 2013). Why do you think this is so? Do you think using mobile phones or other electronic devices while driving is safe?

The Washington Post/Getty Images

President Obama's 2014 announcement of immigration reform would have, in part, allowed nearly 5 million undocumented immigrants to stay in the U.S. In contrast, the Trump administration has pledged to build a wall along the border of the United States and Mexico, and to withhold federal funds from "sanctuary cities" – cities which "do not generally cooperate with federal immigration enforcement" (ABC, 2017).

Because social problems can be highly complex, it is helpful to have a framework within which to view them. Sociology provides such a framework. Using a sociological perspective to examine social problems requires knowledge of the basic concepts and tools of sociology. In the remainder of this chapter, we discuss some of these concepts and tools: social structure, culture, the "sociological imagination," major theoretical perspectives, and types of research methods.

Elements of Social Structure and Culture

Although society surrounds us and permeates our lives, it is difficult to "see" society. By thinking of society in terms of a picture or image, however, we can visualize society and therefore better understand it. Imagine that society is a coin with two sides: On one side is the structure of society, and on the other is the culture of society. Although each side is distinct, both are inseparable from the whole. By looking at the various elements of social structure and culture, we can better understand the root causes of social problems.

Elements of Social Structure

structure The way society is organized including institutions, social groups, statuses, and roles.

institution An established and enduring pattern of social relationships.

The **structure** of a society refers to the way society is organized. Society is organized into different parts: institutions, social groups, statuses, and roles.

Institutions. An **institution** is an established and enduring pattern of social relationships. The five traditional institutions are family, religion, politics, economics, and education, but some sociologists argue that other social institutions—such as science and technology, mass media, medicine, sports, and the military—also play important roles in

modern society. Many social problems are generated by inadequacies in various institutions. For example, unemployment may be influenced by the educational institution's failure to prepare individuals for the job market and by alterations in the structure of the economic institution.

Social Groups. Institutions are made up of social groups. A **social group** is defined as two or more people who have a common identity, interact, and form a social relationship. For example, the family in which you were reared is a social group that is part of the family institution. The religious association to which you may belong is a social group that is part of the religious institution.

Social groups can be categorized as primary or secondary. **Primary groups**, which tend to involve small numbers of individuals, are characterized by intimate and informal interaction. Families and friends are examples of primary groups. **Secondary groups**, which may involve small or large numbers of individuals, are task oriented and characterized by impersonal and formal interaction. Examples of secondary groups include employers and their employees and clerks and their customers.

Statuses. Just as institutions consist of social groups, social groups consist of statuses. A **status** is a position that a person occupies within a social group. The statuses we occupy largely define our social identity. The statuses in a family may consist of mother, father, stepmother, stepfather, wife, husband, partner, child, and so on. Statuses can be either ascribed or achieved. An **ascribed status** is one that society assigns to an individual on the basis of factors over which the individual has no control. For example, we have no control over the sex, race, ethnic background, and socioeconomic status into which we are born. Similarly, we are assigned the status of child, teenager, adult, or senior citizen on the basis of our age—something we do not choose or control.

An **achieved status** is assigned on the basis of some characteristic or behavior over which the individual has some control. Whether you achieve the status of college graduate, spouse, parent, bank president, or prison inmate depends largely on your own efforts, behavior, and choices. One's ascribed statuses may affect the likelihood of achieving other statuses, however. For example, if you are born into a poor socioeconomic status, you may find it more difficult to achieve the status of college graduate because of the high cost of a college education.

Every individual has numerous statuses simultaneously. You may be a student, parent, tutor, volunteer fund-raiser, female, and Hispanic. A person's *master status* is the status that is considered the most significant in a person's social identity. In the United States, a person's occupational status is typically regarded as a master status. If you are a full-time student, your master status is likely to be student.

Roles. Every status is associated with many **roles**, or the set of rights, obligations, and expectations associated with a status. Roles guide our behavior and allow us to predict the behavior of others. As students, you are expected to attend class, listen and take notes, study for tests, and complete assignments. Because you know what the role of teacher involves, you can predict that your teachers will lecture, give exams, and assign grades based on your performance on tests.

A single status involves more than one role. The status of prison inmate includes one role for interacting with prison guards and another role for interacting with other prison inmates. Similarly, the status of nurse involves different roles for interacting with physicians and with patients.

Elements of Culture

Whereas the social structure refers to the organization of society, the **culture** refers to the meanings and ways of life that characterize a society. The elements of culture include beliefs, values, norms, sanctions, and symbols.

> Whereas the social structure refers to the organization of society, the culture refers to the meanings and ways of life that characterize a society.

social group Two or more people who have a common identity, interact, and form a social relationship.

primary groups Usually small numbers of individuals characterized by intimate and informal interaction.

secondary groups Involving small or large numbers of individuals, groups that are task oriented and are characterized by impersonal and formal interaction.

status A position that a person occupies within a social group.

ascribed status A status that society assigns to an individual on the basis of factors over which the individual has no control.

achieved status A status that society assigns to an individual on the basis of factors over which the individual has some control.

roles The set of rights, obligations, and expectations associated with a status.

culture The meanings and ways of life that characterize a society, including beliefs, values, norms, sanctions, and symbols.

Beliefs. **Beliefs** refer to definitions and explanations about what is assumed to be true. The beliefs of an individual or group influence whether that individual or group views a particular social condition as a social problem. Does secondhand smoke harm nonsmokers? Are nuclear power plants safe? Does violence in movies and on television lead to increased aggression in children? Our beliefs regarding these issues influence whether we view the issues as social problems. Beliefs influence not only how a social condition is interpreted but also the existence of the condition itself.

Values. **Values** are social agreements about what is considered good and bad, right and wrong, desirable and undesirable. Frequently, social conditions are viewed as social problems when the conditions are incompatible with or contradict closely held values. For example, poverty and homelessness violate the value of human welfare; crime contradicts the values of honesty, private property, and nonviolence; racism, sexism, and heterosexism violate the values of equality and fairness. Often responses to opinion surveys (see this chapter's *Self and Society* feature) reveal an individual's values. For example, agreeing with the statement "a chief benefit of a college education is that it increases one's earning power" reflects the American value of economic well-being.

Values play an important role not only in the interpretation of a condition as a social problem but also in the development of the social condition itself. For example, most Americans view capitalism, characterized by free enterprise and the private accumulation of wealth, positively (Newport 2012). Nonetheless, a capitalist system, in part, is responsible for the inequality in American society as people compete for limited resources.

Norms and Sanctions. **Norms** are socially defined rules of behavior. Norms serve as guidelines for our behavior and for our expectations of the behavior of others.

There are three types of norms: folkways, laws, and mores. *Folkways* refer to the customs, habits, and manners of society—the ways of life that characterize a group or society. In many segments of our society, it is customary to shake hands when being introduced to a new acquaintance, to say "excuse me" after sneezing, and to give presents to family and friends on their birthdays. Although no laws require us to do these things, we are expected to do them because they are part of the cultural tradition, or folkways, of the society in which we live.

Laws are norms that are formalized and backed by political authority. It is normative for a Sikh to where a turban, and to have long hair and a beard. However, when a Hofstra University student who was also a Sikh sought to enlist in his school's ROTC program, he was denied a religious exemption from the army's "grooming policies." The army later argued that Mr. Singh could not request a religious exemption unless he was an ROTC cadet. A newly filed lawsuit against the United States Army notes the catch-22: Mr. Singh cannot become an ROTC cadet unless he is granted a religious exemption and cannot request a religious exemption unless he is an ROTC cadet (Shortell 2014).

Mores are norms with a moral basis. Both littering and child sexual abuse are violations of law, but child sexual abuse is also a violation of our mores because we view such behavior as immoral.

All norms are associated with **sanctions**, or social consequences for conforming to or violating norms. When we conform to a social norm, we may be rewarded by a positive sanction. These may range from an approving smile to a public ceremony in our honor. When we violate a social norm, we may be punished by a negative sanction, which may range from a disapproving look to the death penalty or life in prison. Most sanctions are spontaneous expressions of approval or disapproval by groups or individuals—these are referred to as informal sanctions. Sanctions that are carried out according to some recognized or formal procedure are referred to as formal sanctions. Types of sanctions, then, include positive informal sanctions, positive formal sanctions, negative informal sanctions, and negative formal sanctions (see Table 1.2).

TABLE 1.2 Types and Examples of Sanctions

	Positive	Negative
Informal	Being praised by one's neighbors for organizing a neighborhood recycling program	Being criticized by one's neighbors for refusing to participate in the neighborhood recycling program
Formal	Being granted a citizen's award for organizing a neighborhood recycling program	Being fined by the city for failing to dispose of trash properly

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beliefs Definitions and explanations about what is assumed to be true.

values Social agreements about what is considered good and bad, right and wrong, desirable and undesirable.

norms Socially defined rules of behavior, including folkways, laws, and mores.

sanctions Social consequences for conforming to or violating norms.

Indicate with a check mark the items you "strongly agree" or "somewhat agree" with.

	Strongly Agree or Somewhat Agree
1. Racial discrimination is no longer a major problem in the U.S.	_____
2. Abortion should be legal.	_____
3. Colleges should prohibit racist/sexist speech on campus.	_____
4. The US should intervene in the wars of other countries.	_____
5. Marijuana should be legal.	_____
6. Same-sex couples should be able to marry.	_____
7. Disadvantaged students should be given preferential treatment in college admission.	_____
8. Individuals cannot do much to bring about social change.	_____
9. How would you characterize your political views?	
Far left	_____
Liberal	_____
Middle-of-the-road	_____
Conservative	_____
Far right	_____

Percentage of first-year college students at bachelor's institutions who "strongly agree" or "somewhat agree" with the following statements*

	Strongly Agree or Somewhat Agree
1. Racial discrimination is no longer a major problem in the U.S.	18.6
2. Abortion should be legal.	63.6
3. Colleges should prohibit racist/sexist speech on campus.	70.9
4. The U.S. should intervene in the wars of other countries.	28.6
5. Marijuana should be legal.	56.4
6. Same-sex couples should be able to marry.	81.1
7. Disadvantaged students should have preferential treatment in college admission.	52.3
8. Women should have the same opportunities as men.	95.4
9. Individuals cannot do much to bring about social change.	26.3
10. How would you characterize your political views?	
Far left	3.9
Liberal	29.6
Middle-of-the-road	44.9
Conservative	19.8
Far right	1.8

*Percentages are rounded.
SOURCE: Eagan et al. 2016.

Symbols. A **symbol** is something that represents something else. Without symbols, we could not communicate with one another or live as social beings.

The symbols of a culture include language, gestures, and objects whose meanings the members of a society commonly understand. In our society, a red ribbon tied around a car antenna symbolizes Mothers against Drunk Driving, a peace sign symbolizes the value of nonviolence, and a white-hooded robe symbolizes the Ku Klux Klan. Sometimes people attach different meanings to the same symbol. The Confederate flag is a symbol of southern pride to some and a symbol of racial bigotry to others.

The elements of the social structure and culture just discussed play a central role in the creation, maintenance, and social responses to various social problems. One of the

symbol Something that represents something else.

Elements of Social Structure and Culture   **9**

goals of taking a course in social problems is to develop an awareness of how the elements of social structure and culture contribute to social problems. Sociologists refer to this awareness as the "sociological imagination."

The Sociological Imagination

The **sociological imagination**, a term C. Wright Mills (1959) developed, refers to the ability to see the connections between our personal lives and the social world in which we live. When we use our sociological imagination, we are able to distinguish between "private troubles" and "public issues" and to see connections between the events and conditions of our lives and the social and historical context in which we live.

For example, that one person is unemployed constitutes a private trouble. That millions of people are unemployed in the United States constitutes a public issue. Once we understand that other segments of society share personal troubles such as intimate partner abuse, drug addiction, criminal victimization, and poverty, we can look for the elements of social structure and culture that contribute to these public issues and private troubles. If the various elements of social structure and culture contribute to private troubles and public issues, then society's social structure and culture must be changed if these concerns are to be resolved.

Rather than viewing the private trouble of obesity and all of its attending health concerns as a result of an individual's faulty character, lack of self-discipline, or poor choices regarding food and exercise, we may understand the obesity epidemic as a public issue that results from various social and cultural forces, including government policies that make high-calorie foods more affordable than healthier, fresh produce; powerful food lobbies that fight against proposals to restrict food advertising to children; and technological developments that have eliminated many types of manual labor and replaced them with sedentary "desk jobs" (see Chapter 2).

Theoretical Perspectives

Theories in sociology provide us with different perspectives with which to view our social world. A perspective is simply a way of looking at the world. A **theory** is a set of interrelated propositions or principles designed to answer a question or explain a particular phenomenon; it provides us with a perspective. Sociological theories help us to explain and predict the social world in which we live.

Sociology includes three major theoretical perspectives: the structural-functionalist perspective, the conflict perspective, and the symbolic interactionist perspective. Each perspective offers a variety of explanations about the causes of and possible solutions to social problems.

Structural-Functionalist Perspective

The structural-functionalist perspective is based largely on the works of Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, and Robert Merton. According to structural functionalism, society is a system of interconnected parts that work together in harmony to maintain a state of balance and social equilibrium for the whole. For example, each of the social institutions contributes important functions for society: Family provides a context for reproducing, nurturing, and socializing children; education offers a way to transmit a society's skills, knowledge, and culture to its youth; politics provides a means of governing members of society; economics provides for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services; and religion provides moral guidance and an outlet for worship of a higher power.

The structural-functionalist perspective emphasizes the interconnectedness of society by focusing on how each part influences and is influenced by other parts. For example, the increase in single-parent and dual-earner families has contributed to the number of children who are failing in school because parents have become less available to supervise their children's homework. As a result of changes in technology, colleges are offering more technical

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The structural-functionalist perspective emphasizes the interconnectedness of society by focusing on how each part influences and is influenced by other parts.

sociological imagination The ability to see the connections between our personal lives and the social world in which we live.

theory A set of interrelated propositions or principles designed to answer a question or explain a particular phenomenon.

programs, and many adults are returning to school to learn new skills that are required in the workplace. The increasing number of women in the workforce has contributed to the formulation of policies against sexual harassment and job discrimination.

Structural functionalists use the terms *functional* and *dysfunctional* to describe the effects of social elements on society. Elements of society are functional if they contribute to social stability and dysfunctional if they disrupt social stability. Some aspects of society can be both functional and dysfunctional. For example, crime is dysfunctional in that it is associated with physical violence, loss of property, and fear. But according to Durkheim and other functionalists, crime is also functional for society because it leads to heightened awareness of shared moral bonds and increased social cohesion.

Sociologists have identified two types of functions: manifest and latent (Merton 1968). **Manifest functions** are consequences that are intended and commonly recognized. **Latent functions** are consequences that are unintended and often hidden. For example, the manifest function of education is to transmit knowledge and skills to society's youth. But public elementary schools also serve as babysitters for employed parents, and colleges offer a place for young adults to meet potential mates. The babysitting and mate selection functions are not the intended or commonly recognized functions of education; hence, they are latent functions.

In viewing society as a set of interrelated parts, structural functionalists argue that proposed solutions to social problems may lead to other social problems. For example, urban renewal projects displace residents and break up community cohesion. Racial imbalance in schools led to forced integration, which in turn generated violence and increased hostility between the races. What are some other "solutions" that have led to social problems? Do all solutions come with a price to pay? Can you think of a solution to a social problem that has no negative consequences?

WHAT do you THINK?

Structural-Functionalist Theories of Social Problems

Two dominant theories of social problems grew out of the structural-functionalist perspective: social pathology and social disorganization.

Social Pathology. According to the social pathology model, social problems result from some "sickness" in society. Just as the human body becomes ill when our systems, organs, and cells do not function normally, society becomes "ill" when its parts (i.e., elements of the structure and culture) no longer perform properly. For example, problems such as crime, violence, poverty, and juvenile delinquency are often attributed to the breakdown of the family institution; the decline of the religious institution; and inadequacies in our economic, educational, and political institutions.

Social "illness" also results when members of a society are not adequately socialized to adopt its norms and values. People who do not value honesty, for example, are prone to dishonesties of all sorts. Early theorists attributed the failure in socialization to "sick" people who could not be socialized. Later theorists recognized that failure in the socialization process stemmed from "sick" social conditions, not "sick" people. To prevent or solve social problems, members of society must receive proper socialization and moral education, which may be accomplished in the family, schools, places of worship, and/or through the media.

Social Disorganization. According to the social disorganization view of social problems, rapid social change (e.g., the cultural revolution of the 1960s) disrupts the norms in a society. When norms become weak or are in conflict with each other, society is in a state of **anomie**, or *normlessness.* Hence, people may steal, physically abuse their spouses or children, abuse drugs, commit rape, or engage in other deviant behavior because the norms regarding these behaviors are weak or conflicting. According to this view, the solution to social problems lies in slowing the pace of social change and strengthening social norms. For example, although the use of alcohol by teenagers is considered a violation of a social norm in our society, this norm is weak. The media portray young people drinking alcohol, teenagers teach each other to drink alcohol and buy fake identification cards (IDs) to purchase alcohol, and parents model drinking behavior by having a few drinks

manifest functions Consequences that are intended and commonly recognized.

latent functions Consequences that are unintended and often hidden.

anomie A state of normlessness in which norms and values are weak or unclear.

after work or at a social event. Solutions to teenage drinking may involve strengthening norms against it through public education, restricting media depictions of youth and alcohol, imposing stronger sanctions against the use of fake IDs to purchase alcohol, and educating parents to model moderate and responsible drinking behavior.

Conflict Perspective

Contrary to the structural-functionalist perspective, the conflict perspective views society as composed of different groups and interests competing for power and resources. The conflict perspective explains various aspects of our social world by looking at which groups have power and benefit from a particular social arrangement. For example, feminist theory argues that we live in a patriarchal society—a hierarchical system of organization controlled by men. Although there are many varieties of feminist theory, most would hold that feminism "demands that existing economic, political, and social structures be changed" (Weir and Faulkner 2004, p. xii).

The origins of the conflict perspective can be traced to the classic works of Karl Marx. Marx suggested that all societies go through stages of economic development. As societies evolve from agricultural to industrial, concern over meeting survival needs is replaced by concern over making a profit, the hallmark of a capitalist system. Industrialization leads to the development of two classes of people: the bourgeoisie, or the owners of the means of production (e.g., factories, farms, businesses), and the proletariat, or the workers who earn wages.

The division of society into two broad classes of people—the "haves" and the "have-nots"—is beneficial to the owners of the means of production. The workers, who may earn only subsistence wages, are denied access to the many resources available to the wealthy owners. According to Marx, the bourgeoisie use their power to control the institutions of society to their advantage. For example, Marx suggested that religion serves as an "opiate of the masses" in that it soothes the distress and suffering associated with the working-class lifestyle and focuses the workers' attention on spirituality, God, and the afterlife rather than on worldly concerns such as living conditions. In essence, religion diverts the workers so that they concentrate on being rewarded in heaven for living a moral life rather than on questioning their exploitation.

Conflict Theories of Social Problems

There are two general types of conflict theories of social problems: Marxist and non-Marxist. Marxist theories focus on social conflict that results from economic inequalities; non-Marxist theories focus on social conflict that results from competing values and interests among social groups.

Marxist Conflict Theories. According to contemporary Marxist theorists, social problems result from class inequality inherent in a capitalistic system. A system of haves and have-nots may be beneficial to the haves but often translates into poverty for the have-nots. For example, in 2013, the typical pay for a CEO of a Standard & Poor's company increased 9 percent to $10.5 million—257 times the national average. During the same time period, the wages of a U.S. worker increased just 1.3 percent (Boak 2014). As we will explore later in this textbook, many social problems, including physical and mental illness, low educational achievement, and crime, are linked to poverty.

In addition to creating an impoverished class of people, capitalism also encourages "corporate violence." *Corporate violence* can be defined as actual harm and/or risk of harm inflicted on consumers, workers, and the general public as a result of decisions by corporate executives or managers. Corporate violence can also result from corporate negligence; the quest for profits at any cost; and willful violations of health, safety, and environmental laws (Reiman and Leighton 2013). Our profit-motivated economy encourages individuals who are otherwise good, kind, and law abiding to knowingly participate in the manufacturing and marketing of defective products, such as brakes on American jets, fuel tanks on automobiles, and salmonella-contaminated peanut butter (Basu 2014).

In 2010, a British Petroleum (BP) oil well off the coast of Louisiana ruptured, killing 11 people and spewing millions of gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico (see Chapter 13).

Evidence suggests that BP officials knew of the unstable cement seals on the rigs long before what has been called the worst offshore disaster in U.S. history (Pope 2011). Since July of 2015, BP has paid over $29 billion in claims, advances, settlements, and other related costs (BP 2015).

Marxist conflict theories also focus on the problem of **alienation**, or powerlessness and meaninglessness in people's lives. In industrialized societies, workers often have little power or control over their jobs, a condition that fosters in them a sense of powerlessness. The specialized nature of work requires employees to perform limited and repetitive tasks; as a result, workers may come to feel that their lives are meaningless.

Alienation is bred not only in the workplace but also in the classroom. Students have little power over their education and often find that the curriculum is not meaningful to their lives. Like poverty, alienation is linked to other social problems, such as low educational achievement, violence, and suicide.

Marxist explanations of social problems imply that the solution lies in eliminating inequality among classes of people by creating a classless society. The nature of work must also change to avoid alienation. Finally, stronger controls must be applied to corporations to ensure that corporate decisions and practices are based on safety rather than on profit considerations.

Preschooler Jacob Hurley, who became seriously ill after eating peanut butter manufactured by the Peanut Corporation of America, is shown sitting with his father Peter Hurley, who is testifying before a House Energy and Commerce Committee hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, in January 2009. Nine deaths and over 700 illnesses resulted from the salmonella-tainted peanuts and, in 2015, the former president of the company was sentenced to 28 years in a federal prison (Davis 2015).

Non-Marxist Conflict Theories. Non-Marxist conflict theorists, such as Ralf Dahrendorf, are concerned with conflict that arises when groups have opposing values and interests. For example, antiabortion activists value the life of unborn embryos and fetuses; prochoice activists value the right of women to control their own bodies and reproductive decisions. These different value positions reflect different subjective interpretations of what constitutes a social problem. For anti-abortionists, the availability of abortion is the social problem; for pro-choice advocates, the restrictions on abortion are the social problem. Sometimes the social problem is not the conflict itself but rather the way that conflict is expressed. Even most pro-life advocates agree that shooting doctors who perform abortions and blowing up abortion clinics constitute unnecessary violence and lack of respect for life. Value conflicts may occur between diverse categories of people, including nonwhites versus whites, heterosexuals versus homosexuals, young versus old, Democrats versus Republicans, and environmentalists versus industrialists.

Solving the problems that are generated by competing values may involve ensuring that conflicting groups understand each other's views, resolving differences through negotiation or mediation, or agreeing to disagree. Ideally, solutions should be win-win, with both conflicting groups satisfied with the solution. However, outcomes of value conflicts are often influenced by power; the group with the most power may use its position to influence the outcome of value conflicts. For example, when Congress could not get all states to voluntarily increase the legal drinking age to 21, it threatened to withdraw federal highway funds from those that would not comply.

Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

Both the structural-functionalist and the conflict perspectives are concerned with how broad aspects of society, such as institutions and large social groups, influence the social world. This level of sociological analysis is called *macro-sociology:* It looks at the big picture of society and suggests how social problems are affected at the institutional level.

alienation A sense of powerlessness and meaninglessness in people's lives.

Theoretical Perspectives | **13**

Micro-sociology, another level of sociological analysis, is concerned with the social-psychological dynamics of individuals interacting in small groups. Symbolic interactionism reflects the micro-sociological perspective and was largely influenced by the work of early sociologists and philosophers such as Max Weber, Georg Simmel, Charles Horton Cooley, G. H. Mead, W. I. Thomas, Erving Goffman, and Howard Becker. Symbolic interactionism emphasizes that human behavior is influenced by definitions and meanings that are created and maintained through symbolic interaction with others.

Sociologist W. I. Thomas (1931/1966) emphasized the importance of definitions and meanings in social behavior and its consequences. He suggested that humans respond to their definition of a situation rather than to the objective situation itself. Hence, Thomas noted that situations that we define as real become real in their consequences.

Symbolic interactionism also suggests that social interaction shapes our identity or sense of self. We develop our self-concept by observing how others interact with us and label us. By observing how others view us, we see a reflection of ourselves that Cooley calls the "looking-glass self."

Last, the symbolic interactionist perspective has important implications for how social scientists conduct research. German sociologist Max Weber argued that, to understand individual and group behavior, social scientists must see the world through the eyes of that individual or group. Weber called this approach *verstehen,* which in German means "to understand." *Verstehen* implies that, in conducting research, social scientists must try to understand others' views of reality and the subjective aspects of their experiences, including their symbols, values, attitudes, and beliefs.

Symbolic Interactionist Theories of Social Problems

A basic premise of symbolic interactionist theories of social problems is that a condition must be *defined or recognized* as a social problem for it to *be* a social problem. Three symbolic interactionist theories of social problems are based on this general premise.

Blumer's Stages of a Social Problem. Herbert Blumer (1971) suggested that social problems develop in stages. First, social problems pass through the stage of *societal recognition*—the process by which a social problem, for example, drunk driving, is "born." Drunk driving wasn't illegal until 1939, when Indiana passed the first state law regulating alcohol consumption and driving (Indiana State Government 2013). Second, *social legitimation* takes place when the social problem achieves recognition by the larger community, including the media, schools, and churches. As the visibility of traffic fatalities associated with alcohol increased, so did the legitimation of drunk driving as a social problem. The next stage in the development of a social problem involves *mobilization for action*, which occurs when individuals and groups, such as Mothers against Drunk Driving, become concerned about how to respond to the social condition. This mobilization leads to the *development and implementation of an official plan* for dealing with the problem, involving, for example, highway checkpoints, lower legal blood-alcohol levels, and tougher regulations for driving drunk.

Blumer's stage development view of social problems is helpful in tracing the development of social problems. For example, although sexual harassment and date rape occurred throughout the 20th century, these issues did not begin to receive recognition as social problems until the 1970s. Social legitimation of these problems was achieved when high schools, colleges, churches, employers, and the media recognized their existence. Organized social groups mobilized to develop and implement plans to deal with these problems. Groups successfully lobbied for the enactment of laws against sexual harassment and the enforcement of sanctions against violators of these laws. Groups also mobilized to provide educational seminars on date rape for high school and college students and to offer support services to victims of date rape.

Some disagree with the symbolic interactionist view that social problems exist only if they are recognized. According to this view, individuals who were victims of date rape in the 1960s may be considered victims of a problem, even though date rape was not recognized as a social problem at that time.

Labeling Theory. Labeling theory, a major symbolic interactionist theory of social problems, suggests that a social condition or group is viewed as problematic if it is labeled as such. According to labeling theory, resolving social problems sometimes involves changing the meanings and definitions that are attributed to people and situations. For example, so long as teenagers define drinking alcohol as "cool" and "fun," they will continue to abuse alcohol. So long as our society defines providing sex education and contraceptives to teenagers as inappropriate or immoral, the teenage pregnancy rate in the United States will continue to be higher than that in other industrialized nations. Individuals who label their own cell phone use while driving as safe will continue to use their cell phones as they drive, endangering their own lives and the lives of others.

Social Constructionism. Social constructionism is another symbolic interactionist theory of social problems. Similar to labeling theorists and symbolic interactionism in general, social constructionists argue that individuals who interpret the social world around them socially construct reality. Society, therefore, is a social creation rather than an objective given. As such, social constructionists often question the origin and evolution of social problems. For example, social constructionist theory has been used to

> analyze the history of the temperance and prohibition movements[,]…the rise of alcoholism as a disease movement in the post-prohibition era[,]…and the crusade against drinking and driving in the 1980s in the United States…. These studies [each] analyzed the shifts in social meanings attributed to alcohol beverage use and to problems within the changing landscapes of social, economic, and political power relationships in American society. (Herd 2011, p. 7)

Central to this idea of the social construction of social problems are the media, universities, research institutes, and government agencies, which are often responsible for the public's initial "take" on the problem under discussion.

Table 1.3 summarizes and compares the major theoretical perspectives, their criticisms, and social policy recommendations as they relate to social problems. The study of social

TABLE 1.3 **Comparison of Theoretical Perspectives**

	Structural Functionalism	Conflict Theory	Symbolic Interactionism
Representative theorists	Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, Robert Merton	Karl Marx Ralf Dahrendorf	George H. Mead, Charles Cooley, Erving Goffman
Society	Society is a set of interrelated parts; cultural consensus exists and leads to social order; natural state of society—balance and harmony.	Society is marked by power struggles over scarce resources; inequities result in conflict; social change is inevitable; natural state of society—imbalance.	Society is a network of interlocking roles; social order is constructed through interaction as individuals, through shared meaning, making sense out of their social world.
Individuals	Individuals are socialized by society's institutions; socialization is the process by which social control is exerted; people need society and its institutions.	People are inherently good but are corrupted by society and its economic structure; institutions are controlled by groups with power; "order" is part of the illusion.	Humans are interpretive and interactive; they are constantly changing as their "social beings" emerge and are molded by changing circumstances.
Cause of social problems?	Rapid social change; social disorganization that disrupts the harmony and balance; inadequate socialization and/or weak institutions.	Inequality; the dominance of groups of people over other groups of people; oppression and exploitation; competition between groups.	Different interpretations of roles; labeling of individuals, groups, or behaviors as deviant; definition of an objective condition as a social problem.
Social policy/ solutions	Repair weak institutions; assure proper socialization; cultivate a strong collective sense of right and wrong.	Minimize competition; create an equitable system for the distribution of resources.	Reduce impact of labeling and associated stigmatization; alter definitions of what is defined as a social problem.
Criticisms	Called "sunshine sociology"; supports the maintenance of the status quo; needs to ask "functional for whom?"; does not deal with issues of power and conflict; incorrectly assumes a consensus.	Utopian model; Marxist states have failed; denies existence of cooperation and equitable exchange; cannot explain cohesion and harmony.	Concentrates on micro issues only; fails to link micro issues to macro-level concerns; too psychological in its approach; assumes label amplifies problem.

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Each chapter in this book contains a *Social Problems Research Up Close* box that describes a research study that examines some aspect of a social problem and is presented in a report, book, or journal. Academic sociologists, those teaching at community colleges, colleges, or universities, as well as other social scientists, primarily rely on journal articles as the means to exchange ideas and information. Some examples of the more prestigious journals in sociology include the *American Sociological Review*, the *American Journal of Sociology*, and *Social Forces*. Most journal articles begin with *an introduction and review of the literature*. Here, the investigator examines previous research on the topic, identifies specific research areas, and otherwise "sets the stage" for the reader. Often in this section, research hypotheses are set forth, if applicable. A researcher, for example, might hypothesize that the sexual behavior of adolescents has changed over the years as a consequence of increased fear of sexually transmitted diseases and that such changes vary on the basis of sex.

The next major section of a journal article is *sample and methods*. In this section, an investigator describes how the research sample was selected, the characteristics of the research sample, the details of how the research was conducted, and how the data were analyzed (see Appendix). Using the sample research question, a sociologist might obtain data from the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This self-administered questionnaire is distributed biennially to more than 10,000 high school students across the United States.

The final section of a journal article includes the *findings and conclusions*. The findings of a study describe the results, that is, what the researcher found as a result of the investigation. Findings are then discussed within the context of the hypotheses and the conclusions that can be drawn. Often, research results are presented in tabular form. Reading tables carefully is an important part of drawing accurate conclusions about the research hypotheses. In reading a table, you should follow the steps listed here (see the table within this box):

1. *Read the title of the table and make sure that you understand what the table contains.* The title of the table indicates the unit of analysis (high school students), the dependent variable (sexual risk behaviors), the independent variables (sex and year), and what the numbers represent (percentages).

2. *Read the information contained at the bottom of the table, including the source and any other explanatory information.* For example, the information at the bottom of this table indicates that the data are from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, that "sexually active" was defined as having intercourse in the last three months, and that data on condom use were only from those students who were defined as being currently sexually active.

3. *Examine the row and column headings.* This table looks at the percentage of males and females, over four years, who reported ever having sexual intercourse, having four or more sex partners in a lifetime, being currently sexually active, and using condoms during the last sexual intercourse.

4. *Thoroughly and carefully examine the data in the table, looking for patterns between variables.* As indicated in the table, compared to 2013, fewer high school males engaged in risky behaviors than in 2015 with the exception of condom use, which declined over the time period. In the same year females report a lower rate of ever having sexual intercourse than in the

problems is based on research as well as on theory, however. Indeed, research and theory are intricately related. As Wilson (1983) stated:

> Most of us think of theorizing as quite divorced from the business of gathering facts. It seems to require an abstractness of thought remote from the practical activity of empirical research. But theory building is not a separate activity within sociology. Without theory, the empirical researcher would find it impossible to decide what to observe, how to observe it, or what to make of the observations. (p. 1)

Social Problems Research

Most students taking a course in social problems will not become researchers or conduct research on social problems. Nevertheless, we are all consumers of research that is reported in the media. Politicians, social activist groups, and organizations attempt to justify their decisions, actions, and positions by citing research results. As consumers of research, we need to understand that our personal experiences and casual observations are less reliable

previous three time periods. In 2013 females report the highest rate of four or more lifetime sex partners. Comparing 2009 to 2015, there is a meaningful decrease in the percent of females who report being sexually active and the percent reporting condom use during last intercourse.

5. *Use the information you have gathered in step 4 to address the hypotheses.* Clearly, sexual practices, as hypothesized, have changed over time. For example, contrary to expectations, both males and females, when we compare data from 2009 to 2015, report a general decrease in condom use during sexual intercourse. Furthermore, the percentage of males and females reporting four or more sex partners has also decreased during the same time period. Look at the table and see what patterns you detect, including how these patterns address the hypothesis.

6. *Draw conclusions consistent with the information presented.* From the table, can we conclude that sexual practices have changed over time? The answer is probably yes, although the limitations of the survey, the sample, and the measurement techniques used always should be considered. Can we conclude that the observed changes are a consequence of the fear of sexually transmitted diseases? The answer is *no,* and not just because of the results. Having no measure of fear of sexually transmitted diseases over the time period studied, we are unable to come to such a conclusion. More information, from a variety of sources, is needed. The use of multiple methods and approaches to study a social phenomenon is called *triangulation.*

Percentages of High School Students Reporting Sexually Risky Behaviors, by Sex and Survey Year

Survey Year	Ever Had Sexual Intercourse	Four or More Sex Partners during Lifetime	Currently Sexually Active*	Condom Used during Last Intercourse†
Males				
2009	46.1	16.2	32.6	70.4
2011	49.2	17.8	34.2	67.0
2013	47.5	16.8	32.7	65.8
2015	43.2	14.1	30.3	61.5
Females				
2009	45.7	11.2	35.7	57.0
2011	45.6	12.6	34.2	53.6
2013	46.0	13.2	35.2	53.1
2015	39.2	8.8	29.8	52.0

*Sexual intercourse during the three months preceding the survey.
†Among currently sexually active students.
SOURCES: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016.

than generalizations based on systematic research. One strength of scientific research is that it is subjected to critical examination by other researchers (see this chapter's *Social Problems Research Up Close* feature). The more you understand how research is done, the better able you will be to critically examine and question research rather than to passively consume research findings. In the remainder of this section, we discuss the stages of conducting a research study and the various methods of research that sociologists use.

Stages of Conducting a Research Study

Sociologists progress through various stages in conducting research on a social problem. In this section, we describe the first four stages: (1) formulating a research question, (2) reviewing the literature, (3) defining variables, and (4) formulating a hypothesis.

Formulating a Research Question. A research study usually begins with a research question. Where do research questions originate? How does a particular researcher come to ask a particular research question? In some cases, researchers have a personal

> The more you understand how research is done, the better able you will be to critically examine and question research rather than to passively consume research findings.

interest in a specific topic because of their own life experiences. For example, a researcher who has experienced spouse abuse may wish to do research on such questions as "What factors are associated with domestic violence?" and "How helpful are battered women's shelters in helping abused women break the cycle of abuse in their lives?" Other researchers may ask a particular research question because of their personal values—their concern for humanity and the desire to improve human life. Researchers may also want to test a particular sociological theory, or some aspect of it, to establish its validity or conduct studies to evaluate the effect of a social policy or program. Research questions may also be formulated by the concerns of community groups and social activist organizations in collaboration with academic researchers. Government and industry also hire researchers to answer questions such as "How many vehicle crashes are caused by 'distracted driving' involving the use of cell phones?" and "What types of cell phone technologies can prevent the use of cell phones while driving?"

Reviewing the Literature.   After a research question is formulated, researchers review the published material on the topic to find out what is already known about it. Reviewing the literature also provides researchers with ideas about how to conduct their research and helps them formulate new research questions. A literature review serves as an evaluation tool, allowing a comparison of research findings and other sources of information, such as expert opinions, political claims, and journalistic reports.

WHAT do you THINK?

In a free society, there must be freedom of information. That is why the U.S. Constitution and, more specifically, the First Amendment protect journalists' sources. If journalists are compelled to reveal their sources, their sources may be unwilling to share information, which would jeopardize the public's right to know. A journalist cannot reveal information given in confidence without permission from the source or a court order. Do you think sociologists should be granted the same protections as journalists? If a reporter at your school newspaper uncovered a scandal at your university, should he or she be protected by the First Amendment?

Defining Variables.   A **variable** is any measurable event, characteristic, or property that varies or is subject to change. Researchers must operationally define the variables they study. An *operational definition* specifies how a variable is to be measured. For example, an operational definition of the variable "religiosity" might be the number of times the respondent reports going to church or synagogue. Another operational definition of "religiosity" might be the respondent's answer to the question "How important is religion in your life?" (for example, 1 is not important; 2 is somewhat important; 3 is very important).

Operational definitions are particularly important for defining variables that cannot be directly observed. For example, researchers cannot directly observe concepts such as "mental illness," "sexual harassment," "child neglect," "job satisfaction," and "drug abuse." Nor can researchers directly observe perceptions, values, and attitudes.

variable Any measurable event, characteristic, or property that varies or is subject to change.

hypothesis A prediction or educated guess about how one variable is related to another variable.

dependent variable The variable that researchers want to explain; that is, it is the variable of interest.

independent variable The variable that is expected to explain change in the dependent variable.

Formulating a Hypothesis.   After defining the research variables, researchers may formulate a **hypothesis,** which is a prediction or educated guess about how one variable is related to another variable. The **dependent variable** is the variable that researchers want to explain; that is, it is the variable of interest. The **independent variable** is the variable that is expected to explain change in the dependent variable. In formulating a hypothesis, researchers predict how the independent variable affects the dependent variable. For example, Kmec (2003) investigated the impact of segregated work environments on minority wages, concluding that "minority concentration in different jobs, occupations, and establishments is a considerable social problem because it perpetuates racial wage inequality" (p. 55). In this example, the independent variable is workplace segregation, and the dependent variable is wages.

Arctic Circle

Panel 1: "99% OF PEOPLE SURVEYED WERE LONELY AND WANTED SOMEONE TO TALK TO."

Panel 2: DUH. YEAH...

Panel 3: ...THEY ARE THE ONLY PEOPLE WHO RESPOND TO TELEPHONE SURVEYS.

Methods of Data Collection

After identifying a research topic, reviewing the literature, defining the variables, and developing hypotheses, researchers decide which method of data collection to use. Alternatives include experiments, surveys, field research, and secondary data.

Experiments. **Experiments** involve manipulating the independent variable to determine how it affects the dependent variable. Experiments require one or more experimental groups that are exposed to the experimental treatment(s) and a control group that is not exposed. After a researcher randomly assigns participants to either an experimental group or a control group, the researcher measures the dependent variable. After the experimental groups are exposed to the treatment, the researcher measures the dependent variable again. If participants have been randomly assigned to the different groups, the researcher may conclude that any difference in the dependent variable among the groups is due to the effect of the independent variable.

An example of a "social problems" experiment on poverty would be to provide welfare payments to one group of unemployed single mothers (experimental group) and no such payments to another group of unemployed single mothers (control group). The independent variable would be welfare payments; the dependent variable would be employment. The researcher's hypothesis could be that mothers in the experimental group would be less likely to have a job after 12 months than mothers in the control group.

The major strength of the experimental method is that it provides evidence for causal relationships, that is, how one variable affects another. A primary weakness is that experiments are often conducted on small samples, often in artificial laboratory settings; thus, the findings may not be generalized to other people in natural settings.

Surveys. **Survey research** involves eliciting information from respondents through questions. An important part of survey research is selecting a sample of those to be questioned. A **sample** is a portion of the population, selected to be representative so that the information from the sample can be generalized to a larger population. For example, instead of asking all middle school children about their delinquent activity, the researcher would ask a representative sample of them and assume that those who were not questioned would give similar responses. After selecting a representative sample, survey researchers either interview people, ask them to complete written questionnaires, or elicit responses to research questions through web-based surveys. Some surveys are conducted annually or every other year so that researchers can observe changes in responses over time. This chapter's *Self and Society* feature allows you to voice your opinion on various social issues through the use of a written questionnaire. After completing the survey you can compare your responses to a national sample of first-year college students.

Interviews. In interview survey research, trained interviewers ask respondents a series of questions and make written notes about or tape-record the respondents' answers. Interviews may be conducted over the phone or face-to-face.

experiments Manipulating the independent variable to determine how it affects the dependent variable. Experiments require one or more experimental groups that are exposed to the experimental treatment(s) and a control group that is not exposed.

survey research Eliciting information from respondents through questions.

sample A portion of the population, selected to be representative so that the information from the sample can be generalized to a larger population.

Social Problems Research | **19**

Some of us know early in life exactly what we want to be, or at least what we think we want to be, when we "grow up." Starting in high school and continuing in college, students are often frantic about what to "do." I see it all the time as a sociology student adviser. "I really love sociology but what can I do with a sociology degree?" Actually, I don't find that question particularly surprising. Few of us grow up hearing about sociology or knowing what it is. Even I didn't consciously choose to be a sociologist as one might choose a career in law or nursing, or increasingly, in business and computer science.

There is a theory called "drift theory," which argues that delinquency is a "relatively inarticulate oral tradition" (Matza 1990, p. 52), in which youths drift back and forth between conforming and nonconforming behavior.

Although believing strongly and hoping fervently that sociology is more than a "relatively inarticulate oral tradition," I think the concept of drift applied to me. I had no vision, no calling, no great quest to be a sociologist. I don't even remember, although this was many years ago, the first time I was aware of the fact that such creatures existed.

But as a child of 13, I left the safety and security of suburbia to take a train to downtown Cleveland, Ohio, to an area called Hough to investigate why some people, who were very, very different than me, were burning down a town. It was, as you may know, part of the urban riots and civil rights protests of the 1960s. I suppose, looking back, it was my first field research.

Throughout high school, I consciously drifted in and out of various cliques, fascinated by each, and at Kent State University, where I did my undergraduate work, I was faced with the reality of anti–Vietnam War demonstrations not unlike the many student demonstrations of today (e.g., Occupy Wall Street). There was one difference, though. At Kent State, four students were killed and nine injured by Ohio National Guardsmen called in to quiet the protests.

I think these events, as various events you could isolate in your own lives, were instrumental in molding me as a person and, eventually, as a sociologist. Although, as I said, I had no burning desire to be a sociologist growing up, today I am possessed by a "very special kind of passion" (Berger 1963, p. 12), driven by a demon, perhaps the one that led me to Hough so many years ago.

I feel privileged and honored to be a sociologist and to be able to do what I want to do—and to get paid for it.

The beauty of sociology, among other things, is that it provides a framework—a lens, if you will—to problem-solve within a variety of venues: social service departments; consulting firms; hospitals; federal, county, or local government agencies; nursing homes and rehabilitation facilities; law offices; and so forth. Or, as I did, you might want to become an academic sociologist.

Not only will you find sociologists working in almost every imaginable location, the list of what they do is endless. As you may know, you can find sociology courses on race, class, and gender; social movements; family; criminology; sexuality; mass media; religion; the environment; education; health; social psychology; aging; immigration; . . . and yes, social problems. We have such diversity of topics because we do such a variety of jobs. Would you like to be a Foreign Affairs Officer and work in the State Department? Among other degrees listed for this entry-level position is a bachelor's degree in sociology (U.S. Department of State 2013).

But then there's that other pesky problem—what about pay? I know you're all smart enough to know that income in itself is not predictive of job satisfaction. You could earn $249,999 a year, a lot of money to you and me, but if you never saw your spouse/partner, developed ulcers from the stress, worked in a life-threatening environment, and had little job security, I hope most of you would run the other way. So let's take a more balanced approach.

As discussed in the *Wall Street Journal* (2013) and *Forbes* (Smith 2013), an annual listing of the 200 "Best and Worst Jobs" indicate that sociologists are near the top, checking in at number 19. Imagine that you are number 19 out of 200 students graduating from your high school class. Not bad. And the best part is that these calculations were based on official data (e.g., from the U.S. Department of Labor) in *five areas*: (1) environmental factors (e.g., stamina required, competitiveness), (2) income, (3) outlook (e.g., expected employment growth), (4) physical demands (e.g., requires lifting), and (5) stress (e.g., deadlines, travel) (Career Cast 2013).

I admit it would be nice to be number one but right now, I couldn't be happier with number 19.

SOURCE: Mooney 2015.

One advantage of interview research is that researchers are able to clarify questions for respondents and follow up on answers to particular questions. Researchers often conduct face-to-face interviews with groups of individuals who might otherwise be inaccessible. For example, some AIDS-related research attempts to assess the degree to which individuals engage in behavior that places them at high risk for transmitting or contracting HIV. Street youth and intravenous drug users, both high-risk groups for HIV infection, may not have a telephone or address because of their transient lifestyle. These

groups may be accessible, however, if the researcher locates their hangouts and conducts face-to-face interviews.

The most serious disadvantages of interview research are cost and the lack of privacy and anonymity. Respondents may feel embarrassed or threatened when asked questions that relate to personal issues such as drug use, domestic violence, and sexual behavior. As a result, some respondents may choose not to participate in interview research on sensitive topics. Those who do participate may conceal or alter information or give socially desirable answers to the interviewer's questions (e.g., "No, I do not use drugs" or "No, I do not text while driving.").

Questionnaires. Instead of conducting personal or phone interviews, researchers may develop questionnaires that they either mail, post online, or give to a sample of respondents. Questionnaire research offers the advantages of being less expensive and less time-consuming than face-to-face or telephone surveys. Questionnaire research also provides privacy and anonymity to the research participants, thus increasing the likelihood that respondents will provide truthful answers.

The major disadvantage of mail or online questionnaires is that it is difficult to obtain an adequate response rate. Many people do not want to take the time or make the effort to complete a questionnaire. Others may be unable to read and understand the questionnaire.

Web-based surveys. In recent years, technological know-how and the expansion of the Internet have facilitated the use of online surveys. Web-based surveys, although still less common than interviews and questionnaires, are growing in popularity and are thought by some to reduce many of the problems associated with traditional survey research (Farrell and Petersen 2010). For example, the response rate of telephone surveys has been declining as potential respondents have caller ID, unlisted telephone numbers, answering machines, or no home (i.e., landline) telephone (Farrell and Petersen 2010). On the other hand, the use of and access to the Internet continues to grow. In 2016, the number of Americans connected to the Internet was higher than in any other single year (Internet Live 2017).

Field Research. **Field research** involves observing and studying social behavior in settings in which it occurs naturally. Two types of field research are participant observation and nonparticipant observation.

In *participant observation research*, researchers participate in the phenomenon being studied so as to obtain an insider's perspective on the people and/or behavior being observed. Palacios and Fenwick (2003), two criminologists, attended dozens of raves over a 15-month period to investigate the South Florida drug culture. In *nonparticipant observation research*, researchers observe the phenomenon being studied without actively participating in the group or the activity. For example, Simi and Futrell (2009) studied white power activists by observing and talking to organizational members but did not participate in any of their organized activities.

Sometimes sociologists conduct in-depth detailed analyses or case studies of an individual, group, or event. For example, Fleming (2003) conducted a case study of young auto thieves in British Columbia. He found that, unlike professional thieves, the teenagers' behavior was primarily motivated by thrill seeking—driving fast, the rush of a possible police pursuit, and the prospect of getting caught.

The main advantage of field research on social problems is that it provides detailed information about the values, rituals, norms, behaviors, symbols, beliefs, and emotions of those being studied. A potential problem with field research is that the researcher's observations may be biased (e.g., the researcher becomes too involved in the group to be objective). In addition, because field research is usually based on small samples, the findings may not be generalizable.

Secondary Data Research. Sometimes researchers analyze secondary data, which are data that other researchers or government agencies have already collected or that exist in forms such as historical documents, police reports, school records, and official records

field research Observing and studying social behavior in settings in which it occurs naturally.

of marriages, births, and deaths. A major advantage of using secondary data in studying social problems is that the data are readily accessible, so researchers avoid the time and expense of collecting their own data. Secondary data are also often based on large representative samples. The disadvantage of secondary data is that researchers are limited to the data already collected.

Ten Good Reasons to Read This Book

Most students reading this book are not majoring in sociology and do not plan to pursue sociology as a profession. So, why should students take a course on social problems? How can reading this textbook about social problems benefit you?

1. *Understanding that the social world is too complex to be explained by just one theory will expand your thinking about how the world operates.* For example, juvenile delinquency doesn't have just one cause—it is linked to (1) an increased number of youths living in inner-city neighborhoods with little or no parental supervision (social disorganization theory); (2) young people having no legitimate means of acquiring material wealth (anomie theory); (3) youths being angry and frustrated at the inequality and racism in our society (conflict theory); and (4) teachers regarding youths as "no good" and treating them accordingly (labeling theory).

2. *Developing a sociological imagination will help you see the link between your personal life and the social world in which you live.* In a society that values personal responsibility, there is a tendency to define failure and success as consequences of individual free will. The sociological imagination enables us to understand how social forces influence our personal misfortunes and failures, and contribute to personal successes and achievements.

3. *Understanding globalization can help you become a safe, successful, and productive world citizen.* Social problems cross national boundaries. Problems such as obesity, war, climate change, human trafficking, and overpopulation are global problems. Problems that originate in one part of the world may affect other parts of the world, and may be caused by social policies in other nations. Thus, understanding social problems requires consideration of the global interconnectedness of the world. And solving today's social problems requires collective action among citizens across the globe. To better prepare students for a globalized world, many colleges and universities have made changes to the curriculum such as adding new general education or core curriculum courses on global concerns and perspectives, revamping existing courses to increase emphasis on global issues, and offering a "global certificate" that students can earn by completing a certain number of courses with an international focus (Wilhelm 2012).

WHAT
do you
THINK?

Some colleges and universities have instituted policies that require students to take one or more global courses—courses with a global or international focus—in order to graduate. Do you think colleges and universities should require some minimum number of global courses for undergraduates? Why or why not?

4. *Understanding the difficulty involved in "fixing" social problems will help you make decisions about your own actions, for example, who you vote for or what charity you donate money to.* It is important to recognize that "fixing" social problems is a very difficult and complex enterprise. One source of this difficulty is that we don't all agree on what the problems are. We also don't agree on what the root causes are of social problems. Is the problem of gun violence in the United States a problem caused by gun availability? Violence in the media? A broken mental health care system? Masculine gender norms? If we socialized boys to be more nurturing and gentle, rather than aggressive and competitive, we might reduce gun violence, but we would also potentially create a generation of boys who would not want to sign up for combat duties in the military, and our armed forces would not have enough

recruits. Thus, solving one social problem (gun violence) may create another social problem (too few military recruits). It should also be noted that although some would see low military recruitment as a problem, others would see it as a positive step toward a less militaristic society.

5. *Although this is a social problems book, it may actually make you more, rather than less, optimistic.* Yes, all the problems discussed in the book are real, and they may seem insurmountable, but they aren't. You'll read about positive social change (for example, the number of people who smoke cigarettes in the United States has dramatically dropped, as have rates of homophobia, racism, and sexism). Life expectancy has increased, and more people go to college than ever before. Change for the better can and does happen.

6. *Knowledge is empowering.* Social problems can be frightening, in part, because most people know very little about them beyond what they hear on the news or from their friends "Fake news" can make problems seem worse than they are. The more accurate the information you have, the more you will realize that we, as a society, have the power to solve the problems, and the less alienated you will feel.

7. *The* Self and Society *exercises increase self-awareness and allow you to position yourself within the social landscape.* For example, earlier in this chapter, you had the opportunity to assess your personal values and to compare your responses to a national sample of first-year college students.

8. The Human Side *features make you a more empathetic and compassionate human being by personalizing the topic at hand.* The study of social problems is always about the quality of life of individuals. By conveying the private pain and personal triumphs associated with social problems, we hope to elicit a level of understanding that may not be attained through the academic study of social problems alone. The Human Side in this chapter highlights one of the author's paths to becoming a sociologist.

9. *The* Social Problems Research Up Close *features teach you the basics of scientific inquiry, making you a smarter consumer of "pop" sociology, psychology, anthropology, and the like.* These boxes demonstrate the scientific enterprise, from theory and data collection to findings and conclusions. Examples of research topics featured in later chapters of this book include the portrayal of smoking in popular films, polyamory and poly families, gender and the Internet, how the fossil fuel industry has deceived the public about climate change, responses to masculinity threats, and military suicides.

10. *Learning about social problems and their structural and cultural origins helps you—individually or collectively—make a difference in the world.* Individuals can make a difference in society through the choices they make. You may choose to vote for one candidate over another, demand the right to reproductive choice or protest government policies that permit it, drive drunk or stop a friend from driving drunk, repeat a homophobic or racist joke or chastise the person who tells it, and practice safe sex or risk the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases.

Collective social action is another, often more powerful way to make a difference. You may choose to create change by participating in a **social movement**—an organized group of individuals with a common purpose of promoting or resisting social change through collective action. Some people believe that, to promote social change, one must be in a position of political power and/or have large financial resources. However, the most important prerequisite for becoming actively involved in improving levels of social well-being may be genuine concern and dedication to a social "cause."

Understanding Social Problems

At the end of each chapter, we offer a section with a title that begins with "Understanding…," in which we reemphasize the social origin of the problem being discussed, the consequences, and the alternative social solutions. Our hope is that readers will end each chapter with a "sociological imagination" view of the problem and with idea of how, as a society, we might approach a solution.

social movement An organized group of individuals with a common purpose of promoting or resisting social change through collective action.

Sociologists have been studying social problems since the Industrial Revolution. Industrialization brought about massive social changes: The influence of religion declined, and families became smaller and moved from traditional, rural communities to urban settings. These and other changes have been associated with increases in crime, pollution, divorce, and juvenile delinquency. As these social problems became more widespread, the need to understand their origins and possible solutions became more urgent. The field of sociology developed in response to this urgency. Social problems provided the initial impetus for the development of the field of sociology and continue to be a major focus of sociology.

There is no single agreed-on definition of what constitutes a social problem. Most sociologists agree, however, that all social problems share two important elements: an objective social condition and a subjective interpretation of that condition. Each of the three major theoretical perspectives in sociology—structural-functionalist, conflict, and symbolic interactionist—has its own notion of the causes, consequences, and solutions of social problems.

Chapter Review

- **What is a social problem?**
Social problems are defined by a combination of objective and subjective criteria. The objective element of a social problem refers to the existence of a social condition; the subjective element of a social problem refers to the belief that a particular social condition is harmful to society or to a segment of society and that it should and can be changed. By combining these objective and subjective elements, we arrive at the following definition: A social problem is a social condition that a segment of society views as harmful to members of society and in need of remedy.

- **What is meant by the structure of society?**
The structure of a society refers to the way society is organized.

- **What are the components of the structure of society?**
The components are institutions, social groups, statuses, and roles. Institutions are an established and enduring pattern of social relationships and include family, religion, politics, economics, and education. Social groups are defined as two or more people who have a common identity, interact, and form a social relationship. A status is a position that a person occupies within a social group and that can be achieved or ascribed. Every status is associated with many roles, or the set of rights, obligations, and expectations associated with a status.

- **What is meant by the culture of society?**
Whereas *social structure* refers to the organization of society, *culture* refers to the meanings and ways of life that characterize a society.

- **What are the components of the culture of society?**
The components are beliefs, values, norms, and symbols. *Beliefs* refer to definitions and explanations about what is assumed to be true. *Values* are social agreements about what is considered good and bad, right and wrong, desirable and undesirable. *Norms* are socially defined rules of

behavior. Norms serve as guidelines for our behavior and for our expectations of the behavior of others. Finally, a *symbol* is something that represents something else.

- **What is the sociological imagination, and why is it important?**
The *sociological imagination*, a term that C. Wright Mills (1959) developed, refers to the ability to see the connections between our personal lives and the social world in which we live. It is important because, when we use our sociological imagination, we are able to distinguish between "private troubles" and "public issues" and to see connections between the events and conditions of our lives and the social and historical context in which we live.

- **What are the differences between the three sociological perspectives?**
According to structural functionalism, society is a system of interconnected parts that work together in harmony to maintain a state of balance and social equilibrium for the whole. The conflict perspective views society as composed of different groups and interests competing for power and resources. Symbolic interactionism reflects the microsociological perspective and emphasizes that human behavior is influenced by definitions and meanings that are created and maintained through symbolic interaction with others.

- **What are the first four stages of a research study?**
The first four stages of a research study are formulating a research question, reviewing the literature, defining variables, and formulating a hypothesis.

- **How do the various research methods differ from one another?**
Experiments involve manipulating the independent variable to determine how it affects the dependent variable. Survey research involves eliciting information from respondents through questions. Field research involves observing and studying social behavior in settings in which

it occurs naturally. Secondary data are data that other researchers or government agencies have already collected or that exist in forms such as historical documents, police reports, school records, and official records of marriages, births, and deaths.

• **What is a social movement?**
Social movements are one means by which social change is realized. A social movement is an organized group of individuals with a common purpose to either promote or resist social change through collective action.

Test Yourself

1. Definitions of social problems are clear and unambiguous.
   a. True
   b. False
2. The social structure of society contains
   a. statuses and roles.
   b. institutions and norms.
   c. sanctions and social groups.
   d. values and beliefs.
3. The culture of society refers to its meaning and the ways of life of its members.
   a. True
   b. False
4. Alienation
   a. refers to a sense of normlessness.
   b. is focused on by symbolic interactionists.
   c. can be defined as the powerlessness and meaninglessness in people's lives.
   d. is a manifest function of society.
5. Blumer's stages of social problems begin with
   a. mobilization for action.
   b. societal recognition.
   c. social legitimation.
   d. development and implementation of a plan.
6. The independent variable comes first in time (i.e., it precedes the dependent variable).
   a. True
   b. False
7. The third stage in defining a research study is
   a. formulating a hypothesis.
   b. reviewing the literature.
   c. defining the variables.
   d. formulating a research question.
8. A sample is a subgroup of the population—the group to whom you actually give the questionnaire.
   a. True
   b. False
9. Studying police behavior by riding along with patrol officers would be an example of
   a. participant observation.
   b. nonparticipant observation.
   c. field research.
   d. both a and c.
10. Students benefit from reading this book because it
    a. provides global coverage of social problems.
    b. highlights social problems research.
    c. encourages students to take pro-social action.
    d. all of the above

Answers: 1. B; 2. A; 3. A; 4. C; 5. B; 6. A; 7. C; 8. A; 9. D; 10. D.

Key Terms

achieved status   7
alienation   13
anomie   11
ascribed status   7
beliefs   8
culture   7
dependent variable   18
experiments   19
field research   21
hypothesis   18
independent variable   18

institution   6
latent functions   11
manifest functions   11
norms   8
objective element of a social problem   5
primary groups   7
roles   7
sample   19
sanctions   8
secondary groups   7
social group   7

social movement   23
social problem   5
sociological imagination   10
status   7
structure   6
subjective element of a social problem   5
survey research   19
symbol   9
theory   10
values   8
variable   18

> "America's health care system is neither healthy, caring, nor a system."
>
> **WALTER CRONKITE**

2

Physical and Mental Health and Health Care

Chapter Outline

The Global Context: Health and Illness around the World

● **Social Problems Research Up Close:** Are Americans the Healthiest Population in the World?

Mental Illness: The Hidden Epidemic

● **Self and Society:** Warning Signs for Mental Illness

Sociological Theories of Illness and Health Care

Social Factors and Lifestyle Behaviors Associated with Health and Illness

U.S. Health Care: An Overview

● **The Human Side:** Testimony from Medical Marijuana Patients

Problems in U.S. Health Care

Strategies for Action: Improving Health and Health Care

● **Animals and Society:** Improving Mental Health through Animal-Assisted Therapy

Understanding Problems of Illness and Health Care

Chapter Review

Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will be able to…

1 Compare life expectancy and mortality in low, middle, and high-income countries, and identify ways in which globalization affects health and health care.

2 Describe the prevalence, impact, and causes of mental illness.

3 Explain how conflict theory, structural-functionalism, and symbolic interactionism help us understand illness and health care.

4 Identify five lifestyle behaviors that influence health and give examples of how socioeconomic status, gender, race, and ethnicity affect health.

5 Identify and describe the various types of private insurance plans and public health care insurance programs in the United States and differentiate between allopathic medicine and complementary and alternative medicine.

6 Critically evaluate health care in the United States on the dimensions of health insurance coverage, cost of health care, and adequacy of mental health care.

7 Describe efforts to improve health in low- and middle-income countries, fight the growing problem of obesity, improve mental health care, and increase access to affordable health care in the United States.

8 Discuss the complexity of factors that affect health and that must be addressed in order to improve the health of a society.

Poverty is an underlying social condition that contributed to the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa.

in 1976, with more Ebola cases and deaths in 2014 than all previous outbreaks combined (World Health Organization 2015a). Containing an Ebola outbreak requires identifying, treating, and isolating people who are infected with the virus, and also finding everyone who had close contact with infected individuals and tracking them for 21 days. Any of these contacts who come down with the disease are isolated from the community and then their contacts are traced, repeating the contact-tracing process.

Public health worker Rebecca Levine flew to Sierra Leone to help implement contact tracing to contain the Ebola outbreak. When Levine arrived at a Ministry of Health office in Sierra Leone, she found that the database she needed was "pretty much in shambles," with many contacts' addresses either missing or vague, like "down by the farm road" (quoted in Cohen and Bonifield 2014). Less than a third of all the contacts in the database had a usable address, making tracking down people who may have come into contact with Ebola-infected individuals a daunting task. According to public health experts, this inability to do complete contact tracing is a major reason that the Ebola outbreak of 2014 spiraled out of control (Cohen and Bonifield 2014).

ONE OF THE MOST widely covered media topics of 2014 was the West African outbreak of Ebola—a virus that is spread through contact with infected bodily fluids or surfaces contaminated with such fluids. The 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa was the largest Ebola outbreak since the virus was first discovered

> One could argue that the study of social problems is, essentially, the study of health problems, as each social problem affects the physical, mental, and social well-being of humans and the social groups of which they are a part.

In this chapter, we emphasize that health problems are not individual problems—they are social problems that have social causes and social outcomes. Social conditions that are responsible for much of the spread of Ebola include poverty, inequality, and inadequate provision of healthcare (Jones 2014). Social outcomes of the Ebola outbreak in Ebola-stricken West African nations included skyrocketing prices of consumer goods and services, school closings, and mental distress associated with loss, fear, anxiety and stress. In the United States, where the risk of contracting Ebola is small, the 2014 West African Ebola outbreak lead to fear, mandatory quarantines for some travelers from West African nations, and proposals to ban some travelers from entering the United States.

In this chapter, we use a sociological approach to physical and mental health issues, examining why some social groups experience more health problems than others and how social forces affect and are affected by health and illness. We also address problems in health care, focusing on issues related to access, cost, and quality of health care.

The World Health Organization (1946) defined **health** as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being" (p. 3). One could argue that the study of social problems is, essentially, the study of health problems, as each social problem affects the physical, mental, and social well-being of humans and the social groups of which they are a part.

The Global Context: Health and Illness around the World

How long can you expect to live? What kinds of health problems might you experience in your lifetime? What are the causes of death that are likely to affect you, and your loved ones? The answers to these questions vary from country to country. In making international comparisons, social scientists commonly classify countries according to their level of economic development. (1) **Developed countries**, also known as *high-income countries*, have relatively high gross national income per capita; (2) **less developed** or **developing countries**, also known as *middle-income countries*, have relatively low gross national income per capita; and (3) **least developed countries** (known as *low-income countries*) are the poorest countries of the world. As we discuss in the following section, how long people live and what causes their death varies across the globe.

Life Expectancy and Mortality in Low-, Middle-, and High-Income Countries

Life expectancy—the average number of years that individuals born in a given year can expect to live—is significantly greater in high-income countries than in low-income countries (see Table 2.1). Life expectancy ranges from a high of 84 (in Japan) to a low of 49 (in Swaziland) (World Bank 2016).

The leading causes of death, or **mortality**, also vary around the world (see Table 2.2). Deaths caused by parasitic and infectious diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, diarrheal diseases, and malaria are much more common in less developed countries compared with the more developed countries. Parasitic and infectious diseases spread more easily in poor and overcrowded housing conditions, and in areas with lack of clean water and sanitation (see also Chapter 6).

Worldwide, nearly two-thirds of deaths are due to noncommunicable diseases, primarily heart disease, stroke, cancer, and respiratory diseases. These noninfectious, nontransmissible diseases are the leading causes of death in wealthy countries such as the United States and are related to tobacco use, physical inactivity, unhealthy diet, and alcohol abuse. In recent decades, noncommunicable diseases—particularly heart disease—have also become leading causes of death in low and middle-income countries, as rising incomes and emerging middle classes in countries such as China and India have led to (1) increased use of tobacco (linked to cancer and respiratory diseases); (2) increased access to automobiles, televisions, and other technologies that contribute to a sedentary lifestyle, and (3) increased consumption of processed foods high in sugar and fat (linked to obesity).

TABLE 2.1 Life Expectancy by Country Income Level, 2014

Country Income Level	Life Expectancy
High	81
Upper middle	74
Lower middle	67
Low	61
WORLD	71

SOURCE: World Bank. 2016a.

health According to the World Health Organization, "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being."

developed countries Countries that have relatively high gross national income per capita, also known as high-income countries.

developing countries Countries that have relatively low gross national income per capita, also known as less developed or middle-income countries.

least developed countries The poorest countries of the world.

life expectancy The average number of years that individuals born in a given year can expect to live.

mortality Death.

TABLE 2.2 Leading Causes of Death, by Country Income Level

Low Income	High Income
1. Respiratory infections	Heart disease
2. HIV/AIDS	Stroke and other cerebrovascular disease
3. Diarrheal diseases	Trachea, bronchus, lung cancers
4. Stroke	Alzheimer's and other dementias
5. Heart disease	Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
6. Malaria	Respiratory infections
7. Preterm birth complications	Colon and rectum cancer
8. Tuberculosis	Diabetes

SOURCE: World Health Organization 2014b.

Data on deaths from international terrorism and tobacco-related deaths in 37 developed and eastern European countries revealed that tobacco-related deaths outnumbered terrorist deaths by about a whopping 5,700 times (Thomson and Wilson 2005). The number of tobacco deaths was equivalent to the impact of a September 11, 2001–type terrorist attack every 14 hours! Given that tobacco-related deaths grossly outnumber terrorism-related deaths, why hasn't the U.S. government waged a "war on tobacco" on a scale similar to its "war on terrorism"?

> When Tanzanian mothers are in labor, they often say to their older children, "I'm going to go and fetch the new baby; it is a dangerous journey and I may not return."

Mortality among Infants and Children. The rates of **infant mortality** (death of live-born infants under 12 months of age), and **under-5 mortality** (death of children under age 5) provide powerful indicators of the health of a population. The *infant mortality rate*, the number of deaths of live-born infants under 1 year of age per 1,000 live births (in any given year), ranges from an average of 5 in high-income nations to 53 in low-income nations (World Health Organization 2015d). The *under-5 mortality rate*, or death rate of children under age 5, similarly is much lower in high-income countries than in low-income countries. Diarrhea, which can lead to life-threatening dehydration, often results from contaminated drinking water and lack of sanitation, or the unavailability of toilets or other hygienic means of disposing of human waste. One-third of the world's population does not have access to adequate sanitation facilities, and one in 10 people on the planet don't have access to safe drinking water (World Health Organization 2015d) (see also Chapter 6).

Maternal Mortality. Women in the United States and other developed countries generally do not experience pregnancy and childbirth as life-threatening. But for women age 15 to 49 in developing countries, **maternal mortality**—death that results from complications associated with pregnancy and childbirth—is a leading cause of death. When Tanzanian mothers are in labor, they often say to their older children, "I'm going to go and fetch the new baby; it is a dangerous journey and I may not return" (Grossman 2009). The top causes of maternal mortality are hemorrhage (severe loss of blood), infection, high blood pressure during pregnancy, and unsafe abortion.

Suppose that you or your partner had a 1 in 40 chance of dying from a pregnancy or childbirth-related cause—the same risk of maternal death that women in low-income countries face (see Table 2.3). Would that knowledge affect your views about (1) having children? (2) using contraception? (3) policies to ensure access to safe abortion?

Rates of maternal mortality show a greater disparity between rich and poor countries than any of the other societal health measures. Nearly all (99 percent) maternal deaths occur in low-income countries (World Health Organization 2014a). High maternal mortality rates in less developed countries are related to poor-quality and inaccessible health care; most women give birth without the assistance of trained personnel. High maternal mortality rates are also linked to malnutrition and poor sanitation and to pregnancy and childbearing at early ages. Women in many countries also lack access to family planning services and/or do not have the support of their male partners to use contraceptive methods such as condoms. Consequently, many women resort to abortion to limit their childbearing, even in countries where abortion is illegal and unsafe.

infant mortality Deaths of live-born infants under 1 year of age.

under-5 mortality Deaths of children under age 5.

maternal mortality Deaths that result from complications associated with pregnancy, childbirth, and unsafe abortion.

TABLE 2.3 **Lifetime Risk of Maternal Mortality by Country income**

	Lifetime Risk of Maternal Mortality
Low Income	1 in 40
Middle Income	1 in 220
High Income	1 in 6,000
United States	1 in 3,800

SOURCE: World Bank 2016b.

Compared with people who live in low-income countries, people in the United States have longer lives and better health. But how does the United States compare with other high-income countries with regard to longevity and health? This chapter's *Social Problems Research Up Close* feature reveals that the United States is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, but it is not one of the healthiest.

Globalization, Health, and Medical Care

Globalization, broadly defined as the growing economic, political, and social interconnectedness among societies throughout the world, has had both positive and negative effects on health and medical care. On the positive side, globalized communications technology is helpful in monitoring and reporting outbreaks of disease, disseminating guidelines for controlling and treating disease, and sharing medical knowledge and research findings (Lee 2003). Global travel and global trade agreements are aspects of globalization that can impact health negatively.

Effects of Global Travel on Health. International travel has become commonplace, with more than 90 million international passengers a year flying into the United States (Berman et al. 2014). Global travel can result in the spread of infectious disease, such as when Thomas Duncan flew to Texas from Liberia—one of three West African countries where a deadly Ebola outbreak in 2014 caused thousands of deaths. Duncan was diagnosed with Ebola and soon after died in a Dallas hospital, where two nurses also came in contact with and later tested positive for the virus. To contain the spread of Ebola, U.S. federal officials ordered health screening for travelers from West Africa arriving in U.S. airports. Passengers who showed symptoms of Ebola (such as an elevated body temperature) and/or who reported possible exposure to Ebola were isolated and monitored to avoid further spread of the Ebola virus.

Effects of Global Trade Agreements on Health. Global trade agreements (see Chapter 7) have expanded the range of goods available to consumers, but at a cost to global health. The international trade of tobacco, alcohol, and sugary drinks and high-calorie processed foods, and the expansion of fast-food chains across the globe, is associated with a worldwide rise in cancer, heart disease, stroke, obesity, and diabetes (Hawkes 2006). Globalization has resulted in rising incomes in the developing world, and although it has improved quality of life for many people, it has also increased access to unhealthy foods and beverages and decreased levels of physical activity. As poor populations move toward the middle class, they can afford to buy televisions, computers, automobiles, and processed foods—products that increase caloric intake and decrease physical activity, leading to increased rates of obesity around the world. Indeed, a new word has emerged to refer to the high prevalence of obesity around the world: **globesity**.

Globesity. Until recently, obesity was a public health problem only in Western industrialized countries. But over the last couple of decades, obesity has become a global problem affecting countries of every income and development level. Since 1980, worldwide obesity has more than doubled. In 2014, more than half of the world's population was either overweight (39 percent) or obese (13 percent) (based on Body Mass Index calculations determined by height and weight) (World Health Organization 2016a). Globesity includes children, too: 41 million children under age 5 are overweight or obese (ibid.). Globally, there are more people who are obese than underweight.

> In general, as countries move up the income scale, rates of obesity increase as well. But in low-income countries, wealthier people are more likely to be overweight, whereas rates of obesity in high-income countries are higher among the poor (Harvard School of Public Health 2013). Why do you think this is so?

> The United States is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, but it is not one of the healthiest.

globalization The growing economic, political, and social interconnectedness among societies throughout the world.

globesity The high prevalence of obesity around the world.

WHAT
do you
THINK?

Many Americans view the United States as the best country in the world, and assume that this means that Americans have the best health of any population in the world. Is this true? The National Institutes of Health asked the National Health Research Council and the Institute of Medicine (2013) to form a panel of experts to study the health of Americans compared with that of populations in other wealthy countries. This Panel on Understanding Cross-National Health Differences Among High-Income Countries included experts from public health, medicine, economics, sociology, and other disciplines. The panel's task was to examine the health of Americans across the lifespan, comparing it with that of other high-income countries, and investigate explanations for why Americans have poorer health outcomes compared with other populations.

Sample and Methods
The panel selected 16 comparable high income, or "peer" countries to compare with the United States on various measures of health and longevity. These countries include Austria, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. The panel relied on secondary data analysis—the analysis of data that have already been collected by other researchers and organizations, including the World Health Organization and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Selected Results
How did the United States compare with its peer countries on measures of health? Let's start with the good news: Compared with people in other industrialized countries, Americans are less likely to smoke and drink heavy alcohol, and they have better control over their cholesterol levels. The United States also has higher rates of cancer screening and survival, and has higher survival after age 75.

But the report's main finding was that despite the fact that the United States spends more on health care per person than any other industrialized country, Americans die sooner and have higher rates of disease or injury. Life expectancy of U.S. men is shorter than for men in any of the other 16 countries, and only one country (Denmark) has a lower life expectancy for women than that of U.S. women. The United States ranked last or near the bottom in nine key areas of health: infant mortality and low birth weight; injuries and homicide; teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections; HIV/AIDS prevalence; drug-related deaths; obesity and diabetes; heart disease; lung disease; and disability. This "U.S. health disadvantage" has been getting worse for three decades, especially among women. And although health outcomes are generally worse among socially disadvantaged members of a population, even advantaged Americans—those who are college educated, upper income, or insured—have poorer health than similar individuals in other industrialized countries.

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medical tourism A global industry that involves traveling, primarily across international borders, for the purpose of obtaining medical care.

mental health Psychological, emotional, and social well-being.

mental illness Refers collectively to all mental disorders, which are characterized by sustained patterns of abnormal thinking, mood (emotions), or behaviors that are accompanied by significant distress and/or impairment in daily functioning.

Medical Tourism. The globalization of medical care involves increased international trade in health products and services. **Medical tourism**—a growing multibillion-dollar global industry—involves traveling across international borders to obtain medical care. Health care consumers travel to other countries for medical care for three primary reasons: (1) to obtain medical treatment that is not available in their home country; (2) to avoid waiting periods for treatment; and/or (3) to save money on the cost of medical treatment. Steve Jobs reportedly traveled to Switzerland for special cancer treatment, and National Football League quarterback Peyton Manning flew to Europe for a stem cell procedure to treat his injured neck (Turner and Hodges 2012). Popular medical tourism destinations that lure health care consumers with competitively priced medical care include Mexico, Singapore, Thailand, South Korea, and India, among other countries. Medical tourism companies offer packages that bundle air travel, ground transportation, hotel accommodations, and guided tours, along with arranging medical treatment, such as organ transplants, dental work, stem cell therapies, cosmetic surgery, reproductive assistance, weight loss surgery, cardiac surgery, and many other medical treatments and services.

Although medical tourism can benefit some patients in providing timely, reduced-cost, quality medical care, there are a number of risks and problems involved. Unlike the highly regulated health care industry in the United States, medical services, products, and facilities in other countries may not be regulated, so quality control is a concern.

The research report offered the following explanations for the U.S. health disadvantage:

- **Health systems.** Americans are more likely to find health care inaccessible or unaffordable. Unlike other industrialized countries, the United States has a relatively large uninsured population and more limited access to health care.
- **Unhealthy behaviors.** Compared with other industrialized populations, Americans have higher rates of prescription and illegal drug abuse, are more likely to use firearms in acts of violence, are less likely to use seat belts, and are more likely to be involved in traffic accidents that involve alcohol. Americans also consume the most calories per person and have the highest obesity rates.
- **Social and economic conditions.** Although the income of Americans is higher on average than in other countries, the United States has higher rates of poverty (especially child poverty), more income inequality, and less social mobility (see also Chapter 6). The United States also lags behind other countries in the education of youth, which also negatively affects health. And compared with other industrialized populations, Americans benefit less from social safety programs that help buffer the adverse health effects of poverty and low educational attainment.
- **Physical and social environment.** The physical environment in most U.S. communities discourages physical activity, as the environment is designed for automobiles rather than pedestrians. Indeed, U.S. adults take the fewest steps of any industrialized nation, averaging slightly over 5,000 steps a day compared with adults in Australia and Switzerland who average nearly 10,000 steps a day (Trust for America's Health 2012). And in the absence of other transportation options, greater reliance on automobiles in the United States contributes to higher traffic fatalities (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine 2013). The social environment adversely affects Americans' health in a number of ways: (1) Americans' unhealthy patterns of food consumption are shaped by the agricultural and food industries, grocery store and restaurant offerings, and marketing; (2) the higher rate of firearm-related deaths in the United States is at least in part due to the fact that firearms are more available in the United States than in peer countries; (3) Americans' higher rates of substance abuse, physical illness, and family violence may be related to the higher-stress lifestyle in the United States. For example, Americans tend to work more hours and have less vacation time compared to workers in other industrialized countries (see also Chapter 7).

In sum, the U.S. health disadvantage has multiple causes involving inadequate health care, unhealthy behaviors, adverse social and economic conditions, physical and social environmental factors, and the cultural values and public policies that shape these factors. Unless these conditions change, Americans will continue to have shorter lives and poorer health than people in other industrialized countries.

Medical travel may contribute to the spread of infectious disease, and the medical tourism industry may encourage the illegal market for human organs, as the very poor are vulnerable to being coerced into selling one of their kidneys for transplantation. Medical tourism raises ethical concerns about health equity, as health services in popular medical tourism destinations flow not to the local population, but to foreigners.

Mental Illness: The Hidden Epidemic

Although what it means to be mentally healthy varies across cultures, in the United States **mental health** is understood to include our psychological, emotional, and social well-being. **Mental illness** refers collectively to all mental disorders, which are

Chicago Tribune/Getty Images

Many Americans cross the border into Mexico to obtain less expensive dental care.